

Be Born Again

- As we begin this passage, we are introduced to a "ruler of the Jews"
- His name is Nicodemus
- He comes to Jesus by night, and in speaking to Him, prompts a very important statement from the Savior
- Jesus introduces a concept that, if we come to understand what it means, changes our view of Christianity
- Those who have already placed their faith in the Savior know it by experience
- But to a world of both religious and non-religious people, it is foreign
- What phrase are we talking about?
- And why is it the key to obtaining eternal life?
- We'll try to answer those questions (and others) as we approach John 3

John 3:1-3

- 1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
- 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.
- 3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

- Nicodemus, a Pharisee and important Jewish leader, makes a statement about Jesus
- He, in essence, says no one can do the miracles He is doing, if God is not with him
- The response of Jesus is fascinating - and perhaps somewhat unexpected

- Jesus is speaking to someone who should know the scriptures
- We'll get to that in verse 10 when Jesus asks " Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"
- The point is, He is not introducing a brand new concept from a Biblical perspective
- He is explaining the transformation that takes place in a person that comes to faith
- The Old Testament scriptures pointed to this kind of transformation in prophecies of the Messiah
- Isaiah 42:6-7 provide just one example...

"I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house."

- This light would reach to unthinkable areas - even to the Gentiles
- And would do impossible things - open blind eyes and deliver from prison
- Why then, would this "God with Us" not also have the ability to initiate rebirth?
- Nicodemus asks an obvious, but not entirely serious follow-up...

John 3:4-7

- 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?
- 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of 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 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

- When Jesus mentions water, He appears to be speaking of a spiritual washing of the soul
- A washing that is carried out by the Spirit - without which, no one can enter the kingdom
- And while all are born of the flesh, not all are born of the Spirit
- Therefore not all have experienced this washing
- But it must take place if we are to have any hope of redemption
- It is not a mysterious event, it is the result of simple faith in Jesus
- And this is explained in detail as the passage continues...

John 3:8-10

- 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.
- 9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?
- 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

- Like the effects of the wind, the effects of the Spirit are seen
 - We know which direction it blows and we know where it comes from
 - The effects of the Spirit are radically transformed lives
 - All as a result of faith in the Jesus Christ
- When Nicodemus asks a follow-up, Jesus wants to know something
 - How can a man propose to know the scriptures and not understand?
 - How can the mighty power of God be a mystery to someone who should have observed it so many times in scripture?
 - The book of Ezekiel alone speaks twice of this change that would take place by the Spirit
 - Starting in chapter 11, verses 19 and 20...

“And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

- Also in Ezekiel chapter 36, verses 25 to 27...

“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”

- It is understandable, then, that Jesus would wonder how this “master” teacher could understand not this concept

- How was it that he could propose to teach God’s people?

- They needed teaching which came from above...

John 3:11-13

11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

- Those who know Christ as Savior can testify of new birth!

- We know it by experience

- It seems Nicodemus simply does not want to accept what he is being told

- Jesus speaks of heavenly things that occur here on earth

- Things that come from above, delivered to men

- It is only fitting that He does - for He is from above

John 3:14-15

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

- Those who look to the Son of Man will live

- Those who believe in Him will be born again

- They will be granted eternal life because of His sacrifice
- They will not perish
- Why was this the case?

John 3:16-17

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

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

- The Father would reach down and transform us in this way because of His great love
- He would send His only son to die in our place
- To take the punishment we deserve
- To make just atonement for sin - once for all
- Our only part is simple belief - faith
- Because even though we deserved condemnation, the Father did not send His son to condemn
- But to save
- The only way that could take place - the only escape we would have from condemnation - would be through Him
- So, new birth is very simple...

John 3:18

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

- Belief, which is more than just simple affirmation of fact, is our basis for salvation
- But condemnation has already been reserved for those that believe not
- This concept should have been clear to Israel's teachers as well
- We find this Old Testament explanation in Galatians 3, verses 5 through 9...

"He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

- And again in Romans 4, verses 1 through 5...

“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

- Both of these passages explain this statement from Genesis 15:6...

“And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

- But what kind of belief did Abraham have?

- I already mentioned that it was more than simple affirmation of fact

- Romans 4 helps with this also, in verses 18 to 20...

“Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;”

- This was a belief that went against common thinking

- It didn't make sense in the world

- Though his old age and his wife's old age would prevent this promise

- He did not believe in simple logic alone

- God promise was beyond logic

- And what God says is true - always true

- He did not "stagger at the promise" of God

- Why?

- Well, it seems Romans 4:21 has the key...

“And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.”

- It was about the character of God

- He counted Him trustworthy

- He knew, because of who God is, that He could do it

- So it wasn't about what he saw or understood about the world

- But what He understood about the Promise-Maker

- God was "able" to do it

- He is always able to do everything He promises
- Therefore He is able to save us through Christ and Him alone
- Back to our text...

John 3:19-21

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

- This is the real problem
- It is why those rejecting Christ in His time did so, and why those refusing to believe in our time do so
- Men love darkness rather than light
- And when light is introduced and it reveals the horrible realities of sin, men turn from the light
- No matter what complex arguments man makes about his reasons for rejecting God's son, it always comes back to this
- A man may say "God does not exist" and "He has no son"
- But as Dr. Les Ollila says "An atheist doesn't look for God any more than a thief looks for a policeman."
- Sinful man is in the reproof-avoidance business
- Men love sin and flee the light
- But those who choose to recognize, acknowledge, and conform their lives to the truth
- Come to the light
- We hear and understand what God says through His word and draw close to the light
- And whatever that light reveals about us and our love for darkness and our evil deeds makes us uncomfortable
- But we admit that it is good
- Because the Savior is able to change us
- And change our desires and make us brand new
- So, when that which is inside us is made visible we are not ashamed
- Because it is a work of God
- And by Jesus we are made righteous

Christopher Harper, February 2021