

# John Chapter 3

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## Introduction:

1. John is giving his readers samplings of how Jesus carried out His mission to this world.

## Contents:

Nicodemus Encounters Jesus  
How Can an Old Man be Born Again?  
The Greatest Heavenly Mystery  
John the Baptist Endorses Jesus

2. **R.C. Foster** writes:

The first two chapters of John show something of the effect of Jesus' personality and teaching upon the earnest, but untrained, Galileans whom He invited to assist in His ministry; the next two chapters show the impact of Jesus' meeting with the scholars and political leaders in Jerusalem.

3. After picking some disciples to train, Jesus turns His attention to a sincere Jewish scholar.

## NICODEMUS ENCOUNTERS JESUS

**(3:1.) There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee.**

- **Nicodemus** was both **Pharisee** and a **leader**, so he was prominent in Israel, a member of the ruling Sanhedrin. **Pharisees** adhered to the letter of the law and accepted the entire Old Testament as the inspired Word of God. However, they also added their interpretations to the inspired Word and made religion a matter of conforming to traditions, rites and ceremonies.
- **Nicodemus**, along with the other leaders of Israel, had rejected the baptism of John the Baptist while Jesus and His disciples had been baptized.

**But the Pharisees and experts in religious law rejected God's plan for them, for they had refused John's baptism.** (Luke 7:30 NLT)

Now that we know something about the mindset of **Nicodemus**, Jesus will show him another dimension to serving God.

**(2.) After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent You to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with You."**

- Coming **after dark** probably indicates that Nicodemus does not want to be identified. However later, he was willing to defend Jesus before his colleagues:  
**Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked.** (John 7:50-51 NLT)
- **Jesus** did **signs** that convinced Nicodemus and perhaps others of his ruling class that he was **from God**. So Nicodemus believed in Jesus, but *more than faith is required*. Jesus explains:

**(3.) Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."**

- Jesus was direct in His purpose about **the kingdom**. He knew what was on the heart of Nicodemus. A new birth is necessary to even **see the kingdom**.
- **I tell you the truth** shows that **Jesus** spoke from His own authority, not quoting past Jewish scholars for authority.
- It would be easy for a Jewish scholar to think of wealth, position, works or family as shortcuts to **kingdom** life. Even a Jewish scholar like Nicodemus had to be **born again**. He had to undergo a total transformation and dedication to **the Kingdom** message.
- That a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would not automatically be included in a coming **kingdom** was unthinkable to Nicodemus.

### **HOW CAN AN OLD MAN BE BORN AGAIN?**

**(4.) "What do You mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"**

- **Nicodemus** asked about a physical birth because that is the only kind he knew. He did not grasp the figure of speech that Jesus was using to communicate with him.

**(5.) Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit."**

- Jesus defined His birth as being of *another kind*. Being **born of water and the Spirit**. It is a single birth consisting of two parts: the **water** part is baptism in water and **the Spirit** part is the total change caused by faith and repentance. The newborn would then be guided by the **Spirit** through the written word as well as people speaking the written word. This truth was later presented in the letter of James:

**He chose to give birth to us by giving us His true word. And we, out of all creation, became His prized possession.** (James 1:18 NLT)

- Repentance and baptism were not revealed as the way into the kingdom until Pentecost, but Nicodemus was given a preview of what was to come.

### **(6.) Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.**

- There are two kinds of birth under discussion and Nicodemus must distinguish them in order to understand and be a part of the kingdom of God.

### **(7.) So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.'**

- This new kind of birth was a **surprise** to Nicodemus. His mind just couldn't process this dimension. Nicodemus believed that keeping the 613 laws that had been identified by the Rabbis was his ticket to God's presence following death.

### **(8.) The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."**

- You don't know either the source or destination of **the wind** even though you **hear** its results.
- The birth of the **Spirit** is like **the wind**. We can see its results in the changed lives of believers.

<b>THE ANALOGY OF THE NEW BIRTH</b>		
<i>Birth Cycle</i>	<i>Natural Birth</i>	<i>Spiritual Birth</i>
Seed	Living sperm	Living Word of God. Luke 8:11
Place of Planting	Womb	Heart (the will) Luke 8:15
Signs of Life	Action	Change of Life Style Luke 3:8-15
Change of state	Born	Baptized. Romans 6:1-6
Nourishment	Milk, then solid foods.	Milk of the Word. 1 Peter 2:2 Then solids: Hebrews 5:12-14
Relationship	Son, heir, child of the father	Son of God by adoption, joint heir with Christ. Galatians 4:5-7.

