

You Must Be Born Again (Part 4)

John 3:9-15

Thought for the Day: We are spiritually born again and receive God's gift of eternal life when we place our trust in Jesus Christ to save us from our sins.

John 3 may be the most important chapter in the Bible. In this passage, Jesus explains how we can be spiritually born again; that is, how we can be saved from the death penalty due to our sins. What must we do to have the assurance that we will spend eternity in heaven with God when we depart planet earth?

9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

- Nicodemus was thinking of being born again (vss. 3-8) in natural terms rather than spiritual.
- The unaided wisdom of this world cannot discover and does not comprehend the wisdom that comes from above; the Holy Spirit must open our hearts and minds and enable us to understand the things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:6-16)

10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"

- Jesus was disappointed that Nicodemus, a man who was fluent in the teachings of the O.T., could not see beyond the physical world to the spiritual realities He was revealing.
- We need to move beyond a mere intellectual knowledge of the Word of God to a real spiritual discernment of the truths and principles that are taught therein.
- Genuine spiritual apprehension is a work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds, and we must be open to and desire His work in our lives.
- Nicodemus knew the Old Testament thoroughly, but he didn't understand what it said about the Messiah. Knowledge alone is not salvation. (John 5:39-40)
- "People may know the Bible and even study it regularly, but unless they understand and respond to the God whom the Bible reveals and the salvation that he offers, the Scriptures will only be a priceless relic rather than a life-changing treasure." (*The Life Application Commentary Series*)

11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

- The "you" in this verse is plural. It is possible that Nicodemus brought others with him, just as it is likely that Jesus' disciples were present for this conversation. If Nicodemus was alone, then Jesus is speaking through him to all the religious experts of Israel.
- Jesus is probably referring to Himself and all the prophets who had given testimony before His coming, including John the Baptist.

12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

- "Earthly things" – things that occur on the earth (the new birth, the movement of the wind, perhaps the miracles Jesus was performing).
- "Heavenly things" – the truths that pertain to the heavenly realm and the heavenly kingdom.

- We have a responsibility to cultivate an appetite for spiritual truth, to go deeper in the things of God, to move beyond the superficial to spiritual maturity. (Hebrews 5:11-14)
- "Even today the depths of Christ's teaching escapes the bored and inattentive. As Jesus pointed out, many of us have ears to hear, but do not listen." (*The Life Application Commentary Series*)

13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

- As Jesus begins to answer Nicodemus' questions, He presents His credentials for what He's about to share.
- Jesus is uniquely qualified to speak about heavenly matters. No other person has come to earth from heaven!

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

- Every time the words "lifted up" occur in John's Gospel, they refer to Jesus' death on the cross (see 8:28; 12:32, 34). This was a euphemism for death by crucifixion.
- Jesus Christ came from heaven and became a man in order to die for our sins. Jesus illustrated this truth from the story in Numbers 21:4-9.
 - Bronze symbolizes the judgment of God.
 - Cp. Revelation 1:14-15 – "His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace..." Speaks of Jesus' authority to carry out the judgment of God on man.
- "Jesus quoted this OT incident to illustrate how the new birth takes place. Men and women have been bitten by the viper of sin and are condemned to eternal death. The serpent of brass is a type or picture of the Lord Jesus. Brass, in the Bible, speaks of judgment. The Lord Jesus was sinless and should never have been punished, but He took our place and bore the judgment which we deserved. The pole speaks of the cross of Calvary on which the Lord Jesus was lifted up. We are saved by looking to Him in faith." (*William MacDonald, p. 1433*)

15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

- First mention of "eternal life" in John's Gospel (see 4:36; 5:39; 6:54,68; 10:28; 12:25; 17:2,3).
- "When a person trusts Christ, he or she is born again and receives eternal and spiritual life, God's kind of life." (*NKJV Study Bible, p. 1764*)
- "The Savior was made sin for us, He who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ receives eternal life as a free gift." (*MacDonald, p. 1433*)