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15

How To Enter The Kingdom Of God?
Jn. 3:1-15

As one examines the millions of religions in the world, one is made aware of the common denominator they all possess, that of personal works to merit acceptance before God.

Here in is where Christianity differs from all human religions, in that all a person has to do is believe in the sufficient work of Jesus Christ to be accepted by God.

The key to enter the kingdom of God is declared by Jesus to Nicodemus the Pharisee in what is the first of several discourses selected by John.

The discourse reveals the one and only way that all of mankind can enter the kingdom of God.

And the secret of entering the Kingdom of God is revealed to Nicodemus as he plays out three distinct roles.

- I. Nicodemus the seeker. vs. 1-3
- II. Nicodemus the skeptic. vs. 4-8
- III. Nicodemus the student. vs. 9-15

I. Nicodemus the seeker. vs. 1-3

- A. The identity of Nicodemus. vs. 1
 - 1. He was a Pharisee.
 - a. The Pharisees were the religious ritualists of the day.

16

- 1) They had arisen during the Macabean wars against Antiochus Epiphany who attempted to wipe out the Jewish religion and there were no more than 6,000 at any one time.
 - 2) Their name meant the separated ones.
 - 3) They were the scribes and teachers of the Law of Moses.
 - a) The Mishnah was the codified scribal law, for example the section on the Sabbath extends to not fewer than twenty-four chapters.
 - b) The Talmud is the commentary on the Mishnah and in the Jerusalem Talmud the section on the Sabbath law runs sixty-four and a half columns and in the Babylonian Talmud it runs to one hundred and fifty-six double folio pages.
 - 4) They were to live out the very law they taught but for the most part were the epitome of hypocrisy.
2. He was a ruler of the Jews.
- a. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin.
 - 1) The Sanhedrin was the ruling body of Israel comprised of elders, scribes and high priest that oversaw the affairs of Israel.
 - 2) The court comprised of seventy members after the Old Testament order.
 - 3) The Sanhedrin consisted of the Pharisees who were the ritualists and the Sadducees who were the materialists and of the priestly order.

- b. Nicodemus was a prominent figure in the Jewish community.
 - 1) He was looked up to by his peers.
 - 2) He was looked up to by the people.
 - 3. He was wealthy.
 - a. Nicodemus came to bury the body of Jesus along with Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus who had asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Jn. 19:38
 - b. Nicodemus brought 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes. Jn. 19:39
- B. The initial conversation of Nicodemus. vs. 2**
- 1. His coming was at night.
 - a. There are those who say he came by night because he was afraid of his peers and label him a coward.
 - b. There are other who say he came to find fault with Jesus.
 - c. The context reveals to us that Nicodemus for whatever reason he came to Jesus by night was a sincere seeker.
 - 1) He is put in contrast to the individuals in the preceding chapter who Jesus did not commit Himself to because they believed in Him due to the signs and not genuine faith. 2:23-25
 - 2) He could of come by night, revealing the chance he was taking in view of the clash in the temple cleansing
 - 3) He might of come at night simply due to the fact that they would not be interrupted.

- 4) He could of come at night after the practice of the Rabbis who studied the law a night.
 - 5) He could of come at night symbolizing the spiritual dark condition of his life despite his religious credentials and position.
 - a) By the way, this is the phrase by which he is identified two other times, "he who came to Jesus by night". Jn. 7:50, 19:39
 - b) The contrasts of light and darkness are prominent in John. 1:5, 9, 3:19, 8:12, 9:4-5, 12:35
- 2. He addressed Jesus with respect.
 - a. Nicodemus called Him, Rabbi which means master or teacher.
 - b. The title is believed to originated from the Chaldees, signifying doctor or master.
 - c. The title was not used before the captivity except for describing officers of Assyria and Babylon, "Rabsaris" and "Rabshakeh". 2King 18:17
 - 3. He confessed Jesus to be from God.
 - a. The statement is not limited to him, "We know that You are a teacher sent from God".
 - 1) The plural is used by Nicodemus "We", perhaps other Pharisees, elders and scribes.
 - 2) The word know "oida" means intuitive knowledge and can be translated perceive or understand, the exact same word is translated "see" in verse three.
 - b. The reason that Nicodemus gives for believing that Jesus is from God are the signs He is

doing., "For no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him".

