

LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

We are on a journey through one of the accounts of Jesus' life and mission, "The Gospel of John." In the previous two chapters, we saw an overview of who Jesus is, His connection with a few followers, and some early "signs" that Jesus was ushering in something completely new. We ended the chapter with an assessment from Jesus, that "He knew all people" (2:24) and though people were seeing His miracles and seeming to put their faith in Him, he knew it was at best a tentative faith.

READ JOHN 3:1-13

Summarize the story of verses 1-4? (who, when, what, etc.).

- **Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. He stated that "we know" that you are a teacher who has come from God because of the miraculous signs**
- **Jesus altered the conversation to focus on Nicodemus' faith and status with God**
- **Jesus made it clear that no one will see the kingdom of God without being born again/from above**

How did Nicodemus initially view Jesus? What do you make of his approach to Jesus? What do you think he was hoping to do or know?

- **He was polite and respectful, addressing Him as "Rabbi"**
- **But Nic. didn't tip His hand that He might be the Messiah**
- **He was curious, representing the questions that upper leaders were asking. He didn't ask – he stated that he "knew" that Jesus came from God. But didn't ask if He were the Messiah.**

How did Jesus reply? Why might this be? (3)

- **Jesus made an audacious statement about who sees/enters the kingdom of God.**
- **Jesus knew that as a council member and Pharisee, Nicodemus was focused on religious authority and practices rather than what God has revealed. He also knew that Nicodemus had a healthy curiosity and respect and wanted to cut to His mission of making it possible to people to enter the Kingdom by faith in Him.**

What is Nicodemus' response to Jesus' statement? (4) What might this reveal about the those who were in the "the Jewish ruling council," the 70 men who were most trained and studied in the Mosaic law? (See also 3:10)

- **Nicodemus' response what one of logical confusion or incredulity. What Jesus stated as fact he could not conceive outside of his religious grid**
- **The Pharisees were focused on their man-made rules about the law instead of the heart of the message of the Old Testament. Nicodemus hadn't understood what was written in the Scriptures that might connect with what Jesus said.**

NOTE: The word translated as "born again" (*anōthen*) can be translated as "born again" or "born from above." In this passage, the author uses it to mean both. First, Nicodemus understands it to mean "again" and Jesus doesn't correct him. Then, in 3:31, Jesus clearly understands it to mean "born from above," meaning from God. So both meanings apply to this passage.

In verses 5-6, Jesus responds with a statement to explain his statement about being “born again” by providing a parallel statement:

“Be born again” + parallel statement “Be born of water and the spirit”

“See the kingdom of God” + parallel statement “enter the kingdom of God”

“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”

Jesus implied that an expert in, professor of, and ruler over the understanding of the Old Testament Scripture should “not be surprised” (vs.7, 10) at the above statements. Read the following Scriptures and summarize what the Scriptures might explain about Jesus’ statements.

Isaiah 44:3-5

- **God promised to bring restoration and blessing to the people of Israel through water and Spirit**

Joel 2:28

- **God promised to “pour out my Spirit” on people in future times**

Ezekiel 36:25-27

- **This is a perhaps a key prophecy that someone of Nicodemus’ position should have remembered.**
- **God promises to cleanse people with water, removing sins. He also promises to give them a “new heart” and a “new spirit” and put His “Spirit in you.”**
- **This verse seems to parallel what Jesus spoke.**

Titus 3:4-7

- **This passage from the New Testament reveals the work that God does in us.**
- **In these verses: “washing of rebirth” and “renewal by the Holy Spirit” that is “poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior”**
- **The result of this is hope of eternal life, Cf. “see the kingdom” or “enter the kingdom” in John 3.**

NOTE: We learn from verses 6-7 that “human birth produces people who belong to the earthly family of humankind, but not to the children of God. Only the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” (D. A. Carson, “The Gospel according to John,” p. 196) God through the Holy Spirit can cleanse people and give them a new spirit.

From what you have read or heard in the message on Sunday, how would you summarize what Jesus meant by “born again” and “born of water and the spirit?”

- **As we see in Titus 3, Jesus work on the cross provides cleansing from sin and enablement for God to renew our spirit through the work of the Holy Spirit.**

What do we learn about spiritual birth John 1:12 and Romans 8:14?

- **John 1:12 Those who “receive” Jesus can be “born again” as God’s child.**
- **Romans 8:14: Those who have the Spirit of God are God’s children.**

What eventually happens in Nicodemus life? (See John 19:38-39)

- **He becomes a believer / follower / supporter**

What do we learn about the Holy Spirit from Ezekiel 37:1-5?

- **The Holy Spirit is able to give light to the dead. This is the work that happens when we put our faith in / receive Jesus.**
- **Please ignore looking up John 1:8-9, it was a wrong reference.**

What qualifies Jesus to speak about heavenly things? Is there anyone else in history, before or since, who qualifies as He does?

- **Jesus is God, has eternally existed, knows heavenly things.**
- **No one before or since is qualified apart from words given by God (i.e. writers of Scripture)**

DISCUSS TOGETHER

When was the first time you heard this statement? What did it mean to you then? What did it become significant to you?

- **I love hearing how God has worked in people's lives.**
- **This also introduces this deep topic and the sometimes confusion attached to what it means.**

What do we learn about Jesus from this week's passage?

- **Jesus wants people to be born again into eternal life with Him**
- **Jesus knows the truth that we need**
- **Jesus knows that religion does not qualify people for the kingdom of God**
- **Jesus knows our hearts**
- **Jesus did miraculous signs unlike any person**
- **Jesus is patient, wanting people to turn to Him**
- **Jesus knows that we need to be cleansed and born from above**

How might being steeped in religious tradition be a dangerous thing? How might this distance us from God?

- **Those steeped in religious tradition can get focused on their ways, their insight, and their desires.**
- **People confident in their religion are prideful and stiffen to the gospel**
- **Religious tradition, like we see in Pharisees, cannot save nor please God**

What do we learn about conversion stories from Nicodemus' life? How is this helpful to us?

- **In this story, Jesus knew enough about Nicodemus to know his issues and needs.**
- **Jesus didn't assume that because Nicodemus was religious that he was right with God**
- **Jesus demonstrated compassion, patience, conversation,**
- **Jesus presented the truth with clarity, illustration, and discussion**
- **Jesus didn't press Nicodemus for an immediate answer, but he did present what Nicodemus needed in his life**

May you be filled with joy, knowing that you will one day be with Jesus in His kingdom,

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