

GOSPEL OF THE MESSIAH

Message 16

Text: John 3:1-10

Date: 6/15/2014

INTRO: We are studying the life of Jesus Christ. Today we are in John 3 and in my calculations we might now be about one month into the ministry of Christ. He was baptized and then fasted for 40 days, after which He was tempted by Satan. He then went back to where He had been baptized. It was there that He entered His ministry. And from there He chose His first few disciples. Shortly after this He went to Cana, where He provided the purist of grape juice for that wedding, after they had run out. Then He left with His mother and His disciples for Capernaum, and from there He went to Jerusalem for the Passover.

In our last message John recounted one event of that time. Jesus entered the temple and saw what was going on and He made a whip and drove out money changers, sheep and oxen and overturned the money changers tables. And He said, "Take these things out. Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise."

In this series I cannot do any detailed expositions, but I have decided to give the historical information that will be helpful to you in understanding the Gospels. Many of you are reading and rereading the Bible, and when you read the Gospels, this historical information will be very helpful to you.

Now it is historical information that will help us understand Nicodemus, the man who came to see Jesus by night in John 3. You see, there was a ruling body of men in Jerusalem known as the Sanhedrin. This ruling body was made up of 70 men plus the High Priest. They formed the supreme council in Israel. The members of the Sanhedrin came from the chief priests, scribes and elders. One article I read said, "During the time of the Roman governors, such as Pontius Pilate, the Sanhedrin had jurisdiction only over the province of Judea. The Sanhedrin had its own police force which could arrest people, as they did Jesus Christ. While the Sanhedrin heard both civil and criminal cases and could impose the death penalty, in New Testament times it did not have the authority to execute convicted criminals. That power was reserved to the Romans, which explains why Jesus was crucified—a Roman punishment—rather than

stoned, according to Mosaic law." Another article says, "The high priest and chief priests formed an elite religious nobility within Jerusalem." It goes on to say that the members were chosen from a small number of wealthy families. Annas' family, of whom Caiaphas was the son-in-law was one of those wealthy families, and Caiaphas was the High Priest.

Another article says, "These men controlled not only the temple, but a large number of seats on the Sanhedrin, the supreme judicial body of the Jewish nation. Its 71 members were divided into three groups, the chief priests, the elders and the scribes. The high priest served as its presiding officer. Although in theory the Sanhedrin had executive and legislative functions as well as judicial authority, its powers had been restricted by the Roman rulers. In Jesus' day, the Sanhedrin did not have the authority to carry out the death sentence", end quote. Well, the Sanhedrin came to an end with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.

Now from that historical information I have this question for you: "What do you think these men thought and talked about that day when Jesus cleansed the temple? Do you think any of them gave consideration to who Jesus might be?"

#### 4. His dealings with men

It is with that question in mind that I take you to John 3. In this chapter we will first see evidence that Jesus was the Messiah from his dealings with men. Verse 1 says, "There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." Here we have one of those Sanhedrin. And in verse 2 it says, "This man came to Jesus by night..." Let me read from Alfred Eedersheim here. He says, "We can scarcely realize the difficulties which he had to overcome. It must have been a mighty power of conviction, to break down prejudice so far as to lead this old Sanhedrist to acknowledge a Galilean, untrained in the Schools, as a Teacher come from God, and to repair to Him for direction on, perhaps, the most delicate and important point in Jewish theology", end quote. What he is saying is that something very deep was going on inside Nicodemus, or Nacdimon in Hebrew, to even dare

show His face before Jesus. And we know from the fact that he came by night, that the Sanhedrin were fired up and very opposed to what Jesus has done in the temple. But beyond that, Nicodemus, a Dr. of the law by education, acknowledges this un-schooled nobody from Galilee, a place that only produces nobodies, as a Teacher who has come from God. You see, Nicodemus recognized truth! And when you recognize truth at first, it can be scary enough to make one come by night.

Now let me show you something I would have missed, had Eedersheim not pointed it out. Look at the pronoun Nicodemus uses. He says, "We know..." You see, Nicodemus was not the only one who recognized who Jesus was. There were others that recognized it too, but they did not even show up by night. They recognized the truth but did not have the courage to stand up for it. You see, it is not the weakness of miracles that fails to convert men, it is the wickedness of the heart that keeps men from confessing the truth. Out of the 70 plus 1, only Nicodemus came, and that, by night. And I ask, what was it that made Nicodemus realize that Jesus was a teacher come from God? Well, it was those miracles. So let us read verse 2 (read).

