Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The New Birth
Scripture: John 3:1-10
Code: 1505B

John's gospel, chapter 3, a bulletin goes through verse 15 but I want to read, as you follow, just verses 1 to 10 as the basis for our message this morning...John 3:1 through 10. And beginning in verse 1, John writes:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee. Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it willeth and thou hearest the sound of it, but canst not tell from where it cometh and where it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a teacher of Israel and knowest not these things?

May God bless this portion of His Word as we shall study it in a few moments.

We're studying a series in the gospel of John and as I've said to you each week, and shall repeat again this morning, the purpose of John's writing this gospel is to present Jesus Christ as the Son of God, God in human flesh, God in a body, the Christ, the Messiah promised to the Old Testament. This is John's point, to present Jesus Christ as God a very God. He does it all kinds of different ways in this gospel. Every page you look at is just more evidence that Christ is God.

Now reviewing a little bit, you remember that he shows how Christ is God by virtue of the fact that He was with God before the world began. He shows how He is God by the fact of the statement of the ones who were His first disciples. John the Baptist, who said, "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." He is piling together evidence to prove that Christ is indeed God, that He's not one of many gods, that He's not a sort of an elevated human, that He's not one man who fanned the spark of divinity, whatever that may be. But He is God a very God in a body. He is the unique God-man, there's no other like Him.

And John presents this from all angles. Now last Sunday we saw in chapter 2, verses 13 to 25, three attributes of Christ that show He is God. You remember, we said--first of all--that His passion for reverence indicated that He was God as He cleansed the temple. He couldn't tolerate anybody who didn't give glory to God. And then we saw that His power of resurrection proves that He's God. In verses 18 and forward, He talks about the fact that He's going to raise Himself from the dead, only God could do that. Thirdly, His perception of reality shows that He's God. He could read a man's heart without even hearing it from his lips. He could see exactly what was in man. That's what verses 24 and 25 of chapter 2 say.

Now, as we come to chapter 3, we have the account of Jesus Christ and Nicodemus in the first few verses, first 21 really, including all of the discourse of Christ. And here John is illustrating, first of all, the principle of chapter 2 verses 24 and 25. Secondly, expounding on salvation. Now reflect back for just a moment. The purpose of John in writing is to present Christ as God. Second purpose of John has under that is to present the salvation that Christ offered. And so we find in chapter 3 for the first time, John from the lips of Christ gives the plan of salvation. He is God first of all, then He is God offering salvation to men.

And so, in these first 21 verses, Christ is seen as God, first of all by virtue of the fact that He can read Nicodemus' heart, which only God can do. Secondly, because He presents to man the plan of salvation ordained by God, presented by Christ who is God. So John in these two ways is showing that Christ is God by the fact that He really...the story of Nicodemus illustrates verses 24 and 25. If I was going to...if I had been one of the editors in the King James, I would have broken it at verse 23 of chapter 2 because I think the last three verses of chapter 2 are definitely the introduction to chapter 3. Nicodemus is living proof that Christ can read a man's heart. And so He shows His Messiahship in that He is God by being able to read Nicodemus' heart. Secondly, He shows He's God by presenting the plan of salvation from God. He is God's messenger to man with salvation. He came to tell about the new birth and about salvation and what's involved in it.

Now we, of course, cannot consider all 21 verses. Well, I shouldn't say we cannot, it's mathematically possible. It's very unlikely that we can get done by five o'clock. So we're only going to consider the first 10...the first 10 verses. Now the first 21 verses fall into two parts. Verses 1 to 10 is Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, interaction, Jesus and Nicodemus. After verse 10, Nicodemus fades away and from verse 11 to 21, it's a pure discourse on the part of Christ describing salvation. So the first 21 verses have two parts: the dialogue and the discourse. The dialogue carried on with Nicodemus, the discourse by Christ Himself explaining salvation. And, of course, the great truths of God loving the world and all of this that's there. We're going to consider only the first 10 verses.

