

### A Private Interview

In our study of chapter 2 we learned of the “new beginning” initiated by Jesus’ ministry. The turning of water into wine and the cleansing of the temple revealed the radical newness Jesus was initiating. Jesus *Himself* was the new wine replacing the old system of Judaism. Jesus introduced *Himself* as the purifier and the new temple for worship. In chapter 3 we learn how entrance into God’s kingdom would be brought about when John records a personal conversation between Jesus and a prominent Jewish leader.

**Drawing Near:** Dear Lord, You have promised to meet those who seek Your face. Come now and let Your transforming power remake us completely.

The closing verses of chapter two not only form the conclusion to the story of Jesus’ cleansing of the temple, they also act as a bridge to prepare us for Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. To get an idea of how these two passages fit together begin **reading** at John 2:23 and continue through 3:15 as if there were no chapter break.

1. How might the statements in verses 23-25 apply to Nicodemus?
  
2. **Read John 3:1-15** again, this time observing the details of this remarkable encounter. Reading the section out loud may help you visualize this historic dialogue.
  - a. How is Jesus’ visitor introduced?
  
  - b. What title do both Jesus and Nicodemus share? (See 3:2 and 3:10.)
  
  - c. What do you see in their exchange that would indicate that Nicodemus was open to the truth about Jesus?
  
  - d. Who might Nicodemus be referring to in verse 2 when he says, “we know...?”
  
  - e. The fact that Nicodemus came to Jesus “at night” is repeated by John later in his gospel. Reflect on why John may have included this fact.

Nicodemus was a member of the most influential and conservative religious party of his time. He was also one of the most prominent citizens of his nation, belonging to the Jewish Council of seventy men known as the Sanhedrin. As a Pharisee he had great respect for the Jewish Scriptures and taught the careful observance of Israel’s laws. Nicodemus would have thought that his birth as a Jew would assure him a place in the kingdom of God.

3. Nicodemus likely came to Jesus in an honest effort to discover who He was. But Jesus did not respond to Nicodemus' observations about His identity at first (3:2-3). Why do you think Jesus changed the subject abruptly in verse 3? (Consider the broad context.)
4. How does Jesus preface his remarks to Nicodemus in verses 3, 5 and 11? (*This expression is used by Christ when He is about to introduce something of great significance!*)

In light of this, let's pay special attention to what follows.  
Listen to the absolute truth of Jesus' words spoken to a righteous Pharisee.  
***"...unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."***

5. Consider the implication of Jesus' words for Nicodemus and for your life as well. Why is the "new birth" mandatory for one to see/enter the Kingdom of God? Reflect on Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:9-12 and Ephesians 2:1.

The Greek word translated "born again" can also be rendered "born from above." *What did Jesus mean by this expression?* As we continue to study this passage ask God to open the eyes of your heart.

From John 3:4 it is clear that Nicodemus was deeply puzzled by Jesus' statement. His failure to understand the nature of Jesus' teaching provided an opportunity for further instruction.

6. **Prayerfully consider verses 4-8.** Highlight the word *must* in verses 7, 14 and 30. Following a time of reflection tell how these illustrations and analogies enhance your perspective. (*Remember to interpret these verses in light of the overall teaching of Scripture.*)  
John 3:5-7

John 3:8

7. The concept of a new beginning and a decisive inner transformation of a person's life were foretold in the book of Ezekiel almost six hundred years before Christ. (See Ezekiel 36:25-27.) What do we learn about the new birth from this prophecy?

The expressions “born again,” “born of the Spirit,” or “born of God” are used about 15 times in the New Testament. The following references help round out this concept. John 1:12-13; 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, 21; 1 Peter 1:3-5, 23; Titus 3:4-7; 1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18.

8. From all your background work explain the concept of the “new birth” in your own words.

*The means by which the new birth is accomplished clearly eliminates all possibility of human effort. But one might ask, how does faith relate to the new birth? Although personal faith in Christ as Savior is necessary, faith does not produce new life; only God can do that. It is likely that human faith and divine regeneration occur at the same time, but one is man’s responsibility as he is enabled by the Holy Spirit, the other is the work of God to impart His life to us through the Spirit.*

9. If you have experienced the reality of “new life” in Christ write out your personal testimony on a separate sheet of paper. *(If you would like to learn more about how to have a personal relationship with Jesus speak to your leader.)*

10. In John 3:9-15 the dialogue between these two rabbis continues. After Jesus’ clarification in verses 5-8, note Nicodemus’ response in verse 9 and Jesus’ reply in verse 10.

Despite Nicodemus’ spiritual blindness regarding the new birth, Jesus continued to explain how such regeneration is possible. **Look back over John 3:11-15.**

11. Jesus concludes by reminding Nicodemus of a powerful Old Testament illustration. Compare John 3:14-15 with Numbers 21:6-9. How could this imagery help Nicodemus understand how “life” is mediated to believers?

12. How might verses 13-15 answer Nicodemus’ initial question about Jesus’ identity?

13. As you reflect on John 7:50-52 and 19:38-39, do you think this prominent “teacher of Israel” eventually acknowledged his spiritual need and humbled himself before God? Why or why not?

14. How can John 3:1-15 be a model for your evangelism?

The section that follows the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus (verses 16-21) is considered by many to be reflections by John the writer. As you **read and ponder** this beloved portion of Scripture realize that in every word there is a depth and mystery of meaning which God alone can fathom.

15. What does John 3:16 reveal about the meaning of love?
  
16. Jesus' purpose in coming was to save, but His coming also provokes judgment. How is it possible to bring condemnation upon ourselves (verses 17-18)?
  
17. In John 3:19-21 John uses images of "light" and "darkness" to illustrate two opposing realities. Describe in your own words the stark choices that face each person.

**Personal Reflection:** Does your behavior indicate that you love light or darkness? Are you willing to let God expose all your current habits and practices to the light? Spend some time with God in prayer... Listen to His voice... Invite Him to shed His light in all the dark places.

In the last section of this chapter John reports on the overlapping ministries of Jesus and John the Baptist in the countryside of Judea. **Read carefully John 3:22-36.** The transition from John the Baptist's ministry to that of Jesus Christ symbolizes the transition from the old covenant to the new. Scripture makes it clear that the new covenant is not merely a revision of the old, rather it is something brand-new and completely different (Matthew 9:16-17).

18. John 3:27-30 records the final witness of John the Baptist to Jesus Christ. What is the meaning of the imagery in verses 28-29?
  
19. Reflect on the words of this wise and humble servant in verse 30. What are some ways that Jesus could increase and you decrease in your life?

The closing verses of chapter 3 not only provide the explanation for Jesus' preeminence (observe 3:31-34) but also disclose some of the beauty of the inner workings of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in providing redemption for mankind. (Contemplate 3:34-35.) Notice how each One is willing to be there in loving service for the other and how the complete circle of the divine Family—Father, Son and Holy Spirit serve as *One* as they make themselves available to the lost.

*Finish by praising God for the beauty of His character! Thank Him for enabling you to be reborn! Express your gratitude to the Father for giving His Son to save you! Thank Him for saving you from God's wrath (3:36)!*