

SEEING AND ENTERING

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN



WE MUST BE BORN AGAIN
(from above)

1) Nicodemus comes to Jesus ...

Nicodemus' faith is shaken, and so he comes to Jesus hoping for some answers.

1. Nicodemus approaches Jesus and states what he believes to be true about Jesus, 3:1-2.
 - (John 3:1-2 ESV) **Now 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**.”
 - A. Nicodemus seems to have been experiencing doubt, fear, confusion and hope.
 - B. Nicodemus openly expressed belief in two true things about Jesus—that Jesus was a teacher come from God and that God was with him.
 - C. His problem was that believing some things about Jesus is not enough.
 - D. It also seems probable that Nicodemus was one of the many referred to in 2:23-25 who also only believed some things about Jesus.
 - (John 2:23 ESV) Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, **many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing**.
 - E. Jesus did not trust these “believers” because he knew that they were not believing in him for the salvation God offered—forgiveness of sins.
 - (John 2:24-25 ESV) But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, **because he knew all people** 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for **he himself knew what was in man**.
 - F. They were believing in him for the salvation that they hoped for—that he would use his miracle working power to establish a kingdom for them on the earth.
2. Compare Nicodemus' statements of belief with the statements others made about Jesus.

Nicodemus ...

- (John 3:2 ESV) ... **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 the Baptist ...

- (John 1:29 ESV) ... “**Behold, the Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Andrew ...

- (John 1:41 ESV) ... [Andrew] ... said to him, “**We have found the Messiah**” (which means Christ).

Philip ...

- (John 1:45 ESV) Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “**We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph**.”

Nathaniel ...

- (John 1:49 ESV) ... “**Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!**”

Simon Peter ...

- (John 6:69 ESV) And we have believed, and have come to know, that **you are the Holy One of God**.

Martha ...

- (John 11:27 ESV) She said to him, “Yes, Lord; **I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God**, who is coming into the world.”

John's statement of purpose ...

- (John 20:31 ESV) ... **these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

2) Jesus answers Nicodemus ...

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again to see the kingdom of God.

1. Jesus answered the question that was on Nicodemus' heart, 3:3.
 - (John 3:3 ESV) Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God**.”
 - A. The question that was on Nicodemus' heart was — How can a person see the kingdom of God?
 - B. We know this is the question on his heart because it is the question Jesus answered.
 - C. Jesus knew what was in Nicodemus (see 2:24-25 above) and so he knew what was on his heart.
 - D. So Jesus begins to prod Nicodemus toward the truth—that his work for the kingdom of God was fruitless ... and that he had spent his entire life with his religious ladder leaning against the wrong wall.

2. He told Nicodemus that for a person to **see** the kingdom of God that he needed to be born into a new life from above.

A. Important Note: Here Jesus speaks of **seeing** the kingdom and later speaks of **entering** the kingdom.

The word John used [οἶδα - oida] means to perceive with the eyes; to perceive by any of the senses; to notice, discern, discover; to turn the eyes, the mind, the attention to anything; observe.

To see spiritually is the ability to know and understand spiritual truths.

B. A new birth from above was necessary to bring about **a new life** and then the person would have the ability to perceive spiritual truth, e.g. he or she could now see the reality of the kingdom of God.

- (1 Corinthians 2:12–13 ESV) **Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.** 13 And we impart this in words **not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.**

C. This helps to explain the misguided efforts of those who had not yet experienced this new birth in seeking salvation in a king and kingdom on earth.

D. Nicodemus and the others could only see what their natural minds were capable of seeing—they could not see past earth and the things of earth.

- (1 Corinthians 2:14 ESV) **The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them** because they are **spiritually discerned.**

E. It was impossible for them to seek the kingdom of God or set their minds on things that are above.

- (Matthew 6:33 ESV) But **seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you.
- (Colossians 3:1–2 ESV) If then you have been raised with Christ, **seek the things that are above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your minds on things that are above**, not on things that are on earth.

3. So what does it mean to be born again?

- (John 3:3 ESV) Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**”

A. To be born again means to be regenerated; formed or created again; be conceived again; to be brought into existence afresh, or become new.

B. The words may also be translated to be born from above; from a higher place; of things which come from heaven or God.

C. We are born into the reality of a new person—we are born into a new creation.

- (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation.** The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

D. We are born again (from above) by the will of God.

- (John 1:12–13 ESV) But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 **who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**

3) Jesus and Nicodemus continue their dialogue regarding the nature of the new birth ...

Nicodemus has not yet reached the place of believing what he needs to believe and so is still not connecting the dots.

1. To see the kingdom of God we must be born again.
2. It is only by the work of God alone (here the Spirit's work) that we are born into this new life.
3. The analogy of being born into life as a human teaches us the impossibility of attaining the new birth—salvation—by any effort of our own, 3:4-8.

- (John 3:4–8 ESV) 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?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, 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.’** 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

A. Jesus used the example of being born by natural birth to explain what he meant regarding being born again (from above) spiritually.

B. Nicodemus understood his point that it is impossible for a person to do such a thing—to be born again.

C. Salvation by human effort is as impossible as a person being born again from his mother's womb.

D. Jesus answers that this rebirth only happens by the washing of regeneration and being made into a new person by the work of the Spirit .

- (Ezekiel 36:25–26 ESV) **I will sprinkle clean water on you**, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you **a new heart**, and **a new spirit**. I will put within you. And I will **remove the heart of stone** from your flesh **and give you a heart of flesh**.

- (Titus 3:5–6 ESV) He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit**, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

E. We are born again (from above) to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ.

- (1 Peter 1:3 ESV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, **he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead**.

F. We are born again (from above) of imperishable seed—the living and abiding word of God.

- (1 Peter 1:23 ESV) Since you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, **through the living and abiding word of God**.

4) Nicodemus voices his frustration ...

Nicodemus exclaims ... “How can these things be?”

1. Nicodemus has not yet come to saving faith and so he sincerely asks the question.

- (John 3:9 ESV) Nicodemus said to him, **“How can these things be?”**

2. It seems from the following text that Nicodemus finally arrives at saving faith—but not on this particular evening.

- (John 19:38–40 ESV) After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. 39 **Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night**, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. 40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

5) To be continued ...

Jesus proceeds to rebuke and instruct Nicodemus ...

CONCLUSION

This is how God so loved the world ...

Jesus clearly tells us that we must be born again to see and enter the kingdom of God, but that is mission impossible for mere humans.

So God loved the world in this way. He sent Jesus from heaven to save us from our sins.

- (John 3:16 ESV) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- (1 Corinthians 15:3–4 ESV) For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received: **that Christ died for our sins** in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 **that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day** in accordance with the Scriptures.