

## Transcript

### The Jesus Story - Nicodemus: Part One

Up to now, while looking at The Life of The Lord Jesus Christ, we have been looking at John's gospel, at incidents that are not found in any of the other gospels.

In chapter two, we looked at the wedding at Cana, where Jesus performed a great miracle by turning water into wine. John then described just what happened when Jesus cleared all the traders and animals out of the temple.

This is where we finished last time, chapter 2 verse 23:

***23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.***

***24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,***

***25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.***

Now we come to Chapter 3. This passage must be one of the best known and most well-read passages in the whole of the Word of God, and verse sixteen has been described as The Gospel in a nutshell.

In John Chapter three we have the gospel revealed in all its fullness; we have the doctrine of the new birth fully explained; we have an insight into the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ; and, we have the revelation of the Love of God; the whole plan of salvation revealed, and the awesome fact that there is an eternity, to be spent in either Heaven or in Hell.

In John chapter three, there is a wealth of Good News to be found, and it is going to be well our while looking at this meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, this is how chapter three begins:

***1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.***

***2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.***

We need to take this chapter one step at a time. There is a natural dividing line in verse 12, after Jesus finished his discussion concerning the New Birth. He makes this statement:

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

Jesus will go on to talk about heavenly things. But today we will just be looking at the earthly things that he talked about.

In Verse 1 we read:

***1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.***

Just who was this man Nicodemus? Nicodemus. He was a religious leader and a ruler of the Jews. That meant he had power, authority, wealth, intelligence, and respect. He had everything anyone could ever want.

With the beginning of chapter three John gives a perfect example of Jesus knowing just what was in the man. Jesus showed Nicodemus that even he, a teacher and scholar, required the “new birth” in order to enter the kingdom.

The teachings and miracles of Jesus were affecting Nicodemus. His world was being rocked by Jesus to the point where he decided that he had to find out for himself who this man was. We read:

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, and when he reached Jesus, he said to him:

***“I know you’re a teacher from God.”***

But notice, though he came by night, Jesus made him welcome. Jesus, though busy during the day, did not refuse to have a discussion with a sinner seeking the truth at night. A man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus.

Verse 1 tells us who Nicodemus was and the important position he held. His rank is given - a ruler of the Jews. Later on in verse 10, Jesus will describe him as: “The teacher of Israel”. John describes him as “a ruler of the Jews.”

It’s likely he was a member of the Sanhedrin (the seventy-member ruling council of the Jews). Nicodemus could well be described as one of the best specimens of “religious humanity”; well-educated, moral, holding a high position. He was a man of culture; a strict observer of religious rites, and ordinances; a “ruler of the Jews,” a “master of Israel,” and a believer in Israel’s promised Messiah.

But, the most important thing that we find in this verse was not his position or qualifications, but the very fact that “He came to Jesus by night”, Nicodemus, the “teacher of all Israel” realized that he did not have what Jesus had.

The spirituality of Jesus was of a kind totally different to that of Nicodemus’. The miracles he witnessed were astonishing and the teaching of Jesus was outstanding. This was clearly “something special” and it was good.

Nicodemus wants more of this deep personal teaching from Jesus. He comes humbly, though secretly, and admits that he sees Jesus as being from God. Nicodemus is clearly here to learn and not to argue. So Jesus immediately goes on to teach him.

There have been many different reasons put forward as to why Nicodemus came at night. Some would tell us that it was because he did not want to be seen by the other Pharisees. It may just have been simply that he was too busy to see Jesus during the day. It could also have been that he wanted to see Jesus by himself to be able to ask Him questions without interruptions.

But, whatever the reasons put forward for the night time visit they are not really all that important. The important fact is that: This man came to Jesus.

Nicodemus began with a high compliment, but Jesus immediately got to the heart of the matter. Jesus immediately looks beyond the statement that Nicodemus makes

and tells him of his greatest need. Nicodemus was familiar with Jesus' previous teachings and wanted to have a personal conversation with Him. But, it seems that Jesus is setting the terms of their conversation here at the beginning.

Jesus revealed the most vital, fundamental aspect of our faith which is to belong to God and his Kingdom we must be born again. Jesus is letting Nicodemus know that He was, as of yet, not suitable for the kingdom of Heaven, and if this Pharisee couldn't grasp that, then their conversation was going to go nowhere.

Jesus responds to Nicodemus's friendly statement by coming directly to the heart of the matter. He does not waste time on secondary issues. His statement, "Most assuredly," at the outset calls for careful, single-minded attention. Nicodemus's destiny will hang on how he hears and answers what Jesus will now say:

***3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."***

He may have perhaps come to Jesus for several reasons but they were all sincere. He may have been curious to see the person that was doing so much good in Jerusalem. He may have wanted to just spend some time with Jesus and learn what he could.

