



First Baptist Church Selmer

A JOURNEY THROUGH JOHN • "BORN AGAIN?" • JOHN 3:1-21 • 1/2/2022

MAIN POINT

Jesus made it very clear to Nicodemus that religion doesn't necessarily mean that one is saved. In order for one to see the kingdom of God, "You must be born again."

INTRODUCTION

What is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen?

Where is the most beautiful place you have ever been?

If you haven't traveled very far from McNairy County, you should. It is quite amazing to see what God has created around us in just a spoken word. Whether it is the mountains in East Tennessee, the white sand beaches of the Gulf Coast, the fall leaves in the Northeast, the deserts of the Southwest, or the towering trees of the Pacific Northwest, we don't have to travel far to see God's handiwork. There are some very beautiful places even in our own backyard.

How much time have you spent thinking about the kingdom of God?

What do you think it looks like? Sounds like? Feels like? Smells like?

It is mindboggling to think about what is to come. We have experienced through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch so many things on this side of heaven that are amazing, and even some we hope not to experience again. But the kingdom of God is one that we cannot even begin to fathom. First Corinthians 2:9 states, "... What no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."

Not only will the kingdom be beyond our wildest imaginations, but the greatest part is that everyone has an opportunity to experience it. There is only one thing that you must do in order to experience it, "You must be born again."

UNDERSTANDING

Let's take a quick look today at the Gospel of John and understand a few things about this Gospel. We will spend the next 17 weeks looking in this one book as we hope to better understand Jesus from his life, death, and resurrection.

John was written by the Apostle John (as most agree upon). It possibly was written around the year AD. 85 and his primary focus was to persuade people to believe in Jesus (John 20:30-31). The main theme of the book is this, "Jesus is the Son of God." The book focuses on seven of Jesus' signs (miracles) as well as seven "I am" statements from Jesus himself. All of this was written to confirm Jesus as the "Son of God."

What is something interesting that you know about the book of John?

What other books are attributed to John's writings?

There may be many interesting things about the book of John itself but here are two. There are stories contained in John specifically that are not mentioned in the other three Gospel accounts. The first three Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels due to their similar content about Jesus' life while the Gospel of John doesn't just include those stories but tells of additional ones. For instance, Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine, the resurrection of Lazarus, and the passage we will look at today are only found in the book of John. the additional stories found in John are very important in understanding the deity of Jesus.

John is attributed to having written four other books in the New Testament, the three epistles of John and the book of Revelation.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 3:1-8

Who does the passage say Nicodemus is?

Why do you think Nicodemus approached Jesus in the night?

What was Nicodemus so amused with when it came to Jesus?

The Bible states that Nicodemus was a Pharisee but also, "a ruler of the Jews." It is likely that Nicodemus was both a Pharisee and part of the Sanhedrin. This meant he was a member of the most influential Jewish sect as well as the supreme council that made judicial rulings on religious, political, and social issues. Nicodemus was a man of great influence. Much speculation has come about why Nicodemus approached Jesus at night but one likely reason was the societal stigma that would surround a man such as Nicodemus engaging Jesus in

a conversation of this magnitude. If brought to light, Nicodemus could likely face expulsion from the synagogue.

What response did Jesus give Nicodemus on what must be done to see or enter the kingdom of God?

Why do you think Nicodemus was so confused about the thought of being "born again?"

Jesus told Nicodemus that anyone that wants to see or enter the kingdom of God "must be born again." Nicodemus's response was one of great confusion, "Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus began to teach about the difference between the flesh and Spirit. Nicodemus approached Jesus from an earthly, fleshly standpoint but Jesus was speaking about something that is not of this world. This was a new concept to many of the Jews who based their entire lives on adherence to the law of Moses. Now Jesus was speaking on something very different. He was speaking about the Spirit who would now live in those who believed.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 3:9-15

Why was Jesus so direct with his disappointment of Nicodemus' lack of knowledge?

What do you think Nicodemus thought with Jesus' line of questioning?

Nicodemus has all the right credentials and up to this point, was well versed in what he believed, but Jesus changed the narrative. Jesus displayed a sort of frustration or disappointment that Nicodemus was a religious teacher yet did not fully understand what he was teaching. Jesus then began to speak on what was soon to happen regarding himself as Nicodemus continued to listen.

