

- Videos available on our YouTube channel: www.htchurch.tv
 - All notes, etc. available at: www.htchurch.com/john
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Recap

- Last week we explored Jesus cleansing the Temple. The Lord was angered because business was being conducted there, and because non-Jews were being kept from worship. (If necessary, review diagrams from last week.)
- The Jewish leaders misunderstood that because Jesus was really speaking of His body. He was prophesying that He would die, then rise again on the third day.
- Jesus claims to be the place where people meet God, and He is the one through whom people are reconciled to God.
- Many people believed in Jesus, but He didn't disclose Himself to them.

1. A Nighttime Visitor (John 3:1)

1 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 are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

- Nicodemus was *Naqdimon* in Hebrew, possibly *Naqdimon Ben Gurion*.
- The Greek name *Nikódemos* means "conqueror of the people."
- In John, darkness or night is a picture of spiritual darkness or blindness.

- Nicodemus: an example of one who doesn't understand but slowly comes to faith.
- He resurfaces twice more, showing increasing faith.

A. Jewish political and religious groups in the Gospels

1. Pharisees or "separated ones"

- Believed in strict adherence to the Law of Moses.
- Also followed many oral traditions that had been passed down.
- More middle-class than the priestly families.
- Did not control the ruling council but were respected by the people.
- The Apostle Paul had been a Pharisee.

2. Scribes

- The teaching class, experts in the law.
- Many wrote documents and contracts for people.
- The Gospels usually show them as being concerned with religious questions.
- After the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 AD, the scribes and Pharisees became the foundation of modern Judaism, which is built on teachers.

3. Sadducees

- Few in number, but very influential, mostly priestly families.
- As much of a political party as they were a religious party.
- Controlled the majority of seats on the council.
- Not as strict as the Pharisees; didn't follow all the oral traditions.
- Did not believe in the supernatural, nor in the resurrection of the dead.

4. Herodians

- We know nothing certain about this group.
- They may have been the political elites who surrounded Herod's family.

Notice that although these groups might have opposed one another, they united in their opposition to Jesus, and also to the early Church.

B. About the Sanhedrin

- Nicodemus was likely a member of the Sanhedrin.
- This was the law-making assembly and also the Supreme Court.
- The Sanhedrin was composed of 70 elders, plus a President. This harks back to the 70 elders of Israel, plus Moses.
- The Pharisees were the minority party in the council. This may explain some of Nicodemus's caution in coming to Jesus.
- The New Testament shows us that some Pharisees were sympathetic to Jesus or the early Christian movement.

2. Nicodemus Addresses Jesus

“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

- He gives Jesus the title “Rabbi,” as a show of respect.
- Who is the “we” that Nicodemus mentions?
- Nicodemus says Jesus has come from God. What did he mean by this?

- I suspect that Nicodemus was trying to pull a response from Jesus.
- In any case, Nicodemus acknowledged that God was with Jesus in some sense.
- The miracle ministry of Christ was something that hadn't been seen for centuries!

3. Born Again (John 3:3)

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

A. Jesus puts the most important issue squarely in front of Nicodemus.

- Notice Jesus leapfrogging over Nicodemus's thoughts in order to cut to the chase.
- There is an experience he must have in order to see the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus gives a *double amen* and speaks with authority: *I say to you!*

B. Born again or born from above?

- The Greek word *anōthen* can mean "again," but most often means "from above."
- Either way a new (additional) birth is required. We need a heavenly birth, a birth from God. In Jewish thinking, "from above" was a way to say from Heaven.

4. Born Of Water And The Spirit (John 3:4-5)

4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

- One of the most blatant misunderstandings in John's Gospel.

- Jesus responds with the same phrase He had just used: *Amen amen, I say to you.*
- This time, however, Jesus says you must be born of water and the Spirit.
- This would have been troubling to Nicodemus. Remember how the Jewish people considered themselves to be in good standing with God by virtue of ancestry.
- Jesus doesn't define the *kingdom of God*, but Nicodemus probably thought He was referring to the age to come, when the Messiah would rule the nations.
- Regardless, Jesus says that unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot even **enter** God's kingdom.
- Just like John the Baptist had done, Jesus says their Judaism is not enough.

A. Water and the Spirit?

- Jesus was clearly is equating this with being born again. What does it mean?
- Most likely, both terms refer to the activity of God in saving us: there is a cleansing aspect to it, and another aspect in which He makes us alive in Him.

B. The prophets predicted a new work of the Spirit!

- It seems that Jesus is referring to something that had been predicted by the Old Testament prophets: a work of the Spirit in which God would not only save His people in the earthly sense, but also save them from sin and its power.
- The prophets speak of this work of God in a number of places.
- *Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 11:19-20)*

- *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezek. 36:25-27)*
- *And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (Deut. 30:6)*
- *“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the LORD: “I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (Jer. 31:33)*
- I believe Jesus had such passages in His mind when He told Nicodemus that a new birth was needed, a birth that was by water and the Spirit.
- This experience isn’t only for the age to come; we can begin to live in it now. We need to experience this birth from above in order to enter the Kingdom of God!

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