Now in this dialogue, there are three parts. There is the inquiry in verses 1 to 3; the insight, Christ diving in a little deeper with Nicodemus in 4 to 8; and then in verses 9 to 10, the sarcastic end of the

thing is the indictment. The inquiry, the insight and the indictment...and we're going to hurry this morning cause our time is limited.

All right, I want you to see verses 1 to 3, the inquiry. And let's meet Nicodemus. Now keep in mind that this, verse 1, follows exactly verses 24 and 25, let me read them. "But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them." Who is the them? Those who believed in verse 23 when they saw the miracles. Now remember that's not saving faith. They believed, it doesn't say what they believed and it doesn't say they committed themselves to that belief, it's one thing to believe that Christ is the Son of God, it's something else to receive Him. The devils even believe. We talked about this last week.

All right, so those that believe Christ, did not commit Himself because He knew all men, verse 25, "And needed not that any should testify of man for He knew what was in man." He knew the character of their faith. He could read a man's heart. Illustration in point, verse 1, "There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews..brackets [whose heart Jesus read.]"

Now look at this guy. Nicodemus, interesting name for a Jew because it's a Greek name. It means something like "victor over the people." But a lot of Greeks...pardon me, a lot of Jews had Greek names, it was kind of a common mixture. Now I want you to notice just a little bit about this man. He was no ordinary type fellow. Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

Now the Pharisees we shall meet all through our study of the gospels, and they're a very interesting group. Evidently they kind of evolved in many fashions but they really came to be identified during the Maccabean era. From the close of the Old Testament about the time of Ezra to the opening of the New Testament, there's a 400-year gap. During that four years...400 years there was a man and all of his sons who were really important revolutionaries in Israel called the Maccabees. And they fostered a lot of revolution and caused a lot of problems and it was during that period that a man named Antiochus Epiphanes lived and he was the Roman ruler in Israel and they had constant conflict with him and he was desecrating the temple by stuffing pork down the mouths of the priests, and all kinds of things. And slaying a pig on the altar, just really terrible things in terms of the Jewish law. And the Maccabees were leading the revolt.

Well, out of that period came the Pharisees. And they were hyper-legalists. I mean, they were extremely hung up on the law. And I'm not necessarily talking about the Mosaic law, they had all kinds of oral laws. Every time a rabbi made a rule, they threw it in the oral law and it became a gigantic monstrosity of rules. Interestingly enough, the Pharisees were right on many points. You know, a clock that doesn't run is right twice a day. And the Pharisees had some things that they were right about. They were right about the decree of God. They were right about man's responsibility morally. They were right in teaching immortality. They were right in teaching the resurrection of the body. And all of this from only the Old Testament. They were right about teaching the existence of spirits. They were right about teaching rewards and punishments. And they produced some great

men, notably Gamaliel, a great Pharisee. And his great student Paul, also a great Pharisee. Also a well-known Pharisee that you may have heard of by the name of Josephus, perhaps the most important contemporary historian of that day. They produced some pretty quality type people.

But they had one big problem. They...now watch this...they externalized religion. They were the absolute epitome of having a form of godliness with no reality. They were no nearer the Kingdom of God than a prostitute. But, man, you would never convince them of that. In fact, they were likely farther cause you had to untangle them with what they were tangled up in.

They had some of the craziest things you...I picked up just a few of them just to share with you. One of the laws they kept, and they kept all...I don't know...nearly 600 of them, they believed--get this, ladies--that a woman should not look into a looking glass on the sabbath. It would be kind of an interesting sight around here. Woman was not to look into a looking glass on the sabbath. Why? Because she might see a gray hair and be tempted to pull it out and you weren't allowed to work on the sabbath. Women in those days had basically the same problems that women today have, only they don't pull it out today they just change it.

They had another interesting law. They had not a lot of medicines in those days but basically when a person was ill, one of the common remedies was vinegar, particularly for a cold or sore throat. And you were allowed to swallow it but you could not gargle it. That is in the Pharisaic law. That was labor.

