

1. Discovering Our True Selves

Human beings are hybrids. We are spiritual-material beings designed to house the very Spirit of God and to reign over God's material universe. This is a remarkable privilege, but as a fallen race, humanity must first be restored spiritually. This is why Jesus came into the world, to provide redemption for all humanity and to send the Holy Spirit. Our true identity is found in accepting the salvation of Jesus and the restoration of the Holy Spirit.



Following Jesus - Hempfield UMC - 1-1-17

Nicodemus Visits Jesus John 3

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." 3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, **no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.**"

4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "**Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.** 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. **So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.**"

9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "**Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?** 11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 **No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**

16 "**For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**"

Observations

Nicodemus represented the Jewish leadership who perhaps wanted to know if Jesus would be cooperative, yet they failed to see that Jesus was the Messiah, the king.

Jesus' reply shows that Nicodemus' advancement in religion has no bearing on his true spiritual life. Neither can the Jewish leadership see the kingdom or recognize Jesus as King without a second spiritual birth, that is, a spiritual awakening.

The word for "born again" also means "born from above." Nicodemus' question is somewhat cheeky.

Jesus' understanding of humanity is simple. Without the Spirit, we are merely fleshly creatures, unable to enter the spiritual kingdom by our own power. Yet if we are born of the Spirit, we will truly be the children of God. Therefore, progress in the Christian life can begin only when we are spiritually awakened.

We cannot manipulate the Spirit, who works in unpredictable ways.

Jesus' expresses his frustration at the teachers of Israel, who are steeped in religious traditions but don't understand the first thing about the Kingdom of God!

(vs. 13) Here Jesus claims a unique authority; the term "Son of Man" comes from a prophecy in Daniel 7 where the Messiah takes his place to reign over God's creation.

(vs. 14) Here is the first reference to the cross and the reward: eternal life.

Entrance into the kingdom of God is solely through belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. This entrance is open to the entire world. All the world can be saved!

18 **Those who believe in him** are not condemned; but **those who do not believe** are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and **people loved darkness** rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But **those who do what is true come to the light**, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Belief in Jesus Christ is the sole criterion that unlocks a new relationship with God.

Let's face it—it is our love for evil that keeps us from embracing the abundant life God desires.

This last comment is directed toward the fact that Nicodemus came at night. Jesus intends for everyone to come to him out in the open for others to see.

Application for abundant living:

God
The Kingdom
Personal Growth
Relationships
Our Mission

God is Spirit, and so we must respond to the Holy Spirit in order to fully relate to God.

The kingdom is Spiritual as well, and can only be perceived by those born of the Spirit.

Believing in Jesus Christ is the starting point of a Spiritual life.

As we respond to the Holy Spirit, we will find kinship with others who are likewise living by the Spirit.

The ultimate goal of the church is to help others embrace their true Spiritual identity.

Further Study for a deeper understanding:

Read what Jesus says in the upper room about the coming of the Holy Spirit in **John 14:15-31 and John 16:4-15**.

Read what St. Paul says about Spiritual wisdom in **1 Corinthians 2**.

Verse for Memory: **“Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (John 3:3)**

Questions for reflection or group discussion:

Nicodemus represented a political order that struggled to know what to do about Jesus. In what ways do governments or political parties still try to control religion?

In what ways has your understanding of God developed over time? Do you think this development has come by the influence of the Holy Spirit?

In what ways can churches go astray when they are unable to understand the things of the Spirit of God?

Final Thought:
What is God
teaching you?