

Introduction

A few weeks ago, I told her that a woman we knew had a baby. She wanted to know how much the baby weighed, and when it was born, and other details. I simply had to say that I did not ask those questions. We usually talk about the things that are on our hearts, and I did not have the things that she asked about on my heart. She usually finds out more details about things than I do. If I knew what was in her mind, I would have asked those questions.

Our passage today is about Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus. Nicodemus came to Jesus with some questions on his heart. He did not even get to ask his first question, because Jesus gave him the answer before he asked. Our passage last week ended by saying that Jesus did not entrust Himself to people for "He knew all men... for He know what was in man." When Nicodemus came to Jesus, He knew what was inside of him. He knew the questions on his heart, and He immediately began to answer Nicodemus' first question, which was, "How can a man enter the kingdom of God?"

After Jesus answered that question by saying, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," Nicodemus had a follow-up question, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born, can he?" He wanted to know what it means to be born again.

After Jesus answered that question, Nicodemus asked a third question, "How can these things be?" And Jesus gave a lengthy response to that question. Nicodemus was thirsty for spiritual understanding, and Jesus took the time and opportunity to explain the gospel message to him. The questions that Nicodemus asked are the most important questions anyone can ask. All of us have benefited from his questions and the answers Jesus gave about how to enter the kingdom of God and have eternal life. We have all benefited from how a man must be born again. Turn in your Bibles to John 2:23, and we will read our text.

Jesus' Responses to Nicodemus

1. How can a man enter the kingdom of God? (Jn 2:23-3:3)
2. How can a man be born again? (Jn 3:4-8)
3. How can these things be? (Jn 3:9-21)

(Jn 2:23–3:3) "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. {24} But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, {25} and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man. {3:1} 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 have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." {3} Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

(Jn 3:4-8) "Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" {5} Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. {6} "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. {7} "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' {8} "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

(Jn 3:9-15) “Nicodemus said to Him, “How can these things be?” {10} Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? {11} “Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. {12} “If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? {13} “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. {14} “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; {15} so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.”

(Jn 3:16-21) “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. {17} “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. {18} “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. {19} “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. {20} “For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. {21} “But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

1. **How can a man be saved?** (Jn 2:23-3:3)

Our passage today is a continuation from the text last week. There is a chapter break there, but most scholars believe that it should have been at the end of John 2:22. So, let me do a brief review as we start chapter three.

After the wedding in Cana, Jesus went to Capernaum for a few days, and then He went to Jerusalem for the Passover, where He cleansed the temple by driving out all the animals, those selling the animals, and the money changers. Since He did those things, the religious leaders wanted to know what authority He had and asked Him for a sign. He told them that if they destroy the temple, He would raise it in three days, which was a prophetic sign of His death and resurrection, the ultimate sign. While Jesus was there, He performed many signs, and many believed in His name. However, Jesus knew what was inside of man, and did not entrust Himself to them. Some people see signs and miracles and believe that God did them, but they do not make a commitment to follow Jesus. They do not repent of their sins and place their trust in Christ. When a person believes and places their trust in Christ, Jesus comes into their life and entrusts Himself to them. At the Passover Feast, many saw the signs and believed, but He did not entrust Himself to them. He knew what was inside of them, for He knew all men.

(Jn 2:23–3:3) “Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. {24} But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, {25} and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.”

Jesus knows the thoughts of all men. In Psalm 139, David wrote that the Lord searched him and knew him. The Lord knew when he sat down and rose up, and understood his thoughts from afar. The Lord was intimately acquainted with all his ways, and before there was a word on his tongue, the Lord knew it all. God knows our thoughts, and what we are going to say before we say it. Jesus knew the thoughts of the people that saw the signs and believed in Him. He also knew that they did not have saving faith. Nicodemus never asked his first question; Jesus knew his thoughts and answered it before he could ask it.

(Ps 139:1–4) “O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*. {2} You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. {3} You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. {4} Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all.”

In Matthew 9, we have another example of Jesus knowing the thoughts of men. A paralytic was brought to Jesus, and He said to him, “Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven.” Some of the scribes said to themselves, “This fellow blasphemes.” And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, “Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, and walk?’ Jesus knew their thoughts, just as He knew Nicodemus’ thoughts.

(Mt 9:2–7) “And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, “Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven.” {3} And some of the scribes said to themselves, “This fellow blasphemes.” {4} And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, “Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? {5} “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, and walk?’ {6} “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your bed and go home.” {7} And he got up and went home.”

