

The New Birth

(John 3:1-21)

I. Vv. 1-2 Meet Nicodemus

A. *Serious About Spiritual Things.*

1. As a son of Abraham, he took his faith seriously.
2. As a Pharisee, he was a member of “the straitest sect of our religion” (Acts 26:5).
3. As a member of the Sanhedrin Court, he served in the supreme court of the Jewish judicial system.

B. *Sincere In Spiritual Things*

1. He recognized that the teaching of Jesus was from God, confirmed by miracles.
2. His commendation of Jesus was sincere, not like the Pharisees of Matt. 12:24 (attributed his miracles to Satan) and of Matt. 22:15-18 (used flattery to set trap).

C. *Searching For Spiritual Things*

1. He came to Jesus by night:
 - a. To sit at the feet of the Master Teacher, to seek information.
 - b. Out of timidity and fear - his cohorts on the Court did not know of his faith (7:48).
2. Nicodemus was looking for the kingdom of God.
 - a. He had to learn that his ancestry as a Jew and his credentials on the Sanh. Court did not qualify him for the new kingdom and Israel of God.
 - b. We too must learn that our ancestry (family, national, or religious) and our acceptance in certain circles cannot qualify us for the kingdom of God today.
 - c. This is why Nicodemus and men today need to hear the lesson of Jesus on the new birth.

II. Vv. 3-8 Born Again, Anew, From Above

A. *Importance of the New Birth: Essential if We are to See, Share, or Enter the Kingdom of God.*

1. This is the rule of God by which He blesses man spiritually for time and eternity.
2. The kingdom of God is divine rule, not human rule. It is government OF, BY, and FOR GOD.
3. It is called the kingdom of God (its origin is with God), the kingdom of heaven (it is heavenly, spiritual in nature), and the kingdom of Christ (he rules in it as King of kings and Lord of lords).
4. This is the kingdom prophesied in Dan. 2:44 which would stand forever.

- B. *“EXCEPT” Has the Force of IF AND ONLY IF* (cf. vv. 2-3; Matt. 18:3; 19:9; Lk. 13:3).
- C. *“HOW?” Refers to Second Birth - We Must Understand Question to Understand the Answer* (vs. 4).
1. He is NOT asking “HOW” the 1st birth occurs. Denom. people are quick to say the water refers to the physical birth, not to BAPTISM.
 - a. We can be born of water when a man, old.
 - b. If it refers to the amniotic fluid, then Jesus said, “Except a man be born of amniotic fluid and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”
 - (1) That excludes from heaven people born of a dry birth.
 - (2) It excludes a pregnant mother and her infant who die together.
 2. Denom. teaching often avoids mentioning the water of the new birth altogether. Illustrate with tracts. Jesus said there is water in the new birth.
 3. Others grant there is water in the new birth, and that it is baptism, but apply the passage to infant baptism.
 - a. Ill. with Catholic application for infant baptism.
 - b. Nicodemus understood that Jesus was discussing something which applied to a responsible, mature mind (“a man...when he is old”).
 4. The new birth is a birth in which both water and the Holy Spirit play some role. Let the Bible explain it:
 - a. John 3:5 - Water + The Spirit ---- Kingdom of God
 - b. Titus 3:5 - Washing of Reg. + Renew of Holy Spirit --- Saved
 - c. 1 Cor. 12:13 - Bapt. + Holy Spirit (origin, — Body (Church) controlling guidance, Blessings of Holy Spirit revelation)
 - d. 1 Cor. 1:13 - Bapt. + Words of Holy Spirit --- Family of God (2:13; 4:15)
Gospel
 - e. 1 Pet. 3:21 - Bapt. + Truth - Holy Spirit --- Save, Purify Soul (1:22-23)
Word of God.
 5. The baptism revealed and required by the Holy Spirit is immersion in water, not sprinkling or pouring (Acts 8:38; Rom. 6:3-4; in Lev. 14:15-16 Holy Spirit used “pour” oil in palm, “dip” finger, “sprinkle” oil).
- D. *The New Birth Is a SPIRITUAL Birth* (vv. 6-8).
1. It renews the inner man: Rom. 6:17; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; 2:20.
 2. BOTH water baptism and a genuine reception of the teaching of the Holy Spirit are essential to this birth.
 3. We could immerse 2 people on the same day and 1 be truly born again and the other not.
 - a. One truly believes, sincerely repents, honestly confesses, and is baptized, obeying from the heart.

