

John 3:1-12 (NIV)

¹Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

³In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” ⁴“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” ⁵Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” ⁹“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”

43-03-02-Seeking the Unexpected

questions, new birth, regeneration, Nicodemus, Holy Spirit
John 3:1-12

Jesus offers us not comfortable stability but a transforming adventure.

INTRODUCTION:

–When people seek out Jesus, they may not know it, but they’re *seeking the unexpected*. That’s what Nicodemus discovered the night he sought out Christ. As “*a member of the Jewish ruling council*,” he probably went “*at night*” to keep his visit private. Having ties with Jesus wasn’t popular back then *politically* or *religiously*, even as it’s not, sometimes, today. –It seems Nicodemus’s interest represented that of other Pharisees. He called Jesus “*Rabbi*” and said, “*we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.*” This might have been a prelude to a more direct question on the minds of many: “*Jesus, Are you the Messiah?*”

–The answer he got was totally *unexpected*. It upset his political cart and rocked his religious boat. That can happen to us, too, when we get into the presence of Christ. **HOM.idea.** Let’s look at some elements in this spiritually transforming adventure. First of all,

I. God’s Kingdom Is a Totally New Start– v.3. *In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”*

A. Nicodemus wasn’t asking about entrance into God’s kingdom, but he was talking to the Person Who was *the doorway into it*.

1. As a Pharisee, he felt secure that he already had God’s favor. (Pharisees followed an *elaborate legalistic system* they thought made their status with God higher than others around them.)
2. Here is Christ’s attitude on that– **Luke 18:10-14**, “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

B. Ignoring his surface question, Jesus zeroed in on Nicodemus’s real need: ‘*You must be born again.*’ **lit.** “*born from above*,” which had come to

mean ‘from the top’ or ‘from the start’ or ‘all over again’].

1. Nicodemus’s next question showed he took it to mean ‘all over again’—v.4, “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”
2. Jesus *did* mean “born all over again,” but also “born from above,” a birth from a totally new source—v.5-6, Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

TRANS: Like most Pharisees, Nicodemus might have thought he had already arrived religiously. He didn’t expect hearing he needed to start all over again. [H. S. graduation seems like an arrival, until you get to college and realize, “I’ve just begun to learn how to study.”] Nicodemus thought his earthly cultural and religious status was secure. Jesus wasn’t talking about a comfortable stability but a transforming adventure. Moral effort is not the source of God’s new beginning. Jesus says that...

II. God’s People Are Totally Spirit-Dependent—v.8, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

A. This is Christ’s description of born-again people:

1. Christians can’t be pigeonholed! (No one can see in their hearts that original, intimate episode where the Holy Spirit began their transformation. [We sing “I Come to the Garden Alone,” only because each new birth is mysteriously unique and individually special. Ask any mother!]) And...
2. Christians can’t be boxed in by religious systems! (1Pet 2:5 calls us “living stones” in a “spiritual house.” Stones are stable, but “living stones” are on a moving adventure. [In biology, motility characterizes living organisms.] Movement also describes a “living stone” in God’s kingdom, even if religious systems can’t tell “where it is going.”)

B. This view of spirituality upsets many religious carts. (Not only Pharisees but many churches in history tried preserving a religious status quo, when God was pouring “new wine into new wineskins.”)

1. Phariseeism depends on rule-keeping to preserve certain patterns of supposedly proper worship and acceptable behavior.
2. But to depend on human legalistic efforts to obtain and maintain spiritual life is deadly—Paul says in 2 Cor 3:5-6, we are “ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

TRANS: This “new covenant” of Christ [*the anointed one*] is manifested by the same anointing Spirit Who brings us new birth and becomes our Guide. The Holy Spirit’s name means ‘wind.’ His way with Spirit-dependent believers is as mysterious and uncontrollable as “wind [that] blows wherever it pleases.” Humans like to have control, especially religious control of programs & practices, but we are of this world....

III. God’s Program Is From Another World—v.12, “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”

A. Nicodemus was voicing the mind of all Pharisees in asking, “How can this be?” Jesus, answering with a representative approach, was addressing the lack of understanding in all the Pharisees—

1. v.10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? (Past OT prophecy was the basis of Christ’s critique.)
2. Nicodemus had said, “we know you are a teacher...” so Jesus answers in v.11, I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.” (Christ’s “we” were the voices of John the Baptist’s testimony, the Holy Spirit’s miracles, and the witness of those healed—all showed that God’s program from another world had arrived!)

B. Jesus taught us the way to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

1. Religion makes “the kingdom of heaven” an afterlife goal; Jesus tells us that God’s heavenly program is for today... for right now!
2. In fact, Jesus Himself is God’s program: God’s will being “done on earth as it is in heaven.” (The usual religious idea of reaching up toward God was reversed: God has reached down to us!)

CONCLUSION:

—It was risky for Nicodemus to seek out Jesus. If He was the Messiah, what next? Jesus cut past his question to what he really needed: new birth, a Spirit-led life, entry into God’s heavenly kingdom now. **Jesus offers us not comfortable stability but a transforming adventure.** Later in this Gospel, Nicodemus seems to have chosen the adventure.