The climax of it, perhaps, is coming in this rule. And this is so ridiculous it's hard to believe. The rule was that you could eat an egg that a chicken laid on the sabbath only if you intended to kill the chicken the next day because that chicken should be punished for having laid that egg on the sabbath. And that's just one little idea.

Now, I mean, they were really hung up on the law. You talk about legalism. As I said, they had some things that were good. But they were so hung up on the law that they...that when Christ came along with all this grace and all this new birth, Nicodemus' mind was a bog. He couldn't see it at all. And I've heard people say, "Yes, John chapter 3, the conversion of Nicodemus." I don't see Nicodemus get converted in this chapter anyplace. Incidentally, Nicodemus is incidental to this chapter. John's not telling us about Nicodemus, he's telling us about Christ and salvation. Nicodemus is just a kick-off point. Nicodemus, evidently, I don't see him getting saved in this chapter. He did eventually because by the nineteenth chapter of John, he appears as a disciple. I don't know where it came but I don't see it in this chapter. His mind was so messed up after he heard what Christ had to say about everything that has to do with the Kingdom of God being within a man and not this external law that her was confused.

All right, they were really messed up on the law. If you were to give them a name, you could call them the salvation by works party. They were a group of people who believed there was one way to God and that was through keeping the law. And they did the best they could, of course, in their incapacity. They kept all of the diddly little laws and let the main ones go. You know, it's a lot easier not to eat an egg laid by a chicken on the sabbath than it is to love your neighbor. And they didn't have any problem with the little laws. The ones that they had problems were the ones that mattered. And that's why Jesus said you strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.

All right, in verse 2 then...and incidentally, he was a ruler of the Jews. A very important man, a member of the Sanhedrin, evidently, a scribe, a teacher of the law, an interpreter, an instructor of the law, an Old Testament scholar. Over in verse 10 it indicates by the use of ha didaskalos there in an article, definite article, that he was probably the most illustrious teacher in all of Israel. Anyway, he came to Jesus.

Now verse 2, he.."The same came to Jesus by night." And I bet I've heard many sermons where somebody makes a big thing out of the fact that he came at night. Well, I don't think it's that big of a thing. Certainly it's not symbolic of the sin in his life and he wasn't sneaking away to Jesus Christ and this and that and the other thing. I think there were two reasons probably most likely why he came at night, and again I'm speculating.

Number one reason was because it was very busy during the day, which is fairly obvious. Passover time, anybody connected with religious worship was really hopping. Two and a quarter million Jews in Jerusalem, there was a lot of stuff to do...especially after Christ had just messed up everything by throwing everybody out of the marketplace and out of the temple. And all of these other things. And here was Christ going around doing miracles. Christ was busy during the day and so was Nicodemus. Besides, the rabbis of old always said the best time to study is at night when there's quiet. And so that's probably the first reason he came.

Secondarily, maybe he came at night because he didn't want the whole world to see him come to Christ because in a sense he would be representing the Sanhedrin. And he didn't want to necessarily link the Sanhedrin with Christ. People might assume too much.

Whatever the reason is, that doesn't matter. The point is he came to Jesus and that's where it all begins. God can't do anything for anybody who's not going to come to Christ initially. That's not all there is to it. You remember the guy and the rich young ruler, I mean, this man came running up to Christ and fell on his knees. He just had slid up in front of Christ and asked the right question: what must I do to inherit eternal life? And he went away without it. Coming to Jesus is the beginning, not the end. But Nicodemus came, the point isn't when, the point is he came.

He came at night. He could have an undisturbed lengthy talk with Christ. Now this is really interesting. He says to Christ, "Rabbi, (or teacher or master) we know that Thou art a teacher come from God." It's obvious. On what basis? "For no man can do these miracles that Thou doest except God be with Him." Now remember around the Passover, evidently He had been doing some miracles back in verse 23 of chapter 2. And so Nicodemus had seen these miracles. And he said, "Listen, it's obvious to us that You are a teacher from God. Nobody does those kind of things with human resources." Fantastic miracles.