— From a design by Paul Butler

**(9.) "How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.**

- Even though he asked **How** in verses 4 and 9, **Nicodemus** couldn't grasp the truth from the great Teacher.
- **James Smith** points out that for Pharisees, salvation was a reward for good deeds, not being "born again."

**(10.) Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things?"**

- This is a gentle rebuke for Nicodemus. Nicodemus needed to understand this new birth.

**(11.) I assure you, We tell you what We know and have seen, and yet you won't believe Our testimony.**

- Jesus wasn't guessing. **He knew**. He had borne witness to what he had **seen** and Nicodemus wasn't accepting it.

**(12.) But if you don't believe Me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things?**

- While the new birth that Jesus disclosed was spiritual, yet it was still an earthly matter. There was no way for Jesus to communicate **heavenly things** to such an earth-bound listener.
- **Paul Butler** put it aptly:  
If Nicodemus could not understand that a “new heart and a new spirit” was necessary to be pleasing unto God (something he should have known from the Old Testament), how much more incredible would be God’s eternal purposes to such a carnal mind!

**(13.) No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man [who lives in heaven] has come down from heaven.**

- Jesus made it clear that He descended **from heaven**. He was not a mere man blessed with heavenly information.

**(14.) And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, (15.) so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.**

- Jesus alludes to an event recorded about **Moses** in Numbers 21 when citizens of Israel were being bitten by serpents:

**Then the LORD told him, "Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!" So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!**

(Numbers 21:8-9 NLT)

There was no personal merit in looking at the pole, just faith to obey and *look up* when the demand of safety was to *look down*.

- Likewise, it will be necessary to **believe** in the **Son of Man** to **have eternal life**. The choice was up to Nicodemus — but none of this matched with his theology.

### **THE GREATEST HEAVENLY MYSTERY**

**(16.) "For God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.**

- Jesus continues, explaining the driving force here. It was unfamiliar to Nicodemus: the **love of God for the whole world**.
- The verse can be remembered:
  - The declaration of God's love. He loved the entire world, not just hand-picked people. This includes gentiles.
  - The demonstration of God's love. Giving one's only son is sacrifice in the extreme like Abraham did of Issac.
  - The determination of God's love. He does require a response from the perishing. All must believe or have faith.
- **Augustine** said, "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love." Amazing.

### **(17.) God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Him.**

- Jesus *could* have come, gathered a few timid believers and nuked the rest.

### **(18.) "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in Him. But anyone who does not believe in Him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.**

- **There is no judgment against believers** with faith.
- But there is **judgment** for those who **do not believe**. The choice is up to each individual. This was radical talk for Nicodemus.

### **(19.) And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.**

- **The light** that has come is Jesus. (John 1:4.)
- People **love the darkness**. Jesus, the **light**, demonstrates that **their actions** are **evil**. They like the results of living in **darkness**.
- **Paul Butler** address the objection that those without faith are merely ignorant:

"Jesus shows that the condemnation which abides upon the unbeliever is just - it is what the unbeliever deserves - and He further reveals the inner moral wrong which makes this condemnation deserved.

The Greek word for loved in verse 19 is *agapae* which means a love of intelligence and purpose . . . a deliberate love. Thus a man who deliberately loves the darkness is morally rebellious and makes his own choice! When the light comes and convicts this man of his sins he will purposely reject the light and deliberately love the darkness. Such a man inevitably condemns himself and receives a just punishment (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Unbelief stems from a moral wickedness and not from ignorance! Paul recognizes as the basic cause of rejecting of the truth "having pleasure in unrighteousness."

**(20.) All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed.**

- Those addicted to wickedness want nothing to do with the **light** because they do not want to have **their sins exposed**.

**(21.) But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants. "**

- **R.C Foster** summarizes this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in this way:

Jesus seems at the first of this great conversation to have avoided the implied question of Nicodemus, and to have turned from the problem of His own personality to that of the kingdom, but in the closing words He gave such a beautiful and fascinating delineation of His person and work that it has been called "the Golden Text of the Bible:"

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life." The revelation of Himself was still veiled and profound as were His declarations concerning the kingdom, but He opened the door of a mighty vista to Nicodemus and challenged him to come forth "to the light, that his works may be made manifest."

What hours of agonizing indecision and meditation must have passed in the life of Nicodemus before he stood forth in

the light of day to help lift the body of his Savior from the cross!