- 1) The statement that these signs were valid credentials to prove that Jesus was from God is true in that He did all within the boundaries of the Scriptures and gave God the glory.
- 2) The statement also is wrong in that Satan can counterfeit signs and will through the Anti-Christ.
 - a) He will come after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders and deceivableness of unrighteousness. 2Thess. 2:9-10a
 - b) The false prophet will do great signs, bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of man. Rev. 13:13

* Signs and wonders must be judge by the Scriptures, if they add, take away or contradict them, then they are not of God! Deut. 13:1-3

C. The incredible response of Jesus. vs.3

1. Jesus declares that what He is saying is of the upmost importance and truth by the phrase, "Most assuredly", "Virily, Verily" or "Truly, Truly". vs. 3,5,11
2. Jesus declares He is supreme in authority having no need to quote Moses or the elders, "I say to you".
3. Jesus declares that unless one is born again "anothen" from above, he or she can not see

"oida" perceive or understand the Kingdom of God, He says it three times. vs. 3,5,7

- a. The Kingdom to the Jew meant the age to come when the Messiah would destroy their enemies and reign for a thousand years.
- b. The Kingdom to the Christian is present and yet to come.
 - 1) The Church is not the Kingdom.
 - 2) The Church will not bring in the Kingdom.
 - 3) The Church is part of the Kingdom.
 - 4) The Church will reign in the Kingdom.
4. Jesus answered Necedemus not according to what he said but according to what was in his heart, he was thinking of entrance to the Kingdom of God. 2:24-25

Illustration

When a little captive girl told the wife of the king of Syria that there was a prophet in Samaria that could heal her chief captain's lepersy, the King sent him at his request with lettes, silver and gold to the King of Israel to be healed and Namaan the leper went with an open heart! 2Kings 5:1-5

Application

1. Have you come with an open heart having heard about Jesus?
2. Have you come because of the miracles that you've heard in others lives?
3. Having come with an open heart, Jesus will tell you how to experience the greatest miracle by being born again.

Necedemus the seeker came to Jesus with an open heart!

II. Nicodemus the skeptic. vs. 4-8

- A. Nicodemus responds to Jesus with great skepticism. vs. 4
1. Nicodemus' question, "How can a man be born again when he is old?" reveals two things.
 - a. The futility of the natural mind to understand spiritual things. 1Cor. 2:14
 - b. The impossibility of such a thing being able to happen.
 2. Nicodemus' second question, "Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?", confirms his blindness regarding spiritual things.
 - a. Nicodemus' questions are honest and sincere even though it is skeptical.
 - b. Nicodemus attempts to understand as well as he can and states his mind.
 - 1) Notice Jesus does not rebuke him.
 - 2) Notice Jesus does not become impatient.
 - 3) Notice Jesus continues to minister unto him.
 - * A bruised reed He would not break, and smoking flex He will not quench. Matt. 12:20
- B. Jesus answers Nicodemus with great patience. vs. 5-8
1. Jesus declares the same truth a second time by using a few different words to emphasize the source of the new birth and the results of the new birth. vs. 5
 - a. The importance of the statement is evident again, "Most assuredly".

- b. The supreme authority is stated again, "I say to you".
- c. The declaration that unless a man be born again, he or she cannot see the Kingdom of God is declared once again using other words as synonyms.
 - * We want to look at them in reverse order.
 - 1) The first word that Jesus substituted is the word "enter" for "see" of verse three, emphasizing the results of the new birth..
 - a) Remember "see" means perceive or understand in reference to the Kingdom.
 - b) Therefore the word "enter" has to refer to the Kingdom also, namely that one who is born again is able to understand and enter the Kingdom of God.
 - 2) The second word that Jesus substituted is "again" or "above" in verse three by the phrase "of water" and "of the Spirit", emphasizing the source of the new birth.
 - a) What ever meaning we want to give to both of these words they must be true to the meaning of the word "again"
 - b) The word "again" or "above" described the source of the birth, namely spiritual and from heaven.
 - c) Therefore the phrases "of water" and "of the Spirit" must refer to something spiritual and from heaven and not something different which would only confuse the understanding of Nicodemus further!

15

- 3) Some have declared that "of water" means water baptism because John the Baptist and the disciples of Jesus were baptizing, but this commits two errors.
- a) Jesus would be teaching that water baptism was a requirement to be saved and enter heaven, thereby undermining His finished work of the cross for redemption. Rom. 6:3-4, 1Pet. 3:19-21
 - b) Jesus would be contradicting the heavenly source of the new birth, for water is sourced in earth not heaven.
- 4) Others have declared that "water" and "Spirit" refer to the same thing, namely the purifying work of the Holy Spirit, committing three errors.
- a) That Jesus is not using "water" as a metaphor but a simile.
 - b) That Jesus is being redundant by saying one had to be born of the Spirit and of the Spirit.
 - c) That of ignoring that Jesus is stating two things not one, water and Spirit.
- 5) The only meaning that the phrase "of water" can refer to is "the word of God".
- a) The term "water" is used in two ways in John, literal and symbolic.
 - 1) Ten of the twenty-four times it is found in John, it is used symbolically.

