Lesson 4 [Chapter 3]"Nicodemus"

Remember:

Last lesson, John Chapter 2 features two major events: Jesus's first miracle at the Wedding in Cana, where He turns water into high-quality wine, revealing His glory and prompting His disciples to believe; and His cleansing of the Jerusalem Temple, where He drives out money changers and sellers, prophesying His own body's resurrection in three days, which the Jews misunderstood for the temple.

Lesson Goal:

Knowing that the true spiritual life and entering God's Kingdom, requires being born "from above" (spiritually) through baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit, not physical lineage.

Lesson Opener:

In today's movie clip, there's a young boy by the name of Forrest Gump, who has a bad back. He's been given these leg braces that are meant to help him learn how to walk correctly. Let's see if those braces teach Forrest how to walk in a better way.

Click to view this video clip (from the movie *Forrest Gump*)
Sometimes the first way we learn how to do something isn't the best way to do the thing. The problem with learning something the "wrong way" is that it makes it harder for us to learn how to do it the better way.

Nicodemus thinks life with God involves braces on legs ("religious rules") but Jesus is saying, "But then you can't run. The rules will stop you from letting the Holy Spirit move you where you need to move." In essence, Jesus is like Jenny and is saying, "Run, Nicodemus! Run with God's Holy Spirit!" The same thing might be true for us, too. We may not want to relearn things we think we already knew but this clip reminds us of how rewarding that is.

Lesson Body:

NICODEMUS AND THE NEW BIRTH 3:1-21

The gospel according to St. John presents to us the story of the renewal of the creation,

- ✓ 1st renewal at Cana's wedding [➔ the New Messianic life]
- ✓ 2nd renewal at the Temple [➔ the new and resurrected Temple]

- ✓ 3rd renewal when He met Nicodemus [➔ New birth-Baptism]

Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was thoroughly versed in the Torah and Jewish traditions.

After crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea took permission from Pilate to bury the Body of the Lord in his new private tomb. Together with Nicodemus they prepared the body for burial.

The mentality and experience of Nicodemus did not enable him to accept the new life in the Lord Jesus Christ. He could not comprehend the grace of a new birth and the benefits of a new spiritual Law. He needed the Lord to help him lift his thoughts and heart towards heaven. By doing so, Nicodemus could come to comprehend his need for a new birth through the One who "came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven...." He alone ascends into heaven and carries all those who believe in Him to enjoy adoption through Him and be the children of God.



Why did he come to the Lord at night?

Probably his fear that this would be reported to the chief priests. It could be that he lacked the light of faith even though he was attracted to the Lord as a person, yet he had not yet become well acquainted with Him. There are many probabilities, but none is confirmed by John.

He came at night and found the door of the Lord's heart open. The Lord did not hurt his feelings with any reproach. His faith was like a mustard seed that grew and became a great tree by the time the Lord was crucified.

Although Nicodemus was different, he regarded the Lord in a human manner. He spoke about Him as a prophet and pronounced Him to be great due to His miracles.

Verse 2: "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." Jesus's humility made Him abstain from saying: 'I do not need help from others for I have the power to do all things as I am the Son of God Himself, and I possess the power of My Father.' That would have been hard on Nicodemus.

Verse 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.”

Nicodemus was accustomed to being a teacher. Now that he had to learn, it made him feel embarrassed. St Augustine.

Nicodemus understood that the words of the Lord were an invitation to a ‘new birth’, and this baffled and crippled him. How could a fully grown adult enter his mother’s womb and be born again?

The new birth is from heaven, achieved through baptism by water and the Spirit.

It is a birth that possesses surpassing power and so it is likened to the wind, that no one knows its mystery.

The Lord Jesus Christ gently reprimands Nicodemus and reveals to him that it is not enough for a person to believe that Jesus Christ is a divine teacher; neither is it enough to admire His miracles and consider them real and unique. Indeed, what is needed is a birth from ‘above’ that is a heavenly birth that would allow him to see heavenly matters. A fetus in its mother’s womb can neither see the world nor have any experience in it unless it is born and out of its mother’s body. In the same way, a person can neither see the kingdom of God nor experience the blessings of heaven unless he is born again from above. Only then will it be possible for him to see the Light of the new world and live within it.

Nicodemus is not only an Israelite but a Pharisee as well. What better birth could the Lord wish to give him? The Jews expected that when the Messiah would come, the other nations would accept the faith and be born again, but as for them, this did not apply. For they felt there could be no other birth more honorable for them than their status.

The Lord repeats again what He had said earlier, insisting on the need for a new birth despite the inability of Nicodemus to comprehend it. For there is no other way to see and enter the kingdom of God except by going through a second birth.

Verse 6: Through baptism, we have been granted adoption. Hence, we have become sons of God. The new birth does not involve a physical birth achieved by re-entering into the mother’s womb but rather, a spiritual birth.

The Lord presents to him another example, the wind blows in a variety of directions, we hear its sound, perceive its effect on the trees, but we cannot discern the air itself ¬ We only know that it exists by the effects which it produces ¬ So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. Its influence is clear in the life of the believer who experiences His presence each day.

