

John Chapter 2: v. 23: - 3: v. 36 – “You must be Born Again”

Introduction

²³ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.

²⁴ But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, ²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² 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.”

³ Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴ 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?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹ Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? ¹¹ Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

¹³ No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

¹⁸ “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

²² After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. ²³ Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. ²⁴ For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

²⁵ Then there arose a dispute between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"

²⁷ John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'

²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. ³⁰ He must increase, but I *must* decrease.

³¹ He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.

³³ He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. ³⁴ For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

³⁵ The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. ³⁶ He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

So far we have discovered that the purpose of writing the Gospel of John is that people might believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that believing, might have life in His name.

John has also called Jesus, the word, because the word appropriately described all that God did in the Old Testament, concerning the creation of all things. We also learnt that John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the world by describing Him to be the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

John assumes that his readers understood the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Jesus was also declared to be the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

We also learnt in the calling of the first disciples that Jesus displayed the attributes of God.

Those attributes were that Jesus was all knowing, everywhere present, and all powerful.

Last week we learnt that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, put her faith and trust in Jesus as the Son of God and we also discovered that Jesus hates religion, in particular, the corruption of God's House.

We continue with our series from chapter 2: v. 23 – 3: v. 36.

There are 4 main things in the passage that we need to discover

1. Rebirth is essential for entry into God's Kingdom.
2. Rebirth is God's work – He regenerates.
3. Rebirth is possible only through God's Son, we must believe in Him in order to have New Life.
4. The Necessity of Faith and the reason for people rejecting it. (explained by Jesus)

1. Re-birth is essential for entry into God's Kingdom - v. 2: v. 23 – 3: v. 3.

The reason I am starting from verse 23 of chapter 2 is that John tells us that Jesus knew the heart of man.

People who saw the miracles performed by Jesus believed in Him, but that didn't automatically change their hearts. He knew about the sinful nature of every person born into this world. (Romans 3:23, 5:12)

Romans 3: v. 23

Romans 5: v. 12

Jesus didn't have to die on the cross to perform miracles, but He had to die on the cross in order to change the hearts of men and women like me and you.

Nicodemus saw the miracles performed by Jesus and he was curious to discover what it was all about.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, their name literally means separatists. They were a deeply religious group that were trying to revive back sliding Israel.

They were actually the "Good Guys" trying to challenge sinful practices in the nation of Israel.

Most Christian readers of the Bible tend to look down on the Pharisees, like the Pharisee in Luke 18: v. 11-12, however they were the spiritual heroes of the day.

They planted synagogues across the country, and won the hearts of the common Jewish people with God's Law. If "Religion" could save people then Nicodemus and his Pharisee friends were doing a great job, don't knock them.

However Nicodemus must have realized that there was a problem with "Religion", it actually couldn't change his heart. Maybe he recognized that the heart of Jesus was different. Well whatever it was

He came by night either because he wanted to have a one to one with Jesus, without the crowds, or because he didn't want people to know that he was mixing with Jesus.

Nicodemus acknowledges Jesus as a teacher who had come from God.

However Jesus immediately identifies the heart of Nicodemus's problem.

He tells Him that He must be born again in order to see the Kingdom of God.

Nicodemus was not a fool. He must have known the history of Israel and He certainly would have read the Prophets and known the writings of Ezekiel and Isaiah for sure.

Nicodemus would have known the human failure of man to reach God's standards.

He would know the story of creation in Genesis and the history of the Jewish nation. The 400 years of captivity in Egypt, the 40 years in the desert, the problems that Joshua had concerning the conquering of the Promised Land. He would have known the problems of the Judges and then the Kings of Israel.

In fact Nicodemus knew everything, he was an intelligent man. Most Religious people are very intelligent but they lack one thing, they can't deal with the problem of SIN in their lives, or in the lives of other people.

Nicodemus must have known that there was no solution to sin. Nicodemus was Religious but couldn't deal with sin.

However he has to listen to Jesus because Jesus is talking about a solution to sin and entry requirements into God's kingdom.

This week in Japan lots of students have been taking exams in order to get into their choice of high school. I don't know what the pass mark is? However I do know that it's not 100%. However entry to God's kingdom is 100% Holiness.

None of us can claim to be 100% Holy. We have all missed the mark of God's standard and none of us in our own merit deserves entry into God's Kingdom.

