

“BORN FROM HEAVEN”

John 3:1-15

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INTRODUCTION

In our last message, we noted that Jesus has profound divine insight into human nature; He did not entrust Himself to those who professed to “believe in Him” after seeing His “signs” (miracles) because “He knew all men” and because “He knew what was in man” (2:23-25).

Now, we read that “there was a **man**” who came to him who likewise had seen His signs and was very impressed by them. He was no ordinary man, but was a religious leader of the Jews. Here was Jesus’ opportunity to “stake His claim” to recognition by the religious establishment of His day. Here was His opportunity to promote Himself.

Instead, as always, He is concerned about the spiritual needs of the other person—not His own recognition or personal advancement. Jesus saw that this man, unlike those to whom He would not entrust Himself, had some spiritual potential. He might respond in truth to the message of salvation that He had come to bear to the world.

The message Jesus gave to Nicodemus contain some of the best known words in all of the Scriptures, and are some of the best known words in the Bible to even the unsaved world. How often we see signs being held up even at football games saying “John 3:3” or even “You must be born again” (3:7). Many today refer to themselves as “born again Christians.”

But, in light of this passage of Scripture, we can’t help but wonder, Would Jesus “entrust Himself” to many of these professed “born again” people? In order to answer this question we must ask ourselves, “What is the new birth?” and “How is one born again?”

YOU CANNOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN UNLESS YOU ARE ‘BORN AGAIN’.

I. THE OMNISCIENT TEACHER (1-2)

A. The Visitor’s Person

1. His nature—a man
2. His Name—Nicodemus (“Victor over the people”)—A Greek name (not unusual for Jews)
3. His party—a Pharisee
4. His position—a “ruler”—Likely a member of the Sanhedrin
5. His circumstances—came by night
Out of “fear” or concern; for practical reasons and better communication; for symbolical reasons. (Compare 7:50-51; 19:39)

B. The Visitor’s Statement (and implied question)

1. Respectful address—“Rabbi”—says a great deal from a Sanhedrin member.
2. Companions in interest—“we”
3. Acknowledgement: “You have come from God—a teacher”

But note that he didn't see Jesus as the Prophet—let alone the Messiah. His estimate was way too low.

- a. Evidence of “signs”
- b. God is “with Him.”

Implied in all of this, as Jesus clearly notices, is some kind of request. Maybe like the “rich young ruler” later [Nicodemus may be the “rich old ruler”!]: “How do I inherit eternal life?” or “How do I enter the kingdom?” or “Are you now about to introduce the kingdom to Israel?”

II. THE PROFOUND LESSON (3-9) [The teacher is taught.]

Jesus' answer was not at all what Nicodemus expected. Nicodemus represented all that was involved in the Old Dispensation of the Law—as distorted by the Jewish leaders of the day. “What good deed, what better work, what special ordinance, etc. do I need to do in order to gain better favor with God and gain certainty of the kingdom?”

Jesus astounded him by giving him nothing by way of religious ceremony or good deed that would satisfy God. Instead Jesus told him that he, or anyone else, needed to be “born again.”

A. The Necessity of the New Birth (3)

1. Importance and Certainty of the Statement “Truly, truly” [Amen, Amen]
2. The meaning of the statement
 - a. “From above” or “again”
 - b. Spiritual “new life”
3. The result of the experience—“See” the Kingdom of God
 - a. “See”—i.e. experience
 - b. “Kingdom of God”—His rule and realm

B. The Confusion of Nicodemus concerning the Birth(4)

Is Nicodemus' confusion the result of pride and stubbornness—refusal to admit that *he*, a great and important person, needed what only pagans should require? Or, is he genuinely confused about the possibility of such an amazing change? The context seems to indicate the latter—since there is *no hint at rebuke* in Jesus' response, and later Nicodemus *became a follower* of Jesus.

When one is “old” [maybe like Nicodemus] and is “set in his ways”, how can everything change? How can he have a totally new start? Obviously he can't enter again into his mother's womb; then how can he totally change?

C. The Supernatural Nature of the Birth (5-9)

1. The Supernatural elements necessary—“water and the Spirit”

Various views: Christian Baptism

Baptism of the Baptist

Physical Birth

Spiritual Cleansing and Birth (cf. Ezek. 36:25-26)

Note, the **both** water and Spirit are necessary to the experience Jesus is

describing. Jesus would not be giving Nicodemus merely another sacramental or man's works approach to salvation.

The relation to physical birth can only fit here if seen by way of spiritual application (See I Jn. 3:9). Then "water" and "Spirit" are really saying the same thing. Notice that in vv. 6, 8 only "Spirit" is mentioned.

Also, there is no mention of the Baptist here; and, we have no proof of direct connection of Nicodemus with the Baptist. And, Baptism by the Baptist surely is not necessary for one to be born again—especially now that He has come.

