

Jesus and Nicodemus, John 3:1-12 April 26, 2009 - Skip MacMillan

Nicodemus, John 3:1-2

Only in Gospel of John, chapters 3, 7:50 and 19:39-42; named, unlike chapters 4 and 5.

Status

“A **man of the Pharisees**”. Man – John 2:25; part of the religious structure or system.

“**Member of the Jewish ruling council**”. Ruler of Jews, highest national body in charge of Jewish affairs (Kostenberger, 118). Inner circle, heavy hitters, insider of the insiders.

“Night”

Historical detail on John’s part, authenticating the text.

Covert operation; Nicodemus represented the Pharisees. Could he be seen or overheard having such a conversation during the day with all the crowds and other Pharisees of dissimilar views?

Practically, night time may have been the only time he could get meaningful conversation.

Used metaphorically to show spiritual darkness of Nicodemus; he was in the dark spiritually.

Genuine seeking on Nicodemus’ part, seen later in John 7 and 19.

“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (3:2).

Rabbi – a title of respect.

We know – Nicodemus and some others of the inner circle are convinced God is with Jesus. “Sympathizers,” or open minded to a remote possibility, another is Gamaliel (Acts 5).

Nicodemus is sharing some very confidential information, from the private meetings.

Fracture in the inner circle, Nicodemus represents that faction.

Some knew Jesus was from God but couldn’t quite fit Him into their theology!

“God was peculiarly with him” -DA Carson, 187.

Others within the Pharisees declared Jesus demon-possessed (John 8:48, 52; 9:16).

Compare Nicodemus and Judas: giving inside info and going to the other side.

Teacher who has come from God”, *cautious*, not a prophet, The Prophet, nor the Messiah.

Signs – showed Jesus to be a prophet (6:14) and God-sent Messiah (7:31) (Kostenberger).

- must have been astonishing to even convince the inner circle of Pharisees, John 21:25.
- signs introduce but are not the substance of Christ.

Nicodemus begins the conversation with this **curious respect** for Jesus, a kind of feeler statement. He says, here is what **we** are thinking, hiding behind the “we”: you are a teacher from God. He is implying “who are you?”

This is where many people are today, curious but not accepting, interested but no commitment.

We come to the question of Jesus at odd times of the night and in our lives; dark night of the soul.

Not sure; who is He, what does He want, what will He demand of me and can He help?

We too can hide behind the “we”, stay non-personal and arm’s length away.

Born Again, John 3:3-12

Jesus: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (3:3).

Jesus jumps right in, confronts Nicodemus, goes for the throat, no pleasantries, no polite introduction.

"You're not in the kingdom, Nicodemus."

"No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"No one"

"No one," means no one!

Nicodemus, you are not part of God's Kingdom: your religion, ritual, position, morality, not even studying the Bible, makes you a part of the Kingdom.

No one gets in "unless he is born again".

"Born Again." What does Jesus mean?

Born – *gennan*, "generation" or "**regeneration**"; Jesus is saying you must be regenerated, born anew to enter the kingdom.

Again – *anōthen*, "**from above**" or "again".

Nicodemus understood it to mean "**again**"; **Jesus** meant "**from above**".

Jesus says you must be regenerated from above to see the kingdom of God!

John said it in Chapter One: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, **but born of God**" (John 1:12-13).

Jesus' Confronts Nicodemus with:

- The need for a complete and God-induced change, a re-birth, the necessity to be reborn; forming a new life, a new way of living. This is brought about by God, for God, in mankind - Barclay (paraphrased), "New Testament Words".
- You have an essential "need for transformation, for new life from another realm, for the intervention of the Spirit of God (in your life)" -DA Carson.
- Man must be completely overhauled (regenerated) and changed. "G. K. Chesterton said, 'Whatever man is, he is not what he was meant to be.' He has to be changed so radically that the change can only be called a new birth. . . ." -Barclay, "New Testament Words".
- Yes even you Nicodemus, ruler of the Jews, you must be born from above to see the Kingdom of God! The ceremonial jars and corrupted temple will NOT do it.

Nicodemus doesn't get it, takes offense and goes sarcastic: " 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' " (3:4).

Nicodemus:

First, I came to you with a cautious respect and you reciprocate with I'm not in the Kingdom!

Second, I don't even get what you're saying or what you mean by "born again."
How can a person be physically born a second time?

And how can this "new birth" be a requirement for entrance into the kingdom of God?

I'm offended by your confrontation.

Back on his heels, thinking materially, not spiritually, he shoots back with sarcasm: "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

This is what is so disturbing about Jesus:

Jesus confronts, offends and always goes for your heart; He knows what is in a man.

1. Jesus offends us, telling us, You're not in the Kingdom of God! You must be regenerated from above!
2. Some of us even respond just like Nicodemus; when we don't understand Jesus we go sarcastic, make fun and blow Him off as absurd.
3. **Nicodemus was offended BUT deep inside he sensed it was true and so do you!**

Jesus explains "Born from Above", John 3:5-8

"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water AND the Spirit" (3:5).