Now I don't think Nicodemus knows who He is, but he knows He's from God. And since there hadn't been a prophet for 400 years, Nicodemus is probably thinking this is the prophet of God. Now whether or not he was Messiah would still be in doubt, but certainly a prophet from God. And so he seeks Him out. Being a religious leader, he'd like to know all about this. So he comes to Christ. And this is interesting because this is the beginning of the drawing ministry of the Father. You know, Jesus said, "No man cometh unto Me except the Father draw him." And God begins to draw Nicodemus and he comes...slowly and little by little. And I don't know when he gets converted but somewhere before John, nineteenth chapter he gets converted. Before Christ's death somewhere he comes to Christ. We don't know where but the Father begins to draw him just at the beginning. And you can see it...you can see it. He hasn't got a chance. God's beginning to draw him.

And as the story goes on, you see how God continually penetrates his heart and how Christ penetrates his heart. This is how God works. He begins to draw a man, sometimes it takes time. The salvation experience takes a flash of a second, a moment, when a man puts his trust in Christ, but the leading up to that may take time...may take time.

And so...and we've talked about this many times...and so he comes and gives Jesus a sincere compliment. And we'll hurry past this although I hate to do it. But look at verse 3, "And Jesus answers..." It's interesting that Jesus answers a question Nicodemus doesn't even ask. And here you have the proof that this is Messiah because He reads Nicodemus' heart and doesn't care about what he says with his mouth. Verse 3, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily (or truly, truly, amen, amen, so be it, so be it) I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

Somebody says, "Well, what does the Kingdom of God have to do with anything? Who is talking about the Kingdom of God?" Nobody was talking about it but guess who was thinking about it? You see, there was only one thing in the mind of Nicodemus, the same old thing that was in the mind of every other Jew: how do I get into the Kingdom? He looked back to the Old Testament and saw the promised Kingdom. Man, the whole struggle of his life was to be a part of the Kingdom. And when the Bible uses the term "Kingdom of God" which is different from "Kingdom of heaven," when the Bible uses the term "Kingdom of God" it refers to God's dominion. It's really the sphere of salvation at any time. In other words, I right now as a Christian am a part of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom

of God will have a millennial aspect for a thousand years when Christ reigns on earth. That will be a part of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God has an eternal meaning, context...eternity shall be the Kingdom of God. The whole sphere of salvation at any time in history is the Kingdom of God. It has a now aspect, a millennial aspect and an eternal state aspect.

And so, Nicodemus in his heart, he wanted to know how to get to God. That's what he wanted to know. How to be a part of God's world, how to be a part of the sphere of redeemed men, how to be a part of those that are righteous, that can stand with God and live with God and dwell in His Kingdom. That's what was in his heart. Listen, he wasn't all wrapped up in that religion just for exercise. He was in that because he was passionately seeking the Kingdom of God.

And Jesus answers him, not the question of his mouth, the question of his heart. Nicodemus never even got to put the question into words. But He says, "Nicodemus, you have to be born again." Born again...what do you mean? I mean, you've got to start all over again, Nicodemus.

Now get a little bit of what's going through Nicodemus' brain. All these years, he has been observing the law, observing the law, all the sacrifices, all the rituals, all the feasts, all the tithes, everything. Why? Just so he could get into the Kingdom of God. And Jesus says, "Well, Nicodemus, you might as well scrap the whole pile, you've got to start all over again." And I'm sure Nicodemus thought in his mind when he came to Jesus, "Boy, I...I have done so many things and all these things and I imagine maybe there's one thing I just haven't done and He'll just say, well, you know, if you just take three steps to the right and jump to the left, you'll be in." And I'm sure he thought he could stack up all of his legalism and Christ would just say, "Well, you know, just one...boy, you're there, see, Nicodemus, you're just banging on the door." And Christ says, "Nicodemus, you're nowhere. You're absolutely nowhere. You're a great big fat Pharisaical zero. You're nowhere."