Nicodemus was unable to understand divine matters by depending on human wisdom. The new birth neither obeys the laws of nature or logic. The new birth is solely authorized and directed by God.

The Lord reprimanded him for not understanding, being a teacher to the Jews.

Has Nicodemus not read in the OT about the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men like the prophets?

In v11, the Lord uses the plural probably to indicate that He is speaking in the name of the Holy Trinity Who yearns for the new birth of mankind.

In v13, The Lord may be referring to a mistaken understanding that some Jews have concerning Moses. They believe that Moses ascended to heaven to receive the commandments then descended to Israel. The Lord corrects that by confirming that no one has ascended to heaven except the Son of Man who descended from heaven and remained in His Divinity filling the heavens.

He shows the reason why He descended from heaven, that He might be lifted up, i.e. crucified, for the salvation of man. As the serpent was raised up, so shall Christ be raised on the cross for us.

Here we come to the most famous verse in the Bible.

Verse 16: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

God's unique love is demonstrated "for God so loved the world". It is as though the Lord is saying: 'Do not be amazed that I should be lifted up on the Cross so that you might be saved for this is God's decision. He has loved you so much that He has sacrificed His Son for His slaves. Clearly none of you would do that for a friend or for any righteous person.

If you really love others, you need to be willing to give up the best that you have for them. True love is not stingy. It doesn't keep back anything selfishly. It doesn't regret it once it has given something to others.

V17 is not only new to the ears of the Jewish leaders and people, but it was a stumbling block as well. This was because the teachers had interpreted the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the awaited Messiah in the sense that He would rebuild the tabernacle of David, restore the kingdom to the people of Israel with all its glory and greatness, and condemn and wipe out the other nations. No matter how it was presented, the idea that He would redeem and save the world could never be acceptable or conceivable to the Jewish mentality.

In rejecting Christ, one rejects salvation and eternal life.

Thieves and highway robbers usually do evil in the darkness of the night. God has granted the sun to give light to men so that they might work by day and rest by night. As for those who choose to sleep during the daytime to do evil at night, then they deserve to be punished as ones who have broken the law of God.

It is as though the Lord is saying: 'I have come to help the people out of the darkness. Therefore, they are condemned since they did not abandon the darkness and come to the Light. They have no excuses.

Therefore, erase what you have done [wrong] so that God might redeem what He has done.

John the Baptist Exalts Christ 3:22-36

The Lord Jesus Christ began to baptize through His disciples before John the Baptist is put in prison. The Baptist proclaimed joyfully and with a glad spirit that what the Lord was doing is authorized by heaven ¬ He found this a good opportunity to confirm and clarify for a second time his witnessing to the Lord.

As if he is saying: "I have told you from the beginning that I was only the forerunner of the Messiah, and was sent, not to form a separate party, but to direct men to the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.

Was the baptism performed by the disciples better than the one done by the Baptist?

No, it was not better in any way. Both were done without the gift of the Holy Spirit. So, they were similar and shared the same objective which was to lead those who got baptized to the Lord Jesus Christ.

"He must increase, but I must decrease" or in other words 'He will grant me good things and I will receive; He will be glorified and I will confess.'

May every person become aware of his own condition and confess to God.

V31, He wishes to indicate that the Lord does not need anyone for He is superior and greater than all…so the Baptist says: "…he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth" referring to himself. John was correcting his disciples feelings by pointing to Christ….do you see how he has nothing else to say of himself other than that he is of lesser stature and came from the earth and was born of it? As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He had come to them from heaven. With all these words, the Baptist can satisfy their jealousy.

The Father loves the Son, not as a lord loves his servants, not as an adopted Son, but as His only begotten Son.

Lesson Delivery Idea:

When you serve anywhere in the church or outside, do you let God increase or do you increase?

Whatever we do, ministry, sports, chatting, or anything else, we must be focused on the glory of God. We must be humble and willing to take the backstage. We must have the attitude that we must decrease and God must increase. We should not seek attention or importance from serving. We should not get offended if others are serving more or "better" than us. Instead of working against others, we should work with them and use our gifts together. John the Baptist is a great example for us.

- ✓ He didn't do ministry to get attention or power.
- ✓ He didn't do ministry to feel important.
- ✓ He didn't do ministry because he liked to lead or wanted people to follow him.
- ✓ He had no selfish motivation.
- ✓ He did ministry to point people to Christ. This was his motivation. It wasn't about him. It was about Christ.

All the glory was for God. John was so humble and gracious. He was a true servant, willing to serve in the background without getting recognition. Also, He didn't quit just because others were more successful or popular.

What a great example this is for us! So often people have wrong motivations for serving. Many do it to feel important or get attention. We need to examine our heart; if we find ourselves getting jealous of people who are more popular, then our motivation is wrong and we need to repent.

Do the work that God has given you to do without attention or loyalty or thanks. Point people to God. It is not about you or me but Him!!!

Memory Verse: 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

References:

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