

The Gospel of John
Week Four
John 3:1-30

Day One

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He 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." 3 In 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!"

v. 1 – Up to this point, Jesus had initiated contact with those who became His disciples. Based on His performance in Jerusalem during the Passover, someone then requested time with Him. This was no ordinary man, but Nicodemus, a member of the ruling council. While we know that most of the Pharisees opposed Jesus, this man was drawn to the Lord and wanted to have a private audience to get some answers.

v. 2 – Nicodemus came at night, under the cover of darkness perhaps (although this account doesn't indicate that this was the situation). Even if that is true, he still showed remarkable courage and called Jesus "Rabbi," a term of respect and equality coming from one of Israel's rulers. Notice that Nicodemus said that "we" know that Jesus has come from God. That is another remarkable statement, for while many publicly opposed Jesus, there were some who acknowledged His heavenly credentials.

The miracles that Jesus did had convinced Nicodemus that God sent Jesus, which is exactly what they were intended to do. He had come to the correct conclusion. He still struggled, however, with who Jesus was and what He was saying, but at least he was honest in his dialogue and search. Nicodemus was a good man. **Are you honest in your search, or are you telling others and God what you think they want to hear, what you think you should say? What can you do to be more transparent as Nicodemus was?**

v. 3 – There is Jesus' "tell you the truth" introductory remark. **What else could Jesus say?** Yet what He was about to say would seem so bizarre to Nicodemus that Jesus had to assure Him that He was telling the truth. It seems that Jesus answered a question about the Kingdom that Nicodemus wasn't even asking. Jesus knew his heart, however, and took the conversation where it needed to go. It seems all the leaders were eagerly looking and searching for the coming of the Kingdom, but Jesus disappointed them and did not fulfill their erroneous expectations.

Jesus told Nicodemus that a man (or woman) must be born again to see the Kingdom. **What was He saying?** He was saying that it would be essential for someone to unlearn

what they knew to comprehend and accept the new thing that God was doing through Christ.

v. 4 – Nicodemus took Jesus’ words literally and it caused him confusion. **How could anyone be born again and become a baby once more?** Of course Jesus was not speaking literally but metaphorically, saying that to enter into the things of God man must have a radical change of heart and perspective so as not to miss and dismiss God’s work and Word. **Is there any place where you are stuck? Do you have to unlearn what you know so that God can teach and show you something new?**

Day Two

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 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." 9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

v. 5 – Jesus was referring to something that Nicodemus should have been able to comprehend, for John the Baptist had turned Israel upside down with his baptism of repentance. Furthermore, Ezekiel referenced the Spirit breathing life into dry bones in Ezekiel in Ezekiel 36:25-27:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Even though Nicodemus was undoubtedly familiar with what Ezekiel said, he had preconceived notions of how that would happen and thus could not comprehend Jesus’ words. **Do you have any preconceived notions that are hindering hearing from the Lord? For instance, if God wants to bless you but there is a bad economy, do you think He cannot do what He said?** Your preconceived notion of a good economy can block God’s ability to do anything at any time, anyway He chooses.

v. 6 – Jesus introduced the thought that men would need a total makeover of their current nature if they were going to function in God’s kingdom. There is a saying that what got you here today won’t get you into tomorrow, and that is what Jesus was saying in essence. He was telling one of Israel’s finest leaders that he needed a whole new heart and mind if he and Israel were going to enter into God’s new work of the Kingdom. Nicodemus thought he was all right as he was, but he could not understand what Jesus was saying.