All the deeds of the law justify who? Nobody. You can't be justified by keeping the law. Because if you ever break it in one, you've offended the whole law. You've had it.

This was a tough thing for Nicodemus to swallow. I mean, he spent his whole life observing the law. Now God through Christ says it's no good, Nicodemus, start all over, be a baby again and get born a new way.

I'll tell you. There's so much truth in that statement. Do you know that that's another great illustration of the curse of religion? I've said that to many people. Some people come to talk to me in the office who don't know Christ, you know, will sit there and they'll say, "Well, you know, I had a bad experience with religion. I had a bad experience..." And I always say, "Well, you know," I said, "it's no wonder because religion is the devil's curse."

"It is? Aren't you a religious man?"

"Oh, I'm not religious. I hate religion."

"You do? What kind of church is this?"

Religion is a curse. Religion is a security blanket for people who want to suck their thumb and tickle their nose, that's what it is. Religion is meaningless. Religion is going through all the falderal and all the baloney that gets you nowhere. It's exactly what Jesus said to Nicodemus. Nicodemus, all the religion in the world never got anybody close to God, what it does is give them a horrible false sense of security in their isolation from God. We're going to talk about that tonight in the Laodicean church and you're going to really see some isolated people and God spews them out of His mouth. I don't want to get off on that sermon.

Anyway, religion is a curse. And I believe personally the devil spends most of his time operating through religion. That's really his dynamo. And so, Jesus says to him, "Nicodemus, forget it all. You've got to start from the bottom and be born again. Listen, you're in the wrong family to get into the Kingdom." Remember what Jesus said to the other Pharisees? "You are of your father...whom?...the devil." You're in the wrong family, Nicodemus. You've got to get born into God's family. You have to be recreated.

Ah, that was just too much for Nicodemus to handle...that new birth. I mean, he probably reflected back and said, "I'm a Jew, it doesn't do me any good. I'm a Pharisee, it does me less good. I'm in the Sanhedrin, for what? I know all that Old Testament, it's useless." You've got to get...you've got to get right at the beginning and be born all over again and Jesus said, "Except a man become as a little child, he cannot see the Kingdom." Strip it all off, go back to the bottom and start all over again. On what basis? Not works, what? Faith...faith. "If any man be in Christ, he is a...what?...he's a brand new creation." That's the business God's in, making new creations.

Peter says, "We are begotten again unto a living hope." Peter says, "We are begotten by an incorruptible seed." And John says five times in 1 John, "We must be born of God." And James says, "We have been begotten by God according to His will." That's a New Testament principle. We must be recreated. And that's what happens when we receive Christ, the old man dies, the new man rises. "I am crucified with Christ," that's one ego dead, "nevertheless I live," that's a new life. And so He says you've got to start all over again, Nicodemus. All your religiosity, all your legalism, all your ritualism, all your ceremonialism, all the stand up, sit down and do the law, meaningless. You need to be reconstructed from the inside. You can't cure a man's cancer by painting him. You've got to get into the inside and root it out.

And so He gives him this initial statement in the inquiry. Now look at the insight at verses 4 to 8. Jesus tries to give him insight which he never gets. He's so messed up in the law, he just can't get it. Now verse 4, Nicodemus says unto Him, unto Christ, "How can a man be born when he's old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Now really, that doesn't...he is not talking about physical birth. He's putting it in the words of physical birth because that's the words that Christ put it in. But Nicodemus is nobody's dummy. He knows Jesus is talking about spiritual reality. He's really saying this, "I hear what You say but I'm too old to start all over again. I can't...I've done all this all my life, I just can't accept this that fast."