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. John does not tell us the reason that Nicodemus came at night. He may have been teaching and busy all day, and this may be when he could come. It is more likely that Nicodemus was checking things out and did not want to be noticed by people and in particular, the other Pharisees. He wanted to come secretly to Jesus to ask His questions.

(Jn 3:1-2) “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 have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

Who was Nicodemus? His name means “victorious among the people, one who has won distinction among the people.” Nicodemus certainly had done that. He was a Pharisee. The word, Pharisee, means separated. The Pharisees had separated themselves by making a solemn vow to God to keep and obey God’s laws, particularly the ten commandments. There were about 6,000 Pharisees at the time of Jesus. They wanted to please God by being obedient to His laws. The Pharisees had also memorized the first five books of the Old Testament, and could quote it verbatim. They were very knowledgeable about the Law. They were legalists, and had made up lots of laws to help them follow the Law. They wrote the Mishnah, which had twenty-four chapters on how to keep the Sabbath. They also wrote the Talmud, which was a commentary on the Mishnah, and it was 156 pages. They were very legalistic about keeping the ten commandments, and all their man-made laws pertaining to the ten commandments.

Nicodemus was not just a Pharisee; he was a ruler of the Jews. He was part of the Sanhedrin Council, which was the Supreme Court of Israel. The Sanhedrin Council was made up of seventy men, and the current high priest. It was made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees believed in miracles and the resurrection, while the Sadducees did not believe in either of those two things.

Nicodemus was also a teacher. In verse ten, Jesus said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Nicodemus was apparently a renowned and well-respected teacher among the Pharisees.

(Jn 3:10) “Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?”

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, and a respected teacher of the Jews. He had wealth, honor, prestige, and power. He had everything that most people wanted, yet he knew that something was missing. There was an emptiness inside of him. He saw the signs that Jesus was doing, and he knew that Jesus had come from God. He said, “Rabbi,” which was a respectful way of addressing and acknowledging that Jesus was a teacher. He said, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” Nicodemus had observed all the signs that Jesus was doing while at the Passover. He saw all kinds of miracles, healings, and deliverances, and he knew that only someone with God could do those things.

(Jn 3:2) “...and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

That was as far as Nicodemus got before Jesus answered him, saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Truly, truly or Verily, verily is a phrase that means this is really important, listen to what I am about to tell you.

(Jn 3:3) “Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The answer that Jesus was about to tell him was very important. In fact, there is nothing more important than the question he was asking. The answer to that question determines where we will spend our eternity. The Bible says that it is appointed for all men to die, and after this comes judgment. All of us are going to die and stand before God, and give an account to Him. Some will spend an eternity with God in heaven, and some will spend an eternity in hell, where they will be tormented day and night forever, and where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The answer to the question on Nicodemus' heart determines where you will spend your eternity.

(Heb 9:27) “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment,”

(Mt 25:41–46) “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels... {46} “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. Nicodemus was a righteous man in terms of the Law, and the public eye. He was a religious person and as a Pharisee he fasted twice a week, faithfully gave his tithes, served by teaching and ruling, and was well respected. Unfortunately, none of that was going to get him into the kingdom of God. Jesus told him that that unless he was born again, he could not see the kingdom of God. This was a hard word for Nicodemus, the Pharisee and ruler of the Jews.

The term, born again, is a common term for most of us. People use this term to describe a fresh start. They say that their business is born again when they rebrand their company, or relaunch a product of service. When I had a stem cell transplant in March 2024, I received a certificate from the transplant team with a new birthday; I was born again. Some people when they go through a recovery program for addictions say they have been born again. In the political world, when

people change parties or beliefs, they sometimes refer to that as being born again. It has also become a name that people use. We have a lady in our neighborhood named, Rene, which means to be born again. None of these terms are what Jesus was referring to.

The Greek word for born again is *anōthen* (Strong's G509), which means to be born from above, to be born from the beginning, or the born from the top. It was a new term for Nicodemus and he did not understand what the term meant. Because we have the New Testament, we have a pretty good understanding of what it means to be born again. There is a spiritual birth that takes place when someone believes in Jesus and confesses Him as Lord. When he receives Christ, He comes into them, and they are sealed with the Holy Spirit, and are born again spiritually.