- b. The other does not sincerely repent, but comes for convenience, to please a relative, or for material gain.

III. Vv. 9-13 Christ: The Witness From Heaven

- A. *Vs. 9-10 Nicodemus Professes He Cannot Understand, But Jesus Reminds Him He Is Too Well Read in the O.T. to Not Understand.*
 - 1. The prophets spoke of these things (Ezek. 11:19-20; 18:31;36:25-27).
 - 2. John preached these things (Matt.3:1-12, esp. vv. 2, 8-9).
- B. *Nicodemus and All Men Can Understand Jesus, the Master Teacher, the Witness Sent Down From Heaven (Vv. 11, 13).*
 - 1. Never was a man so qualified to speak these things and so capable of making himself understood!
 - 2. Beware of diluting the force of the terms witness, testify, and testimony. To tell what a witness said does not make us a witness.
 - a. Jesus was the witness sent from heaven.
 - b. His Apostles were witnesses of his resurrection.
 - c. We are not witnesses but point people to the witnesses.
- C. *Vs. 12 If Nicodemus Professes to Not Understand the Earthly Things (1st Principles) Taught by Jesus, How Can Jesus Teach Him the Heavenly Things (Greater Lessons of the Invisible Realm - hadean world, horrors of hell, glories of heaven, etc.)?*

IV. Vv. 14-17 - Look and Live!

- A. *When the Jews Murmured Against God, He Sent Serpents Which Bit and Poisoned Them (Num. 21:4-9).*
 - 1. God told Moses to lift up a brass serpent on a pole. If anyone was bitten, “when he looketh upon it he shall live.”
 - 2. Sin is the serpent that poisons and plagues us.
 - 3. Christ was lifted up on the cross, suffering a horrible death so that we might live. The provision of God’s love (vs. 16).
- B. *It Is Not Enough to Say, “I Believe,” Without Looking, Obeying!*
 - 1. If Nicodemus believes, he must believe what Jesus taught on the new birth.
 - 2. Vs. 16 is said to be “the Golden Test” of the Bible--“enough to save all the world.”
 - a. WHAT ABOUT VS. 5? Cannot understand v.16 without v.5. Ill. with Baptist tract on Jn. 3:16 (no mention of vs. 5).
 - b. To enter the kingdom in v. 5 is to receive the promise of eternal life in v. 16.

- C. *Christ Came Not to Judge and Condemn Men But to Save Them! He Will Return to “Judge the World in Righteousness” (Acts 17:31).*

V. Vv. 18-21 - Choice: Darkness Vs. Light

- A. *Did Nicodemus Finally Accept and Obey the Gospel?*
1. Each reference to him leaves the answer in doubt.
 - a. John 7:50-52 (he tried to make an indirect defense of Jesus but did not affirm his faith); 12:42-43; 19:38-39.
 - b. He is always called the one who came by night, highlighting his timidity and fear.
 2. We do not know what choice he finally made. He was so near and yet so far away from the kingdom, like many today who have learned the truth but failed to obey the gospel.
- B. *The Principle Which Determines Whether Men Accept and Obey the Gospel of Christ Is This: LOVE OF DARKNESS or LOVE OF LIGHT and TRUTH.*
1. This principle determined Nicodemus’s final answer. With all his good qualities, if he failed to obey, it can only be because he loved darkness in some form (his position, circle of associates, human traditions, etc.).
 2. This principle determines our choice. Only the love of darkness in some form keeps us from coming to Christ. Only the love of light and truth can lead us out of the darkness of sin.
- C. *Our Reaction to the Light Reveals Our True Character.*
1. A thief works in the night - ducks, dodges, avoids the light.
 2. A coal miner lost after an explosion and cave-in rejoices to see the light.

Invitation:

1. Will you come to the light of Christ and truth, or turn back again to the darkness?
2. We can be born again, born into the family of God, born into

The Land of Beginning Again

I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning Again

Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
and all of our poor selfish grief

Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door,
and never be put on again.

(Louisa Fletcher)

- Outline by: *Ron Halbrook*