But regardless of his reasons, he had come with the right attitude and in the right spirit. He would leave that night after having found that for which he was looking. Nicodemus had come because he genuinely wanted to see and to know more about Jesus.

His attitude had been a perfect model of the kind of right attitude and spirit that leads to true biblical salvation. No person cannot be false and find peace with the Lord. So Nicodemus was not false.

This begins a debate that we need to look a little closer at Nicodemus, makes the simple statement:

***"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."***

***3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."***

Jesus is not telling Nicodemus how to live for God. But first of all he tells him that he must come alive to God. A man must be born again, without this New Birth, Natural man is devoid of spiritual life.

"Born again"! The phrase is appealing and fresh, it is alive with meaning. Another chance of starting all over again, a new life! Is it possible?

That is exactly what Jesus is saying. Jesus is laying out very clearly man's needs. It's not that he is ignorant, and needs instruction. It's not that he is feeble, and needs invigorating. It's not that he is sick, and needs a doctor. It's far worse than that, he is spiritually dead; the natural man is spiritually lifeless.

He needs quickening; he is a spiritual corpse, he needs bringing from death to life. What natural man needs more than anything else is divine life? And just as birth is

the gateway to natural life, to come alive spiritually, a man must be born again, of the Spirit of God.

It is very important that we fully understand the doctrine of the New Birth. This statement made to Nicodemus was not just for him, but for everyone who wants to see the kingdom of God. Jesus answers a question that Nicodemus does not even ask. He read Nicodemus' heart and came to the very core of his problem, his need for the spiritual regeneration produced by the Holy Spirit.

You tell the average man that he must be born again, he thinks that he has to turn over a new leaf. He thinks that he has to reform his lifestyle or he needs a change of heart. But it does not matter how many changes of heart a man has, it will be to no avail.

The New Birth is far more than turning over a new leaf or reforming, or even having a change of heart. There are millions today who think that to be Born Again is to become religious, but churches throughout the world are filled with religious people. They pray, they read their bibles, they take part in all the religious activities that they can, but you would have to go a very long way to find someone who would be more religious than Nicodemus.

Not only was he a Teacher of Religion, he held one of the highest positions that it was possible to hold in religious circles. A Pharisee, a member of the Jewish ruling council, and the message that Jesus has for him is very simple - Nicodemus, you must be born again.

For all those who would be saved, escape hell and be prepared for heaven. They must be born again, nothing less will do. The new birth is the impartation of a completely new nature.

When we are born, we receive from our parents their nature. When we are born again, we receive from God His nature. The spirit of God begets in us a spiritual nature. We need to be very clear on this point, we need nothing less than to be completely born again of the spirit of God.

There is a fundamental law of life, and it applies to all forms of life. Everything in nature produces its own kind. So, that which is born of sinful man is sinful child. No corrupt tree can bring forth good fruit. So that which is born of flesh is flesh. It's impossible for it to be any other.

You can educate it, cultivate it all you like, it remains flesh. It may be refined flesh; it may be beautiful flesh. It may even be religious flesh, but it remains flesh.

On the other hand, that which is born of the spirit is spirit. A child always partakes of the nature of its parents. The new birth is not a reformation of the outward man. It's not the education of the natural man. It's not a cleaning up of the old man. It's the creation of a completely new man. It's being born into the family of God.

Jesus uses two symbols, water and spirit. He tells Nicodemus that for a man to enter the kingdom of God his new birth would be in two stages - he must be born of Water, and he must be born of the Spirit.

There is an important spiritual truth revealed here. I know that this text is often used

to demonstrate Salvation and Water Baptism, and that may sound ok, but in the Bible the symbol of water often represents cleansing, and the spirit is often used to represent power.

When a man repents of his sins and really believes in the Lord Jesus Christ all his sins are dealt with. Not only are they forgiven, but they are forgotten as well. A man is completely cleansed of all his past sins and to prevent him from going out and making the same mess of his life all over again, he needs the power of the Holy Spirit. That power that enables him to be what in his own strength he could never be and to do things that in his own strength he could never do.

Being born of water and the spirit is simply receiving the cleansing and strengthening power of Christ, which not only wipes out our past sins but gives us the victory for the future. To be Born Again of Water and of the Spirit is to be changed in such a way that it could only be described as being completely re-created.

