John 3 Part 1 The New Birth

Chapter 2 introduced us to Jesus first miracle (turning water into wine) followed by cleansing the temple. The events in this chapter happen in Jerusalem, most likely after the Passover and during the Week of Unleavened Bread celebration.

Read John 3:1-21

Vs 1 Who are we introduced to in this verse? Nicodemus. Who was he? A ruler of the Jews, a Pharisee. The Jews were ruled by the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the supreme judicial and legislative council of ancient Israel, serving as the highest religious, political, and legal authority for the Jewish people during the time of Jesus. Composed of 71 members (origins in Numbers 11:16), including the High Priest, chief priests, scribes, and elders, it functioned as the final court of appeal on matters of Jewish law and governance within Judea. It did not have power over the Romans, though. The Sanhedrin was primarily divided between two religious factions: the Sadducees, who dominated the priestly aristocracy and controlled the High Priesthood (and they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead), and the Pharisees, who were experts in religious law and held significant influence among the people. The Sanhedrin convened daily, except on the Sabbath and festivals, typically in the Chamber of Hewn Stones within the Jerusalem Temple, until its dissolution following the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. FYI, today, Israel is a parliamentary democracy where executive power rests with the Prime Minister and Cabinet, legislative power with the 120 member Knesset, and judicial power with an independent court system. Since Nicodemus is a Greek name, we can assume he was educated by the Greeks as well as being well versed in the Jewish scrolls.

Vs 2 Why do you think he came to Jesus at night? Likely so his fellow leaders would not know John 9:22. Or maybe he was too timid to coming openly during the day or maybe he just wanted Jesus all to himself. How did he address Jesus? He called him Rabbi, which means teacher. How does he start the conversation? He is saying the leaders (we) knew He was a teacher from God directly (not like they are). The Jews were keen on signs as the Old Testament is full of supernatural signs proving God was at work. Up to this point, the only sign Nicodemus saw was the cleansing of the temple. But it was remarkable/notable enough for him to realize God was with (backing) Jesus.

Vs 3 Jesus answers his statement on a bizarre way. What topic does He bring up? A second birth being required to see the Kingdom of God. Jesus' reply to Nicodemus shattered the Jewish assumption that their racial identity (their natural birth) assured them a place in God's Kingdom. Jesus made it plain that a man's first birth does not assure him of the kingdom; only being born again gives this assurance. Most Jews of that time looked for the Messiah to bring in a new world, in which Israel and the Jewish people would be pre-eminent. But Jesus came to bring new life, in which **He** would be preeminent. The Greek word translated "again" can be also translated "from above." This is the sense in which John used this word in John 3:31, 19:11,23. Either way, the meaning is essentially the same. To be born from above is to be born again.

Vs 4 Did Nicodemus get it? No! He had no clue Jesus was talking about spiritual rebirth. He was thinking Jesus was referring to actually being born again as a baby in a woman's womb. He rightly acknowledged an old person can't become a physical baby and can't crawl back into his mother's womb to be born a second time.

Vs 5 In verse 3 Jesus gave the requirement to see (*perceive*) the Kingdom of God (you must be born from above). What does Jesus say now? In order to enter (*go out and come in*) the Kingdom of God, you must be born of water and of spirit. We covered this before – it has layered meaning – but at it's simplest, in order to belong to the Kingdom of God you must have had a human (natural) birth (born of water) and a (spiritual) God-birth (born from above).

Vs 6 What is this verse saying? Flesh and spirit are different and you can only be one or the other. You can't get to spirit through the flesh. Rom 8:5-8,Gal 5:16-18

Vs 7-8 These verses clarify Jesus' point. I imagine Nicodemus was stunned! How does a person who is spirit-led compare to the wind? Just as you can see the effects of the wind but not the wind itself, so you can see the effects of the Holy Spirit working in a person without actually seeing the Spirit. Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know that he didn't have to understand everything about the new birth before he experienced it and he should not lean to his own understanding Prov 3:5-6.

Vs 9-10 Again, we see Nicodemus is having a tough time understanding this. Why did Jesus expect him to get it? By acknowledging him as a teacher (of the law), Jesus is implying Nicodemus should have been familiar with the teaching of the new birth. Deu 30:1-6, Jer 23:1-8,31:31-34,32:37-41, Eze 11:16-20,36:16-28,37:11-14, 37:21-28. These passages essentially made three promises in the New Covenant, 1.The gathering of Israel (Jews assumed in Jesus' day this already happened after the return from Babylon), 2. The cleansing and spiritual transformation of God's people (they believed strong spiritual movements like the Pharisees fulfilled this) 3. The reign of the Messiah over Israel and the whole world. This is all they were waiting for. They believed the rebirth to be a national thing, not a personal one.