The next passage is one of the most known passages of the Bible. Many of you know it and have it memorized yourself.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 3:16-21

Why is John 3:16 such an important verse for us all to remember?

What does Jesus say about those that have never believed in the first place?

If someone was to ask, "What must I do to be saved?", what would you tell them?

This verse or section of verses is vital in understanding Christianity. Why did Jesus come? "For God so loved the world..." What must I do to be saved? "believe in him..." What will I inherit? "Eternal life." All of these things are essential pieces in our own personal relationship with Jesus.

Why did Jesus compare salvation to light and darkness?

Which comes more naturally to people, light or dark?

Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, we have all been born into a life of darkness. Whether our own doing or a shadow of darkness that we naturally are drawn to, Jesus came to bring light into the darkness. It is likely that Nicodemus did not choose darkness over the light but he had grown so accustomed to the darkness, the light was blinding to him. We hear very little about Nicodemus after this encounter but we hope that he came to the light.

How is it possible to come to the light rather than live in the darkness?

Jesus says that for one to be saved, "you must be born again." Not a life that continues in darkness but one that is transformed by living in the light. Jesus is that light and a saved life, a born-again life, is one that is surrendered to Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION

How much time do you spend daily thinking of the kingdom of God?

Can you point to a time in your life that you can state that you were "born-again"?

When and where?

What darkness of your life needs to be brought before Jesus so that His light can shine through it?

PRAYER

Help us to know we are saved. Help our salvation experience not be limited to a church service, walking down an aisle, or even a prayer we stated. Help us to understand and know that we have been truly born again!

COMMENTARY

| JOHN 3:1-21

3:1-2. Nicodemus appears in the New Testament only in John's Gospel (see also 7:50- 51; 19:39-40). The text does not suggest Nicodemus's motive for coming to Jesus, but John does

emphasize his personal subordination to one he already understood had authority from God. When Nicodemus called Jesus Rabbi, this member of the Jewish ruling council placed himself in the role of learner. The conversation that unfolded led him to eternal life.

While the exact makeup and nature of the Jewish governing body in first-century Palestine is uncertain, the varying depictions of the Sanhedrin reveal a group consisting of priests and religious teachers who meet to decide on legal matters with religious, political, and social ramifications. (The Lexham Bible Dictionary)

3:3. If we view these first fifteen verses of chapter 3 as a series of questions and answers, the first question might look like this: "Are you here to bring in the kingdom?" And Jesus' first answer is, "You will never see the kingdom without being born again." Nicodemus demonstrates that religious training without spiritual insight is useless. Jesus got right to the heart of the problem. He told the teacher he must be born again or from above, a word which appears again in verses 7 and 31. The actual words describe a garment torn from top to bottom. Unless God changes our hearts His way, from the inside out, any discussion of the kingdom is useless.

3:4. Now the second question surfaces: How can a man be born when he is old? The physical world is often unexplainable just like the spiritual world, and Jesus later used the wind as an example to make that point. A person cannot respond to spiritual truth in natural ways. Though the metaphor may have changed somewhat, Nicodemus could have heard this message even before Jesus' public ministry began. John the Baptist had preached that the king was already in their midst, but they would not experience the kingdom just because they were children of Abraham. Jews had compelled Gentiles to be baptized in order to participate in the nation, and John warned them that the Jews needed the baptism of repentance. The rite of Jewish baptism for proselytes does not necessarily depict the new birth Jesus proclaimed. But it contained the idea of washing away one's old and defiled life to emerge as a new person. But Nicodemus could not make the connection; he was stuck on a physical wavelength.

3:5. The second answer must have hit Nicodemus directly between his theological eyes: "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." Verse 3 deals with the source of the new birth, and verse 5 talks about the process. Being born of the Spirit means the regeneration provided at the time of faith in Christ. The phrase born of water and the Spirit probably refers to spiritual birth that cleanses from sin and brings spiritual transformation (Ezek. 36:25-27).

3:6-7. Though the Holy Spirit was active in the Old Testament text, nowhere in Judaism could one find the role of the Holy Spirit in personal regeneration. The first time You appears in verse 7, it is singular as in verses 3 and 5. Obviously Jesus was talking directly to Nicodemus. But in the

last phrase of verse 7, the You becomes plural saying, in effect, “all of you.” The new birth was not just for Nicodemus. The movement from flesh to spirit, from world to kingdom, from death to life is a necessity for every human being.