Now I know some people think he's talking about physical birth, but give him a little credit. He knows Jesus is talking on a spiritual level. He knows He's from God. He knows He's a prophet. So he says I don't think spiritual rebirth is possible. I don't think it can happen to me, I'm too far along this road of law-works. And he thought it was an impossible thing. And besides, he didn't see how it could be so internal. You know, when you get hung up on the law, it's pretty hard to see grace at all. And so he says, "Could You...could You explain a little more how can it happen? I mean, I'm so far gone, how can I get back to the beginning again?" And Jesus gives him the crux of the issue in verse 5 and here's a verse that you need to understand very carefully. "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee. Except a man be born..." and here's how it has to happen..."of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."

Now there's a very important verse...a verse that's been interpreted all kinds of ways. Let me share with you what I believe the Spirit of God means here in the words of Christ.

First of all, Jesus says you have to be born of water and the Spirit...that's connected. There's no comma there, you have to be born of the water and of the Spirit, no. Of the water and Spirit. Now what does He mean "water"? What kind of water is this?

Well, some people say that's H20. That the way you get saved is to get put in the water. I would daresay, ladies and gentlemen, that if you were to assume that salvation comes by water, that you have cross-grained every biblical principle of salvation by grace through faith. Salvation cannot be accomplished by an external bath. Water brings out no spiritual cleansing. It is merely a symbol...as it was in the Old Testament a symbol of purification. He cannot be talking about water.

Incidentally, in John 4:2 it says Jesus baptized nobody. And if it was that important, He'd have been baptizing somebody. It's not the water baptism that saves a man. That's the fallacy of various churches that take a little tiny baby and put water on it and assume that that seals its salvation. Salvation is by faith, otherwise Romans 3 is a lie and so is Ephesians 2. He's not talking about the water of H20 type water.

Then someone else says, "Well, there's another kind of water. That's the water of physical birth. That He's saying to Nicodemus you have to be born physically cause the baby is born in a physical way. When a baby's born, it's born in a sack of water." And so what He is saying is, "Nicodemus, you have to be born naturally and then spiritually." The only question is, why is He standing there telling this old man that he has to be born physically? He was born physically long ago. Plus the fact that that would be completely read into the text, appears no where else in the Scripture and is pure conjecture.

Well, then, what water is it? Well, let's take the context. What water would Nicodemus have thought of? If Jesus said to him you must be born of water and the Spirit, what water would have come to Nicodemus' mind? Very obvious. The Old Testament water used for purification. He would have immediately remembered that whenever an object or a person was defiled and unclean, that person had to go through ceremonial washing of water which symbolized an inward perfection. That's what the baptism of John the Baptist was all about, it was symbol of cleansing on the inside.

Now think with me on this, don't lose yourself. To the Jews, water meant cleansing. And Nicodemus' brain would have gone right back, cause he knew the Old Testament, to Ezekiel 36:24 to 27. And you know what he would have read there? Listen, "I will sprinkle you with clean water," and then two verses later, "I'll put My Spirit within you." In Ezekiel's prophecy that God would redeem Israel, He says it will take two forms, I'll sprinkle water upon you and you shall be clean, the water of cleansing and I'll put My Spirit within you. That's what it was. It was a symbol of cleansing. H20 water isn't even there in verse 5, that's not talking about water water, that's talking about purification in the inside. So He is saying, "Except a man be cleansed, purified, he can't enter the Kingdom of God." And it's interesting to me, also, that the agent of this purification is the Word of God. And we'll show you this in a moment.

So, here's the picture. This person needs to be purified. That purification is done by the Holy Spirit using this water. And what is the water? Ephesians 5 says that Christ shall wash His church by the water of the...what?...Word. The Holy Spirit takes the Word of God and purifies the soul of a man. That's what's here in view. You know what this is? And get it and get it good...this is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, this is what that is. Now in the book of Acts, there's a distinction because it's transitional. Today and here, this is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit in baptizing one at the point of salvation. We are cleansed by the Word as the Spirit of God administers it to us. We are regenerated, baptized, indwelt and sealed all at the same point. That's why Paul told the Ephesians there's one Lord, one faith, and 34 baptisms. Is that what he said? One Lord, one faith, one baptism...at the time of salvation is the only time you're ever baptized with the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in the Bible does it have anything to do with tongues or anything else. It's only a point of salvation that involves the baptism of the Spirit.

