

# **The Journey of Faith**

## **Light In The Darkness**

### **John 3:1-21**

#### **Introduction:**

- A. We're at a "safe distance" of 2000 years from the NT
  - 1. What would it feel like to have been alive then?
  - 2. Zacchaeus, wanting to see Jesus from a distance, only to have him invite himself
- B. What was it like to be this Nicodemus
  - 1. A trained scholar, an elite member of Jewish society, confident in his understanding of God and a teacher among the people
  - 2. Suddenly intimidated by one who seemed to know more than he did
  - 3. Imagine the fear of facing the possibility that all of your own faith and practice might be misplaced, wrong-headed.
  - 4. How does someone like this turn loose of a life-long belief about God that Jesus challenges

#### **Conversation: Read (John 2:23 - 3:5)**

#### **I. Faith that is not faith**

##### **-Affirming baptism**

- A. Baptism is an important and necessary part of the faith-response God wants us to have
  - 1. The gospel **1 Cor.15:1-5** & our salvation is bound up in that story
    - a. The confession of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection is wrapped up in the symbol of immersion
    - b. This response is significant for the person on the journey of faith
  - 2. But there is even more that we are supposed to understand from this text that is a bit, scary.
  - 3. Perhaps John is reflecting back to the beginning of his Gospel by this scene.
    - a. Here Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, in the darkness, (Nick at Night 3:19-21) 1:5: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" - NIV has not understood it."
  - 4. If we are supposed to be following Nicodemus on the journey of faith, don't you suspect we are supposed to hear something more than baptism from this text?
    - a. Don't you sense that coming out of the darkness and stepping into the presence of the One who already knows you better than you know yourself is going to demand more than the simple act of baptism?
  - 5. Sometimes In John's Gospel, Jesus seems to be about the business of confusion.
    - 1. John continually shows Jesus in conversations that are full of confusion and double meanings. (Led Zeppelin- Stairway to Heaven)
    - 2. The process of translation has created more confusion for the modern reader because Jesus intentionally uses a word that has two different meanings (Again/From above)
  - 6. Nicodemus appears to compliment Jesus, yet Jesus attacks him 3:1-2
    - 1. Nicodemus hears the idea of being born "again."
    - 2. The New Revised Standard Version is the first standard translation in English to provide the meaning that Jesus actually intended, which is "from above."
    - 3. This is the confusion that runs through the rest of their conversation.
    - 4. Nicodemus is trying to figure out how to re-enter his mother's womb, while Jesus is trying to convey the necessity of being born "from above."
    - 5. Jesus has in mind a baptism that is "from above" and that leads to the indwelling of the Spirit.
    - 6. Only this could produce a transformation of life from God - it's from above!
- B. Not the religious practice of religion

1. This word also has different meanings (The service and worship of God/an institutionalized system of beliefs and practices)
    - a. It's this institutionalized system of belief and practice that Jesus attacks
    - b. At camp GB this summer I stated that this verse was not talking about baptism! I may have over stated this but my point is -- if we're not careful, a good deal of our teaching and believing regarding this verse has centered on water baptism without much or even any thought given to the Spirit.
    - b. Jesus insists that one can enter the kingdom of God by rebirth, which is only from above!
  2. Nicodemus the pharisees certainly would have been a serious law keeper
    - a. No doubt that Jesus was teaching that it's not enough to just keep the Law!
    - b. Yet Nicodemus does not seem to understand
    - c. So Jesus restates his meaning in v. 5 (Water and the Spirit)
      - (1) This is what introduces baptism in the conversation
        - Water meant that he needed cleansing
        - Spirit meant the power that could change him was the Holy Spirit- (From above)
  3. Is it me or are all of us here today supposed to read this text and ask ourselves this question: Did my baptism really mark a transition in my life? Or better yet: Do the people who know me have good reason to believe that mine is a Spirit-begotten lifestyle, a life-from-above lifestyle?
  4. Baptism without the concept of the Spirit and a rebirth that comes from above leaves us wanting.
  5. Oddly enough, it is not water that Jesus emphasizes; rather it's the Spirit! vv. 6-8
- C. It is to be Spirit-born -
1. Born from above - it is to experience the radical act of God's grace empowering us for life.
    - a. Otherwise, we're like Nicodemus-- left with human effort even in the act of water baptism
    - b. It becomes just another line item on Nicodemus' "to-do list."
    - c. He already has that performance-based faith figured out.
  2. Jesus is suggesting a radically different approach, one that cannot be humanly explained any more than Nicodemus could explain the blowing of the wind.
  3. What I'm trying to say is: A baptismal certificate won't be enough at the last day.
    - a. Instead we will want to be standing before the Judge of Heaven and Earth with that wind-blown -- Spirit-effected and Spirit-revealing - look of newness, life, and light that someone living "from above" would bear!
  4. For Nicodemus, the idea that being Jewish wasn't enough and that being a member of the Sanhedrin wasn't a guarantee of being a member of the kingdom of God, that being a rabbi didn't mean you knew everything you really needed to know -
    - a. Like Nicodemus, we need to hear Jesus' challenge v.3:13

## II. Faith that leads to new birth

### A. The power of God

1. The new birth begins and ends with the power of God.
2. Jesus told Nicodemus in vv. 6-8 that the new birth is by the power of the Spirit
3. It is through this rebirth that we have real and significant change!

### B. By faith in Jesus

1. Do not miss the anticipation of the cross that comes at this point!
2. In Numbers 21, God sent poisonous snakes through the camp of the rebellious Israelites to punish them for their constant complaining. When the people cried for help, Moses cried out to the Lord and the Lord instructed him to raise up a bronze snake in the midst of the camp so that everyone bitten by the poisonous snakes could look up at the bronze snake and live.
3. In the same way, Jesus says, the Son of man will be "lifted up," so that whoever

believes in him may live. vv. 14-15

4. That leads into the most famous verse in John's Gospel: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

### Conclusion

- A. Does God want anybody to be lost? Absolutely not.
  - a. And the coming of Jesus to be "lifted up" is proof of that.
  - b. Being born from above allows us to come out of the darkness vv. 19-21 and to experience the safety of the Father's presence in our lives
  - c. We're not interested here in getting you water baptized for the sake of being born again and then continuing to live in darkness.
  - e. We proclaim the radical grace of God this morning, the gift of being born from above, the safety of walking out of darkness and shame and false piety - empowered now to live in his light!

**Today is the day for you to leave your night for Christ's day, your darkness for his light, your judgment for his grace, your flesh for his Spirit. And if you are willing to make that move, God is anxious and eager to meet you in the baptismal waters, to accompany and empower you along your journey of faith, and to welcome you home at the end. This would be the perfect day for you to step out of your shadowy darkness and into his glorious light.**

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