

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Encounter Jesus – The Son of the Living God

Conversation in the Night - Part 2

This lesson picks up where we left off last week – in the middle of the conversation in the night that Jesus had with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. He was also a seeker – a seeker after the truth about Jesus. Jesus and Nicodemus were discussing what it means to be ‘born again’ or ‘born from above.’

I know that I have shared this story in past lessons but it is so appropriate for today’s lesson I must repeat it. In 1981, evangelist Billy Graham met a Catholic priest in Warsaw, Poland, who told the following story: Years before, the priest was in the United States, riding a bus in Chicago. A black lady sitting behind him tapped him on the shoulder and asked, “Excuse me, but have you ever been born again?” Shocked, the monsignor answered, “I’m a priest.” She shot back, “That isn’t the question I asked. I asked if you have ever been born again?” Later in his room, the priest could not get her question out of his mind. He got out his Bible and read in **John 3** where Jesus told Nicodemus, *he must be born again*. He read **John 3:16**, which says that *whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but will have eternal life*. After reading the passage several times, he knelt beside his bed and prayed. Billy Graham says, “He told me he did not know what to call that incident - recommitment, rededication, or new birth - but for him it was the beginning of a new relationship with God. The priest had accepted an opportunity to believe. It is a choice that each person is given. Beware that the choice must be made on this side of eternity. However, Christ does and will accept deathbed professions of faith. In **Matthew 20**, Jesus told the parable of the workers paid equally. Some are called to work for Jesus when they are very young. Others are called into the harvest field in middle age. And still others come at the last minute when there is little time remaining. Often when we read this parable, our thoughts confuse the parable with “rewards.” Jesus was not speaking about rewards. He was illustrating grace. Some on their deathbed might hesitate to accept Christ at the last moment on the grounds that it would be hypocritical to call on Christ at such a late hour. But, Jesus is always beseeching us to come. In fact, that is why He said in **Matthew 20:16 (ESV)**¹⁶ *So the last will be first, and the first last.*” And whether or not you are called first or last, Paul said in **Romans 8:1 (ESV)**¹ *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. Nicodemus, the seeker, needed to find grace!

Read John 3:6-8 (ESV)⁶ *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*⁷ *Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’*⁸ *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

Parents may be the most devout people who ever lived, but still that which is born of them is only flesh. It is only when we are born of the Spirit of God that there is any spiritual life in us. Human birth and physical ancestry are insufficient for obtaining eternal life.

In the Hebrew language, the word *ruah* can mean wind, breath, or Spirit. One of the symbols of the Spirit of God in the Bible is the wind or breath. **Job 33:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.* A number of years ago, a class member named Kyong came to know the Lord in a very powerful way. She was not living in a manner that pleased the Lord and knew what she was doing was not right. One night as she was in her apartment alone, a physical wind suddenly blew through her apartment causing the front and back doors to open. She felt the Power of God as the physical wind rushed through and shortly thereafter she gave her life to Christ. Another friend whom I worked with for many years believed that Jesus was only a good man who lived a long time ago. As her husband hovered near death in a hospital, my friend felt a peace come over her that she had never felt before. I told her that Peace was brought to her by the Holy Spirit. After feeling God's Presence through His Spirit, she realized that Jesus was more than a just man who lived a long time ago. He became her Savior. When we accept Christ and receive the Holy Spirit, we undergo a mysterious change. We become new people with a new life and those living their lives outside of Christ cannot comprehend it.

Read John 3:9-13 (ESV) ⁹ *Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"* ¹⁰ *Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"* ¹¹ *Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.* ¹² *If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?* ¹³ *No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.*

Nicodemus was not 'getting it.' To a man of Nicodemus' position, Jesus' reply probably stung: *Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?* Nicodemus was educated in the law and still did not understand the things of the Spirit of God. The workings of the Spirit were present in the Old Testament. (i.e. **Isa 32:15; Ezek 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-29**). As a teacher and leader, Nicodemus should have been able to make the connection. For years, Nicodemus had taught others that the way into God's kingdom was to keep the commandments and the traditions of the elders. But now Jesus is telling him that this is the wrong way. A person needs new life imparted by the Spirit of God. When you study Israelite history, you find they continually rejected the Old Testament prophets and that same nation would reject Jesus their Messiah even though they 'knew' the scripture. Knowledge is not salvation. A person who thinks he or she 'knows everything' and does not know Christ personally is making a fatal mistake. The religious leaders did not want to believe Jesus was the Son of the Living God and submit to Him. Submitting to Him would involve giving up their own 'power.'

