

G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ◇ deo ◇ gloria

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

Jesus and Nicodemus

John 2:23-3:10

November 14, 2004

Chapter 2

Verse 23

- There were many miracles not recorded in John
 - We must realize that Jesus had already “made a name for himself”
 - John 20:30
- These people “believed in Jesus’ name” because of His signs
 - They wanted to know what *He* could do for *them*
 - This was not sincere and genuine faith that is the result of regeneration

Verses 24-25

- Jesus knows all men and cannot be persuaded or manipulated by flattery
 - Read Jeremiah 17:10

Chapter 3

Verse 1

- The connecting word is *de*
 - This could be *and* or *but* (*Now* is not the most accurate translation)
- The word *and* could be used here

- If so, it would indicate that Nicodemus was similar to those (in 2:23-25) who believed in Jesus because of His signs
 - This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that Scripture says that Nicodemus approached Jesus on the basis of His signs
- The word *but* could be used here
 - Nicodemus stands in contrast to the individuals in 2:23-25, since Jesus does entrust Himself to him
 - Read John 7:45-52
 - John records that Nicodemus was at Calvary, working with Joseph of Arimathea to take away and prepare the body of Jesus for burial (John 19:38-42)

Verse 2

- Nicodemus came to Jesus at night
 - When John uses *night* he does so in order to refer metaphorically to moral and spiritual darkness (John 3:2; 9:4; 11:10; 13:30)
 - It seems, though, that Nicodemus also came during the night time hours, in the cloak of darkness so that his fellow Pharisees would not see him
 - This is a classic case of the dualism of John
- NOTE: Nicodemus refers to the following plurals:
 - **Signs**
 - These signs reveal that God is *with* Jesus
 - Ref. John 1:1
 - **We** [know that You have come from God as a teacher]
 - Nicodemus seems to be nervous here, and is possibly hiding behind the shared opinions of some of his fellow Pharisees
 - There seems to be other Pharisees (it is unknown how many) who are beginning to believe that Jesus is from God

Verse 3

- One must be *born again* before he can *see the kingdom of God*

- **REGENERATION PRECEEDS FAITH**
- The phrase “the kingdom of God” is not found in the Old Testament
 - However, the Old Testament does speak of the LORD as king
 - Yahweh sovereignly reigns over His creation
 - Exodus 15:18; Psalm 93:1; 103:19
- The Old Testament prophets spoke of a kingdom at the end of history that would be ruled over by:
 - The Son of David (Isaiah 9:1-7; 11; Zechariah 9:9-10)
 - The LORD’s servant (Isaiah 42 1; 49:1)
 - The LORD himself (Isaiah 9:1-7; 33:2; Zechariah 14:9)
- This coming ruler was differentiated from God (Yahweh) and identified with Him
 - This is similar to John 1:1, where the Logos (Jesus Christ) is with God and *is* God.
- For Nicodemus, a Pharisee and teacher of the Law, to “see the kingdom of God” was to participate in the coming kingdom at the end of the age, to experience eternal, resurrection life.
- “to see the kingdom of God” here in the Gospel of John is addressed in the Synoptics, as well:
 - “to enter life” in Mark 9:43, 45
 - “to enter the kingdom of God” in Mark 9:47
- However, this **eternal, resurrection life begins NOW.**
 - “One of the most startling features of the kingdom announced in the Synoptics is that it is not exclusively future. The kingdom, God’s saving and transforming reign, has in certain respects already been inaugurated in the person, works and message of

Jesus. John stresses this 'inaugurated' or 'realized' component of the long-awaited salvation even more. True, he can refer to the resurrection (5:28-29) and speak unambiguously of what takes place at the last day (e.g. John 6:40), but it is far more characteristic of him to stress entry into life and participation in the eternal life *now* (e.g. John 3:16)."