Now I want you to see something about Jesus. Here before him is no little fry. Here is a big fish. Jesus is a fisher of men, and before Him sits the success of His day's work. Most of us as pastors would make very sure to do things in such a way as to not lose such a prize, even if he did come at night. But we have seen twice already that Jesus knew mankind. Just in the previous chapter He did not commit Himself to those who believed in Him because He knew all men. Jesus knows that if Nicodemus is ultimately to put truth above his own prestigious position, he will have to face things during the light of day.

Now, no doubt, we have but the basics of the discussion that took place that night. I sense slight reproof in Jesus' voice as He answers Nicodemus. Here is how I hear it, "Nicodemus, Nicodemus..." You see, Jesus said something very

interesting here. The NKJV says, "Most assuredly..." The KJV translates it as, "Verily, verily..." Well, what does that mean? In the Greek it is, "Ameen, Ameen..." We get our word 'Amen' from that.

So I might read it like this, "Nicodemus, Nicodemus, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Now, this can be translated either, except one is born anew, or born again, or born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Perhaps, because of Nicodemus' question in verse 4, it has been translated, 'born again' (read). However, the precise meaning of that is not as important as that of the next verse (read verse 5).

I cannot take time here to discuss the various ways being born of water and of the Spirit has been understood. The difficulty, of course, is the word water. Let me give you some of the views of the meaning of the word *water*. One, Jesus is referring to the baptism of John. Two, water signifies Christian baptism. Three, water is the purifying power of the Holy Spirit. Four, it refers to prosylite baptism. Five, it refers to natural birth. And six, water and Spirit are one and the same thing. The text would then read, "...except a man be born of water, even the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

To that I want to add a seventh view, which is the view hold. You need to now look at our passage. Notice the word "Spirit" in verse 5. It is the Greek word *pneumatōs*. We get our word 'pneumatic' from that. Anyone here know what pneumatic tires are? (Air filled tires.) So *pneuma* can be translated, wind, breath or spirit. It is the context in which the word appears that determines its use. Now look at verse 8 (read). Now the word translated 'wind' is the very same word translated 'spirit' in verse 5. So, we could legitimately translate verse 5 as, "Ameen, ameen, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of wind or breath, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." And I think it should be translated like that. Now I want you to notice one reason why in

verse 5. Notice the definite article 'the' before the word 'spirit'. It is not there in the original. Since it is without the article, I think it lends itself to the understanding that Jesus meant wind, not spirit.

Now, the word 'water' *hudatos*, is translated literally as water; so I think it best to leave the word *pneumatos* as 'wind'. Now, you might wonder why I spend time on this. Well, if you leave both words as concrete terms, and you see that the Scriptures often use the word *pneumatos* to symbolize spirit, then I think it is easy to show what the word 'water' refers to. You see, the word wind symbolizes the spirit in Scripture. But in its concrete meaning it means 'wind' or 'breath'. So if we symbolize the word wind as spirit, and we do the same with the word 'water', what could the word water symbolize?

You will need to go with me to a number of Scriptures. We begin with John 15:3 (read). The Word of God, like water, cleanses. Then we go to Ephesians 5:26 (read). But, above and beyond that, the Scriptures teach that the Word of God is the instrument God uses to bring about the new birth. Turn now to 1 Peter 1:23 (read 22-23). You see, the new birth takes place through the Word of God and here the water clearly symbolizes the Word of God. Then we go to James 1:18 (read).

It is further interesting that our Catechism teaches this view on regeneration. Question 7 on Regeneration and Good Works asks, "Who brings about regeneration in us?" The answer given is, "God Himself brings about regeneration in us by his Word and Spirit, unto the obedience of Christ" (Page 57).

Now let me mention one more matter regarding this illustration of birth. We learn from nature that it takes two to bring about natural birth, and in spiritual realm it takes two as well. It requires the Word of God and the Spirit of God to come together in man to bring about the new birth. And those two come together in man when man believes the Gospel. Therefore the new birth is by faith.

