

John Ch 3 Vs 1-8

“You Must Be Born Again”

Wednesday evening we covered one of the great chapters of the bible. 2nd Samuel Ch 7, what makes it so great? You’ll have to get the tape or cd to find out, or read it for yourself. But today we come to *another* great chapter, one of the more familiar portions of scripture in the bible; it’s here we find the very 1st episode of “Nick at night.” Because it’s in this chapter that we find Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night to get some clarity on a certain issue, namely the Kingdom of God, and no pun intended on the “wind” that Jesus is going to speak to him of, and use as an illustration to try and open his understanding, but Jesus is going to “blow” Nick’s mind. and As to where Ch 2 ended with belief based on miracles, Ch 3 deals with a miracle that’s based on belief.

Because of the way the transition is made between the last few vs of ch 2 and the 1st vs of Ch 3, Ch 2 should’ve probably found it’s break at vs 22. Because the context of this 1st vs is set in the last 3 vs of ch 2, so lets back up just a bit so we can follow the flow of the context and begin there in vs 23 of ch 2.

Vs23-25

Now as we closed last week we utilized this portion of scripture as further proof text as to the deity of Christ. Because we read here that Jesus “knew” all men, and that He knew what was “in” man. Or to understand that another way, the reason that Jesus didn’t commit Himself to them is because He knew their hearts. They were “following” Him, they were “committing” to Him, but their committal was contingent, it was conditional. and Jesus knew that, now how did He know that? Was it because they came to Him and said, “We’ll follow You as long as You continue to do this, that and the other for us.” No, it was because He knew their hearts, and the bible is very clear that God alone searches the heart, and God alone accurately assess, or evaluates the heart. *“For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”* 1 Sam 16:7 Last week we quoted Jer 17:10 which says, *“I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind.”* Prov 17:3, *“The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests the hearts.”*

Woven all throughout the scriptures is the common thread that it’s God alone who searches and knows the heart. The book of Hebrews tells us, *“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”* Heb 4:13 So then we can conclude that’s it’s God who searches and knows our hearts, what did Jesus say to the church of Thyatira there in Rev Ch 2 regarding those who refused to repent? He said that they would be cast into the Great Tribulation, and that, *“All the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.”* Rev 2:23 Now wait a minute; I thought only God exercised that authority. Bingo, Jesus is God, and here in John ch 2 we find Him exercising His divine prerogative to search the heart of those people who were gathering around Him, and “Believing” in Him, and He didn’t appreciate what He saw so He didn’t commit Himself to them.

In here lies a critical point, Jesus is very interested in our motives as to why we are committed to Him, and the point in this is that if it's for what He can *do for us* rather than who He *is to us*, (what He does, vs who He is,) He's not interested. and Though you may seek to attach yourself to Him, He won't attach Himself to you. and So though you may do all kinds of things in His name, when you see Him on that Day, He'll say, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." It's not about you just believing in Him, that is to say, committing to Him on the basis of what He can do for you physically or materially, or whatever. It's about Him committing to you, and before He does that, He's going to search your heart.

What we see here is that those who seek to commit to Jesus on the basis of signs and wonders, the Miraculous, the experiential, won't find Jesus committing to them. Because they're always looking for some proof that Jesus loves them, or validates who they are by some sign, some financial or healing Miracle. and Jesus isn't committed to those who's faith is built upon, or contingent upon some physical, tangible, sign or wonder mentality. Why? Because the last sign is never quite enough, I need another one at this point in my life, a sign won't stabilize you, the children of Israel seen more signs and wonders during their deliverance from Egypt than probably any other people ever have or will upon the face of the earth. Yet it didn't solidify their walk with the Lord, they still strayed, and I'm always going to be preoccupied with the sign that didn't happen, or the healing that didn't come, our faith has to be built upon *not* what Jesus does, but who He *is*. and Who He is, is revealed in the Word of God, and so what does the bible say? "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" Rom 10:17 It's not about *wonders*, it's about the *Word*, the Word of God pointing to the Son of God, Jesus Christ Now how does this relate to vs 1 of ch 3? Like this, Jesus knows what's in man, and vs 1 of Ch 3 begins.

Vs1-2

So though Jesus knows what's in man, and wouldn't commit Himself to *those* men, (meaning those people, guys and gals alike), "There *was a man* of Pharisees named Nicodemus", and Jesus knows his heart as well, and we find that Jesus takes the time to commit to Nicodemus. So *he* enters the scene in contrast to those previously mentioned. and I love how that as continually inundated and saturated with people as Jesus was, He always had time for the individual. As a matter of fact many of His most powerful discourses were one on one conversations with the individual. We like to save our nuggets for the multitudes and impress people with what we know, Jesus unveiled His most radical insights to single individuals. We have John ch 3 because of a single individual who took the time to seek Jesus out. and Though the signs that we read of there in the last portion of ch 2 are what initially struck his interest, his desire towards Jesus went beyond that.

