

## STUDY #7

## INTERVIEW WITH NICODEMUS (PART A)

**John 2:23-3:8 (ESV)—**

<sup>23</sup>Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. <sup>24</sup>But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup>and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

**3** <sup>1</sup>Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>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.” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” <sup>4</sup>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?” <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup>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.”

**Key Words:**

**“did not entrust”** (v. 24) —“entrust” is the same Greek word for “believe” in v. 23. Basically, John is saying though the people believed in Jesus, Jesus did not continue to believe in them. The people were amazed at His spectacular signs, but their faith proved to be shallow, superficial, and disingenuous. Mere amazement or intellectual belief is not true saving faith. Even the demons believe (James 2:19), but do not have salvation. Saving faith requires one to be conscious of the need for forgiveness of sins and the conviction that Jesus alone is the Mediator of that forgiveness between God and man.

**“he knew all people...he himself knew what was in man”** (vs. 24-25)—Jesus’ omniscience is clearly stated. It is universal (all people) and individual (what was in man).

**Pharisees** (3:1)—the elite religious party that, because of their zeal for the Mosaic Law and their own oral traditions replaced true religion with mere behavior modification and ritual. “Salvation” was all about works. Sadly, the wide gap between their teaching and their practice led to hypocrisy (something that Jesus points out repeatedly). They had great influence with the common people.

**“ruler of the Jews”** (3:1)—He was one of 70 members of the Sanhedrin, which was the governing council of Israel.

**“born again”** (3:3)—the new birth, or regeneration, is the act of God by which He gives eternal life to those who are “dead in...their sins” (Eph 2:1)

**“kingdom of God”** (3:3,5)—synonymous with salvation.

**“Born of water and the Spirit”** (3:5)—water and Spirit often are symbolically used in the Old Testament for spiritual renewal and cleansing. (Ezekiel 36:24-27) “Born of water” may bring John the Baptist’s message of repentance and water baptism to mind. “Born of the Spirit” means regeneration. Therefore, one “cannot enter the kingdom of God” without: Repentance and Regeneration.

**“born of the Spirit”** (3:6)—only the Holy Spirit can produce spiritual birth. It is His work, unaided by human effort.

**“wind”** (3:8)—the wind cannot be controlled or fully predicted, but it can be observed. Same with the Spirit—His work of regeneration in the heart cannot be controlled nor predicted, yet its effects can be seen in the lives of those who have been transformed.

**Related Passages:**

2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:4-5

### Discussion Questions

\*1. In general, do you like to feel confident (“I’ve got this!”) or needy (“Oh boy, I am in need of so much help right now.”). What if you think you are confident about what you are doing, but a respected someone comes along and says, “You’ve missed the mark and are in so much need of help.” What then?

\*2. Read vs. 23-25. What did the people believe about Jesus? (O) Why did Jesus not entrust himself (or “believe in”) their belief? (O/I) How can Jesus distinguish between mere amazement and true saving faith in people? (I) How does that apply to us? (A) *Personal Application Question: When Jesus looks in you, what does He see?*

→ Read 3:1-10.

3. Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus? (I) From how he addressed Jesus in 3:2, how is he similar to the people in 2:23? (O/I)

\*4. How was Nicodemus described? (O) What is the significance of these descriptions? (I)

1. \_\_\_\_\_(3:1)

2. \_\_\_\_\_(3:1)

We can see that Nicodemus was the best kind of person that religion, education, and culture could produce. In regards to salvation, he probably felt like “I’ve got this!” In what was his confidence placed? (I) What qualities, activities, or practices might we be tempted to think make us “good” people or even “good” Christians? (A) How does this apply to how we parent our children? (A)

5. Look at Jesus’ response in 3:4. What did Jesus think about Nicodemus? (I) Did He praise Nicodemus for his belief in His signs or for stating that God must be with him? (O) According to Jesus, what was missing? (O) How would you explain “born again” to your child or someone new to the faith? (I) Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. How does this passage increase our understanding of being “born again”?

2 Corinthians 5:17—“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

\*6. Do you think it was easy for Nicodemus to accept that his good works and positions didn't earn him the right to "see the kingdom of God"? (O) Look at his response in v. 4. Why do you think he responded as if Jesus meant literal, physical rebirth? (I) Is it possible he was offended? (I) How would you respond to hard-to-accept truth like this? (A)

\*7. What is the first word in both of Nicodemus' responses in vs. 4 & 9? (O) By starting off his questions with this word (instead of "why"), what about being "born again" was hard for Nicodemus to accept? Read Ephesians 2:8-9. How does this relate? (I) How can we live out this truth & teach it to others? (A)

Ephesians 2:8-9—"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

8. Jesus chooses to teach Nicodemus **how** one is "born again." From verses 5-8, is being "born again" a work of man or of God? (O) In what ways? (I)

A. Instead of repeating "born again," Jesus breaks it down further and says one must be "born of \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_." (3:8) How are we to understand this? (I) How does the following verse help understand this concept? (I)

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> 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...*" (Titus 3:4-5)

Furthermore, Jesus was probably referencing the ministry of John the Baptist by stating that one must be "born of water." In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist said, "I baptize you with water for **repentance...**"

"Born of water and the Spirit" = R\_\_\_\_\_ and R\_\_\_\_\_

B. Read v. 6. Who does "the flesh" represent? (I) Who does "the Spirit" represent? (I) Can "the flesh" produce something spiritual? (O) Why? (I) Does that mean we can't generate spiritual rebirth? (I)

C. Read v. 8. In what ways is the Spirit's work like the wind? (O)

**PRE- STUDY #8****INTERVIEW WITH NICODEMUS (PART B)****John 3:9-21 (ESV)—**

<sup>9</sup>Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” <sup>10</sup>Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” <sup>11</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup>If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?<sup>13</sup>No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.<sup>14</sup>And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,<sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.<sup>19</sup>And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.<sup>20</sup>For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

**Key Words:**

**“We...our” (v. 11)**—these plurals encompassed Jesus’ disciples and even John the Baptist, who understood and testified to the truth of salvation. **“you” (v. 11)** is also plural and indicates that Nicodemus’ unbelief was typical of the nation as a collective whole.

**Son of Man (v. 13, 14)**—Jesus uses this term to emphasize His humanity and time of humiliation.

**Eternal life (vs. 15 & 16)**—the believer’s participation in the blessed, everlasting life of Christ through their union with Him.

**Perish (v. 16)**—to perish is to receive God’s final and eternal judgment.

**Related Passages:**

John 6:38—“<sup>38</sup>For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

Numbers 21:5-9—“<sup>5</sup>And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” <sup>6</sup>Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. <sup>7</sup>And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. <sup>8</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” <sup>9</sup>So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.”

Psalm 119:105—“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Ephesians 5:8-10—“<sup>8</sup>...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup>(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup>and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

**Study Questions:**

Why is Jesus a trustworthy source of “heavenly things”? (v. 11-12, John 6:38) (I) Though from heaven, Jesus calls Himself the “Son of Man.” Why? (I)

Read Numbers 21:5-9. What was the point of Jesus reference this Old Testament account?

What does doing “what is true” and “coming to the light” look like for believers? (I/A)