Keep in mind that the Jews were not familiar with the terms “flesh” and “spirit” as we are. This was new terminology to them, so Nicodemus was lost. Jesus was indicating

that the way forward in God was not what had brought Israel to the place that they were. They needed a new understanding, in fact a new heart, if they were going to enter God's kingdom. Nicodemus thought that being a Jew was enough; Jesus was informing him that it was not. **Are you thinking in old ways as you try to come into the new things of God?** If so, you need a makeover, just like Nicodemus.

vs. 7&8 – Jesus informed Nicodemus that there was no need to be surprised, but Nicodemus nevertheless was. Jesus then referenced the wind as a metaphor for what God was doing through Jesus' ministry. The wind is something that you know is there but you cannot see. You can feel and see it move, but it has a "mind" or will of its own. It can swirl, gust, change directions, and stop and start again; there is no predicting what it will do. That is how it is with the Spirit of God, according to Jesus.

I wonder if Nicodemus thought of another passage from Ezekiel, where the wind of God blew over the bones that were disjointed and dead.

Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' " So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

What natural man could not do for himself, God was going to do in the power of His Spirit by causing dead flesh to be alive to God through being born again. **Is the wind of the Spirit blowing in your life? If not, why not? What can you do, if anything, to allow Him to blow again?**

Day Three

10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 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. 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? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

v. 10 – This should put "fear" or concern in the heart of every church worker, for we see that is possible to be a teacher among God's people yet not understand the things of God.

In fairness to Nicodemus, Jesus was talking about things that were new, that Israel had never heard before in the context and manner in which Jesus was sharing. Yet instead of having the “light bulb go on,” Nicodemus was confused and questioned the meaning of Jesus’ words. At least he was questioning, however, and not just rejecting or pretending. Nicodemus was a good man and wanted to know the truth. **Do you want to know it? Don’t answer too quickly. If your denomination has a certain rule and that rule or teaching isn’t what it should be, do you really want God’s truth or are you willing to hold onto the rule or teaching?**

v. 11 – Jesus uttered, “I tell you the truth” for the fourth time in the first three chapters of John! **What else could He say?** Yet Nicodemus must have been thinking that Jesus was wrong. I find it interesting that Jesus speaks in the first person plural here, saying “we” and “our.” **Was he referring to Him and the disciples? Him and the Father?** The Jews were only to accept testimony based on two or three witnesses, but here the Jews as represented by Nicodemus, were indicted for not accepting the truth as presented by Jesus, a faithful and knowledgeable witness.

Jesus was more than any earthly prophet had ever been, for He spoke of things for which He had firsthand knowledge. What’s more, He had the power to back up what He said, as evidenced by His miracles. You can trust what Jesus said, yet there are many today who cast doubt and even reject that Jesus said or did what He did. They are just like Nicodemus but feel they have new insight because it is 2,000 years after Jesus’ time on earth. **Do the “experts” really believe that Jesus could not utter and preserve His words for 2,000 years, protecting them from disintegration or corruption?**

I believe the same Spirit that inspired the Word can protect and has protected the Word from any and all harm. The same Jesus that performed miracles on earth can continue to do so by preserving the Word of God for us today.

v. 12 – Jesus said something that the writer of Hebrews stated in a different way:

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:11-14).

Can you handle heavenly things or are you struggling with simple and basic earthly things where God and His Word are concerned?

v. 13 – It was clear in Jesus’ mind who He was, where He had come from and what He had come to do. He said who He was, spoke the truth and wanted them to be.

vs. 14&15 – Jesus referred to the story of the serpents and the bronze serpent found in Numbers 21:1-9. This tells us that Jesus:

1. Acknowledged that the Old Testament contained historical facts, not myths.
2. Knew that He had come to do what the bronze serpent had predicted would be done by another – deliver the people who looked unto Him from death.
3. Knew the Old Testament Scriptures.
4. Knew He had the power and ability to grant eternal life to those who believed in Him.

Please read Numbers 21:1-9 before we go any further. Is there anything else that you see?

