

Nick at Night: The Lost Leader and Seeker of Truth

John 3

Introduction

How do people respond to the Son of God? John has introduced us to those who reject and those who accept but who are not trustworthy. Faith tends to have different depths and degrees. We are now introduced to a religious leader named Nicodemus who is instructed in the truth, but he seems to be utterly lost as a leader of Israel.

I. The Social Situation 3:1-2

A. The Previous Section

Many believed with the evidence of signs. 2:23. Jo. 1:12, 20:31

It is interesting that often in the gospel of John the actions of the crowd are contrasted with that of the Pharisees. Hence the faith of the preceding people is now contrasted with the lack of faith of Nicodemus, one of the rulers.

B. The Present Situation

Nicodemus- “Nike” victorious one (See Rev 2-3 Nike and 21-22)

He heard of or saw signs and concluded that Jesus is from God. But he needed to understand more than that about who Jesus was.

He comes at night- Secret meeting

II. The Theological Dialogue :3-12

A. Theological Conception :3

Kingdom of God- Who is the King?

“seeing the kingdom of God” John uses the word kingdom βασιλεια only 5 times— 3:3, 5; 18:36 (3x). Only here is it qualified with the phrase “of God” του θεου.

The fact that John does not stress the concept of the βασιλεια του θεου does not mean it is absent from his theology. There are messianic implications found in chapter 2, both the wedding and miracle at Cana and the cleansing of the Temple.

For Nicodemus, the term must surely have brought to mind the messianic kingdom which Messiah was supposed to bring. But it seems that Nicodemus had missed *precisely* this point about *who* Jesus was! It was the Messiah himself with whom Nicodemus was speaking!

Whatever Nicodemus understood, it is clear that the point is this: he misunderstood Jesus’ words. He over-literalized them, and thought Jesus was talking about a second physical birth, when Jesus was in fact referring to new spiritual birth. i.e. “destroy this temple”

B. Theological Confusion :3-12

1. The Reality :3 “Born again” γεννηθη ανωθεν

Genesis- begin born

“Again” or “From Above” Gen 49:25, Jos 3:16 John 3:31, Matt. 27:51

John uses the word 5 times, in 3:3, 7; 3:31; 19:11 and 23. In the latter 3 cases the context makes clear that it means “from above”. Here (3:3, 7) it could mean either but it seems that the primary meaning intended by Jesus is “from above”.

2. The Response :4-9

a. Nicodemus- Question :4

He asks for the literal or the issue of “again”

b. Jesus- Reply :5-8

“*Born of water and Spirit*” υδατος και πνευματος

Options

#1 Water baptism and Spirit baptism (I Cor 12:13 or Acts 2)
(Catholic Church and sacramental churches)

Reason- Similar to John 6:51 eat flesh and drink blood is related to communion so John 3 water is related to baptism

Rebuttal- John seems to see baptism as secondary not primary
John 4:2, I Cor. 1:14-17

#2 Natural and Spiritual Birth

Water-reference to birth process and Spirit to spiritual process.

Reason- Nicodemus thinks in terms of being born again in womb

Rebuttal – No one in scripture or the 1st century spoke of physical birth this way. They would have said that which is flesh is flesh :6 This description is a modern convention-“her water broke”. But that does not mean birth happened only that it is very near.

3 Water and Spirit resulting in Eternal Life

Reason- In ch. 4 John will tell of Jesus speaking to the women at the well about gaining living water for eternal life. Hence water is a symbol for eternal life. Also, water is included in conjunction with the Holy Spirit in 7:37-39

Response- In ch 4 water is equated as the result- eternal life- not the agency as seems to be understood in ch 3:5

4 Water and Wind

Reason-

The Word for “spirit” is also translated “Wind” in both:

Gk Pneuma πνευμα, spirit or wind (there is no article)

Heb Ruach רוח spirit or wind

This understanding will fit the idea of being “born from above”

Water and wind come from above

Nicodemus as a Pharisee should know his OT.

* Isa. 44:35 Water is the Spirit

(see also Isa 32:15-17, Ezk. 39:29, Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17
Titus 3:5-6 for the Spirit as a divine effusion from on high-
above)

* Ezk, 37:9-10 Breath of God into the dry bones of man.
(The Spirit animates dirt Gen 2 and the dead Ezk 37)
Man must receive the Spirit captured in a dual symbol as
water and wind and both come from above that gives
mankind eternal life.

This is also seen at Qumran DSS as God pours out His
purifying work upon mans heart through His Spirit
symbolically described as water. (Manual of Discipline)

God promised a future to His people that includes the cleansing of sin
and the filling of the Spirit Ezk 36:24-28

"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into
your own land. "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will
cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. "Moreover, I will give you a
new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your
flesh and give you a heart of flesh. "And I will put **My Spirit** within you and cause you
to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. "And you will
live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be
your God." (See also Jer. 31-33 New Covenant with Israel...new spirit)

c. Nicodemus is Incredulous :9

d. Jesus is Indignant :10-12

“**We**” The Godhead- irony to Nicodemus :2 “we” the rulers

C. Theological Confession that Results in Conversion :13-17

1. The Person :13

The Eternal Son The Logos- incarnation came down ascended up
See The Prologue 1:14,18

2. The Pronouncement :14-15

Historical Story: Serpents destroy (Num. 21:4-9)

Look and Live

Holy Savior delivers

3. The Promise :16

Believe in Him, His name 1:12, 2:11, 2:23, 20:30-31

First time “Eternal life” is used.

As Nicodemus pondered these truths after the nighttime interview perhaps on the roof, he would have seen the celestial backdrop to the words of Jesus. For it was Jesus, who descended (3:13) from above who has been lifted up to offer a sacred sacrifice (3:14-15) for the world which He created (1:1-3), who also ascended and returned to heaven to offer eternal life to all who would believe (1:12, 2:23, 3:16). He offers eternal life from above as the water and wind come from above to provide an effusion of life to the parched and arid ground of a heart doomed to the darkness of hell. (Men reject 1:5,11)

Perhaps Jesus had hoped that Nicodemus would reflect upon Proverbs 30:4-5

:Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know! Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

Here he and we see the ascending and descending, the heavenly activities of water and wind in a call to faith to receive the Spirit. But beyond it all was the challenge to know the name of God's Son: That knowledge alone could provide eternal life if we know His name. It was and forever will be Jesus, the logos, the divine one who is the eternal Son of God to whom we must look to live. Typified as a serpent on a pole in the old testament offered to save men from death, now personified as the lamb of God who dies on the cross and takes away the sin of the world now ascended in heaven. All that is required is that we Believe on Him- Believe in His name. For as John declares

“Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” 20:30-31

“There is no other name under heaven by which a man must be saved Acts 4:12

How will you point people this week to Jesus and tell them to look and live?

Write down 2 people you think or know who are going to Hell.

1.

2.

Will you pray for them this week? Yes No

Will you see them this week as a natural course of events? Yes No

If you can, will you try to see them this week and introduce them to Jesus? Yes No