Here are some examples from the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 3:1, Paul referred to them as babes in Christ, i.e., new believers. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, he wrote that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away and new things have come. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:23 that we were born again, not of corruptible or perishable seed, but by incorruptible seed through the living and enduring word of God. In 1 Peter 2:2, Peter exhorted believers to be like babies and long for the pure milk of the word so that they can grow in respect to salvation.

(1 Co 3:1) "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ."

(2 Co 5:17) "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

(1 Pe 1:23) "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God."

(1 Pe 2:2) "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,"

2. **How can a man be born again?** (Jn 3:4-8)

Nicodemus did not have the New Testament, and this was a brand-new concept. To get better understanding of what Jesus meant, he asked a follow-up question. Nicodemus' second question was, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Even though the term meant to be born from above, Nicodemus took it literally, and asked about being born in the flesh a second time.

(Jn 3:4) "Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

Jesus answered saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Jesus said that you must be born again or born from above, and Nicodemus is thinking on the fleshly level, and his answer reflected that. Jesus responds by mentioning being born of water and the Spirit, and then said, that which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit. I believe he is talking about both births. There is a physical birth, characterized by water, and a spiritual birth, characterized by the spirit. That is how I have always viewed this verse.

(Jn 3:5) "Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"

Different scholars and denominations view this verse very differently. The Church of Christ, the Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Anglicans view the water here as meaning to be baptized. They place baptism as a requirement to be born again. The context of the verse does not lend itself to that interpretation. Also, at that time, there were two baptisms that Nicodemus would have been familiar with. When a Gentile converted to Judaism, he had to be baptized as a public declaration of his conversion to Judaism. Jews were not baptized, as they had no need of being baptized since they were already Jews. The second baptism was the baptism of John for repentance. The baptism of John was not the same as being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The concept of being baptized into the body of Christ was not known at that time.

This was John Wesley's favorite text: that you must be born again. He preached this throughout England, Wales, and Scotland. He said that the water represented the baptism of repentance, and that repentance was necessary to be born again. He said that repentance was an honest admission of your need.

Ray Stedman, another great pastor that I highly respect, preached that the water also represented the baptism of repentance. He said, "What Jesus means, then, is what baptism signifies. It is not the water that changes anybody. Many people superstitiously think that if they baptize their babies, that will assure the children entrance into the kingdom of heaven. That is rank superstition."

The Presbyterians see the water as meaning a spiritual cleansing. They refer back to Ezekiel 36:25-28, where Ezekiel prophesies of being sprinkled clean with water, and being cleansed from all filthiness and from all idols. Then he mentions the new heart and the new spirit that God puts in us. This is the New Covenant that he is prophesying about. The water very often was associated with cleansing. The Jews had a "Mikva or Mikveh pool at the entrance of the temple. People would enter the pool and cleanse themselves before entering the temple. The Mikveh symbolized spiritual cleansing and readiness to approach God. The Mikveh pool was also used for the baptism of Gentile converts to Judaism.

(Eze 36:25-28) "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. {26} "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. {27} "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. {28} "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God."

J. Vernon McGee is among the scholars say that the water represents the word of God. In Ephesians 5:26, Paul wrote that Jesus sanctified the church, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. In the same way, husbands are to cleanse their wives by the washing of the word of God. McGee said that we are born of the Spirit using the word of God.

(Eph 5:26) "so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,"

Other scholars like John Gill, say that water does not mean material water, or baptismal water, but refers to the grace of the Spirit of God.

The Baptists view the water as symbolic of physical birth, as I have always viewed it. I lean towards this view, even though many scholars would not agree with that. There are lots of different views, and this is not a verse to be dogmatic about, or to build a doctrine around the interpretation of water. There are other scriptures that are clear about baptism, and who should be baptized. The requirement for baptism is that you believe that Jesus died and was raised from the dead. It is not something that you do to be saved, but an act of obedience for those who are believing and have received Christ into their lives.

In Acts 8:36-38, Luke gives the account of the Ethiopian eunuch being baptized. He saw water and said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And Philip answered, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The Ethiopian eunuch said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." They stopped the chariot and Philip proceeded to baptize him. Therefore, the interpretation that this refers to being baptized does not line up well with the rest of the Scriptures.

(Ac 8:36–38) "As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?' {37} And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' {38} And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him."

