

John Chapter 3

In (verses 3:1-21), the story of Jesus and Nicodemus reinforces John's themes that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God and that He came to offer salvation to men. (John 2:23-24), actually serves as the introduction to Nicodemus' story, since (chapter 3), constitutes tangible evidence of Jesus' ability to know men's hearts and thereby also demonstrates Jesus' deity.

Jesus also presented God's plan of salvation to Nicodemus, showing that He was God's messenger, whose redemptive work brings about the promised salvation to His people (verse 14). The chapter may be divided into two sections:

- (1) Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus (verses 1-10); and
- (2) Jesus' discourse on God's plan of salvation (verses 11-21).

As we begin this chapter, this section on Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus may be divided into 3 sections:

- (1) Nicodemus' inquiry of Jesus (verses 1-3);
- (2) Jesus' insight into Nicodemus (verses 4-8);
- (3) Jesus' indictment of Nicodemus (verses 9-10).

John 3:1 "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:"

Nicodemus name in Greek means "victor over the people". Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. The meaning of Pharisee comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to separate"

They were not separatists in the sense of isolationists but in the puritanical sense, meaning they were highly zealous for ritual and religious purity according to the Mosaic Law. As well as their own traditions that they added to the Old Testament legislation.

Although their origin is unknown, they seem to have arisen as an offshoot from the "Hasidim" or "pious ones" during the Maccabean era. They were generally from the Jewish middle class and mostly consisted of laity (business men), rather than priests or Levites. They represented the orthodox core of Judaism and very strongly influenced the common people of Israel.

According to Josephus, 6,000 existed at the time of Herod the Great. Jesus condemned them for their hyper-concentration on externalizing religion (rules and regulations), rather than inward spiritual transformation.

This is the same Nicodemus who stands up for Jesus against the Sanhedrin and says "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" (John 7:51).

At the time (verse 1 occurred), Nicodemus was still sneaking to see Jesus so that the other Pharisees would not know that He believed Jesus. We will see this in the next verse because he came by night to see Jesus.

John 3:2 “The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”

He came under cover of darkness to keep his associates from knowing. Rabbi, we have touched on before. It is an honorable name for teacher or master.

Nicodemus knows that Jesus is not like the priests and religious leaders in the temple. They do not have the power to heal anyone. He recognizes these miracles as being from God. This is a good beginning with Nicodemus.

Perhaps the most logical explanation why Nicodemus came at night was that he was afraid of the implications of associating openly in conversation with Jesus. He chose night in order to have a clandestine meeting with Jesus rather than risk disfavor with his fellow Pharisees. Among whom Jesus was generally unpopular.

John 3:3 “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

This statement made to Nicodemus was not just for him but for everyone who wants to see the kingdom of God. We know that Verily, verily means that this is beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Jesus answers a question that Nicodemus does not even ask. He read Nicodemus’ heart and came to the very core of his problem, i.e., the need for spiritual transformation or regeneration produced by the Holy Spirit. New birth is an act of God whereby eternal life is imparted to the believer.

Chapter (1:12-13), indicates that “born again” also carries the idea “to become children of God” through trust in the name of the incarnate Word.

This statement to a rational man is very difficult to understand. This is really speaking of a drastic change that takes place within a person. The word repent means to turn away from the old life to a new life. This is what this is saying here.

Jesus is telling Nicodemus that to acquire the Kingdom of God is much deeper than just believing in the miracles He did. He is telling Nicodemus that this is drastic, like birth. The change has to be total. You must become a new creature.

“He cannot see the kingdom of God”: In context, this is primarily a reference to participation in the millennial kingdom at the end of the age, fervently anticipated by the Pharisees and other Jews. Since the Pharisees were supernaturalists, they naturally and eagerly expected the coming

prophesied resurrection of the saints and institution of the messianic kingdom (Isa. 11:1-16, Dan. 12:2).

Their problem was that they thought that mere physical lineage and keeping of religious externals qualified them for entrance into the kingdom rather than the needed spiritual transformation which Jesus emphasized. The coming of the kingdom at the end of the age can be described as the “regeneration” of the world (Matt. 19:28), but regeneration of the individual is required before the end of the world in order to enter the kingdom.

Nicodemus is caught up in things that you can figure out with your mind. He is fully aware of what physical birth is, as you will see in the next verse.

John 3:4 “Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?”

As I said, Nicodemus is thinking in the natural. Many a mother has interceded for her children and seen them spiritually born again because of her prayers. In a sense, she has birthed them twice.

Nicodemus was a teacher himself and understood the rabbinical method of using figurative language to teach spiritual truth, and he was merely picking up Jesus’ symbolism.

John 3:5 “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

Jesus wasn’t referring to literal water here but to the need for “cleansing”.

Ezekiel 36:24-27 tells us: "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land." "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do [them]."

The argument of baptism could go on for ages. What has to be done which way. I truly believe it is important to be baptized in water as an outward show to the world that we are buried with Christ and rise again with Him to new life.