So we go to verses 6-8 (read). Jesus told Nicodemus that he ought not to marvel at this idea that man must be born again. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. With regard to verse 8, let me read a comment from Albert Barnes commentary. He writes, "Nicodemus had objected to the doctrine because he did not understand how *it could be*. Jesus shows him that he ought not to reject it on that account, for he constantly believed things quite as difficult. It might appear incomprehensible, but it was to be judged of by its *effects*. As in this case of the wind, the *effects* were seen, the sound was heard, important changes were produced by it, trees and clouds were moved, yet the wind is *not seen*, nor do we know whence it comes, nor by what laws it is governed; so it is with the operations of the Spirit. We see the changes produced, Men just now sinful become holy; the thoughtless become serious; the licentious become pure; the vicious, moral; the moral, religious; the prayerless, prayerful; the rebellious and obstinate, meek, and mild, and gentle. When we see such changes, we ought no more to doubt that they are produced by some *cause*—by some mighty agent, than when we see the trees moved, or the waters of the ocean piled on heaps, or feel the cooling effects of a summer's breeze. In those cases we attribute it to the *wind*, though we see it not, and though we do not understand its operations", end quote.

Well, Nicodemus is still puzzled. Look at verse 9 (read). Now look at verse 10 (read). You see, that people must be born again is not only a NT teaching. Nicodemus, steeped in Jewish teaching should have already known this.

We now go to verse 11 (read). Note the pronouns 'we'. In verse 2, Nicodemus, referring to the religious leaders says, "We know..." Now Jesus says, "We speak what we know, and testify what we have seen..." He is referring, I think, to Himself and those who have acknowledged the truth. And in verse 12 he says to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how

will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" Jesus had used earthly things, water and wind, to explain spiritual things. And if Nicodemus, a Dr. of the law, could not understand such things, what will he do when Jesus speaks of spiritual things that are not illustrated with earthly things?

Let me just make one brief comment on verse 13 (read). When Jesus speaks of the Son of Man who is in heaven, present tense, we meet something we will meet again and again in the Gospels. Jesus was both human and divine. And with little doubt, His divinity is in view here. He is telling Nicodemus that He is the Messiah.

So, we now come to a most crucial Scripture in verses 14-21. Let us begin by reading 14-15 (read). There came a time when Israel was traveling through the wilderness to Canaan that they disobeyed God again and God sent little fiery serpents among them. And when anyone was bitten by the serpents, they died. You may wish to read the account in Numbers 21 for yourself. But God had Moses put a brass serpent on a pole. And all the Israelite who had been bitten by the deadly serpent had to do to be saved from dying was look at the brass serpent on the pole.

Now I think the serpent was made of brass because brass is often used to symbolize judgment in Scripture. And I long pondered why God would have Moses put a serpent on the pole? It is no doubt a picture of Christ on the cross, so why a serpent? And then one day as I pondered that, I came to the conclusion that it pictured Christ in my place. He was pictured like a snake, because he pictured me, the lost sinner. He took my place there. And the incredible thing is that all they had to do to be saved was look at the brass snake. When I realize that I am nothing but a snake, and that Christ took my place there on the pole like a snake, and repent of my sins and put my trust in Him, He will save me from sin. That is the picture here in John 3.

Then we have that very special verse, John 3:16, the most popular verse in the Bible (read). Now I want to point out a few things from verses 16-21. First, the word to *believe* is in the present tense. It does not say those who have once believed will be saved. It says those who believe. The present tense is the most common tense when Scripture speaks of salvation. So verse 17 informs us that God did not send Jesus in order that He might condemn us. He sent Him in order that He might save us. Here is that most crucial message Jesus gave Nicodemus that night long ago.

Now note verses 17-18. It says, "He who believes on Him..." Again, that is present tense. He who continues to believe. Boyce W. Blackwelder, in his book, *Light from the Greek New Testament* says, "John 3:18 is illuminating: 'The one who continues trusting [pres. ptcl] in him is not condemned; the one who does not continue trusting [same construction but with negative particle] is already condemned [perfect passive, in a state of condemnation] because he has not believed with abiding results [perfect tense, indicating permanent attitude of unbelief] in the name of the Son of God.'"

Daniel B. Wallace, a Phd from Dallas Theological Seminary, has written an extensive work on the Greek of the NT. Let me read from a note in his book, "Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics" on verbal participles, which is what we have in John 3:18. He comments on why the Greek present is used instead of the aorist. The Greek aorist is somewhat like our past tense. You see, it does not say, "He who has once believed..." or, "He who has believed..." It says, "He who believes. So Wallace says, "Thus, it seems that since the aorist participle was a live option to describe a 'believer,' it is unlikely that when the present was used, it was aspectually flat. The present was the tense of choice most likely because in the NT writers by and large saw continual belief as a necessary condition of salvation" (621). Then he says that it seems significant that the promise of salvation is almost always given to



the believing one (present tense), and almost never to the one who has believed (aorist). The promise of salvation is generally not to those who have once believed (aorist tense), but to those who believe (present tense).