The passage that we read clearly tells us that we need to be born again if we want to go to Heaven. We need 100% Holiness from somewhere. Where are we going to get this Holiness from? We can't buy it, we can't earn it!!

Nicodemus realized that he was powerless to deal with the problem of sin in his own life, therefore he went to speak to someone who might be able to help.

Nicodemus's religion had failed him and he wanted to discover if Jesus had anything to offer him.

Maybe today you have been a visitor to the Shinto Shrine/Temple or the Buddhist Temple all your life. You have paid your money, clapped your hands and prayed.

However your visits to the Temple or Shrine have not met the deep needs of your heart. You are still empty inside, your hearts aches for something real, something lasting that will satisfy the spiritual hunger inside you.

If this describes you, here today at OIC or listening on the internet, then I have good news for you. There is help today from Jesus, but Jesus says " You must be born again"

2. Rebirth is God's work – He regenerates – v. 4-8.

Nicodemus asks the question – How is this possible to be born again and enter into God's Kingdom?

Although Nicodemus was side tracking Jesus about been born again by entering a Mother's womb, he must have known about the promise of God's Spirit from Ezekiel.

(Ezekiel 36: v. 24-28

²⁴ For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.

²⁸ Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

37: v. 14

I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken *it* and performed *it*," says the LORD."

If Nicodemus had known about the prophecies of Ezekiel he would have known that GOD himself would need to do a work in the human heart.

(Philippians 2:13)

¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

We have already been told in John 1:v. 33 that Jesus will "Baptize" with the Holy Spirit. We see clearly that the regeneration of our hearts is not up to us.

A miracle of God's GRACE must take place. God must do a work in our hearts.

In verse 5 when Jesus is talking about being born of water and the Spirit, Jesus is referring Nicodemus back to the prophecy in Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel 36: v. 25-27 it refers to the new order of the Messianic age. In these verses there is reference to cleansing and filling of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is saying to Nicodemus that this "New day" is now upon us. It is here now!!

By implication Jesus is saying it has come now because of me.

In v. 8 Jesus uses an illustration from the wind. The Religious of that day and the Religious people of today might as well try to catch the wind as to put Salvation in a box.

The reason is that human efforts produce a human child, but only the Holy Spirit can give birth to a child of God.

Jesus is using a play on words here also. The word for wind in Greek is "pneuma" and the word for wind in Hebrew is "ruach". Both of these words either mean wind or Spirit.

We have absolutely nothing to do with being born again, this is the sovereign work of a Holy God, who responds to the heart cry of people who put their faith and trust in the work that Jesus did on the cross 2000 years ago.

God's work is like the wind, you can't see it but you can see the effects that it makes in changed lives.

Short Testimony here of a Japanese person who became a Christian.

35 years ago at age 17, I came from Osaka to Lancaster County Pennsylvania through a new Christian program called American Home Life. It was started by a woman named Mrs. Ruth Powers. The program set Asian students up to live with Christian families (also called host parents) while the students pursued an education in High School or Collage. I lived with my host family, the Stauffers and they taught me the Godspell of Jesus Christ, however at that time I had no interest in Spiritual things.

I finished High school and went to collage for 2 years. I transferred to the State University in New York City and lived there for 15 years. When I started collage, I also developed anxiety and mental unrest due to my personal problems that had been a struggle for me since I was a child. I had hurting memories and conflict with my parents in those early years and these issues haunted me.

When I finished collage, I began working for a real estate firm. At about the same time I began to socialize a lot and began to learn the lifestyle of New York City. It involved a lot of drinking and drugs. It was fun at first, and I got deeper into it more and more. Alcohol became my tool for dealing with my personal problems and a way to handle people in my social life.

It wasn't until I found myself drinking first thing in the morning just to get through the day that I began to realize just how serious a problem it had become. I had become an alcoholic. I was living in N.Y. half a year, then I would fly back to Japan for half a year and live in Osaka. the environments of both places made it easy to continue this destructive lifestyle of dependance on alcohol. I drank mainly to cope with my family problems in Japan.

During those years of hard drinking I damaged my pancreas and was close to death, but still, I

could not stop drinking. I was hospitalized again and again. I tried psychologist, psychiatrists and other therapists to help solve my problems. I thought if I could just get over these personal problems, I could be able to stop drinking, but the way they handled my situation just frustrated me, and I always ended up looking for relief at the bottom of a bottle. I also tried Alcoholics Anonymous rehab group, however that did not work for me at all.

