

The Gospel of John

Chapter 3:1-8

January 12, 1997

- **The Gospel of John Outline:**
 - Chapter 1 Our Lord is the Word, the Light and the Life
 - Chapter 2 The Lord of the Wedding Feast; Zeal for the purity of the temple
 - Chapter 3 Spiritual Birth
- **Review & Introduction**

Remaining in Jerusalem, Christ begins to minister and gradually reveal himself to the people. He has just concluded the first cleansing of the temple (from the moneychangers and the sacrificial animal sellers) and performed many signs by which many believed. Despite the fact that Jesus did not yet completely reveal to His followers who He was or what His purpose was, He had a large number of followers and was probably the talk of the town. Clearly His actions had even been the topic of discussion between the rulers of Israel as seen in the narrative between Jesus and Nicodemus recorded only in the Gospel of John.

- **Exposition**

John 3:1-8

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."

- John begins his narrative on the discussion between our Lord and Nicodemus by explaining that Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. He mentions these most likely as an indictment on the unbelief of Nicodemus and the other Pharisees. As one who was a teacher of the Scriptures, they should have been the first to see who Jesus was. Later in John 7, we see that Nicodemus is intervening to ensure that Jesus gets a fair trial and it was he who provided the burial spices for Jesus with Joseph of Arimathea.
- It is not clear why he came to Jesus at night but a likely speculation would be that Nicodemus wanted to meet surreptitiously to protect his reputation. His actions mark a contrast to his first statement that he and the others believe that Jesus was sent from God due to miracles that Jesus performed. Although the miracles were successful in persuading the rulers of Jesus' divinity, the fact that it was not combined with faith and repentance did not produce fruits of regeneration. The presence of the signs alone cannot be the sole basis upon which we believe because not everyone who performs miracles is from God. Deut 13:1, 2 Thess 2:9

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."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?"

- Jesus' response is rather abrupt. It is as though Christ said, "Seeing that you are lacking that which is of highest importance in the kingdom of God, I care little about your calling me Master; for the first entrance into the kingdom of God is to become a new, Spiritual man." The point he is making is in contrast to the confession made by Nicodemus where he states that the leaders know that he is from God. Jesus' response is that there is no way you could know this because the only way to see the kingdom of God is to be born again. Despite the confession of true vision, the spiritual reality is that of blindness which is evidenced by Nicodemus' response.

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."⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."⁷ "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

- There has been much discussion on what is meant by born of water and the Spirit. Some have taken water to mean the water of baptism or taken it allegorically to mean a birth of purity. I think these understandings import too much to the text as it would be more natural to allow the context of the next verse to explain the contrast made by Christ. Note that the dichotomy is made between the flesh and spirit and therefore a more natural understanding is that clearly a man must be born of the flesh (that is, natural birth here symbolized by water) and then he must be born of the spirit, the second birth.
- It would be useful to consider what actually happens when someone is born of the Spirit. First consideration is that in the new birth there is first a death. Romans 6 explains that we cannot partake only of Christ's resurrection we must also partake of His death. When we become Christians, the old man in us is crucified. Because Christ rose from the dead so

too we will be resurrected to new life, but only after there is a death.

- Notice also that entrance into the kingdom of God is through birth; you are *born* into His kingdom. Although someone can act like a citizen of the kingdom, the true subjects are those who have been born into it. There is no naturalization process in this kingdom without rebirth.

8 "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." NKJV

- Jesus uses the sovereignty of the wind in that it goes where it wishes and influences as it desires as a picture to illustrate the sovereignty of God in the process of rebirth. The Holy Spirit moves about convicting men of their transgressions as He sees fit. If the Spirit does not come upon a man and give him a new heart, replacing the old heart of stone with one of flesh, and give him new vision so that he can see spiritual things, then there is no way within himself that man can accomplish these things. When He does, we can see the genuine fruit of the work that is done in a person.