

Jesus & Nicodemus.

14th of March 2021

John chapter three is a delightful and, at the same time, challenging chapter. It reveals Jesus is directly teaching, and the author of John's Gospel has no hesitation in claiming that the words are of Jesus himself. This assumption is essential. In the dialogue, there are only two people present. Jesus or Nicodemus (or both) must have retold of this encounter. This reality does not in any way diminish the truth of this passage.

Our set text examines the famous verse of John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Yet to understand this verse of Scripture, we appreciate its contexts. What lay behind Jesus speaking those words? Hence, we are required to look at the whole encounter of Nicodemus and Jesus.

Let us pray:

O Lord, please grant to us all *your* wisdom as we examine this text this morning. Amen.

Now 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."

Nicodemus is an outstanding example of a sincere seeker after the truth. If only there were more people like Nicodemus in the world today-, men and women who are prepared to lay aside apathy, prejudice, and fear and seek the truth with an honest and humble spirit! "Seek, and you will find," Jesus promised (Matt 7:7).

Jesus' response to Nicodemus was clear:

³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

"**Truly, Truly**" should grab our attention; what I am about to say is important! In short, pay attention.

Jesus must have startled Nicodemus by telling him that he must be born again.

What did he mean?

He was not referring to a second physical birth or an act of self-atoning. We also need to be clear and not fall into the temptation that Jesus is referring to Baptism. Why? Jesus was not alluding to Christian Baptism. He did not institute the sacrament until after the resurrection.

To be sure, Baptism is the sacrament of the new birth. Yet we must not confuse the outward sign with the inward thing signified.

Baptism is a visible public dramatization of the new birth, which is itself an invisible and secret work of God, by which he gives us a new life, a new beginning.

Jesus, we *must* be born again. Without the new birth, we can neither see nor enter God's kingdom.

As we turn our attention to Nicodemus –

Nicodemus was religious, moral, educated, respectable, and courteous.

He even believed in the divine origin of Jesus. But all this was not enough. Jesus said Nicodemus still needed to be born again.

So how does this new birth take place? From one point of view, it is entirely a work of God. Nobody has ever given birth to himself.

Nicodemus didn't understand Jesus, which leads into the Jesus teaching, which he introduces with Truly Truly:

¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

I like how Jesus isn't dismissive of Nicodemus for his apparent lack of understanding. Instead, he gives him a gentle rebuke. Jesus then proceeds to teach him how to obtain this new birth.

This new birth is God's gift for humanity, and it is the reason for the incarnation that is why Jesus became fully human.

¹⁷ For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

The whole teaching of Jesus' sacrificial death means: Salvation is open to all humanity through Him.

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Jesus was alluding to how the Israelites were suffering because of their rebellion, and a plague of snakes came into their camp. As they cried out for mercy, the LORD directed Moses to fashion a snake on a pole and have it raised in the camp as that all who look to this would be saved. For a by-line that where the medical symbol of the medical doctors comes from.

Just as that snake was liked up – so the Son of Man Jesus would be lifted up on the Cross **that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**

Salvation. So, Jesus led Nicodemus to that point. The new birth is a birth "from above," a birth "of the Holy Spirit." It is achieved by accepting what Jesus would do on the Cross. Jesus would be lifted up – and people will be saved!

Then Jesus moves into the area of judgment. A topic which, if we are honest, we may not speak about too much if at all:

¹⁸ He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

One sad aspect is some people will choose not to look to the Cross of Christ. Jesus even explains why this would happen:

¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For every one who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

That makes sense, yet forgiveness is available to all who turn to Christ. And in this dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus finishes on that point:

...anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God." ²¹

But from our side, we are required to both **repent and to believe.** In the Christ who was lifted up on the Cross for our redemption.

To God be glory forever!

Amen