Vs 11 Notice this verse starts with “most assuredly, I say to you” which is “Believe me when I tell you”. This is a strong emphasis to regard what comes next as the truth. Who is the “we” in this verse? Here is another indication of the trinity. Jesus is referring to Himself in the plural form. God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit are witnessing the truth of the words Jesus spoke. They know it, they testify to it (i.e. bear witness) yet Nicodemus did not believe the witness. To the Jews, the testimony of two or three witnesses resolved disputes over truth. Deu 19:15

Vs 12 Jesus goes on to admonish Nicodemus. What does He say? If you can’t even believe things you can see (earthly), how will you believe things you can’t see (spiritual)? A simple look at earthly things, like the illustrations Jesus used and actions He took, should have made the point plain to Nicodemus. If he could not see that he needed this spiritual transformation, what more could Jesus tell him?

Vs 13 What does Jesus say to confirm His deity? Jesus makes it clear that He can speak authoritatively about things in heaven, though no one else can, because He came down from Heaven John 1:1

Vs 14-15 Knowing Nicodemus knew the Scriptures, what Old Testament event did Jesus use at this point? Jesus made a remarkable statement, explaining that the serpent of Num 21:4-9 was a picture of the Messiah and His work. Serpents are often used as pictures of evil in the Bible. However, Moses’ serpent in Numbers 21 was made of bronze, and bronze is a metal associated with judgment in the Bible, because it is made with fire. A bronze serpent speaks of sin judged. In the Numbers example, the people were saved not by doing anything, but by simply looking to the bronze serpent. They had to trust that something as seemingly foolish as looking at such a thing would be sufficient to save them, and some perished because they thought it too foolish to do such a thing. So, too, Jesus is saying it is not your works that save you. Simply looking (perceiving His finished work) at Jesus saves. Isa 45:22 Being lifted up has two meanings; lifted up on the cross (for sin) and being lifted up to Heaven (resurrection because sin was judged).

Vs 16 We have arrived at the most quoted Scripture in the Bible. What remarkable truths are in these verses? God did not wait for the world to turn to Him before He loved the world. He loved and acted when the world was still seeped in sin and against Him. The Jews of that day did not think that God loved the world. They believed they were the chosen ones God loved. The universal offer of salvation and life in Jesus was revolutionary to Nicodemus. When Nicodemus heard “only begotten son”, he would have been reminded of Abraham’s offering of Isaac, of the love that was required, the substitution made, and the prophecy uttered. Gen 22:1-19. The recipient of God’s love goes to those who believe in Jesus, the gift that the Father gave. “Believes in” means much more than intellectual awareness or agreement. It means *to trust in, to rely on, and to cling to*. The intention of God’s love was to save man from eternal destruction. God looks at fallen humanity, does not want it to perish, and so in His love, He extends the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. The duration of God’s love, which never changes, is eternal (*never ending*).

Vs 17 What was the purpose of this great gift? Jesus revealed the heart of God the Father in sending God the Son - to bring salvation (*rescue, give hope, healing, deliver, protect, make whole*) to the world through Him.

Vs 18 How do you separate those who are condemned (*to pronounce judgment, guilty*) and those who are not? Test: Do you believe in the Name of the only begotten Son of God? The focus seems to be on those who deliberately reject the message, as those who heard and encountered Jesus in the first century had opportunity to do. Jesus came to bring salvation, but those who reject that salvation condemn themselves. We’ve already talked about what it means to believe IN the Name of Jesus (in the authority of). And we already talked about the test in 1 John to determine Who is the only begotten Son of God (He came in the flesh).

Vs 19 What is the condemnation? Darkness! Men see/saw the light ad preferred their evil deeds which keeps them in darkness.

Vs 20 What do people who practice evil hate? The light. Luke 8:17

Vs 21 See the contrast here. Those who practice evil don’t want their deeds exposed. People who practice truth love the light and have no problem with their deeds being exposed. Rom 2:15-16 Notice WHY they don’t want their deeds hidden. They have been done in God. They want to bring Glory to God! It’s not about bragging. In fact, we should not brag about what we do for Him. Matt 6:4 The point here is the exposure of the deeds. You don’t get upset when they are exposed, where those who practice evil do.