

You Must Be Born Again! (*Part 1*)

John 3:1-3

Thought for the Day. If we want to enter the kingdom of God, if we want to be saved and spend eternity in heaven with God, we must be spiritually born again. Just as we were born physically into the physical world, so we must be born again from above into the spiritual world.

John 2 closes with the observation that Jesus performed miracles in Jerusalem. It says that many were believing in His name, but Jesus did not entrust Himself to them because He knew what was in their hearts (John 2:23-25). Their faith was incomplete and inadequate because it was based, primarily, on His ability to perform miracles, rather than the fact that He was the Messiah, the Son of God who came to redeem them from their sins. (Cp. Acts 8:10-11). Jesus did not want people to believe in Him because of His ability to perform miracles; He wanted them to believe in Him as the Savior of their souls and the Lord of their lives.

Chapter 3 begins with the word "Now" (or "But"). In chapter 3, John is making a contrast between the faith of the people in Jerusalem and the faith demonstrated by Nicodemus. John wants us to imitate Nicodemus in his response to Jesus, not the people of Jerusalem in their fickle faith.

John chapter 3, in the larger context of the four Gospels, is the first recorded, in-depth teaching of Jesus. It focuses on the most important issue that we face as human beings: How to be born again, how to be saved, how to enter into the kingdom of God, how to receive God's gift of eternal life.

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

- The Pharisees were one of three Jewish religious parties which consisted of about 6,000 men in the time of Christ.
 - They were the conservatives; the largest of the religious parties that made up the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Court.
 - The Sanhedrin was made up of 71 members who specialized in the interpretation and application of both the written law and oral traditions of the Jews.
- The Pharisees were more popular with the people because of their opposition to their Roman rulers and their high regard for the Jewish Scriptures.
- They went to great lengths to keep themselves separated from everything they considered to be unclean, and to perform their religious duties with great care.
- They were very legalistic and strict in their practices.
- Their great besetting sins were pride, self-righteousness, and hypocrisy; they looked down on the common people because of their ignorance concerning the Law.
- **A ruler of the Jews** – Nicodemus was one of the 71 members of the Sanhedrin, a very prominent and important individual in Israel.
 - It was the Sanhedrin who sent a delegation to investigate John the Baptist in chpt. 1.
 - So, Nicodemus knew by this time that John had denied being the Messiah (1:20), but that he had announced that the Messiah was present (1:26-27).
 - Nicodemus became a secret follower of Jesus (7:51-52) and later a well-known follower of Jesus (Matthew 27:57).

- He, along with Joseph of Arimathea, who was also a member of the Sanhedrin and a secret disciple of Jesus (Luke 23:50; John 19:38), cared for the body of Jesus following His crucifixion and laid it to rest in Joseph's own tomb.

2 This man came to Jesus by night...

- The Pharisees as a whole were skeptical and unbelieving concerning Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God. They questioned His authority and rejected His claims.
- Nicodemus appears to be an exception to the rule; he was open to investigating this Man and considering His claims.
- In an attempt to avoid bringing unwelcome attention to himself, Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to learn more about this unusual Man.
- The point is, he was willing to investigate and find out who Jesus really was. He was searching and wanting to know the truth.

...and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

- Though Jesus had not received any formal training in the rabbinic schools (John 7:15), Nicodemus calls Him "Rabbi," a term of respect, and describes Him as "a teacher come from God."
- Jesus knew what was in Nicodemus' heart and mind and He recognized someone who was genuinely seeking the truth. (Cp. 2:24-25)

3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

- "I appreciate the compliment, Nicodemus, but we've got more important things to discuss—your eternal destiny."
- The kingdom of God is the place where God rules, both in heaven and on earth.
 - Currently, the kingdom of God is invisible and spiritual—it is in the hearts of those who have received Jesus as their King.
 - One day, it will be visible and physical—a literal thousand-year kingdom established upon the earth during the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:1-6).
 - And then extend for all of eternity throughout the entire universe (Revelation 21-22).
- Citizenship in the kingdom is not automatically granted to someone because of their ethnic or religious background.
- "The Greek word translated here as 'from above' can also be rendered 'again.' It seems that Jesus was speaking of a birth 'from above' because he later used the analogy of the wind (coming from some unknown [heavenly] source) to illustrate spiritual rebirth (see 3:7-8). But Nicodemus clearly thought that Jesus was speaking of a second physical birth." (*The Life Application Commentary Series*)
- We do not enter the kingdom of heaven by becoming religious people. It requires something much more radical and transformational: We must be spiritually born again by the Spirit of God!
- Just as a baby cannot cause itself to be born physically, so we cannot cause ourselves to be born again spiritually. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that takes place when we receive Jesus Christ as the Savior of our soul and the Lord of our life.