The important part to take away is that we must be born from above. We must be born of the Spirit. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. A person has to be born spiritually in order to see the kingdom of God. All the good deeds that a person like Nicodemus does, or that we do, will not get us into the kingdom of heaven. We must be born of the spirit. This is a spiritual birth that takes place.

(Jn 3:6) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Then Jesus told Nicodemus not to be amazed that He had said "You must be born again." He said that the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." We can't see the Spirit, and we do not know where or how the Spirit is moving, but we will know that the Spirit is moving. We will see the effects and hear the effects of it. There is going to be evidence in a person's life that he is born of the Spirit.

(Jn 3:7-8) "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' {8} "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

3. **How can these things be?** (Jn 3:9-21)

Nicodemus' third question was, "How can these things be? Nicodemus wanted more explanation of the things that Jesus was telling him. He has the humility to say that he does not get it yet. Many people are too proud to admit they do not know or understand something, but not Nicodemus. He wanted Jesus to give further explanation. Jesus replied to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?" He was implying that as a teacher of Israel, he should have understood these things.

(Jn 3:9-10) “Nicodemus said to Him, “How can these things be?” {11} Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?”

Jesus went on to say that “we” speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. The we could refer to John the Baptist, Himself, Moses, and the prophets that came before Him. He then goes from earthly things to heavenly or spiritual things. If Nicodemus was not believing Jesus' testimony about earthly things, he was probably not going to believe the heavenly things.

(Jn 3:11-12) “Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. {12} “If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, when they had both died and were in Sheol (Hades), the rich man asked Father Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers so that they would not go to this place to be tormented. Abraham responded, saying, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” The rich man then said that they would listen if a person is raised from the dead, to which Abraham replied, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.” Jesus, Moses, and the Prophets had been testifying, but the Pharisees and religious leaders were not accepting or believing what they said.

(Lk 16:27–31) “And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house— {28} for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ {29} “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ {30} “But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ {31} “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Jesus went on, saying, “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.” Jesus is plainly declaring to Nicodemus that He came from heaven and that He is the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Messiah. He is the only one that has descended from heaven and come down. The prophets and others died and ascended, but none of them descended from heaven.

(Jn 3:13) “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.”

Then Jesus spoke about the serpent in the wilderness. In Numbers 21, the children of Israel were grumbling at Moses and God about bringing them to die in the wilderness. They said that they “loathed this miserable food.” That grumbling, complaining attitude was not well-received by God, and He sent fiery serpents among the people that bit them, and many of them died. When they repented and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and you; intercede with the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from us.” So, Moses interceded and God told him to make a fiery serpent and set it on a standard. When someone was bitten, they could look to the bronze serpent and live.”

(Jn 3:14) “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”

(Nu 21:5–9) “The people spoke against God and Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.” {6} The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. {7} So the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and you; intercede with the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from us.” And Moses interceded for the people. {8} Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.” {9} And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.”

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that this was a prophetic sign of what was to come. He was going to be lifted up on the cross and people had to look to Him to be saved. Anyone who believes in Him would have eternal life. That was Nicodemus' first question, “How do I have eternal life? How do I enter the kingdom of God?” The answer is that you must believe in the Son of Man. When you believe in Jesus, who was going to die for our sins, you will be washed and cleansed from your sins, and you will be born again and have eternal life.

(Jn 3:14-15) “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; {15} so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.”

Jesus continued His conversation with Nicodemus telling him why the Son of God was sent to earth. This is probably one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. He said, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” The Son of God was sent so that people would believe in Him and have eternal life, which is what Nicodemus wanted to know.

(Jn 3:16) “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

We could spend an entire message on that verse because it is so rich. God is going to judge the world and He hates evil and darkness, but we see here that He is also a God of love. He loved the world so much that He sent His only begotten Son. God is love, and everything that He does is motivated by love. “For God so loved the world that He sent His Son...”

When I think about the characteristics of love, I think of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Love is patient, kind, is not arrogant, and does not seek its own, etc. I also think of this verse. Love gives. God so loved that He gave. Love gives your very best. Love gives and does not hold back. Many people go to church and do not give tithes and offerings to the Lord and they think they love God. When people love, they give. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that we could be saved.

God loves the world, the whole world. He does not want any to perish but for all to come to repentance and have everlasting life. He sent His Son to the world so that whosoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. The teaching that God has created some to be vessels of wrath to go to hell is wrong. He does not want anyone to perish. He wants all men to come to repentance, believe in His Son, and to be saved. That is His will.

