

“You Must Be Born Again!” (Part 2)

John 3:9-15

Reading: Matthew 6:25-34

Bethany Baptist Church

(video service)

March 29, 2020

...pray...

A *Pharisee* named *Nicodemus* came to *Jesus* at night with **three** questions, all reflecting his desire to have *eternal life*, but quickly revealing his *spiritual confusion*.

Question 1 (implied from v.3) – “*How can I see the Kingdom of Heaven?*”

Actually, *Nicodemus* was *beating around the bush*, but *Jesus* *knew* his heart and *cut* to the chase! Our Lord *asked* the *Pharisee*’s question for him, and *gave* the world’s most important instruction: “***You must be born again!***” **2X**

Which lead the *aging Jewish leader* to ask his next question...

Question 2 (v.4) – “*How can a man be born when he is old?*”

Three times in **four** verses *Jesus* stresses that *rebirth* is *spiritual birth*:

v. 5 – “*unless one is born of water and the Spirit*”

v. 6 – “*that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*”

v.8 – “*The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from or where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*”

And it in the midst of His answer, *Jesus* returned to His most important instruction (7): “***You must be born again!***”

Let’s *pick up* that late-night conversation with *Nicodemus*’ **third** question.

You might paraphrase it something like this: “***Huh...?***”

Open your Bible or tap your app to John 3. Nicodemus asks his third and final question in v.9 ... (read 9-15).

Nicodemus is *struggling to keep up!* But he *shouldn’t* be!

He is “***the teacher of Israel*** (10)” and *these things* are basic truths previewed in the *Law* and the *Prophets*. Any serious *Jewish teacher* should *get that!*

Yet he **doesn’t** *get it!* And *Jesus* *says so!*

Let's *unpack* their conversation like this:

The *greatest teacher in Israel* asks his final question of the *greatest teacher in the world*.

In verses 9-12 we hear Nicodemus' *third* question and Jesus' *stern rebuke*.

In verses 13-15 we consider Jesus' *illustration* and *final answer*.

Nicodemus asks his *final question*...then says *no more* (vv. 9-12).

1. “*How can these things be?*” ... which being translated means: “**Huh...?**”
 - a. What Nicodemus means by “*these things*” are from Jesus’ **second answer** in vv.5-8: the *necessity* of spiritual birth; the *contrast* between human birth and the *work* of the Spirit, how the **Spirit’s work** is illustrated by the work of the *wind*, ...
 - b. And of course, “*these things*” certainly include that fundamental spiritual *imperative* (3,7): “**You must be born again!**”
 - c. “*How can these things be...?*”
2. Jesus *answers* Nicodemus by first *rebuking* Nicodemus.
 - a. The aging *Pharisees* has the reputation of be *the teacher of Israel!* Jesus’ words and grammar are revealing: **not “a teacher,”** but “**the teacher of Israel.**”
 - i. If the Pharisees had a “*Teacher of the Year*” award, Nicodemus would have *snagged* that honor almost *annually!* But now the **teacher** can’t solve life’s most important **problem.**
 - ii. Yet the Pharisees spent hours a day *studying* and *memorized* vast portions of Scripture!
 - iii. Nicodemus should have *connected* several clear **OT previews** of the *new birth* (Jer, Ezek) straight to Jesus’ teaching!
 - iv. “Why don’t you *get it*, Nicodemus!?!”

- b. Then, for the **third** time in the interview, we hear Jesus rely “*Truly, truly,*” and we know His answer is *on the way*.
- i. Our Lord *draws a line* between *Himself* and His *disciples*. and *Nicodemus* and the *Jewish leaders* (“*you,*” v.11.b is plural).
 - ii. Jesus’ crew of *Galilean fishermen* move to the head of the class; the *Jerusalem teacher* is sent to sit in the corner!
 1. Jesus’ teaching is *authoritative* (11); it is a *testimony* grounded in *eyewitness knowing* and *seeing*.
 - iii. Yet Nicodemus (Pharisees) *refuse to accept* the Galilean’s testimony. Don’t miss this important distinction in vv.11,12. Nicodemus’ problem is **not** *understanding*, but **accepting**.
 1. V.11 – *you do not accept our testimony*; v.12 – *you do not believe*.
 2. Back in **2:23-25**, we read that many “*miracle chasers*” in Jerusalem seemed to have a *form of faith*, but Jesus looked *straight into their hearts* and saw the *shallowness of their faith*, ... and that included the *Pharisees*.
 3. Nicodemus *refused to accept* that his Jewish *legalism* was not what God was looking for, and that only a radical spiritual *regeneration* can get you into God’s kingdom.

