

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

John 3:1-21
Key Verse: 3:3

Lesson 7

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

May we listen carefully to the words of Jesus so that we can receive from him what Nicodemus could not. May the Lord take away the sins of pride and selfishness and let the wind of his Spirit blow on us.

1. A Pharisee named Nicodemus (1-15)

Nicodemus was a man who seemed to have everything that most men strive to get--wealth, education, a position of esteem and power. He was a religious man. He was a well- disciplined Pharisee and seemingly in control of his life.

But one night he came to Jesus. Perhaps "night" represents the darkness of his heart. He had heard of Jesus' wonderful signs. He was one of those who believed in Jesus because of the miracles. 2:24 says that Jesus could not entrust himself to such persons, because he knew what was in their hearts. He did not come to Jesus believing that he was the Messiah, with a decision to follow him. He came to learn something that he could use in his own business. He called Jesus, "Rabbi" or teacher--not Messiah. He began the conversation by praising Jesus as a teacher come from God. But Jesus who knows what is in men's hearts saw Nicodemus' real problem. He directed the conversation toward fundamental issues. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Nicodemus needed to know spiritual reality. He needed to see the kingdom of God. Seeing miraculous signs was not enough. Jesus told him that he needed to be born again.

Nicodemus answered, " How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter into his mother's womb to be born!" His answer reveals the fact that he is only a physical man. He had no spiritual understanding. He interpreted Jesus' words physically, not spiritually, and since he couldn't understand the process, he did not accept Jesus' words.

Jesus told him again--this time with a clear explanation: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." (5) "The Spirit is like the wind", Jesus continued. You can't see the wind, but when it blows, you can see its effect. You can't put the wind in a box--it blows freely. The Holy Spirit is like this. We can't explain the work of the Spirit, nor can we understand it. But he works anyway.

What does it mean to be born again? And what does it mean to see or enter the kingdom God? To enter the kingdom of God means to move from the kingdom or realm of Satan--who is the prince of this world--to live under the righteous rule of God. Just as we are born physically into this world by the action of our parents, so we must be born spiritually to enter the kingdom of God. John 1:12,12 says that God gives the power or the right to be children of God to whoever receives Jesus, to whoever believes in his name. One cannot be born into God's kingdom by human effort, or by the will or decision of another person. We are born into God's kingdom by the action of the Spirit of God. 1 Peter 1:3 says that we are given new birth into a living hope by power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And 1 Peter 1:23 says, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

New birth suggests a new beginning. When we are born again into the kingdom of God, we are spiritual babies. We must grow, so we need to be nourished on the spiritual milk of the word of God. (1Pe 2:2) As new born Christians, we must feed on God's word, pray and try to obey God's word--our spiritual exercise. If we aren't growing, then something is wrong. We should keep on growing until we enter the heavenly kingdom.

What did Jesus mean by saying that we must be born of water and the Spirit? Perhaps he was thinking of Ezekiel 36:25-27, which says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." Or he may have been thinking of John's baptism of repentance, which is somewhat related to Ezekiel's prophecy.

Jesus was amazed that Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, had no spiritual life with God. He put his finger on the problem. Nicodemus did not accept Jesus'

words. (10,11) When we accept the word of God in our hearts, then God's Spirit begins to work, and he can give us new birth. But if we close our hearts to God's word, rejecting the authority of the Bible and reading it with the critical mind which we use on any other kind of book, we cannot experience the new birth.

Jesus told Nicodemus that he must look at Jesus on the cross, and trust him for salvation--just as the people of Israel looked at the bronze snake in the desert and were saved from the venomous snakes crawling around on the ground. God gives eternal life--spiritual life to those who believe in Jesus lifted up on the cross.

God loves the world. He wants all people to be saved. God did not send Jesus into the world to give people a hard time. He did not send Jesus to judge the world. He sent him to save the world. God loved the world and subjected his one and only Son to unspeakable suffering in order to save sinful men and women. We who live in this world are like people swimming in a sea of death. There is no way out. We are all perishing. But God in his mercy extended his hand of love to us in Christ Jesus. Whoever takes hold of that hand of mercy by believing in Jesus is saved. Those who reject that hand of mercy remain as they are--condemned men swimming in a sea of death. And there is no other way out. We must never doubt God's great love.

Jesus said, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." Unbelief is not an intellectual problem--it is a moral problem. Jesus said that Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Nicodemus was evidently one such man. He came to Jesus by night. He came to the light. But he feared the exposure of his inner man. He didn't want to be changed. He appeared to be a moral man, but he hated the light because he did not want the evil in him to be exposed. There would come a time, however, when he would hate the darkness and the works of darkness. He would cast his useless pride aside and come to Jesus to be identified as one of his followers. (Jn 7,19)