

### John 3.1-15

Nicodemus a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews

⇒ Refer back to 2.13-22

- The Jews ask Jesus for *a sign* (to testify to his authority for cleansing the Temple)
- Jesus responds by speaking about his body as the Temple; they misunderstand, thinking he refers to the earthly temple

Preceding verses (2.23 – 25)

- Many people believed because of Jesus' signs
- BUT Jesus did not believe (entrust) himself to them
- He needed no one to bear witness about man
- For he himself knew what was in man

Then Nicodemus introduced as

1. A *man* of the Pharisees... a ruler of the Jews i.e. one of those who had demanded a sign
2. BUT, speaking as 'we', he says that the signs he does prove that he is "a teacher come from God"

i.e. Nicodemus is closer to the people than his fellow rulers: he believes because of Jesus signs.

BUT already know that Jesus has no confidence in faith based on signs.

Find Nicodemus' faith grows as Gospel proceeds:

- 7.51 - N. calls for a fair trial for Jesus
- 19.38-42 joins Joseph of Arimathea in burying Jesus

"By night" = bespeaks both secrecy and blindness

Nicodemus' blindness (though clever, educated, powerful):

- Misunderstands "born again" (choosing to understand Jesus this way, rather than the equally legitimate "from above" Gk. *anōthen*)

Jesus' answer = abrupt.

- You *cannot* enter the kingdom of God by virtue of being a son of Abraham, or from one of the 12 tribes, or by being circumcised or obeying the law
- You must be born from above – by the Spirit of God – as prophesied by Ezekiel 36.24-28.

- Includes a reference to being born of water and the Spirit – i.e. baptism
- Speaks of total renewal: forgiveness and then a new heart and Spirit

Likens “being born of the Spirit’ to the mystery of the wind blowing. Can’t deny its presence and power, but cannot understand its origin or movement. Nor is it something humans can replace or replicate.

Entering God’s kingdom requires a sovereign act of God – a miracle from above.

Not a matter of illumination but regeneration.

Need to believe the testimony of those who’ve been born again (the “we” in v.11)

When N. wonders how these things can be, Jesus chides him: if you do not believe earthly things (e.g. John’s baptism, and Jesus as the incarnate Son of Man), how can you believe heavenly things?

Then he gives him the climactic statement:

- He is the Son of Man of Daniel 7
- All must look to the lifted up Son of Man and believe in him, citing Moses in Num 21.4-9

i.e. Just as the serpent was both the cause of death in Israel, and that which was looked to for healing, so Jesus – in taking on the sin that leads to our death (2 Cor 5.21) – is the one (lifted up) to whom we must look for the removal of sin.

SO, need to both

1. Be born again, and
2. believe in Jesus

Status/intellect counts for nothing; believing *who* Jesus is, because of forgiveness and new heart and Spirit, is everything.

### **Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. Nicodemus' visit to Jesus is covert, but sincere. In what ways might people be perceived as "coming to Jesus by night" today? What kind of things might motivate them to approach in this tentative way?
2. What do you think of Jesus' blunt, direct approach to Nicodemus? Why do you think he adopted such an approach?
3. What, if anything, might we learn from it today (concerning how we respond to "seekers")?
4. The expression "a born again Christian" tends to be used today as a put-down (when used by non-Christians). Why do you think people sneer at the idea of being "born again" (not that there can be any other type of Christian!)?
5. Think of your own baptism, confirmation, or reaffirmation of baptism. What was your experience of being "born from above"?

Please continue to pray for those who were baptized on Sunday. Satan often goes on the offensive against those newly born of water and the Spirit – snatching the seed sown away.