- c. So Nicodemus **won't** *accept* Jesus' most *basic teachings* – the Lord refers them (12) as *earthly things*. Jesus argues from *lesser to greater* – from *earthly things* to *heavenly*.
 - i. If *Israel's premier professor* won't believe the basics (*spiritual birth*) how can he hope to graduate to the advanced, *heavenly truths* of the Kingdom? How can he ever *see the Kingdom*?
 - ii. You have to *walk* before you can *run*, and spiritually speaking, Israel's champion theologian was still *crawling* on his *hands* and *knees*!
 - iii. And again, to be clear, it wasn't an **IQ issue**, Nicodemus had a *faith issue* (11,12) – “*you do not **accept**, ... you do not **believe**.*”
3. **Isn't** it *interesting* that people say that they *want* God, but they refuse to *accept* God on God's *terms*?
- a. Nicodemus was *all in a dither* about God's Kingdom & eternal life!
 - b. He even recognized that *Jesus came from God*.
 - c. But Nicodemus **couldn't** bring himself *to turn away* from his old way of life (*tradition, ritual, respect*), and to *accept* Jesus' message of *spiritual rebirth* – of *starting over*!

Is that you? Are you trying to have God on your terms?

Friend, Jesus' final answer is that you only enter the Kingdom on His terms.

1. Do you remember that **first question**, the question Nicodemus *wanted* to ask (3)? **How can I see the Kingdom of God?**
 - a. Here comes Jesus' answer; it *begins* in v.13 and it *builds* all the way thru v.15 (**read vv.13-15**):
 - i. Do you see how v.13 **begins**: "*No one...*"? Do you see how v.13 **ends**: "*the Son of Man*"?
 - ii. How can you have eternal life? By "*no one ...but...the Son of Man.*"
 - b. "*Son of Man*" is Jesus favorite title for Himself, and He is claiming to be the *long-promised, long anticipated Messiah* - the *only answer (way)* to our questions about eternal life!
 - i. He offers *life everlasting* by His unprecedented *ascending & descending* to/from heaven.
 - ii. In other words, only Jesus **offers** the *Kingdom of God* **by** the *plan* of God **through** the *wisdom* of God because only Jesus has *come* from heaven with the plan, and then *returned*, having carried it out!
 - c. Months later, in the *Upper Room*, Jesus repeated these same truths (John 16:28): "*I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.*"

2. Jesus keeps *building* His answer, and then *undergirds* it for Nicodemus (14) with an *illustration* from **OT** book of **Numbers**.

a. **Num 21:5-9 (on the long journey to the Promised Land):** The people spoke against God and Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.”⁶ The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷ So the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.” And Moses interceded for the people. ⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, *when he looks at it, he will live.*” ⁹ And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived. ... *When any man looked, he lived!*

b. God doesn’t care much for *grumblers*, so when Israel *complained*, God *judged*. But when the people *repented* (7), God *relented*. His *remedy* for Israel’s *complaining* was a *symbol* (*type*) for His coming *remedy* for **all** of mankind’s *sin*: a *cross*, a *crucified Savior*, and *faith*.

c. Then (14) Jesus cuts to the *crucial connection* in His explanation:

i. The *Son of Man must be lifted up*.

ii. For the **2nd** time Jesus *dons the mantle* of His favorite Messianic title –*Son of Man*. The *Son of Man must be lifted up*.

iii. To “*be lifted up*” often refers to the *crucifixion* in **NT** teachings, but can also be translated “*exalted*” or “*glorified*.”

iv. And don’t *skim past* that little command: “*must*”! The *Son of Man must* be crucified in the place of sinners, and sinners *must look to Him* to live...!