16

- 2)) Nine are used of the Holy Spirit, eight as Jesus conversed with the Samaritan woman at the well. 4:7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15
- 3)) One time at the Feast of Tabernacles as Jesus prophesied of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as rivers of living water. 7:38
- b) The only times the term "water" is used symbolic of the "word" is here in our text because we have already shown that Jesus would be speaking redundant if it referred to the Holy Spirit but the final determination comes from the mouth of Jesus Himself as He tells His disciple, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you". Jn. 15:3
 - * This seems to be confirmed throughout the Scriptures. Eph. 5:26, Ja. 1:18, 1Pet. 1:23
 - * There are two other verses in our text that will prove "water" to be the word of God. vs. 8, 14
2. Jesus declares the same truth a third time by dismissing Nicodemus' understanding of a physical earthly birth. vs. 6-8
- a. Jesus first make the distinction clear, the earthly birth has nothing to do with the heavenly birth. vs. 6
 - * This dismisses the teaching that "water" refers to our earthly birth in our mothers womb as a contrast to the spiritual birth

15

from above. Job 14:4, Ps. 51:5, Rom. 3:10-12

b. Jesus next declares to Nicodemus for the third time the key to enter the Kingdom of God. vs. 7

- 1) Jesus exhorts Nicodemus not to marvel, be amazed or puzzled that He is telling him, "You must be born again"
- 2) Jesus now returns to the original statement of verse three.
- 3) Jesus adds one more thing, the word "must" which means obligation, ought with the idea of an absolute requirement without exception.

* The word is used three times in the chapter. vs. 7, 14, 30

c) Jesus thirdly illustrates the new birth. vs. 8

- 1) The usual teaching of the verse uses the wind as an illustration of the effects on a person who is born from above and certainly we can all identify with this description.
- 2) The problem with this interpretation is that the word for "wind" is "pnuma" and of the 385 times it appears in the New Testament, this is the only time it is translated "wind" all others are translated "spirit" and "Spirit"
 - a) Lets read it with that translation, "the Spirit blows where it wishes and you hear the sound "phone" of it. Eccl. 11:5

16

1. How does the Holy Spirit speak?

* Through the word of God!

2. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

Rom. 10:17

3. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit is the application.

* The Holy Spirit illuminates the word of God, brings conviction to the heart of man, repentance is manifested and the person is born again from above. Jn. 1:12-13

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Illustration

When Naaman the leper was told to go dip himself seven times in the Jordan by the servant of Elisha to be healed, he became furious and offended in that Elisha himself did not come out to call upon God to heal him then and there, not to mention the ridiculous command to go dip himself in the muddy Jordan seven times to be healed and turned away in a rage. 2Kings 5:10-12

Application

1. You may be sitting here skeptical and attempting to figure out how it is possible for a person to be born again from heaven but your natural mind is unable to accept it.

2. You might be saying like Nicodemus, "How can I be born again at this point in my life?"

3. You have to open your heart to the word of God as the Holy Spirit desires to reveal your need of repentance and salvation!

Necodemus the skeptic has been patiently ministered unto by Jesus!

III. Necodemus the student. vs. 9-15

A. Necodemus responds to Jesus with great interest. vs. 9

1. Necodemus' question, "How can these things be?", reveals two things.
 - a. His ignorance as to the spiritual matters of the new birth.
 - b. His petition to be instructed as to the method of being born again.
 - 1) Though Necodemus was a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, he humbled himself to be instructed.
 - 2) Though Necodemus was a ruler of the Sanhedrin with all the authority he never challenged the authority of Jesus.
 - * This is no longer the "how" of verse 4b that of a skeptic but of a student who desires to be a disciple!

B. Jesus declares the evidence of his ignorance. vs. 10-12

1. Jesus reproves Necodemus mildly by two things. vs. 10
 - a. Jesus first points out his position of responsibility, "Are you the teacher of Israel?"
 - 1) The article implies the distinguished position of possibly the leading teacher if not one of the distinguished teachers of Israel.

2) The teachers were to be the models for others.

