

GOSPEL OF JOHN 4

Believe

In John chapter three, we have an amazing conversation between Jesus and a man who had all the religious knowledge in the world, yet lacked understanding when Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God. Jesus tells him, “The Spirit blows wherever it pleases. 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.” In their

conversation, Jesus wipes away his paradigm about what true salvation is. Salvation is not works and laws, what this man seems to be hoping he will be saved by, it is faith in what you cannot see. “We may not understand how the Spirit works; but the effect of the Spirit on the lives of men and women is there for all to see. The unanswerable argument for Christianity is the Christian life. No one can disregard a faith which is able to make bad people good.”¹

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Pharisee literally means, “Separated one.” These leaders were zealous for ritual and religious purity and separated themselves from ordinary life in order to keep every detail of the law in the Old Testament.² Not only was he a Pharisee, he was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a court of seventy members and was the main ruling body of the Jews in Palestine, the supreme court of the Jews. Nicodemus, well aware of the reputation Jesus had been building, decided to come to Jesus at night when no one could see him. “It is astonishing that a man who regarded goodness in that light and who had given himself to that kind of life in the conviction that he was pleasing God should wish to talk to Jesus at all.”³ Here we have a “righteous” Jewish man and top leader, talking to a carpenter of Nazareth about his soul. Nicodemus wanted answers, he wanted a private moment with Jesus, and he got both. He knew Jesus was something special, he was impressed with the signs and wonders Jesus was doing, and knew he could possibly give him the answer to the emptiness he felt in law and tradition. He worked so hard at being righteous but inside he knew he was still falling short.

Nicodemus was up against the problem we all face, we want to be changed, we want our deep longing for greatness to be satisfied, but we cannot do it ourselves. Jesus tells Nicodemus if he wants to enter the kingdom of God he must be “born again.” “What must be seized from Jesus’ insistence on the new birth as a prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom is the fact that this truth is applied to a man of the caliber of Nicodemus. If Nicodemus, with his knowledge, gifts, understanding, position, and integrity, cannot enter the promised kingdom by virtue of his standing and works, what hope is there for anyone who seeks salvation along such lines?”⁴ Furthermore, Jesus tells him again, after Nicodemus is appalled by his first statement, “no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” This is another new and unbelievable claim by Jesus to Nicodemus. Water represented cleansing and purification to any Jew of this time. “When Jesus takes possession

Pre-Article Questions:

1. If you met with your prayer partner from last week, do you have any thoughts, questions, or comments from last week’s study?
2. How would you answer the question, “Are you going to heaven, why or why not?”

1. Barclay, William, The New Daily Study Bible Volume One: The Gospel of John 4. Carson, D.A.

2. MacArthur, John.

3. Barclay, William.

of our lives, when we love him with all our hearts, the sins of the past are forgiven and forgotten and there enters a new power which enables us to be what by ourselves we could never be and to do what by ourselves we could never do." Our righteousness is not sufficient when standing up next to God's. We need Jesus to cleanse us, change us, and to make us the people of the Spirit; making possible that which was never possible in our own strength.

John 3:1-21, NIV

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "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 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." 4 "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!" 5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. 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."

9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. 10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 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. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Study Questions:

1. Has there ever been a time in your life where you could relate to Nicodemus? Is there anyone in your life currently who reminds you of Nicodemus?
2. What were the reasons as to why Nicodemus came to Jesus? What about Jesus and Christianity intrigues or fascinates you?
3. Read a few of the following verses: Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1,4,18; Galatians 6:15; Hebrews 5:12-14; Roman 6:1-11. In what ways do these scriptures align with Jesus' idea of being "born again?"
4. According to Jesus, what is his identity and purpose?

Study Questions:

5. Verse 18 says, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned." Biblical scholar and teacher, John MacArthur, writes that belief in Jesus is, "More than mere intellectual assent, this refers to trust in and commitment to Christ as Savior and obedience to Him as Lord." What is the difference between knowledge and commitment? What are some steps we can take to grow our faith from knowledge to commitment?
6. How have you noticed a difference in your life in college since you have made a commitment to Christ?
7. Read Numbers 21: 4-9. How does the message from this Old Testament passage compare with what Jesus said to Nicodemus about the need for regeneration and spiritual transformation? Re-read John 3:14. How does this passage foreshadow Christ's death?

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Meeting with a brother or sister from your small group over a meal to get to know one another more and answer a few questions:

- Read John Chapter 3:1-21 again
- What does this chapter teach us about Jesus?
- What does Jesus say here about rebirth?
- In what way does the content of this chapter apply to your life?
- What questions or comments do you have for Life Group next week about this chapter? (Make note of them to ask at the beginning of next week's study)

End your time in prayer for one another if possible and set up another time to meet again outside of small group.