Surely, Nicodemus would have no way of understanding Christian Baptism here! We cannot base our interpretation on later views of some church fathers.

2. The Results of the Birth—"enter the kingdom of God

Verses 3 & 5 are the only references in John to this kingdom—other than Jesus' statement in 18:36. In John, "eternal life" replaces the emphasis upon the "kingdom" in the other Gospels. One who gains eternal life has gained the kingdom (cf. v. 15).

3. The limits of physical birth and life (6)

"flesh" here does not have the connotation of "sinfulness" like it often does in Paul; cf. 1:14—the Word became "flesh." It simply denotes human nature in all of its limitations and weaknesses. **One cannot "see" and "enter" spiritual life unless one is spiritually transformed in his inner being by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit!**

4. The necessity of Spiritual Birth (7)

One must not "marvel"—that is stumble in belief, or reject because of the difficulty of grasping this amazing truth. Compare the "marvel" that people had at Jesus' physical "signs".

The **new birth**—that is to be born "from above" or "anew", is an absolute **necessity** if one is to enter the kingdom. **God must birth you; there is nothing you can do to birth yourself!**

The idea here is not some "moral duty" of the person—You Must be born again"—i.e. you must take action! Rather, it is absolute surrender to the divine sovereignty and will in order to be saved.

5. The sovereign and supernatural nature of the new birth (8)

a. The comparison with the "wind"—same word as "spirit".

But comparison shows the word here to be "wind" and not "spirit" as everywhere else in John. Also, Nicodemus could not be said to hear the movement of the "Spirit." **Maybe Jesus and**

Nicodemus heard the movement of the wind just at that time, and as usual Jesus is able to use natural elements in His teaching.

b. The *Uncontrollable* and *Inscrutable* nature of both the wind and the Spirit. Yet, the effects are “*undeniable and unmistakable*.”

6. The confused response to the new birth—“How can these things be?” (9)

III. THE AUTHORITATIVE TEACHER (10-13)

A. Nicodemus’ Weakness as a Teacher (10, 12)

1. He is supposedly “**the teacher**” of Israel. He is a Pharisaic scribe and knew the Bible—yet he did *not understand* the most basic and most essential spiritual truths for salvation and eternal life.
 2. He fails to *believe* the “earthly” truths given him by Jesus—the truths just taught that relate to the life of the believer on this earth. How then will he be able to understand more inscrutable “heavenly” truths of God’s sovereign council and works?
 3. He does not *receive* Jesus’ witness (12)
 4. He had never been in heaven in order to enter into the divine counsel (13).
- Nicodemus’ weaknesses demonstrate the weakness and inability of any merely human and earthly teacher acting apart from divine authority.**

B. Jesus’ Authority as a Teacher (11, 13)

1. Jesus has “descended from Heaven”—He had been there and has come down To share divine truth (cf. 1:14, 51).
2. He is “the Son of Man” (cf. Dan. 7:13-14). He has come with orders from “the Ancient of Days” and will provide sovereign directions to men.
3. He has clear *knowledge* of heavenly truths (11).
4. He has “seen” the reality of which he speaks (11).
The “we” may refer also to John the Baptist and other divine messengers sent by God. Possibly, even some of Jesus current disciples.
5. He *bears authoritative witness* as one sent with solid proof. (11)

IV. THE SACRIFICIAL SUBSTITUTE (14-15)

A. The “Lifting up” of The Son of Man (14)

The comparison to the brazen serpent in the wilderness (Num. 21:9)

1. The threatened death as punishment for sin
2. The divinely provided remedy
3. The lifting up of a substitute in public view
4. The healing of those who respond in faith

This “lifting up” must refer to the cross—always in view in John (cf. 8:28; 12:32, 34). Later this same expression also refers to His exaltation to heaven (e.g. Phil. 2:9; Acts 2:33). Jesus **Must** be lifted up.

B. The “Eternal Life” in Him of the One who Believes (15)

This is the “life of the age to come.” But, this life never ends, and so is “eternal”. This is life **in Christ**. Possessing it removes one from that which is merely earthly. It originates in the **new birth**; it is the **gift** of God. Man cannot achieve it. One who has it has **fellowship with God**—a fellowship that never ends. It involves **goodness, perfection, satisfaction**. This life is superior to “change, decay, or extinction.” (Morris) This “life” is the believer’s.

CONCLUSION

Jesus knows all men; He even knows the expert religious teacher. He knows you and me also. He knows our spiritual need; He knows that we need new life from above. We cannot enter the kingdom any other way. It takes a miraculous transformation of our nature in order to gain eternal life.

Jesus knows of what He speaks. He came from heaven; He was part of the councils of God. We are fools if we refuse to accept His witness.

Since He knows God’s mind, He knows that He **MUST** be lifted up—He must die for man’s sins. Whoever believes on Him will have eternal life.