If there has not been a baptism of our heart changing us from an old flesh creature to a brand new Spirit being, we can be outwardly baptized forever and it will not mean anything. The transformation takes place in our heart. The issues of life, good or bad, come from the heart.

We must have God's Spirit within us to live in newness of life. Verse six tells it all.

John 3:6 “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

The spirit of a man is what he is. Our flesh or our spirit rules over us. We cannot serve two masters. Those who live in the flesh lust after the things of the flesh. The flesh is not in tune with God. When we are born of the flesh, we are consumed by the lusts for the things of the world.

When we are born of the Spirit, we crucify our flesh. We no longer live to please the flesh, our desire is to continually please God. When we are born of the Spirit, our fruit that we bear will be goodness, righteousness, and truth, as we find in;

Ephesians 5:9-10 “(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)”
"Proving that which is acceptable unto the Lord."

The first birth of a person is of the flesh, but the rebirth which makes us in right standing with God is of the Spirit. That old earthly man has passed away and we are a brand new creature in Christ.

John 3:7 “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”

Nicodemus was a learned man of the law and all this seems so strange to him. Jesus tells him not to wonder at it. It is so simple, just accept it. Jesus makes sure Nicodemus knows what He is saying because He says it again here “Ye must be born again” of the Spirit to inherit the kingdom.

John 3:8 “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

You cannot see the wind or the Spirit. To try to say where the wind came from or where it is going would be pure presumption. This is like the new birth in the Spirit. You know it is there, but to explain how it got there is another thing. God is a Spirit.

To be born in the Spirit then would be to be born into the family of God. Just as you can see after a wind has gone through and rearranged leaves etc., the same thing is with the Spirit. It has a way of rearranging lives. After a windstorm, you see the results. After a new birth in the Spirit, you see the results, as well.

So the point that Jesus was making was that just as the wind cannot be controlled or understood by human beings but its effects can be witnessed, so also it is with the Holy Spirit. He cannot be controlled or understood, but the proof of His work is apparent. Where the Spirit works, there is undeniable and unmistakable evidence.

That’s when a person's whole outlook on life changes.

John 3:9 “Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?”

As we said at the very beginning of this study, Nicodemus was a logical man. He analyzed everything all the time, but this he could not understand. He asks Jesus how can it be?

John 3:10 “Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?”

This is not quite a reprimand, but perhaps a caution. Jesus is telling him, you are a man of the law and you don't know this. It seems too, that Nicodemus must have held an important position because he is called here master of Israel. Nicodemus should have known more about what the Old Testament Scriptures taught.

Jesus' reply emphasized the spiritual bankruptcy of the nation at that time, since even one of the greatest of Jewish teachers did not recognize this teaching on spiritual cleansing and transformation based clearly in the Old Testament (verse 5).

The net effect is to show that externals of religion may have a deadening effect on one's spiritual perception.

John 3:11 “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.”

Nicodemus believed the miracles, but he could not turn loose of his affluent life and become a new creature. He wasn't ready to give up friends and family (that's why he came to find Jesus at night). Nicodemus did not really want a total change, just a little bit of change would be okay.

He didn't want to be a new creature with the old passed away. He liked his old way as master of Israel. We read earlier how this Light of Jesus would shine in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. Jesus is saying, we are giving you our firsthand knowledge and you don't believe us.

John 3:12 “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?”

Jesus says to Nicodemus here “The example I gave you was of earthly things that you are acquainted with, and you do not understand. What makes you think you would understand heavenly things of which you know nothing.

Jesus focused on the idea that unbelief is the cause of ignorance. At heart, Nicodemus' failure to understand Jesus' words centered not so much in his intellect but in his failure to believe Jesus' witness.

John Chapter 3 Questions

1. Who was this ruler of the Jews in verse 1?

2. What was he?
3. What does Nicodemus mean?
4. Who does Nicodemus stand against later to take up for Jesus?
5. What makes us know Nicodemus doesn't want anyone else to know he came to Jesus?
6. What does he call Jesus?
7. What made Nicodemus believe Jesus came from God?
8. "Except a man be _____ he cannot see the kingdom of God"
9. What does repent mean?
10. What logical question does Nicodemus ask Jesus?
11. "Except a man be born of _____ and of the _____, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God"
12. Where does the new birth transformation take place?
13. "That which is born of the _____ is _____"
14. "And that which is born of the _____ is _____"
15. We cannot serve _____ masters.
16. What are the desires of fleshly people?
17. Who rules over the spirit?
18. Name three fruits of the Spirit?
19. Where is this Scripture found on the fruit of the Spirit?
20. What did Jesus tell Nicodemus to marvel not at?
21. What can you not tell about the wind?
22. Compare a windstorm to someone who just received the Spirit.
23. In verse 9, what did he ask Jesus?

24. What did Jesus call Nicodemus that would have made you think he knew more about the Bible?

25. What did Jesus tell Nicodemus he wouldn't understand?