

## Jesus and Nicodemus - John 3:1-21

This is one of the most well known chapters in the Bible, containing John 3:16 and its teaching on being born again. Let's look at it a little more closely:

Nicodemus (Victor) was a member of the Sanhedrin the Jewish ruling council (an MP?) and was well regarded. He'd heard about Jesus of Nazareth, who had been teaching and baptising followers in a very similar way to John the Baptist. Unlike John the Baptist, who was distinctly unconventional, living in the deserts, dressed in camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey, Jesus was an ordinary, down to earth carpenter. Yet he was extraordinary as demonstrated by his divine powers to heal the sick, cast out evil spirits and perform other remarkable miraculous signs.

His teaching was beginning to have quite an impact, his healing even more of an impact and to top it all he recently stirred up a storm by going into the temple, chasing out the traders and turning over the tables of the money changers. He gave a very odd reply when he was asked by what authority he thought he could do such a thing. He said *"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again."* He was a puzzle. Yet God was clearly with him.

So Nicodemus visits Jesus secretly one night to suss him out, find out for himself what was going on. After introducing himself he says, *"Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God, for no-one could do the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."* But before he is able to ask him what he really wanted to know, "are you the Messiah?" Jesus says, *"I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."* Jesus was indeed the master of the odd reply.

Pardon?! Born again? "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" It was such an odd expression that Nicodemus couldn't get his head around what Jesus meant. Today 'born again' is part of the English language especially referring to a particular kind of Christian. But we also have 'born again radio' = Christian radio, 'born again bikers' = middle age or retired men who have gone back to motorcycling, and 'born again virgins' a person who has previously been sexually active who makes a commitment to abstain from sex until marriage. 'Born again Christian' is a comparatively new term and was not used before 1928 even though it's taken from the Bible. So is it surprising that Nicodemus had no idea what Jesus was talking about? Would we have got it any more than he did?

Firstly we need to understand that in Greek & Aramaic '**born**' covers both impregnation and conception as well as giving birth. We are born from our mother but we are begotten by our father. Also the word '**again**' means above, on top, high e.g. the temple curtain was torn from **top** to bottom. So considering that God is our Father not our mother the term 'born again' is actually about 'being conceived from on high'. Let's take the familiar jargon away and see what Jesus actually said.

*Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is begotten of water and of the Spirit. Flesh begets flesh but the Spirit begets spirit."*

*You shouldn't be surprised at my saying, 'You must be begotten from above.' The wind blows where it pleases. You hear its sound, but you can't tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone begotten by the Spirit."*

In his first letter John wrote "Anyone who has been begotten of God does not **do** sin, because his seed (sperma) lives in him and he cannot sin because he has been begotten of God." 1 John 3:9. So Jesus is talking about what the Father does in our hearts by the Holy Spirit impregnating us with his divine seed, which grows within us until we reach a point of repentance and faith in Christ, which we then express by being baptised. Being born again is not our conversion experience as is popularly assumed, but about life being implanted from above, like when Mary conceived Jesus. (Luke 1:35) Did she feel anything when it happened? Do we? Jesus describes it like the wind 'you don't know where it comes from or where it is going' and being begotten by the Spirit is something we can't say when or where, we can only see the results. After it has happened people change - they have become children of God.

Theologians call this regeneration. We can't make it happen to ourselves or to anyone else, but we can pray and we can 'sow the seed' of God's word. But only God can regenerate someone. But Nicodemus didn't get it. How could an expert in the Jewish scripture be so baffled by this; there are plenty of clues, in the OT.

Ezek 36:25-27. We see that begetting has two parts:

1. 'I will sprinkle clean water on you' and
2. 'I will give you a new heart and a new spirit.'

NB. Begotten of water and the Spirit does not refer to water baptism, as some teach. It shows we need cleansing before a new heart can be implanted. Today we can see this in both aspects of Jesus work - his cross cleanses us and his resurrection makes us alive. The cross gets us ready for regeneration and then the Holy Spirit regenerates us through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. 1 Pet 1:3.

In this chapter we then have Jesus fullest exposition of his Gospel.

### **Jesus outline the Gospel to Nicodemus**

1. Jesus is actually speaking about himself. He is the Messiah, the Son of Man, the only human being ever to have been sent by God to earth from heaven.
2. He came to be 'lifted up' just as Moses nailed a brass snake on a pole in the desert. Anyone dying from snakebite only had to look at the snake on the pole, in faith, to be healed. Jesus knew he would have to be crucified so that everyone who believes in him might receive eternal life. John 3:16
3. God did not send Jesus into this world to judge us and condemn us but to rescue us from the condemnation under which we currently stand and he also sent him to be a light to us.
4. We all know our deeds are evil and have a sense of guilt so we instinctively hate the light and hide in the darkness, because we fear exposure. 'Religion' tells us we

are condemned to perish because of our evil deeds but Jesus says something so radical, so remarkable that we are actually only condemned because we don't believe in the Name of the only Son of God.

5. As part of a world of condemned people, dying because we have succumbed to the snake bite of sin, all we have to do is lift up our eyes to look at Jesus, God's only Son hanging on a cross. Why is he there? Because of God's great love for us, which is why he sent him. He died so that we would not perish but have eternal life. As we look at him in faith, his brilliant pure light shines right into us and dispels all our guilt and sin. Suddenly we find ourselves knowing the truth. Now we see the Kingdom, so we step into it and start to living for the King, living by the truth and doing deeds of faith through God's power. We actually find ourselves enjoy living in the Light.

Do you believe this? Is this true of you? Then you are begotten from above. However, let's not simply enjoy this for ourselves but pray for God to regenerated others and share our story and his good news with them whenever we can.

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