(1 Ti 2:3–4) “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, {4} who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

(2 Pe 3:9) "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

Verse seventeen is one of my favorite verses. Jesus said that "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." The purpose of His first visit was not to judge people, but to save people. In Philippians 2, Paul said that we are to have the same attitude that was in Christ. In 1 Peter 4:1, Peter exhorted us to arm ourselves with the same purpose as Jesus. If we are going to have the same mindset, purpose, and attitude that was in Christ, we need to focus on getting people saved, not judging people. Jesus did not come to judge; He came to save people. That is why the Father sent Him, so that the world would be saved. There is going to be a judgment, and people are going to be judged, but that was not the purpose of Jesus' first coming. He came not to judge, but to save.

(Jn 3:17) "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

(Php 2:5) "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,"

(1 Pe 4:1) "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,"

Next, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about judgment. He said that whoever believes in Him is not judged, but those who do not believe have already been judged, because they do not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God. The way to escaped judgment is to believe in Jesus. To believe is not an intellectual assent; it is to place your trust in Christ. To believe in Jesus is to place our trust in Him for our salvation, not our works or our own righteousness.

(Jn 3:18) "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Later on, in John 5:24, in a conversation with the Jews, Jesus told them what He had shared with Nicodemus. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." All of us will stand before God and give account. For those who have placed their faith in Christ, they will not be judged; they will give account for their lives and will receive certain rewards and crowns. For those who have not believed in Christ, they will be judged and sent to hell where they will be tormented forever. The way to escape that judgment is to believe in Christ, who came to take away the sins of the world. The only way to appear blameless before God is to receive Christ's payment for our sins and to be declared righteous.

(Jn 5:24) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

Finally, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the judgment. He said that the Light has come into the world. In John's opening, He said that in Jesus was life and the life was the Light of men. In verse nine, he wrote, "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." Jesus is the Light that came into the world. Unfortunately, men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. Those who do evil hate the Light, and do not come to the Light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. Those who practice the truth come to the Light so that their deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. When a person

receives the true Light, the Son of God, they are born again. They are spiritually born, and the Light comes into their life.

(Jn 3:19-21) "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. {20} "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. {21} "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

(Jn 1:9) "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man."

Conclusion and Applications

The question that Nicodemus had is the most important question in life, as the answer to it determines where we will spend our eternity. Will we spend an eternity in the kingdom of God and in the presence of God, or will we be judged and spend an eternity separated from God and tormented forever?

Jesus' answer to Nicodemus was that we must be born again or we will not see the kingdom of God. There is only one way to have eternal life, and that is through believing in Jesus Christ. Some say there are two ways: 1) You can live a perfect life, or 2) You can place your faith in Christ who forgives us of all of our sins and declares us to be righteous. Since we have all sinned, the first option is not really a viable option. In order to escape judgment and have eternal life, we must believe in the Son of God and place our faith and trust in Him alone. When we do that, Jesus comes into our life, and gives us His Spirit, and we are spiritually born.

When a person is born of the Spirit, there will be evidence of the Spirit working in our lives, just as there is evidence of the wind blowing. We may not understand how or where the wind blows, but we see and hear the effects.

When someone believes in the Son of God by looking up to Jesus, just as the Jews looked to the bronze serpent, they will be saved. They will escape judgment and have eternal life.

The most obvious application is salvation. If you have not placed your faith in Jesus, you can do that this morning. Nicodemus was full of good works. Nicodemus, by most standards, was a righteous man and had a good life, but there was an emptiness inside. He knew that He was missing something, and he came to Jesus to find out how to have eternal life. You may have gone to church regularly, lived a seemingly good life, and be well respected, but without Jesus there is an emptiness. If you, like Nicodemus, want to see the kingdom of God and have eternal life, the application is to look to Jesus, just as the Jews looked to the serpent in the wilderness. The answer is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to be born again. If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He came to take away the sins of the world, and that He died and was raised from the dead, you can receive Him by simply praying something like this.

"Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God. I believe that You came to take away the sins of the world. I believe that died for our sins and were raised from the dead. I place my trust in You today, and I ask You to come into my life. I turn my life over to You, and confess You as the Lord of my life today. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen."

