

The Gospel of John

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Lesson #20

The Journey

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The Gospel of John

1st Corinthians 1:26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

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- John 3:1 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."
- Who was Nicodemus? Why did he come to Jesus? Why did he come by night? Why does this prestigious man of stature and wealth come to Jesus and call him Rabbi? 3

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- Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, a 70-member ruling council first introduced in the book of Numbers.
- If Nicodemus lived in America today, he would be considered as “upper class” – he is reported to have been the 3rd richest man in Jerusalem.
- We are not told many names of the members of the ruling council, the Sanhedrin, but we do know at least one other member in Jesus’ day - Joseph of Arimathea.

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- Nicodemus was a Pharisee which means “separated ones” – they were the legalists of Jesus’ day and were meticulous in keeping “the law” as well as lots of other manmade rules.
- The “rules” of the legalists are almost never found in scripture – the “rules” are most often a restatement of the preferences of those in power.
- It is not wrong to have personal preferences, but it is wrong to use our preferences to measure others or insist they adopt ours.

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- During Jesus’ day there were somewhere 5 and 7 thousand Pharisees in Israel – guess how many were even interested enough in Jesus to seek him out?
- As far as we know, out of say 7,000 Pharisees we know of just one who was saved during Jesus’ ministry, Nicodemus.
- Perhaps Joseph of Arimathea, and then later on the Apostle Paul, but it seems to be a short list of “religious” people who were converted to Jesus.

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- Matt 9:16 “No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. 17 Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”
- If the “old guard” was satisfied with the old wine of the Old Testament, then perhaps that is why the Pharisees and Sadducees had no interest in Jesus – they were quite content to be playing church. (temple!) 7

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- Later on, Nicodemus will put up at least a mild defense of Jesus in chapter 7.
- **“Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.”**
- So, we have the picture – Nicodemus was a rich, religious, and powerful Jew whose heart the Lord was opening. 8

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- **“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.”**
- Nicodemus was having his eyes opened by God as he listened to Jesus and witnessed his works.
- **“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but 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.”** John 20:30-31 9

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Nicodemus is experiencing firsthand John's purpose in writing his gospel.

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• John 3:3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, 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?" 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.'

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- We tend to understand "Born Again" as this word that can be substituted to site the extent of God's work of salvation in the believing sinner.
- We sometimes say, "she is a 'born again' Christian" as though there can be a Christian who is not born again – so to say "born again Christian" is to be redundant. ☺
- John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **except anyone be born from above**, he is not able to see the kingdom of God." (Berean Literal Bible) 12

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- The whole idea that one must be born again is anything but an accident by John – it’s an intentional analogy.
- Jesus tells Nicodemus, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** – as holders of the N.T, this should not surprise us.
- Being born again is both an objective and a subjective experience – How would you describe what it is to be born again to someone who is spiritually dead?

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- Jesus presents a picture of what came to be known as the new birth that is easy to read and almost impossible to understand.
- Nicodemus reacts to Jesus like most of the unsaved world of our day reacts to us – “what are you talking about?”.
- The new birth is a very mysterious event that can be grasped enough to be saved, but not so well that it can be fully understood.

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- Nicodemus actually asks, **“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”.**
- He wants a “how to” lesson on being born again, but such a lesson does not exist in the bible – if you notice in our text Jesus does not give him a “how to”.
- Instead, he seems to drag him into even deeper water with, **“unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”**

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- Being born of water and the Spirit is something that is often misunderstood – some say it’s natural birth followed by the new birth and others say it’s water baptism.
- Ezek 36:25 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. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ¹⁶

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- **I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses** – God will cleanse you of your sins and cause you to want to repent.
- **And I will give you a new heart** – you will be given a new nature that wants to please God.
- **And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules** – this needs to be understood in light of what we know about sanctification. ¹⁷

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Titus 3:4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 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.

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- Later on, Jesus says something to Nicodemus about being **"the teacher in Israel"** yet he does not understand something so basic as regeneration. ☺
- Regeneration is just like many Biblical truths that are obscure until someone casts light on the obvious.
- Being born of water and the Spirit happen at regeneration when God brings the dead sinner to life.

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To be "born again " (or "born from above," the preferable translation) means the transformation of a person is so that he or she is able to enter another world and adapt to its conditions. To belong to the heavenly kingdom, one must be born into it.

(The Expositor's Commentary)

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- You know you've been born again when you find in yourself a strange desire to want to obey God. (1st John 2:3)
- You know you've been born again when you suddenly prefer Christian friends to worldly ones. (1st John 3:14)
- You know you've been born again when you begin to see the Spirit's work in you taking you out of your indifference to sin. (1st John 3:9)

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To repeat myself – we do not know how it is that we've been regenerated (born from above), but we sure can know we've born again. Many recoil at the notion that we had nothing to do with our new birth because they do not know that regeneration means "born from above". To those I say, "Okay, you want some credit? You used the faith God gave you to receive Jesus as your Savior"!

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• John 1:12 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.

• Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

• Then, after you were born from above, and after God gave you faith to believe, you believed.

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Is there any gap of chronological time between regeneration & conversion?

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If you have trouble worshipping God, then it follows you do not know him or the work he has done for us! What a wretched person one is to not see fit to acknowledge One who has given so much. As for such people, those who will not do what ought to be done, God will give them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

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Questions?

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