I continued my decline into utter dependence to the point of extreme damage of my body until, yet again my life was in danger. I was totally hopeless and helpless.

In April of 2002, I hit rock bottom in my life and left my parents in Japan and came back to New York City. I knew that N.Y. was not the place I should be.

Somehow, I began to feel desperate to see my Christian host parents from so many years ago, so, I called them. Early the next morning they came all the way to N.Y.C. and picked me up at my apartment. They could tell how desperate my mental and physical condition was, I could not even go to their place by myself, I was such a mess !

As I lived with these Godly Christian people, I began to learn about Christianity again. It was not just learning about it, or people talking about religious information, It was more of watching them and having closeness with them in a loving Christian environment. In that way they showed me the way of the Christian heart and life.

On August 1st 2002 I accepted Jesus Christ into my heart. My host parents had been praying for me for over 23 years ! It took such a long time, and I had to go through so much pain and despair until I was willing and able to see the light and accept The Lord, My eyes were opened, and He became the one worth more to me than anything else ! I had never felt such peace in my heart. My drinking completely stopped and I was fine when in America, however when I returned to Japan, and the atmosphere changed from a Christian environment to a worldly environment, I seemed to lack the power to resist alcohol. When I returned to America living with my host parents all was well again, I didn't drink or even want to.

In 2004 I went to a Christian singles beach retreat. At the retreat I met Todd who gave me a ride to the event in Ocean City, New Jersey. He also did a praise and worship on the beach, then baptized someone in the ocean. I asked him about baptism, and he informed me of the importance of believers baptism. When he found out I was not yet baptized, he kept after me about it. Not long after that I was baptized. I have not had a drink nor even a desire to drink after that time until now, neither in America or in Japan. God has delivered me from that which enslaved me for so many years ! Praise The Lord !!! Baptism is, I found out, very important !

In 2006 Todd and I were married. I am thankful to The Lord for our Holy marriage and that together Todd and I can grow in our faith and be used as lights for Jesus.

As I look back now I can see The Lord protected me and lead me to salvation. I am so overwhelmed by His power every day. One verse that has meant a lot to me has been Acts 4:12 Salvation is to be found through Him alone, in all the world there is no one else whom God has given to save us. Thank you, God for Your greatest mercy, greatest grace, and greatest love.

3. Rebirth is only possible through God's Son – we must believe in Him in order to get New Life – v. 9-15.

In v. 9 Nicodemus says "How can these things be?" In other words Nicodemus is now interested.

How does Jesus answer Nicodemus? And how do we answer people who are interested in becoming a Christian? It is a good question. Let's see how Jesus answered it.

1 .You ought to know because you have the scriptures. Jesus pointed Nicodemus back the scriptures, the Old Testament. The reason for this is that the answer is contained inside the book. The answer is always in the Bible.

2. Jesus pointed to an illustration in the Old Testament which He knew that Nicodemus would know. It was the story of the snake on the pole. What is that all about? Well we must turn to the story.

Let us look up Numbers 21: v. 4-9.

⁴Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way.

⁵And 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 our soul loathes this worthless bread."

⁶So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

⁷Therefore 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.

⁸Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." ⁹So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

The serpent on the pole was not some sort of mind of matter gimmick. God was giving the Israelites an opportunity to demonstrate that they believed Him.

When an Israelite was bitten, all he had to do was turn and look at the bronze serpent and he would be healed. With that look the individual person expressed his or her faith in the Lord, trusting Him to be true to His word.

Now let us suppose that one person was bitten and didn't look at the bronze serpent.

Instead he said to his friends

"Old Moses is really demented now. If he thinks that looking at that ridiculous snake is going to heal a venomous bite, he's got to be crazy. I don't believe it."

That person would have died, not only because of his snake bite, but also because he did not believe God.

God Honors "FAITH" but judges' unbelief.

It is also important for us to understand that God holds us responsible for all that we understand of Him. We are accountable for what we know!

Nicodemus knew the scriptures and He was accountable to God. So are we!

We now move into the final section of Jesus's encounter with Nicodemus.