The second application is about Jesus being lifted up as the serpent was in the wilderness. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10 that these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they craved and not grumble as some of them did, or try the Lord, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents. We are to learn from the examples in the Old Testament. We are to repent of evil cravings, idolatry, immorality, grumbling, complaining, and all other sins. We are to repent of any sin in our lives. We should ask God to forgive us for those sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(1 Co 10:6–11) “Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. {7} Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.” {8} Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. {9} Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. {10} Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. {11} Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

A third application is to align your goals, priorities, and purposes with God's purposes. He sent the Son into the world to save the world, not to judge the world. Is your goal to save people, or are you not concerned about the spiritual destination of others that do not know Christ? Ask God to place a burden on your heart for the souls of others. Tell the Lord that you want to have the same attitude and purpose that He had, which was to save others. Ask the Lord to give you opportunities to share with people, like Nicodemus, who want to know how to be saved.

A fourth application is from John 3:16, and it is to do everything out of love. “For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son...” Everything that God does is motivated and done in love. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 16:14, “Let all that you do be done in love.” Just as love was the motivation behind everything that God does, every that we do is be done out in love. In every decision, every conversation, and every deed that you do, make sure that it is done out of love.

(1 Co 16:14) “Let all that you do be done in love.”

As we come to a close, I want to give a short update on what happened to Nicodemus. In John 7, the religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus and put him to death. Nicodemus said to them, “Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing.” He defended Jesus, and it caused some to ask him if he was from Galilee.

(Jn 7:45–53) “The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, “Why did you not bring Him?... {50} Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them, {51} “Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?” {52} They answered him, “You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee.” {53} Everyone went to his home.”

In John 19:39, after Jesus had been put to death on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus got permission to bury Jesus, and they brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, and took the body of Jesus and prepared it for burial, and buried him. Nicodemus became a believer and follower of Christ. Church tradition is that he was excommunicated from the Sanhedrin Council and banished from Jerusalem. His family was reduced to utter poverty. Finally, he was

martyred, beaten to death by a mob. We do not have Scriptural verification of that, just church traditions that have been handed down for a couple thousand years.

(Jn 19:38–40) “After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. {39} Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. {40} So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.”

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for this important passage about how to enter the kingdom of God. I pray that we will share this message with others. I pray that we will live with the same purpose that You and Jesus had, to save the world. I pray that we will have open doors and opportunities like You had with Nicodemus, and that we will be able to share the good news with them. I pray that our motive will be aligned with you, and that all that we do or say is done out of love. I pray that our lives will reflect that the Spirit has come inside of us, and that Your work in our lives will be evident to others. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think that Jesus was not entrusting Himself to those who believed after seeing the signs that He was doing?
- Why do you think Nicodemus came at night? Was it to have a private conversation, a secret conversation, or just the only time that was available to Nicodemus?
- How do you think Nicodemus felt inside, since he went to Jesus with these questions?
- Do we go to Jesus with the questions that we have? When we do not understand things, do we ask Jesus for insights and understanding? How do we seek the answers to our questions? (For this message, I prayed and asked God for understanding. I also read lots of commentaries. I watched and read many sermons by noted pastors. I also contacted some ministers that I have a great respect for and asked for their insights on what it means to be born of water and the Spirit. Here is a list of some of the resources: Billy Graham, Adrian Rogers, John MacArthur, Ray Stedman, John Wesley, Charles Stanley, J. Vernon McGee, R.C.H Lenski, Albert Barnes, John Gill, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, Joe Warner, Jim Elliff)
- Have you seen the work of the Spirit in your life? What are some of the evidences of God working in your life?
- Are your priorities lined up with God's priorities? Do you have the same purpose as Jesus, to save that which lost?

Jesus' Responses to Nicodemus

Introduction (Jn 2:23-3:21)

1. **How can a man be saved?** (Jn 2:23-3:3, Ps 139:1-4, Mt 9:2-7, Heb 9:27, Mt 25:41-46, 1 Co 3:1, 2 Co 5:17, 1 Pe 1:23, 2:2)

2. **How can a man be born again?** (Jn 3:4-8, Eze 36:25-28, Eph 5:26, Ac 8:36-38)

3. **How can these things be?** (Jn 3:9-21, Lk 16:27-31, Nu 21:5-9, 1 Ti 2:3-4, 2 Pe 3:9, Php 2:5, 1 Pe 4:1, Jn 5:24, 1:9)

Conclusion and Applications (1 Co 10:6-11, Jn 3:16, 1 Co 16:14, Jn 7:45-53, 19:38-40)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.