- b. Jesus next points out his accountability, "And do not know these things?"
 - 1) If the blind lead the blind, they will both fall into the ditch.
 - 2) The statement implies that he should of know this truth.
 - a) The word know "ginoskeis" means to know by experience.
 - b) Ezekiel is one of the prophets that spoke of the new birth through a new heart and a new spirit. Ezk. 36:35-38
 - b) Jesus wept over Jerusalem as He said, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace!!! But now they are hidden from your eyes?. Lk. 19:42
2. Jesus reproves Necodemus for his rejection of God's witness. vs. 11
 - a. Jesus qualifies the importance of what He is going to say again in two ways.
 - 1) The genuineness and truthfulness of the words by the phrase, "Most assuredly".
 - 2) The supreme authority, "I say to you".
 - b. Jesus declares His superior witness.
 - 1) The pronoun "we" speaks of Jesus and others, "We speak, we know, we testify what we have seen".
 - * This is the only time Jesus speak in the plural, "we".
 - a) Some say it refers to John the Baptist.

15

- b) Some to the Prophets which would include John.
 - c) Others say it refers to His disciples.
 - d) Yet others think it refers to the Father.
 - e) In our context, it has to stand in contrast to the “we” of Nicodemus, referring to the Jewish leaders, therefore the “we” of Jesus has to be His followers.
- 2) The pronoun "you" refers to Nicodemus and the Jewish leaders who did not receive the witness.
3. Jesus reproves Nicodemus for his inability to understand what Jesus had told him already. vs. 12
- a. The things Jesus had told Nicodemus were spiritual truth based on earthly things and he did not believe.
 - b. The things of Heaven would be even harder to believe, how would he believe them?
- C. Jesus declares the answer to Nicodemus' petition to be instructed about the method of being born again. vs. 13-15
1. Jesus declares Himself to be the unique revealer of heavenly things. vs. 13
- a. He is the One who has descended from heaven and come down.
 - b. He is the Son of Man, the title identifying His incarnation and one like man.
* Only Jesus uses it of Himself!
2. Jesus tell Nicodemus how to be born again. vs. 14-15

16

- a. The message comes from the Scriptures, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness" vs. 14a., Num. 21:4-9
 - 1) The people of Israel spoke against the Lord and Moses, accusing Moses of having brought them out of Egypt to have them die in the wilderness. vs. 4-5
 - 2) God sent fiery serpents into the camp and many die of the poisonous snakes. vs. 6
 - 3) The people came to Moses and repented of their sin and pleaded for his intercession. vs. 7
 - 4) God told Moses to make a brass serpent and set it on a pole in the middle of the camp that if any who had been bitten would look upon it they would not die. vs. 8-9
* Here in is another evident fact that the "word" refers to the "word of God".
- b. The application is unmistakable, for it is an equal parallel, "So must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life". vs. 14b-15
 - 1) Two absolute musts should not be missed.
 - a) The Son of Man **must** be lifted up.
 - b) The sinner **must** be born again or he or she will never understand or enter the Kingdom of God. vs. 3, 5, 7
 - 2) The outcome is "eternal life" age abiding life which primarily speaks of a quality of

life and secondly life that never ends in fellowship with God.

- 3) The symbolism is incredible.
- a) The pole represented the cross in the wilderness.
 - b) The brass serpent represented sin being judged on the cross.
 - c) The act of looking to the serpent on the pole in the middle of the camp represents faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ.
- * God desires each of us to put our trust and faith in the revelation of His word, regardless of how ridiculous or impossible it may be to believe, for just as looking would keep them from dying from the venomous bites so our looking to Jesus who died for the sins of the world will keep us from perishing!
- * Jesus made reference to His death and the outcome of His death and resurrection.
- 12:32-33

Necodenus the student came to know that a man must be born again to enter the Kingdom of God!

Illustration

The servant of Naaman exhorted him, "If the prophet would of told him to do some great thing, he would of done it. How much more then , when he says to you, wash, and be cleansed?" And he went down dipped himself seven times and his flesh was restored as a little child. 2King 5:13-14

Application

1. Are you open to admit your own ignorance about spiritual matters and how to enter the Kingdom of God?
2. Are you ready to learn as a student and receive and believe the way to enter the Kingdom of God?
3. Are you ready to trust the Scriptures that declare that faith in Jesus is the way to be born again?
4. Are you ready to change your theology, if it is corrected by the Scriptures?

Conclusion

The secret of entering the Kingdom of God was revealed to Necodemus as he played out three distinct roles.

- I. Necodemus the seeker came to Jesus with an open heart, so you must do!
- II. Necodemus the skeptic was patiently ministered unto by Jesus, so have you!
- III. Necodenus the student came to know that a man must be born again to enter the Kingdom of God, so we pray you do!