We now consider verses 19-21 (read). Light exposes; darkness hides. Notice the word 'condemnation'. I think if I were to translate this word it would be 'judgment'. This word is used 48 times in the original and 41 times the KJV has translated it as judgment. The light judges. It exposes. Ephesians 5:13 says, "But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light." You see, whatever exposes wrong in us is light. And our text says men love darkness rather than light. That means me, it means you, and everybody else. We hate exposure. And when the light shines on that darkness, we are judged.

So, everyone who does wrong hates the light and he does not come to the light. When one comes to the light, one's wrongs are exposed, and oh how we hate exposure. But look at verse 21 (read). Truth is a choice. Nicodemus wanted truth, but he came in the dark. He came at night. He did not want to be exposed to the others. May I ask this morning, do you carry some darkness in your heart you do not want exposed?

#### 5. John's testimony of Him (3:22-35)

Well, we want to just briefly look at verses 22-36. Here we once more have evidence from John the Baptist that Jesus was truly the Messiah. So, look at verse 22 (read). Note first that we have left Jerusalem and we are now in the land of Judea, which is the land immediately surrounding Jerusalem. And it sounds as if Jesus baptized there. But look at John 4:1-2 (read). It was Jesus' disciples that did the baptizing. But the Jews seemed to have told John's disciples that Jesus and His disciples were making more disciples than John was.

There then arose a dispute between John's

disciples and the Jews about purification. We are not told what the content of the dispute was about but no doubt it centered around the question of baptism, and may have involved the fact that more were flocking to Jesus' baptism than John's. So let us read verses 23-26 (read). Here we see that somehow this conflict may have involved the fact that Jesus was baptizing as well since in verses 26 John's disciples come to him and inform him that Jesus is also baptizing, and that many people are flocking to Him. There seems to have been concern that Jesus was gaining popularity among the people and John was losing popularity.

So look at verses 27-29. I cannot take time to explain about the friend of the bridegroom here, but let me just say he was somewhat like a best man at our weddings. So, who has the greater prominence at a wedding, the best man or the bridegroom? Well, it is the bridegroom of course, and that is John's point here. Jesus is like the bridegroom while he is only like the best man.

In verse 30 John acknowledges that Jesus must increase but he must decrease. I think we are nearing the time when John will be jailed by Herod. That is likely why verse 24 makes note here that John had not yet been put in prison. It is possible that very soon after this he was put in prison.

Now look at verses 31 (read). John shows that Christ came from heaven. He is the Messiah. But he, John, came from the earth like the rest of us. So here, once again, we have evidence from John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah.

Then in verse 32 John says something very significant (read). Jesus testifies what He has seen and heard. He has been in heaven and He has testified of this. He has told them heavenly things, but John says, "...no one receives His testimony." The idea is that few truly accept Him. John has heard that people were flocking to Jesus. But he knows that few are truly interested in truth. This is a very hard thing to learn.

Many followed Christ, but few had really found the truth. But look now at verse 33 (read). Those who truly find Christ certify that God is true. That is because of verse 34 (read 34-35). And then John says that the Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. John's understanding of the Messiah were very precise.

This passage closes with verse 36 (read). I must point out once more the tenses in this verse. You see, many were coming to Jesus. But John recognizes that it is few that are committed to Christ. So he says, "He who believes (present tense, goes on believing) in the Son has everlasting life (that is, goes on having everlasting life); and he who does not believe (present tense, does not go on believing) the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him."

CONCL: So let us bring this message to a close. We have looked at evidence that Jesus is the Messiah from His dealing with men. It becomes most apparent when Nicodemus comes to Him by night and Jesus speaks the truth to him. It is also evidenced by Nicodemus himself when he said, "No man can do what you are doing unless God is with him." Jesus did not go on a high because one of the Sanhedrin came to Him. He knew what this Sanhedrin would face if he dared show himself during the day, and it is ultimately daytime Christians that count.

Then we heard from John the Baptist once more that Jesus is the Messiah. He said, "He must increase but I must decrease." If my calculations are right we are within days, or at the most within weeks of John's imprisonment by Herod. And John did not realize that soon, he must not only decrease, but decrease. If my calculations are right, his ministry was under a year in length.

Let me remind us all, that faith, believing, is present tense. We must go on believing. It is present tense salvation that saves as both Jesus and John have pointed out in these passages.