3:8. In this fascinating conversation, Jesus moves from the metaphor of birth to that of breeze. Human effort can only produce human results (John 1:13), but the pneuma—the Spirit—is a different story. This is a spiritual mystery known only to God and difficult to explain in terms humans can grasp. The words wind and spirit are derived from the same Greek word. God brings the breeze when and where He chooses. This is a spiritual prototype for the way God brings people to faith. This verse guards against a physical dependence for the new birth such as the water of baptismal regeneration or another accompanying phenomenon. Sights, sounds, and smells are irrelevant. Nor are the time and place of new birth essential, though many people can point to both. Regenerational reality comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit.

3:9–11. Nicodemus raised a third question: How can this be? or, “What does all this mean?” and Jesus began an answer which said, in effect, “It means that eternal life only comes through personal faith in the cross.” As a student of the Old Testament, Nicodemus should have understood something about new birth (Isa. 44:3; Jer. 31:31–33; Ezek. 36:25–16).

The text stops us in verse 11 when we encounter the word “we.” Does this refer to Jesus and John the Baptist? Jesus and the disciples? Nicodemus’s understanding of the prophets? We encounter a plural pronoun four times in this one verse, then abruptly in verse 12 Jesus went back to the use of the singular I. Some commentators do not even deal with this point, and others take a variety of views. Dogmatism is unwarranted in such a case, of course, but the unique appearance of the plurals surely requires some explanation. This is likely “teacher talk.” In verse 2 Nicodemus called Jesus “a teacher who has come from God” and in verse 10 Jesus responded by saying, You are Israel’s teacher. Perhaps the verse could be paraphrased this way: “Teachers tell the truth, instruct from their own knowledge, and describe things they have seen. Why then do religious leaders like you, used to this kind of procedure, not recognize the reality of changed lives you have seen among disciples and followers.”

3:12–13. What are these earthly things of which Jesus had been speaking? Perhaps basic regeneration, without which no other heavenly things could be understood. Included in that spiritual list would have been such doctrines as the incarnation, the virgin birth, and the coming kingdom in which Nicodemus was so interested. Some interpreters take heavenly things to refer to the conversation with Nicodemus, while earthly things could have meant earlier teaching, but that is pure speculation. Perhaps “earthly things” refers to physical phenomena like earth and wind.

3:14–15. The words “lifted up” appear twice more in this Gospel (8:28; 12:32), and each time they emphasize the centrality of the cross and the message of salvation. The sin in the desert was rebellion, and Israel needed to show faith and obedience by looking to the pole (Num. 21:9).

At the end of the paragraph we find the words eternal life from which the title of this chapter is taken. It comes at us again at the end of verse 16. Certainly the adjective refers to the duration of life with God (it lasts forever), but it also describes quality, contrasting Christian faith with nihilism and futility.

3:16. Salvation comes as a free gift when we believe what God has said. For almost two thousand years people have been adding to the gospel, but the truth still rings clear today— whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Nicodemus had superb religious training but very little spiritual insight. He could not grasp Jesus’ statement that a person must be born from above to experience eternal life.

3:17-18. Did all this happen for judgment and condemnation? No. That was never God’s purpose. Notice how central Jesus is to the passage. Verse 15 emphasizes the words “in Him” and they appear again in verses 16-18, while verse 17 talks about God’s saving the world through Him. Every human being has a choice—eternal life or eternal death. And as the Bible describes it, to perish is not to cease existence, but to experience utter failure, futility, and loss—an eternity without God.

3:19-21. Now we see the verdict. People reject Christ because of evil deeds and because they hate the light. God does not label their deeds evil because they love darkness; they love darkness because that is their very nature. Five times John mentioned light, a word he had already introduced in chapter 1. We talk about “giving the invitation” but God demands repentance. What possible excuses keep people from Christ? This passage tells us they refuse light because it shows up the darkness in their own lives. The contrast of our text continues: believers possess eternal life, but unbelievers do not. Believers are not condemned, but unbelievers are condemned already. Believers live in the light, while unbelievers live in the darkness.

The last phrase of this paragraph should encourage all of us. Those who practice the truth, who continuously live in the light of God’s Spirit, demonstrate that their righteousness has been brought about by God.