When we have the Lord Jesus Christ within us; when we have all our past sins forgiven; when we are armed by the spirit for the future, then we become the Sons of God. Then we enter into eternal life, which is the very life of God. Nicodemus must still have seemed puzzled:

***4 Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”***

Notice the wonderful patience that Jesus has with Nicodemus. This is something that we don’t usually realise. Jesus has been ministering to the various needs of all those who needed it during the day. Now Jesus, weary as he must have been, is now gently but firmly explaining to Nicodemus The Whole Plan of Salvation:

***5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.***

***6 “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.***

***7 “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’***

***8 “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”***

This illustration was perfect. I don’t know of anything that could be used to demonstrate the point that Jesus was making. Better than this illustration of the action of the wind. Both the wind and the spirit are sovereign in their activities;

And both are mysterious in their operation. The wind blows just where it pleases, it does not consult man. Men may try but they will never control it. When the wind blows in its full force, it moves everything before it. And it is exactly the same when the Holy Spirit moves in His fullness.

When the Holy Spirit moves in power the Kingdom of Darkness is devastated. He breaks down men’s prejudice, subdues his rebellious will and overcomes all opposition. Another thing that we find about the wind is that it is irregular, sometimes the wind moves so gently that it hardly rustles the leaves on the trees, and yet on

other occasions, it's so powerful that you can hear its roar for miles.

And it is exactly the same when the Holy Spirit moves. Sometimes the Holy Spirit moves so gently that you would hardly know that he was dealing with someone, and on other occasions he moves with such power changing lives, that everyone is aware that he is moving. It may be just the odd one or two saved in a meeting here and there. Or it might be as on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 souls saved in one gathering.

Now besides being irregular the wind is invisible. It is exactly the same with the Holy Spirit. His person is unseen. The wind is beyond our understanding, it defies explanation, we don't know where it comes from or where it goes to. And the moving of the Holy Spirit is the same. His operation is in secret, and his working is profoundly mysterious.

Let me try to explain, God throws an impenetrable veil over the beginning and process of life. The fact that we live, we know, but how we live we just don't know. Life is evident to our consciousness; we know that we are alive, and it is manifest to our senses; we can feel that we are alive.

But just what life is is a mystery, and it is exactly the same with the life of the spirit. The person who is born again of the spirit of God, they know that they have new life. They enjoy the evidence of that new life, but how the Holy Spirit, operates upon the soul, subdues the will and creates new life within us, that is one of the mysteries of the deep things of God.

Nicodemus the Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin and a great teacher he may be, but of spiritual things he knew nothing. But he is honest enough to show his ignorance of these things:

**9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"**

**10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"**

**11 "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.**

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

If Nicodemus has failed to understand the simpler, earthly things, how can he expect to understand the more advanced heavenly realities? Nevertheless, Jesus will go on teaching him in verse 13. Eternal life for all human beings begins with a spiritual re-birth and continues for all eternity. It is inseparably linked to the eternal life that is being now enjoyed by Jesus in his resurrected body.

This is how John describes it in his first epistle, chapter 3 verse 2, this is what we read:

**Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.**

So, all those who have been born again have been born to a permanent inheritance

that is both spiritual and physical. To be born-again you must be willing to let go of living merely on the earthly human plane of your own will and ideas.

We need to be continually seeking to have a moral and spiritual existence continually seeking the will of God. You must realize that no matter how smart and moral you are, you “just don’t have it” in yourself. When you realise that you are missing something very important, and that you need whatever it is that Jesus has. That is the point that Nicodemus came to - and that is the point that we all need to come to as well. Verse 3:

**3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**

“You must be born again said Jesus.” No one will ever see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” No one can enter heaven by their own efforts, we can only enter heaven by receiving a new life through faith in Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of God means the reign of God both in heaven and on earth. When a person believes in Jesus Christ and they give their life over to God, that person enters the “kingdom of God.” In other words, as we place true faith in Jesus Christ, we are born again into the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom. That means that even when our bodies die, our spirits continue to live on in His kingdom. The person who has been “born again” never dies.

To enter the kingdom of God is the same as to receive eternal life. Verse 15 tells us:

**15 “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.**

This eternal life begins as soon as we believe in Jesus, and it never ends.

Peter in his first epistle tells us, 1 Peter 1:23:

**23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.**

Jesus has explained to Nicodemus his need to be born again. He has described the way that this will happen. Still, Nicodemus seems unsure:

**9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”**

**10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”**

**11 “Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.**

**12 “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe**

What are the “earthly things,” which are set in contrast with the “heavenly things?” The most natural way to understand the “earthly things” is to understand them as what Jesus has just been talking about. It may seem strange to classify the new birth as an “earthly” subject, since it is in its very nature. It is a birth from heaven, but it is “earthly” in the sense that it takes place on earth and can be demonstrated with earthly illustrations:

How will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

That is where we need to leave this today. The next time that we look at this we shall begin where we are leaving off with verse twelve:

**12 “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”**

We can then go on to look at the heavenly things that Jesus talks about.

**13 “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”**

Who is better qualified to tell us of “Heavenly Things” than Jesus the one who came down from heaven. Who better to tell us just how great the love of God is, than the one who himself was the gift of love. We shall go on to read of this gift of love in verse 16:

16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”.