Day Four

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

v. 16 – This may be the most quoted verse in the New Testament. God so loved the world that He gave His Son! This was the plan from the time Adam and Eve sinned, for the Lord said:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Yet God didn’t crush the head of the serpent through some secret or ritualistic procedure. He gave His Son, His only Son so that mankind could live and overcome the death of sin. **Where is the hardness or brutality in that, as some portray God to be?** God paid the price Himself to fulfill His own righteous demands. What a great God He is!

v. 17 -- This verse follows right after the famous verse 16, but is just as important. God does not condemn the world, but sent His Son to show the world the way forward, the way to Him. Jesus did not preach a harsh gospel to anyone except the religious who thought they had God all figured out and who hindered others from coming to Him.

Jesus did not come to condemn anyone but to call all to life in Him. If they did not accept, they were already condemned. The Church needs to hear this again and again, for often we have been angry, or at least appear angry to the world, when God isn’t angry. I am not implying that God is never angry, but He hasn’t always communicated when He is angry to His people. We see that in this story:

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you

want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village (Luke 9:51-55).

John was angry at how the Samaritans had insulted Jesus, but Jesus wasn't angry! **Are you angry about situations or with people with whom God isn't?**

v. 18 – We have good news to preach and that good news is that God isn't angry. He welcomes any and all to come to God through Him. If someone rejects that invitation, however, then they remain in their condemnation, for they have no means by which they can deal with their sin. And if one's sin is not dealt with to God's satisfaction, then they are already condemned. Yet God has offered a way out of condemnation in Christ, but there is no other way to be set free.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1-4).

Day Five

19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

v. 19 – Jesus made this assessment: He came with good news that is light for every life. Yet men who lived in darkness, instead of embracing the light, have run from the light and clung hopelessly to their evil deeds done in darkness. If you are in a dark room and light a match, it is amazing how just a little light can dispel darkness. It doesn't take a lot of Jesus to set someone free, yet men run from any encounter because they want to retain their darkness.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:22-24).

v. 20 – When I began to travel, I found that some people aren't just neutral or ignorant concerning God, they hate God and Jesus. The reason they do is because they love their evil deeds and they know that to accept Christ is to abandon their deeds. They can come

up with all the fine sounding arguments they like of why they cannot accept Christ, but the bottom line according to Jesus is that they don't want to repent from their evil deeds.

Yet it seems like some believers can also shun the light for the same reason:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

Are you walking in the light? Don't answer too quickly. Ask God to show you the reality.

v. 21 – **Do you see how the Scriptures flow together?** What Jesus said was repeated in 1 John. Those who know and love Him will walk in the light so their deeds are examined. Yet it is hard to walk with Christ when it is the brothers and sisters that are usually the light in which we must walk. We must learn to be honest with one another and at times we must confront one another:

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:14-16).

Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies. Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it. Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers; their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken (Psalm 141:4-6).

How do you define walking in the light? Is it only a relationship with Jesus? Is it limited to reading God's Word? Or does it involve having meaningful accountability relationships with God's people?

Day Six

22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. 23 Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. 24 (This was before John was put in prison.) 25 An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on

the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

v. 22 – This is a fascinating verse, for I am not sure I had ever noticed that Jesus went into the Judean countryside to baptize. What's more, Jesus went out just to spend some time with the disciples. So they were bonding together and perhaps assisting John in his baptismal ministry. At any rate, Jesus invested a lot of time and energy in training His disciples. You could say that this was his top priority after accomplishing His mission on the cross. **In whom are you investing yourself to leave a legacy and perpetuate the work that God has given you to do? Is it your children, spouse, ministry team, work team or someone else? How much time are you spending together to accomplish this objective?**

v. 23 – John's ministry continued while Jesus began His and Jesus seemed to be helping John in the work. There was plenty of water and people were "constantly" coming, finding John wherever he was. I have often said that you don't have to pursue purpose, it pursues you. John didn't have to go looking for people to baptize; they found him. **What pursues you in life? What group comes to you for help no matter where you are? What opportunities regularly find you?**

v. 24 – John's gospel was written many decades after Jesus' resurrection, so whoever wrote this had a great memory and had to be present personally when the things he wrote about took place. We are reading about a period that took place immediately prior to John's imprisonment, so Jesus and John were ministering concurrently. **Why is this important?** The next few verses explain why the writer positioned this so.