We know a few things about this man, Nicodemus. and Vs 1 reveals 2 of them, #1 He was a Pharisee, now we traditionally think of the Pharisees as religious hypocrites. and In the general sense that's how the Lord referred to them, however to think that every single Pharisee was completely hypocritical and not 1 of them had a genuine heart in doing what they did that they might be pleasing to God would be wrong as well. The bible speaks of at least 2 of them who had a genuine heart towards the Lord in doing what they did, the 1st one revealed here, Nicodemus, the other enters the picture in the book of Acts known as Saul of Tarsus, who as you know would become Paul the apostle. and The Pharisees who #^d about 6,000 men at any given time were the strictest of religious individuals, they dedicated their entire lives to the keeping of the codified law. You say, "What's the codified law?"

They recognized that the 1st 5 books of the OT were God's inspired word to man, and the scribes had sought to interpret those 1st 5 books in their codifying of the law, and that interpretation was called Mishna. So that when the Law said, "*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*" Ex 20:8 There had been written in the Mishna 24 ch, qualifying what that meant. God just said, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Work for 6 days, rest on the 7th, it's to honor the fact that God rested from creation on the 7th day. But it took them 24 ch's to constitute what it meant to keep the Sabbath day holy, what were the limitations, what was acceptable what wasn't, and that type of thing. and This was what the Pharisees sought to keep, not just the law as it was stated, but the codified aspects of it as found in the Mishna.

Now on top of that they had the Talmud, which was a commentary on the Mishna. and So it just went on and on, but the Pharisee devoted his life to this religious regimen, and so that's why when Jesus said, "*For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" Matt 5:20 Everybody's jaw dropped, "Jesus that's humanly impossible!" and That was His point exactly, it's humanly impossible, or impossible by human means to enter the kingdom of heaven. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, #2 he was a ruler of the Jews, that meant that not only was he of the strictest religious sect, he was also 1 of the 70 members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court. He had clout, he was a man of influence and power, judicially speaking, we know that he was very wealthy because after Jesus was taken down from the cross, Nicodemus came with Joseph of Arimathea with these incredibly costly myrrh and aloes to the tomb. Vs 10 points us to the fact that he was the primary proclaimer of the word of God in the religious sect to the people of Israel.

So from the natural standpoint this guy had it made, he was religious, he was rich, he was a ruler, and stood on the platform of peoples lives teaching them and speaking his influence into them. Not a care in the world, but Nicodemus had learned that no matter what you possess or what your position is in this world, nothing in this world satisfies.

To look at him, he had no worries; he was on the top of the ladder in every way, politically, religiously, financially. But much like the rich young ruler, he realized that what he had wasn't enough, there was still a lack in his life, a void in his heart, that try as he may, nothing he did would fill it. Something in his heart just wasn't right, and so this Man storms onto the scene preaching the kingdom of God, overturning tables in the Temple, and doing all these Miraculous things, and here this prestigious teacher of Israel, (not knowing Jesus was the Christ) comes to this 30yr old, young man seeking insight.

Now people have suggested that Nick came to Jesus by night in order to somehow cloak himself, because he didn't want to be seen with Jesus, that may be, but I doubt it. The fact is, Nicodemus was the teacher of Israel, it was the time of the Passover, hundreds of thousands if not millions of Jewish people teeming the streets, he would've been teaching non-stop all day, everyday. Jesus was being thronged throughout the day, and it's probably simply the only practical time that he could schedule a private meeting with Jesus.

Now I'm a firm believer in giving Jesus Christ the 1st fruits of our day, but even still the busyness of the day can press in on us at times, and when the day is over and the quiet of the night settles in, it can be so much easier, (practically speaking) to approach the Lord, to talk to the Lord. David meditated on the Lord in the night watches, and I'm glad the Jesus welcomes late night company.