And so, here is basically what this is about. That the Spirit of God purifies us by the water of the Word at salvation. It's all done inside by the Spirit. And that's what John the Baptist said in chapter 1 verse 33 when he said, "I baptize you with water but somebody's coming after me who's going to baptize you with...what?...with the Holy Spirit." And that's what this is. When a man is cleansed by the washing of the Word and the Spirit of God recreates Him, then he can enter the Kingdom of God. That's exactly what Jesus is saying. Before a man can enter the Kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit must recreate him, must regenerate him and he accomplishes such a cleansing by the power of the Word of God.

Now the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a very purposeful thing. This work where the Spirit of God comes upon us and regenerates us, and, of course, it's all wrapped up in the same thing. But it's a very important reality because it involves two things. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, first of all, unites us with Christ. That's what Galatians 3:27 says, "For as many of you have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." It also unites us with His body. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body," 1 Corinthians 12:13.

So, at the point of faith when you receive Christ, the Spirit of God recreates you, regenerates you by the washing of the power of the Word and brings life where there was death. And so, Jesus is saying to Nicodemus essentially, without trying to split it all up, "Nicodemus, it's all an inside job done by the Spirit." That's basically it. All your laws and all your rules and all that other baloney is worthless. It has to be the Spirit of God inside washing you clean and recreating you in union with Christ. And that's exactly what Paul meant in Romans 6 when he says, "We're buried with Christ when we receive Him and we rise, we're buried with Him by baptism, that's the baptism of the Spirit that buries us, and we rise again in newness of life." And so He says that the Spirit of God does a recreating work in us.

Now, of course, this is really hard for Nicodemus to grab. Verse 6 is a statement of Jesus that reflects the attitude of Nicodemus. Now between verses 5 and 6, Nicodemus' thoughts must have gone something like this: "Oh, I can't accept this. I have been so programmed for law and works, how in the world could I just drop that and assume that everything that happens happens inside by the Holy Spirit? That's too much for me. There's got to be rules. I've got to see it to believe it. I mean, I've got to have some things that I can do. I..I..."

You see, Jesus has said, "Nicodemus, it's all inside. The Holy Spirit does the whole thing in recreating you. You don't have to have all these other things." Oh, that's hard for him to accept. And in verse 6, Jesus says to him, "Well, you don't even have a part in it, Nicodemus. That which is born of the flesh is...what?...flesh. You can't recreate yourself. You can work on all your resolutions and you can go after the law and you can do all these works, you're not going to do a thing, your flesh and you're going to come out with more flesh."

"But, that which is born of the Holy Spirit is spirit." The Spirit of God can get in and recreate you. And I believe that's the Holy Spirit there because of what it says at the end of verse 8 when it talks about being born of the Holy Spirit.

And so, He says, "Nicodemus, you haven't got anything to do with it, neither do I. No one does. Your salvation is accomplished by the Holy Spirit." Jeremiah 13:23 says, "Can the Ethiopian change his color? Can the leopard get rid of his spots? Just about as much as you can change your sinful nature." You can't do it. It's the Holy Spirit's work of recreating you.

Well, this is very hard for Nicodemus because he's so used to doing it himself. And undoubtedly he was really amazed because in verse 7 Jesus says, "Don't be amazed, marvel not that I said unto thee you must be born again." Nicodemus' eyebrows were probably up around his hairline. It just can't be that simple. You mean, I've been blowing it all these years? I don't understand how it can all be inside, I've got to see it to believe it. It's got to be external. Jesus says, "Don't be surprised, it's all...it's all inside, you must be born again from the inside." All your religion doesn't mean anything. How many times you went to church doesn't mean anything. How many times you had a little godly sensations as if there was somebody up there in the great big happy hunting ground doesn't mean anything. Religious emotions, religious feelings and religious activities are pointless. It's an inside job done by the Holy Spirit of recreating you.