v. 25 – An argument developed among some Jews and John's disciples over ceremonial washing. Yesterday I was sitting in a D. Min class and some of my cohort classmates were arguing over an issue of sermon topics. As religious folk, we love to argue about procedures and details. The more we know about God, the more it seems we relish the opportunity to debate and argue. People die without knowing Jesus, yet we persist in endless meetings to discuss opinions about topics that at the end of the day really don't amount to much.

Now, I am just as guilty as anyone else. I get "hot under the collar" about so many things. I want to argue my position and I want to win, so I will do almost anything to do so. Yet James wrote about wisdom and wisdom seems to be ready to yield not to win at all costs:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of

mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness (James 3:13-18).

Wisdom is willing to submit and not press forward! Oh, help me, Lord. I have a long way to go.

v. 26 – The real issue here wasn't ceremonial washing, it was turf-protecting. John's disciples were threatened because someone was getting bigger and better results than John. John's disciples were upset and felt threatened. While they were happy that Jesus had testified about John, now Jesus was getting more and bigger results than John, and that made them uptight. **How would John handle this question and complaint? Would he redouble his efforts to regain his momentum? Would he seek a face-to-face meeting with Jesus to try and work out their differences and establish their territories?** Let's move on to see how John handled this complaint.

Day Seven

27 To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must become greater; I must become less.

v. 27 – John had the perfect, godly perspective on the matter. Results, momentum, honor, following and prestige were all in God's hands; they come from God. They are not the result of human efforts. Oh, how I wish we would all grasp what John knew to be true. If what we have we are given from heaven, then there is no cause for pride or to feel good about what has been accomplished. There is no sense that "I did this" but rather He did this. John was obedient but God gave the results and John refused to be fooled to think that he had anything to do with it.

v. 28 – John did not change his perspective when he was faced with diminishing ministry returns. He had said that he was not the Christ and he did not change his story for expediency sake. John knew that he was the one sent before the Lord; he was not the Lord. One has to admire and respect John's understanding of who he was and what his role was to be. He functioned in that properly and did not deviate. He knew his purpose and stayed true to that, even when it was not in the best interests of his "ministry."

Who are you? What has God assigned for you to do? Are you faithful to it? Are you trying to do more than God has equipped you to do?

v. 29 – John then used a metaphor comparing himself to the friend of the bridegroom but not the groom or the bride. John rejoiced to hear the bridegroom's voice – to see Him come and begin to function as God intended. John was happy being in the limelight and then taking a reduced role when Jesus arrived on the scene.

John wrapped up his public ministry and had one more assignment from the Lord, and that was to confront Herod over his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. It is interesting to me that God sent His finest Old Testament prophet, John, to try to turn Herod from his wicked ways. After Herod had John killed, Jesus refused to speak to Herod when He came to Herod right before the crucifixion. In a sense, John represented Herod's last chance to repent. When Herod wanted Jesus to speak or show Him a miracle or two, Jesus refused.

God can assign you any work that He chooses. At first, John's assignment was to be public and popular. The next assignment was to confront the immorality of the king and it would cost John his life. God makes His assignments without apology. **What has God assigned you to do? Is it easy, or is there some price connected to it? Can you rest in the fact that your ministry or work results are in God's hands? Can you have the same joy that John had in doing the will of God in your life? Can you rejoice to see Jesus exalted while you are a hidden factor in the process?**

v. 30 - John gave an accurate explanation for the process his disciples had described to him. John had to decrease so that Jesus could increase in the presence of Israel and in the hearts of the people. What a brilliant summary of God's strategy! John knew his role and place and the Lord wants us to do the same. **Do you know your role and place in the economy of God? Have you embraced it?**