I doubt that John has a spiritual reason for pointing out the fact that it was night but surely it reflects the fact that spiritually speaking, Nicodemus was in the dark. and He seeks to open the door in his conversation with Jesus regarding the signs that Jesus has done. and He says, "We know that you're a teacher sent by God, because no one could do what you're doing unless God is with him." and Jesus told His disciples later, "*Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.*" John 14:11 and Unfortunately there are many people in the category that Nick finds himself in, he sees Jesus as a teacher, but not as a Savior, how many people see Jesus as a good teacher? But they don't know Him as their Savior; and here we find Nicodemus wanting to talk to Jesus about the Kingdom of God, perhaps on the behalf of his comrades. Here He's gathering quite a following, the Jews wanted the yoke of Roman rule overthrown, so between their political pull, and Jesus' personal influence upon the people, "Lets talk about the Kingdom, or the Empire of God." But notice how Jesus responds.

Vs 3

I Love how Jesus cut through the flattery and got down to business, He wasn't all, "Oh you're aware of those signs; pretty powerful stuff huh? Mind bogglingly amazing isn't it?" He just got to the "heart" of the matter, we just learned Jesus knows the heart of man, and He knew what was on Nick's heart. Now was he wanting to talk about the Kingdom in the political sense?

I don't know, there's obviously conjecture with that, but what I do know is that Jesus said, "Listen Nick, I'm telling you the truth, you aren't even going to see the kingdom of God unless you're born again." and If that's not underlined in your bible it needs to be, it doesn't get any clearer than that. and Whatever was going on in Nick's mind, I'll guarantee you it just came to a raging halt.

If there was anyone who could present sufficient self-righteous credentials to God according to the external keeping of the law, it was a Pharisee, if it were possible to be made righteous through the law or by moral ethics and standards; then Nicodemus had no worries. If there were anyone who didn't need to be born again, then that's the category you'd have found Nicodemus in. But Jesus is seeking to communicate here is that it's not about his efforts (Nick's efforts) it's about an altogether new life. You see; what did you have to do with your birth? Nothing, life was given to you by a means outside of your own efforts, and Jesus is seeking to communicate this same principal in that it works the same way when it comes to God's Kingdom.

You can't work your way in, you have to be born into it, you have to receive new life, and a new heart, it's not about reformation it's about transformation and regeneration, and it comes by a means outside of your own efforts. But Nicodemus was a Jew, God's chosen people, thought he was saved by the fact that he was a physical descendant of Ab and a partaker of the promise given to Ab in that sense. But Jesus is seeking to take him across the threshold of the physical into the spiritual.

Vs4

You see Nick's not tracking, he's not asking why, he knows the insufficiency of his own heart to be apart of God's Kingdom, but he's not understanding how. "Born again," "What are you talking about, it's impossible for anyone to be born a 2nd time?" He's reasoning in the natural, but Jesus is communicating in the spiritual, now Jesus is using physical terminology to try and bridge the gap for him, but it's just not happening for him yet. The bible says, "*The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" 1 Cor 2:14 and This sounds outlandish to Nicodemus, "I can't enter into my mothers womb again and be born a different man, that's absurd." (Jesus keeps working with him.)

Vs 5-7

Why would Jesus say, "Do not marvel", because Nick's standing there bewildered, he's spent his whole life seeking to pursue the righteousness of God and Jesus is saying, "You need a do over," "You've missed it." and In vs 5 Jesus says again, "I'm telling you the truth, unless you're born of the water *and* the Spirit, you're not going to enter the kingdom of God." Now what does that mean, "Born of the water" there's much debate, I'll keep it short. Some teach it means water baptism, I personally thoroughly reject that for a # of reasons. #1 It's not biblical to hinge our salvation on any work other than the finished work of the cross of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus said, *“It is finished!”* John 19:30 What He meant was, “It is finished” the work of redemption, the satisfactory payment for the sin of the world was complete. Now for me to say, “Well actually it’s not completely complete until I’m baptized” is to insult the cross of Jesus Christ and say, “What you did for me on the cross was great and all but I’ll finish up the part you weren’t able to.” “It is finished” means, “It is finished.”

If baptism was a salvational issue why don’t we have a record of any of the apostle’s (outside of Paul) being baptized? I would think that would be a pretty important example, and for Paul to say to the Corinthians, *“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius”* 1 Cor 1:14 would be blasphemy. To thank God that you left them high and dry, preached the gospel and then left them condemned because you wouldn’t baptize them is a pretty dangerous thing to do. The fact is, baptism is a symbol, not of life, but of death, it’s a reckoning of the old man dead. So I think we err to go there with this comment, surely it’s an outward declaration of the inward transformation and we’re to heed the command of Jesus in obedience. But salvation comes today, the same way it’s always come, how were people saved in the OT, by circumcision? No, that was the outward demonstration of the severing of the flesh of the heart to lead a life in the Spirit. and Today baptism is a symbol of death to the flesh, to let Christ have His way in my life, that is, His life, in me. So though the outward expression has changed throughout the ages, the way of salvation has always remained, *“By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,”* Eph 2:8 We’re saved through faith, by God’s grace. To place my trust in baptism is no different then a Pharisee trusting in his keeping of the law, it completely misses the mark.