D.A. Carson

- This has been referred to as **realized eschatology**

- It was a common belief among the Jewish religious leaders of the first century that all Jews would automatically enter into the kingdom of God, with the exception of those who had been extremely wicked and deliberately turned from the faith.
 - However, Jesus was telling Nicodemus, a well-respected Jew and religious leader [teacher of the Law] that, unless he is *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

- The word here for "to be born" is *gennan*, and can refer to the actions of a father ("to beget") or a mother ("to give birth to")

- The word for "again" can mean "from above" or "again"
 - It seems clear that Nicodemus understood Jesus to say, "you must be born *again*," given the nature of his (Nicodemus) reaction.

Verse 4

- Jesus focuses on the SPIRITUAL, Nicodemus focuses on the PHYSICAL

Verse 5

- unless one is born of **water and the Spirit** he cannot *enter* into the kingdom of God.
 - What does it mean to be born of water and the Spirit?
 - Some have suggested the following:

- **Two (2) Births**

- *Natural* (“water” representing the amniotic fluid)
- *Spiritual* (by the Holy Spirit)
- **Christian Baptism**
 - Water represents baptism
- **John the Baptist’s Baptism**
 - A water baptism of *repentance*
 - If this is the proper understanding, then Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he must pass through a repentance baptism (water) and new birth (Spirit)
- NOTICE: in verse 10, Jesus rebukes Nicodemus for not understanding His words, since Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel. Therefore, Jesus is likely referring to an Old Testament passage when he states, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit...”
 - Read Ezekiel 36:24-27:

"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.
- “It appears therefore that ‘to be born by water and the spirit’ refers to **a single event**: spiritual rebirth, metaphorically expressed by the analogy of washing with clean water. Nicodemus may have been startled

by this discovery of his need for spiritual rebirth; the perceptive reader of John's Gospel is already aware of this requirement." Andreas Kostenberger

- Carson states, "The 'spirit' is constantly God's principle of life, even in creation (e.g. Genesis 2:7; 6:3; Job 34:14)...**When water is used figuratively in the Old Testament, it habitually refers to renewal or cleansing, especially when it is found in conjunction with 'spirit.'**"

"Most important of all is Ezekiel 36:25-27, where water and spirit come together so forcefully, the first to signify cleansing from impurity, and the second to depict the transformation of heart that will enable people to follow God wholly."

- It is possible that Nicodemus, as a Pharisee, believed that repentance was not necessary [for him] because of the excellence of his own obedience to the Law
 - Read Ezekiel 37:1-14

Verses 6-7

- "flesh" here refers to human, sinful nature
- Only the Spirit of God gives birth to spirit
 - What John is conveying here is a **new nature**
 - Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

- John Gill states,
 - "a new creation", is a phrase often used by the Jewish {h} doctors, and is applied by the apostle to converted persons; and designs not an outward reformation of

life and manners, but an inward principle of grace, which is a creature, a creation work, and so not man's, but God's; and in which man is purely passive, as he was in his first creation; and this is a new creature, or a new man, in opposition to, and distinction from the old man, the corruption of nature; and because it is something anew implanted in the soul, which never was there before; it is not a working upon, and an improvement of the old principles of nature, but an implantation of new principles of grace and holiness; here is a new heart, and a new spirit, and in them new light and life, new affections and desires, new delights and joys; here are new eyes to see with, new ears to hear with, new feet to walk, and new hands to work and act with:"

- See also John 1:12 and 1:42

Verse 8

- The Greek and Hebrew word for *wind* is the same word for *breath* or *spirit*
- Jesus is making an analogy between wind and the Holy Spirit.
 - More specifically, He is making the analogy between the effects of the wind and the effects of the Spirit.
 - Although wind cannot be controlled or understood by humans, the effects of it can be seen.
 - The individual born of the Spirit cannot be controlled or understood by people who are not born of the Spirit.
 - Just as the "water and spirit" birth reference is based upon Ezekiel 36:25-27, this reference (in verse 8) could be based upon Ezekiel 37
 - God's breath / Spirit goes into the valley of dry bones, and God's people come to life

Verses 9-10

- Jesus says to Nicodemus, “You are a teacher of Israel [a Doctor, Professor, etc.], and you do not understand what I am saying?”
 - Jesus attacked Nicodemus on his “home turf” – the Old Testament