3. And so we come to Jesus’ *promise* in **v.15 (read)**. *Eternal life* is made possible by the sin-paying *crucifixion* and death-defeating *resurrection* of Jesus, the payment *applied* to sinners through *believing* in Jesus....

4. Let's look back and *trace our way* through Jesus' *nighttime interview* with Nicodemus.
- a. The *aging teacher* needed an answer: "*How do you see the Kingdom?*" (= "*How do you have eternal life?*")
 - b. Jesus replied, repeatedly: "*You must be born again!*"
 - c. But Nicodemus **didn't** get it! "*How can these things be?*"
 - d. Jesus *unpacked* the answer: ... by "*No one but the Son of Man*"
 - i. It's the "*essential gospel*," the Son of Man *descended, crucified (lifted up), resurrected, and ascended* to the Father's right hand!
 - ii. All of which demands *your* response: **faith** (**10** – *understanding*; **11** – *accept*; **12** – *believe*; **12** - *believe*, **14** - *look* (Num 21 – *look and live* → *to trust God's plan*); **15** - *believe*).

Here is Jesus' *final answer* (15), the Good News of the Gospel: "*the Son of Man must be **lifted up** so that whoever **believes** will **in Him** have eternal*

Nicodemus *struggled* to follow Jesus' teaching, but he **did** come with the right question: "***How can I have eternal life?***" I hope you've asked that question!

And Jesus' answer is *still true* – exclusively *true*:

- *You must be born again!* That's because you're *dead*... Your *sin* is the symptom of your *spiritual death*. You *do* sin (deed, word, thought, motive), you *are* a sinner (*by nature*), and so you are ***dead*** in your *trespasses and sins*.
- The **NT** tersely diagnoses you this way: "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*" because "*you were dead in your transgressions.*"

God judges sinners. That's bad news!

- God is mankind's *Creator* and *King*, and your sin marks you as a *rebel*.
- When the rebel stands before the King, he'll be *judged* and *condemned*.
- It is ***appointed*** for men to ***die*** once, and after death comes ***judgement***.
- Holy God's condemnation of *sinners* is *real* and *just*: it is *eternal* and *excruciatingly awful*.
- And God will allow only **one** of **two** people to *pay* for your sin.
- You or Jesus. You **don't** want it to be you...

So God's sent His *one & only* Son to pay for you sins in your place.

- As we've already seen in the *Gospel of John*, Jesus *existed* from all *eternity* as God's Son. Then at *just the right* time in history Jesus *descended from Heaven* - He was born as the *miraculously conceived child* of Mary. Which means Jesus is *truly God* and *truly Man*. That combination of *deity* and *humanity* makes Jesus *uniquely qualified* to pay for our sins.
- That is what happened on the *cross*: *all* of the sins of *all* of Christ's people for *all* time were placed on Jesus, and God *punished* Him there for us!
- The New Testament says: *But God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*
- To *prove to the world* that God *accepts* Jesus' payment, He *raised* Christ from the grave on the **third** day (*Resurrection*).
- The Resurrection *also* proves that *eternal life* is God's gift to children; He *raised* Christ, He'll *raise* you! (***That's*** what Nicodemus was looking for!)

But **how** – *how* can you know that Jesus' *payment*, pays for *your sins*? Here's *how*:

- *Look* to Christ, and Christ *alone*. The Bible teaches that the only *condition* for receiving God's forgiveness is *faith* and *repentance*.
- **Repent** (turn) by *turning away* from your *sins* and *selfishness* and *turn to* Jesus.
- **Trust** that Jesus *is* who He claims (The Son of God) and has *done* what He claims (*died* to pay for all your sins, *resurrected* on the **3rd** day).
- If you *look to Jesus*, God will *forgive* you and give you *spiritual life*!

*“the Son of Man must be lifted up so that whoever believes will **in Him** have eternal life.”*

Are you *born again*...?

I'll say it once more: “*You **must** be born again!*”

...pray...