4. The necessity of Faith and the reason for rejecting it. – V.16-18.

Jesus has just told Nicodemus that believing in the Son of God is the key to God's Kingdom. This section begins with the word "FOR". This indicates that the verse will explain why faith in God's solution is necessary.

The subject of verse 16-17 is God. We are told that "FAITH is necessary because of what God has done.

God has acted out of "LOVE" in order to rescue a world in rebellion against Himself.

The focal point of God's action is God's Son. Without the intervention of God's Son, the world is condemned and its ultimate destination is to perish.

However with God's Son's intervention there is the possibility of a rescue.

Jesus has been talking about objective faith in v. 9-14 and He now wants us to trust in His Son as the only answer, which comes from God for sinful human beings.

It is actually putting our Faith and Trust in the work of God, through JESUS.

It is trust in a REAL PERSON that has REAL CONSEQUENCES.

Will you trust JESUS today?

Sometimes people need to get to rock bottom in their lives or in their religion before they will trust Jesus.

Story – I live in Ikoma. I go swimming at least twice a week. They employ two "Life Guards" One of the Life Guards sits on a large chair high up, which overlooks the pool. The other Life Guard seems to go around cleaning things and telling my wife to take her earrings off and things like that.

Imagine that one day a young man who is learning to swim gets half way across the pool and then shouts out help, I can't swim. I think I will drown.

The part of the pool where he is having difficulty is 4 meters deep. He can't put his foot on the bottom of the pool.

Everybody in the pool stops and looks at the Life Guard. He doesn't move, he just sits up on his chair and does nothing. A few moments later he gets down from his chair and stands by the edge of the pool. By this time everybody in the pool is shouting "Do something Life Guard, help him, it's your job."

The Life Guard ignores everyone's shouting and just stands there.

The young man is nearly out of breath with his shouting and waving his arms for help. Just when it seems that the young man is about to drown and die, the Life Guard dives into the pool and rescues the young man and he is saved.

The Manager of the pool calls the life guard into his office. He was about to dismiss him from his position, but gave the life guard an opportunity to speak. The life guard said this;

" I waited long enough for the person to realize that he couldn't save himself and would accept the help of a life guard"

The life guard explained to the manager, who could not even swim, that when he was training to be a life guard he remembered that to rescue a person from drowning was very difficult. In the early stages the people panic and are likely to grab your neck and cause you to drown. It is always best to let them use up all their energy trying to save themselves before you rescue them. In this way you can complete the rescue successfully.

The life guard kept his job and we have a perfect illustration about salvation.

Until you have exhausted all your attempts to live life without Jesus, and to live your life on your own terms, you probably won't listen to the voice of Jesus and what the Bible teaches about salvation, by Grace, through Faith in what Jesus has done on the cross is the only answer for your life now and in the future when you die.

Finally Jesus tells us why people reject God's Son.

v. 19-21. – The reason people reject God's Son.

You would think that after all that God has done for mankind in sending His Son that everybody would put their FAITH and TRUST IN JESUS. We know that is not so but why?

Jesus tells us why. Read v. 19-21 in NLT.

¹⁹ And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.

²⁰ All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants. [a]"

Our natural human response is to run away from God and His light, because we know that we are rebels. We want to remain religious. Therefore the rejection of the gospel is not a matter of belonging to the wrong race or culture, it is a matter of not wanting God to rule over our lives. It doesn't matter what country we come from or what language we speak, we are all sinners in God's sight and we need to be rescued.

In v. 22-36 John the Baptist authenticates all that Jesus has said thus far.

Conclusion/ Application and Challenge.

1. No matter how religious we are. No matter how good we are. No matter how many times we go to Church etc. we will never be good enough to go to Heaven. All of our righteousness is like filthy rags in the sight of God.
2. The only way to have our sins forgiven and get to Heaven when we die is to trust in God's work of sending Jesus to die on a cross for our sins. An innocent person dying on behalf of the guilty. We are the guilty people and Jesus is the innocent person
3. Those who reject Jesus and God's word are rebels. They will face the consequences of their unbelief.
4. I hope today that you won't reject Jesus. I hope that you will cry to God from your heart to save you. He will give you a new start in life, a better future, based upon what His Son achieved when He died on a cross 2000 years ago.

He died that we might be forgiven, He died to make us 100% Holy in God's sight. Jesus was definitely the lamb of God who can take away your sin and mine.