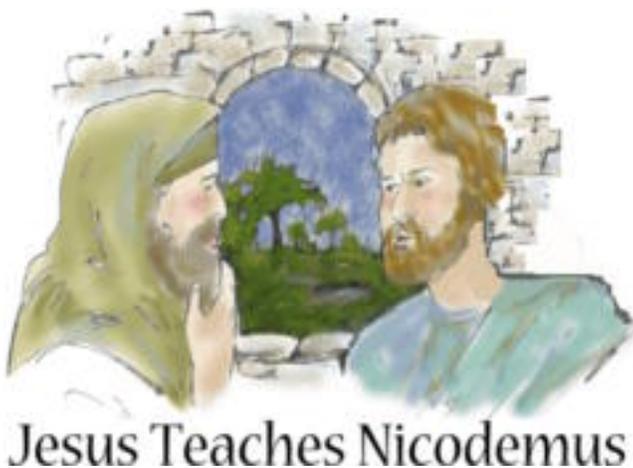


LESSON 13

CHRIST AND NICODEMUS

Scripture Text: John 3:1-12, 16



Today we take a look at the one Source of true life. Since it is a fact that a person must be born again to enter the kingdom, it follows that all in the kingdom are born again. How foolish to call any organization the church which can include those not born again; how futile to try to build a church including those without this experience; how useless to set boundary lines and rules for entering the church when God has already drawn the lines and set up the only possible rule for entrance! These false lines will finally be swept away, but while they exist they confuse and misguide many people.

MEMORY VERSE: *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.*

John 3:16

Visitor by Night

John 3:1-3 Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. A Pharisee, a member of the religious group known for its hypocrisy—for devotion to form and neglect of the spirit. He was a man of authority, superior to others who filled the temple. Yet he shows evidence of sincerity. **Came to Jesus by night.** Why he came to Jesus by night, we are not sure. Some teach that he was afraid; others say he desired the privacy of the evening so he could have the opportunity to better learn from this great Teacher. At least he sought Jesus. His associates scorned Jesus, took active steps against His followers (John 9:22; 19:38). **Rabbi, we know . . . thou art . . . from God.** He believed in Christ as far as he had light. He testified for all his group, **we know!** The miracles had taught what Jesus intended they should, that the Doer of them must have come from God. Nicodemus addressed Jesus as Rabbi, a title showing great respect. Seeing the hunger of Nicodemus' heart, Jesus came directly to the desire He saw there to enter God's kingdom. **Except a man be born again, he cannot . . .** This is the only way. No one can have life in Christ without the new birth.

A Strange Doctrine

John 3:4-7 How can a man . . . Nicodemus was thinking of the physical and human power only. **Verily, verily**—truly, truly—**Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit**—Word and Spirit of God. The washing of water by the Word cleanses from sin; the Spirit makes alive (Ephesians 5:26; John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6). These two words do not signify two steps, but rather two aspects of one operation. The operation, the work, is rebirth. It includes cleansing and the coming of new life. When that happens the person is **born again**, made a child of God. **That . . . born of . . . flesh is flesh . . . born of . . . Spirit is spirit.** Here we see the separation between earthly, material things and spiritual things. God's kingdom is spiritual and cannot be entered by physical, or fleshly birth,

but only by the work of the Spirit in the heart. Physical birth, water baptism, church joining, or any kind of works or form cannot save, cannot make our spirits live. Being born of the Spirit can and does.

Jesus told Nicodemus that he was on the wrong track. In substance He said: Not external signs but an inner change of heart is what you need, Nicodemus. Learning is not enough; there must be life. Nicodemus, a cautious, intelligent, and honest man, but only a beginner in the school of God, wanted more facts, more signs—more of what had already proven inadequate. Fact added to fact until the facts become mountain high will not make one the recipient of God's truth. Jesus declared that what he needed was life.

Men have made flowers, fruit, and many other things that look like the real thing, which have all but that one thing that man cannot duplicate. That one thing is life, which God alone can create. My, what a difference life makes! Christ teaches here that man in his natural state is not destined to eternal life. Something must be added to the natural man to give him eternal life. Life must be added through a new birth. Nicodemus could not understand this. He pointed out the impossibility of a physical rebirth. Jesus agreed, but explained just as physical birth is needed to bring a body into the world, so spiritual birth is needed to bring a soul into the kingdom.

In birth there must be a fertilizing agent. In the case of the body, this agent is the earthly father; in the case of the soul, it is the Heavenly Father. The earthly father by his seed begets a son in the flesh; the Heavenly Father by His Spirit begets a child unto eternal life. Christ came to bring men spiritual life. Everlasting life involves spiritual birth.

All Must Know the Truth

John 3:8-12 The wind . . . so is every one . . . born of the Spirit—like wind, it cannot be seen, but it is real. It causes outward effects. But **how can these things be?** Nicodemus was a teacher of religion, but he did not understand this truth. Neither can anyone else, except one receives the witness of the Spirit of Christ. Just believe. We do not understand the wind, but we use it to sail ships and run windmills. How foolish we would be if we refused to use electricity unless we fully understood all about it. As long as we ask, as Nicodemus did, why and how, about the deep things of life we will never receive an explanation. Accept what God has offered and the answers will be there. You begin to understand. In earthly things we learn and accept. In spiritual things we accept and learn.

John 3:16 God so loved . . . that he gave . . . that whosoever believeth . . . should not perish, but have everlasting life. The world did not take the Son of God; God gave His Son to save the world from perishing. One must believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son, that He can and will forgive our sins and give us life, believe enough to repent, let go and cast himself on the mercy of God to do it. Why does God give so much for nothing? Because **God so loved the world. Whosoever believeth**—"Whosoever" takes in all who will. And as we close this last lesson, let it be with the assurance that we can have eternal life only by believing—believing what we can never by any exercise of the mind completely understand.

JUST A THOUGHT

We are born God's creatures; we are reborn into that spiritual state that makes us God's sons and daughters.

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
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