In verse 11 we read another of Jesus' *truly truly* statements. Beginning with the words *truly truly* or *verily verily* is a proclamation that what follows is the truth and that the person making the statement has **firsthand knowledge** about it. Notice that Jesus switches from using I to using *we*. He says, *we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen?* Some think that Jesus was including Himself with the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist while others think Jesus spoke of the Father and the Holy Spirit when He said *we*. Either thought would be accurate.

Concerning verse 12, Wiersbe explains this way, “I have used earthly illustrations,’ said Jesus, ‘and you cannot understand. If I began to share the deep spiritual truths, you still would not believe’.”

No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. There are different opinions on what this means. For me, I think of what we studied in **John 1** about Jesus’ conversation with Nathanael concerning Jacob’s dream of a stairway from heaven and Jesus being the bridge between Heaven and earth. Jesus lived in Heaven before His earthly birth; therefore, the knowledge He is sharing comes to us directly from the halls of heaven. Next, Jesus mentions an Old Testament story to illustrate the truth to Nicodemus. His story is taken from **Numbers 21:4-9**.

Read John 3:14-15 (ESV) ¹⁴ *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,* ¹⁵ *that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*

When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God sent a plague of snakes to punish the people for their rebellious attitudes. Those doomed to die from snakebite could be healed by obeying God's command to look up at the elevated bronze snake and believe that God would heal them if they looked up in faith. Similarly, our salvation happens when we look up to Jesus’ work on the cross, believing He will save us. Jesus also spoke of being ‘lifted up’ later in His ministry. **John 12:32 (ESV)** ³² *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”* God has provided this way for us to be healed of sin's deadly bite. Those who looked to the bronze serpent in the wilderness escaped the first death for the time being. Those who look to Jesus escape the second death forever. Jesus is the Gift from God who loves the world.

John 3:16 is the magnifying glass of God's love for mankind. It is sometimes called the Bible in a Nutshell because it is one verse that summarizes the heart of the Bible. Martin Luther called it the Miniature Bible. For this reason it is one of the first verses translated into other languages of the Bible.

Read John 3:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

“For God so loved **the Jews**” would **not** have shocked a Jew. The Jews knew that they were God’s chosen people and loved by Him. So there was nothing new or shocking to the Jews about the fact that God loved them. “For God so loved **sinful Jews**” might have been a little shocking, but if a religious Jew thought about it, he would most likely agree. After all, Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so that the sinning Jews who had been bitten by the snakes could look to it and live.

But, “*God so loved the world*” was just plain shocking! By **world**, John’s Jewish readers would have immediately thought, **Gentiles**. Also, John often uses the word to refer to sinful people who were hostile toward Christ and eventually crucified Him (i.e. **John 16:20 and John 17:25**). God’s love goes beyond the Jews to the world – no matter who they are. **Revelation 5:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,*

When I was a little girl, there were times when I needed reassurance of my mother's love for one reason or the other. She would say, "Of course, I love you. I love you because you are a part of me. You are MY child." The reasons I needed reassurance are long gone from memory but my mother's explanation of her love remains as a picture to me of God's love for the world. God loves the world so much that He gave a part of Himself - His Son to save the world.

Read John 3:17-18 (ESV) ¹⁷ *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.* ¹⁸ *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

This purpose for God sending His Son into the world reflects God's shocking love. God could not be blamed if He had sent His Son to clean house on this wicked world. Jesus did not come as a Judge the first time. He came as the Savior. When He comes the next time, it will be as the Judge. **Revelation 19:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ *Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.* But that first time – God gave the world the sweetest most undeserved Gift in history, we read in **Luke 19:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Based on the Word of God, believing in Jesus means to entrust our eternal destiny to all that He did in dying for our sins on the cross. It means that we cease trusting in our own goodness or good deeds as the way into heaven. Rather, we trust entirely in Jesus and His shed blood. When someone refuses to believe in Jesus, they are condemned. There is no way around this truth.

Read John 3:19-21 (ESV) ¹⁹ *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.* ²⁰ *For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.* ²¹ *But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."*

People reject Christ because they love their sin and they hate having it exposed by God's light. Wiersbe writes, "Why will sinners not come into the 'light of life'? Because they love the darkness! They want to persist in their evil deeds, and this keeps them from coming to the light; for the closer the sinner gets to the light, the more his sins are exposed. It is not 'intellectual problems' that keep people from trusting Christ; it is the moral and spiritual blindness that keeps them loving the darkness and hating the light."

Please note that Nicodemus finally did come to the light. During his conversation with Jesus, he was in the darkness of confusion. However, he came out into the sunlight of confession when he was identified with Christ at Calvary (**John 19:38-42**). We don't exactly when, Nicodemus realized that the uplifted Savior was indeed the Son of God but what matters is that Nicodemus looked up so that he could live forever. Please make sure that you too follow the example of Nicodemus!