Water?

Debated meaning: physical birth, baptism (majority of contemporary commentators), or the cleansing from impurity and the transformation of the heart (DA Carson, 192-195).

You must be born of water AND you must be born of the Spirit.

Two major events, two miracles; one physical of this world and one supernatural, not of this world (born again).

Jesus says, Nicodemus, there is one physical birth (water) **AND** there is one supernatural birth (Spirit) - you **must** be born from above (Spirit).

- I'm talking about something in addition to physical birth, Nicodemus.
- Physical birth is not enough; you don't **inherit** your way into the kingdom, i.e. Jewish.
- The **Spirit** must give birth to you, a second birth, born again, born "from above".
- Jesus says, **"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (3:6).**
 - Flesh generates flesh; the Spirit regenerates your spirit.
 - Think spiritually; the Holy Spirit must do a work in you.
 - My kingdom is not of this world (18:36).

Jesus: "you should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again' " (3:7).

- "Born from above" is a new phrase but an old concept.
 - I told you this was coming through My prophets, Ezekiel 36:25-29 / Jeremiah 31:31-34.
- You should not be surprised that there is a "need for a complete and God induced change, a re-birth" (Barclay).
- I have always been after the heart of a man, from the Garden to the New Heaven.

Jesus: "You (plural) must be born again" (John 3:7).

"You" (plural "You-all") means Nicodemus, all the Pharisees, all nations, you and me!
We must be born from above to see and to enter the kingdom of God!

Jesus now confronts Nicodemus on His concept of God.

"You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

Pneuma (NT) and *Ruach* (OT) = wind, breath, spirit; usually in the NT it means Spirit of God. More in John 14-16.

1. God is free: "The wind blows wherever it pleases."

Nicodemus, you can't control, manipulate, determine nor understand fully the movement of God.

God the Spirit moves where He wants, unconstrained, sovereign and free.

He will not be contained; God is Spirit, God is mysterious.

You (we) have attempted to structure and control His movements but you cannot.

God moves where God wants, wherever HE pleases.

2. "So it is with everyone born of the Spirit"

The Spirit moves on people He chooses, people outside your religious structure, people of all nations, tribes and languages.

Nicodemus, this is not about being Jewish, nor is it about a religion, but God moving in the hearts and minds of people around the world, born of the Spirit of God.

"The person who is 'born of the Spirit' can be neither controlled nor understood by persons of but one birth. . . they have their origin and destiny in the unseen God, not in human decision or a husband's will, for they are born of God, (born from above) (1:13)" -DA Carson, 197-198.

Nicodemus: "How can this be?" or "how can this happen?" (John 3:9).

Confused with a whole new way of thinking.

How can you say God moves and works wherever He wants, outside our boundaries that we have created? What do you mean there are two births, one natural one spiritual?

Last words of Nicodemus in this scene.

Jesus: I can't believe you don't know this! (John 3:10-12).

" 'You are Israel's teacher', said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things?' " (3:10).

"The teacher of Israel", recognized master, religious authority, trained, Reverend, Professor and Doctor and you don't understand this (DA Carson, 198).

Jesus then "radically questions his qualification for sorting out 'heavenly things' " -Carson, 187.

Jesus is disrupting Nicodemus' world at the point he thought was his strength: his knowledge of God.

Jesus: "I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" (3:11-12).

Nicodemus proves you cannot understand Jesus without being born from above.

Jesus says we testify to what we have experienced; I know what it means to be born from above.

You however, will not accept what I'm telling you.

I am speaking of earthly things and from a earthly perspective. If you can't understand this then how will you understand when I begin to talk about heavenly things?

We don't hear Nicodemus' reply, only silence; contrast with John the Baptist and the Samaritan woman.

What happened to Nicodemus?

- First to be clearly presented the Gospel, John 3: 1-12
- Speaks up for Jesus to other Pharisees, John 7: 50-51
- Buries Jesus' body, John 19: 39
Here Nicodemus acts as the sole Pharisee, no "we."
Along with Joseph of Arimathea.
No disciples are around but Nicodemus.

We are seeing God's progressing work in a man's life.

Jesus went right to the heart, confronting Nicodemus at his core: you're not in! Shaking him. God loves this man enough to confront, shake him and to offend.

Nicodemus walks away from this scene knowing Jesus' words are true and at some point between chapter 3 and 19 he received Jesus' message, God's love for him, and was born from above.

The question is, do you get it?

Have you moved past the offense and confrontation of Jesus to the truth of the message?
Have you accepted that you must be born from above, by the Spirit of God?

Believe this day in the LORD Jesus Christ, ask Him to give you new birth from above, to make you into a new creation and to reconstruct you from the inside out.