**(22.) Then Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.**

- Jesus focused next on preaching in **the countryside**. John tells us in 4:2 that Jesus personally did not baptize.  
**Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that He was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself didn't baptize them -- His disciples did).** (John 4:1-2 NLT)
- This **baptism** was for Jewish people and was a transition toward **baptism** in Jesus' name that was first preached by Peter on Pentecost in Acts 2.

### **JOHN THE BAPTIST ENDORSES JESUS**

**(23.) At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism.**

- **John the Baptist** continued his work of announcing the kingdom and the Messiah. He was having success with people not only listening, but being **baptized**.
- Note that **baptism** was by immersion because **much water** was required. Sprinkling or pouring would have required only a small container of **water**.

**(24.) (This was before John was thrown into prison.)**

- Since John the writer had not mentioned **John** the Baptist being put into **prison**, it is clear that he had read the other Gospel accounts where it *is* mentioned and believed that his readers had read it also.

**(25.) A debate broke out between John's disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing.**

- Baptism had to do with **ceremonial cleansing**, so a man must have asked some disciples of **John** about their baptism as compared with that of Jesus. This is verified in verse 26.

JOHN'S BAPTISM	CHRISTIAN BAPTISM
1. Preceded by repentance Matthew 3:2	Required faith in Jesus as God's Son and repentance. Acts 2:38
2. Authority of God John 1:23.	In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:19
3. Temporary, preparing for the emergence of Christ. Acts 10:37; 19:3	Permanent, remaining in force until the end of time. Matthew 28:19-20
4. For the Jews primarily. Matthew 3:1	Universal. "All nations." Matthew 28:19
5. For the coming kingdom. Matthew 3:2	Inducts one into the kingdom and into Christ. Acts 8:12, Romans 6:4
6. Unto repentance. Acts 19:4	"for the remission of sins" Acts 2:38
7. Not connected with the Holy Spirit	Followed by the "gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38
8. Discontinued by John. Matthew 14:3	Holdovers from John immersed into Christ. Acts 19:1-5
— From a design by Paul Butler	

● **Paul Butler** writes:

The disciples of John began the controversy and probably challenged the Jew because he had been baptized by Jesus' disciples. That Jesus could baptize without consulting John they could not understand, and undoubtedly argued that the Jew had not been purified or cleansed because he had not been baptized by John. John's disciples probably brought the Jew with them when they came to their Teacher, expecting John to set this man right about the correct administrator of the rite of baptism.

**(26.) So John's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the One you**

**identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to Him instead of coming to us."**

- These **disciples** of **John** were seeing competition and came off in second place.

**(27.) John replied, "No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven.**

- **John** correctly pointed out that the success of Jesus came **from heaven. God** was in charge. There is no room for jealousy in the work of the Lord.

**(28.) You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for Him.'**

- John the Baptist reminded his men that they had said clearly that he **was not the Messiah**, but his forerunner. That is the role assigned to him by God.

**(29.) It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the best man is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at His success.**

- The people coming to Jesus are **the bride**.
- John the Baptist likens himself to **the best man** at the wedding. Hearing the **bridegroom** was a **joy** and John was now experiencing **joy** in hearing Jesus.

**(30.) He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.**

- These changes are set in heaven as seen by the word **must**.

**(31.) "He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but He has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else.**

- It is difficult to determine whether verses 31-36 are the words of John the Baptist or John the writer of the Gospel.
- Jesus **came from above** and cannot be compared to one who is only of this **earth**.

**(32.) He testifies about what He has seen and heard, but how few believe what He tells them!**

- Jesus tells it like heaven wants it said, but John says that no one is listening. There were just a handful of followers who had committed to Jesus: John the Baptist, about six disciples who were with Jesus.

**(33.) Anyone who accepts His testimony can affirm that God is true.**

- But there are exceptions. Those who believe are agreeing that God is right in sending his Son.

**(34.) For He is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives Him the Spirit without limit.**

- This is a claim for the inspiration of Jesus. What He says are **the words of God** himself.
- Jesus now has the **Spirit without limit**. Before His baptism and the coming of the **Spirit**, no miracles of Jesus are recorded. But now He is entering a ministry where He has power without **limits**.

**(35.) The Father loves His Son and has put everything into His hands.**

- Jesus has unlimited power on the earth. His miracles are not being micro-managed in heaven.

**(36.) And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment."**

- There is no middle-of-the-road policy available. John said to either **believe** and have **eternal life** or **disobey** and not even **see life**, but rather, the **anger** of a **God** whose great love has been rejected.