Other’s think that Jesus is in reference to the word of God as Peter said, *“Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God”* 1 Peter 1:23 and There’s certainly scriptural support in taking the position that it’s the Spirit of God working through the Word of God is how we are born again. No argument from me, if you believe Jesus is taking that position here, then you go.

But as for me, just looking at the context, I believe that Jesus is just meeting Nick where he’s at. Nicodemus is on the physical/natural plane, wants to know if it’s possible to be born from the womb again, and we know that the fetus is protected in the water sack prior to birth, and then the water breaks and the baby is born. and Jesus is saying, “Nicodemus you need to get off the physical level, you need to be born of the water and the Spirit.” In other words, “It wouldn’t make any difference if you could be born from your mother’s womb a thousand times.” (So much for eventually getting it right via reincarnation) “It’s the Spiritual birth I’m seeking to get your focus on.” The physical birth is necessary only in that if you’re never born physically, you don’t exist, but once you’ve been born of water, you need to be born of the Spirit. and Jesus emphasizes that there in vs 6 (read).

Or to understand it another way, “It’s not about physical heritage, or your physical birth, it’s about the spiritual.” The only thing the flesh can produce is flesh; (let me say that again) the only thing the flesh can produce is flesh. The only thing that’s born of the flesh, is a work of the flesh, it’s like when Jesus said a bad tree bears bad fruit and a good tree bears good fruit. It’s not about reforming the flesh, because no matter how you polish it, or shape it, or try to package it, it’s still the flesh. Religious efforts in the flesh, are the flesh, remember the law of reproduction found even back in Genesis is, “after it’s kind.” The seed of an apple won’t produce coconuts, or bananas, only apples, and your flesh can only reproduce, flesh, and there are no exceptions regardless of how it’s masked or packaged outwardly.

That’s why God’s remedy for the flesh is death, and once it’s out of the way, and you’ve been “Born again” by the Spirit, you’ll reproduce the fruit of the Spirit, the works you do will be inspired of the Spirit, you must be born again, it’s a universal demand. There are no exclusions to this prerequisite of entering the Kingdom of God.

Mark that word, “Must”, you can’t pray to various saints, you can’t, “Zen” your way in, or reach Nirvana and be accepted, you can’t kill enough infidels for Allah. You can’t be a basically good enough guy, because there are none that are good, let’s be honest. If you want to see the Kingdom of God there’s but one exclusive way, “You must be born again.” That is, born from above. and In trying to help Nick out, Jesus says here.

Vs 8

Now we’ll pick up on this thought next week, but the jest is I can’t see the wind, I don’t know when it’s going to blow, where it’s going to blow, or when it’s going to stop blowing. I simply don’t understand how it works, but I see and sense the effects of it, I see the leaves rustle, and the dust flying. I can take advantage of it, or raise my sails and let it drive me to my destination. This is the essence of what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, “Nicodemus, quite trying to rationalize the process, you’re not going to figure out the workings of the Spirit, when He moves, how He’s going to move, what’s going to happen as He starts to move. You can’t box God in, but you can sure see the effects of His moving in people’s lives, when the Spirit’s moving in someone’s life, things happen, people change, they’re different.

It’s like they’re an altogether different person, almost like they’ve been “born again” into a new nature. and That’s because that’s exactly what’s happened, the flesh nature has been eradicated, and the nature of the Spirit, God’s nature comes to life in them. and Here’s the clincher, you don’t have to understand it to take advantage of it, how are we saved? By grace through faith, as high as the Heaven’s are above the earth, so are God’s ways above ours. You’re never going to grasp it fully, but that doesn’t mean you can’t take advantage of God’s desire for you to enter the Kingdom of God. But don’t be deceived it’ll only happen one way, you must be born again.

How can that happen? We'll get to that next week, but I'll give you a sneak preview, and we've already mentioned it, it's by faith, faith in Jesus Christ and the finished work of redemption that He accomplished upon the cross. So if you're here and you don't know Jesus Christ maybe you're a good moral person, religious individual, know about God, but have never been born again, you've never said, Jesus take my heart, I surrender to you, I want to know you as more than a good teacher, but as My savior. Then I invite you to do that today, that you might be born again and enter the Kingdom of God, not by religious ethics, but knowing Him personally.