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Lesson 2 – Nicodemus

The Gospel for Good People

Text: John 3:1-21

Introduction: Many people have made professions of faith early in their lives and later come to realize they didn't really understand the gospel. Others think they are saved simply because their parents were or because they grew up going to church. Nicodemus was such a person. In this lesson we will see that no one is born a Christian; all must be saved.

You must be born again!

I. Christ shows us our need for spiritual rebirth (1-3).

A. You must understand who Jesus is.

The problem here is not what Nicodemus said, but what he didn't say. He failed to recognize that Jesus is...

- the great prophet (Deut. 18:15-19; John 6:14)
- the Christ, the Messiah (John 11:27, 20:30-31).
- his Lord and his God (John 8:58, 20:28).

Nicodemus had a very high opinion of Jesus, but not high enough. Most cults and false religions share a common opinion of Christ: they greatly respect Him, but they

refuse to call Him God. Many people have much respect for Jesus but are headed straight for hell.

B. You must understand what your need is.

There is a play on words here. The Greek word can mean either “again” or “from above.” Normally it means “above” (see John 3:31; 19:11, 23) but here Nicodemus takes it mean “again.” Most likely both are intended. There must be a second (“again”) birth “from above.”

But what does it mean to be born again?

II. Christ shows us our need for spiritual regeneration (4-8).

A. Regeneration means being cleansed from our sins.

Much debate exists over what Christ means when He says one must be born “of water and Spirit.” The three most popular options are:

- 1) Physical birth and spiritual birth – but these words share a preposition and are one unit.
- 2) Baptism – this is often used by those who hold to baptismal regeneration (one must be baptized to be saved), but there are several problems.
 - Christian baptism as we know it hasn’t yet begun.
 - Christ emphasizes that this birth is unseen (v 8).
 - John makes little of baptism throughout his book.
 - Christ doesn’t go on to discuss baptism.
 - Christ expected Nicodemus to know what He talking about (v 10).
- 3) Spiritual cleansing from sin (Ezekiel 36:25-27) - the best option.

B. Regeneration means being made alive (Titus 3:5).

The Bible teaches that we are dead in our sins and must be brought to life by the power of God (Ephesians 2:1-10). Birth is the beginning of a life, and when someone is saved, they begin a new life (2 Corinthians 5:17). Since sin is the cause of spiritual death, cleansing from our sins and being made alive spiritually go hand in hand. These are two ways of looking at the same act. Regeneration is a cleansing and new life, all at once.

But how can one be born again?

III. Christ shows us our need for belief (9-21).

A. You must trust the testimony of Jesus (vv 9-13).

Nicodemus second question was asked both out of ignorance and unbelief. Nicodemus is struggling to understand these things, but his blindness is motivated by a heart that doesn't want to accept what Jesus is trying to tell him (cf Ephesians 4:18). Nicodemus can't see because he won't see. He refuses to accept that a leader such as himself needs to be born again.

People reject God's Word either because it is too difficult for them to understand, or because they don't like what He says. Often, it's a mixture of both. Christianity begins by asking the question, "Will you trust God's Word?" It was the first question asked in the garden, and it is the same question we are asked every day in a hundred different ways. Faith in Christ begins with accepting His testimony and Scripture's testimony to Who He is.

B. You must trust the sacrifice of Jesus (vv 14-21).

1. You need a sacrifice because of your unbelief (vv 14-18).

God does not view people as neutral. People are either for Him or against Him, but never in the middle. Many picture a decision for Christ as a road which comes to a Y further down the road. At that point they must choose to follow Christ or to live for themselves, and they can put the decision off until then if they want. But the Bible pictures salvation as walking the wrong way down a road and turning around to go the right way. The Bible calls on us, not to make up our minds, but to change them. This means every day you put off a decision for Christ is a decision to continue in unbelief.

2. You need a sacrifice because of your wicked deeds (vv 19-21).

People run from the convicting light of the gospel because their deeds are evil. The title of this message is a bit tongue in cheek, for there are no good people (Romans 3:10-18, 23). Nicodemus thought of himself as a good person; God saw him as a sinner who needed a Savior. You cannot be born again until you see yourself as a sinner.

There are no good people. Only two types people exist in this world: those who need to be saved and those who are saved. Has there been a time in your life that you have gone from the first category to the second? Have you been born again?