And, boy, that's hard for Nicodemus. And Nicodemus is perhaps saying, "I don't understand...I don't understand, how could it be true if you can't see it? How could it be true, I've got to be able to touch it."

And Jesus says, "Let Me illustrate something to you." Look at verse 8. "Nicodemus, some things are real even though you can't see them." Point, verse 8, what's His illustration? The wind. He says, "Nicodemus, everything doesn't have to be seen. You can't see the wind, can you? Is it real? Sure it's real. The wind blows where it wills, and thou hears the sound of it, canst not tell from where it cometh and where it goes." Nicodemus, the wind's there, you see what happens? You see the trees bend, you feel it against your body, but you don't see the wind, you don't know where it came from, where it's going. That's the way the Holy Spirit is. It doesn't mean He's not there just because you can't see Him. You can see your law of works but they don't do you any good. You can't see the Holy Spirit but you can see His results.

Do you know something? If you took a person at the point of salvation and put him in an X-ray machine, you wouldn't see anything. It would be ridiculous. You can't see the new birth. I didn't even see my own. The day that I received Jesus Christ, I didn't see my new birth. But you know what? Man, I started feeling the results. And I've never seen the wind, but I've seen lots of trees bend. And Jesus says, "Nicodemus, you don't have to see it to believe it, you can just see the

results."

Well, bless Nicodemus' heart, he still didn't get it. And so, in verses 9 and 10, Jesus wraps it up with an indictment that really is sarcastic. "Nicodemus," verse 9, "answered and said unto Him, How can these things be?" That's great progress from verse 4, right? He's gone absolutely nowhere. He just can't throw aside the law and accept this total work of the Spirit within him.

And then Jesus absolutely...He runs a spear right through Nicodemus. This is the...talk about subtle...look at this condemnation in verse 9. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel and knowest not these things?" Ouch! That hurt. "You mean, Nicodemus, you didn't know that the work of God even from the beginning was an inside job?"

You know something? That's the last thing we ever hear out of Nicodemus. Did he get converted? I don't know. It doesn't say so. Maybe he turned around and left. I don't know. "Are you the teacher of Israel and you don't know these things?"

You see what can happen? We'll close with these thoughts. Religion can blind a man from reality, can't it? Religion can destroy a man's ability to see. But in one sentence dripping with sarcasm and condemnation, Jesus blasted religion, He blasted law and works as a way to God. With...in divine majesty with one glorious stroke, He brushed aside all the sinner's refuge in ceremonialism, or traditionalism or formalism or legalism or ritualism or ecclesiasticism or any other ism. And He took the barbed arrow of spiritual truth and He drove it into the vital point and said it isn't the rules and the regulations, it's an inside recreation by the Holy Spirit and it happens only when you desire it to happen by faith.

And I'll tell you, that tremendous statement of Jesus Christ like the destructive lightning from a thunder-filled cloud stripped all the forms and formulas, all the dogmas and legalistic requirements and ecclesiastical rituals that have been put up between man and God, it shattered them all and said if you want the Kingdom of God it comes by faith in the person of Christ who comes into your life by His Spirit and recreates you. He went to the root of sin. And what Nicodemus needed was not more...more times at church, more little treks to the temple, more rules, more services, more sacrifices, more prayers, more candles, more anything else. What Nicodemus needed was to be born again.

And that's the message to every man. All your religion in the world doesn't do you a bit of good, only the new birth does. And it comes when you by faith trust Christ as Savior and He recreates you. The words of Christ are a fitting conclusion, "Marvel not that I said unto you, you must be born again."

Our Father, we thank You this morning for Your Word.

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