

The Gospel of John – Rebirth

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One of the things I like during the Summer at the Park is seeing the new born fawns running around. It's nice to see the white spots on their new fur and see them enjoying life as an animal. I had one follow me a little bit on a trail one time barking at me (sounded like barking). Another time, I received a call about baby squirrels at a pavilion. They were old enough to have fur and they ran up my pants leg. I had to kick my leg to get them off. Seeing new birth is enjoyable. When I had to go through the EMT certification over twenty years ago, we had to learn how to deliver a baby. I've forgotten what I learned because that was my least favorite part of EMT training. Luckily, I haven't had to help with a delivery. Seeing a new baby or animal is a joy. We started our journey into the Gospel of John last week and we'll continue that journey today. John wanted to give us, through the Holy Spirit, a better glance into the real Jesus. John does spend time talking about birth. However, it's a different kind of birth that regular people are not used too – spiritual rebirth. A spiritual rebirth is so important to the Christian faith. We don't just become a Christian because we say we are a Christian and many people say they are a Christian, but by name only. What do I mean by this? Let's take a deeper look into the Gospel of John to find an answer.

Let's turn to John 3: 1-9 where we read this, **"3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.'**"³ Jesus replied, **"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.^[a]"**⁴ **"How can someone be born when they are old?"** Nicodemus asked. **"Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"**⁵ Jesus answered, **"Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^[b] gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You^[c] must be born again.'**"⁸ **The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear**

its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”^[d]9 “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. (www’biblegateway.com)

John is telling the story of Jesus and he gets to a point in the story that shows the true message of Jesus and why He came. This is very important to John and this is why this story can only be found in John’s Gospel. A man called Nicodemus comes at night to question Jesus. We’re told Nicodemus is a Pharisee and he was a member of the Jewish ruling council. The Pharisee’s were the enforcers of God’s law and the laws they themselves had added on since the days of captivity or from the Maccabean Revolt (165 B.C). Scholars are not totally sure when the Pharisees formed. What we do know is that they held great power in Israel and with the Jewish people. So, Nicodemus was a learned Pharisee like Apostle Paul was and he was a member of the Jewish ruling council. This group of seventy men called the “Sanhedrin” ran the religious affairs of Israel and they would be the group who would condemn Jesus to death and hand Him over to Rome. We also have to keep in mind that Jesus knew all this at the time of the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus already knew all about Nicodemus and who he worked for. Jesus doesn’t run away from Nicodemus because of this nor does Jesus yell at him knowing what his group will do to Him down the road. I remember watching an old movie about a family in Germany before WWII started. Two of the sons became agents for the Gestapo in the Nazi government. It was hard for the family because since they couldn’t trust the Gestapo, how could they trust even their own sons? If we were in Jesus’ shoes, we would probably go the other direction, but Jesus did not. The Sanhedrin would put Jesus’ to death, but Jesus still spent time talking to one of their members. You see, John wants us to see the bigger picture of the mission of Jesus. Jesus didn’t only reach those He liked, Jesus reached out to those we see as untouchable. Would we reach out to someone who was part of a group that we knew would later assassinate us? Jesus did. Not only that, but Jesus would start a deep discussion with Nicodemus. Now, some people criticize Nicodemus for coming to see Jesus at night. However, even coming at night, Nicodemus risked His whole career and even his own life. What we find here is someone who must have heard Jesus talk somewhere, maybe at the Sermon on the Mount, and he has allowed himself to be challenged in his thinking. Nicodemus wasn’t like most of the other religious leaders who closed their minds to Jesus. Nicodemus wanted answers from Jesus. He wanted the answers so bad, he came personally to Jesus

at night. Maybe this time was picked to have a more personal time with Jesus. We are not sure. What we are sure of is that Nicodemus starts the conversation by praising Jesus in the Pharisee way. It almost seems like he starts off like the other Pharisees who tried to trick Jesus into saying something. Nicodemus doesn't even get his first question out of his mouth before Jesus tells him plainly that he won't be able to see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Nicodemus was not prepared for this statement. Nobody in Israel would tell a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin that they wouldn't be able to see the kingdom of God. Most of the group may have thought they already had seats ready in Heaven for them around God's throne. Jesus shoots straight from the hip here. The first thing that comes to Nicodemus's brain is that Jesus is talking about a baby in a mother's womb. So, Nicodemus questions this remark and Jesus tells him again that he needs to be born again and Jesus adds onto this statement that he has to be born of water and the spirit. Nicodemus is having a hard time understanding what Jesus is saying here and we shouldn't be surprised by this. Apostle Paul told the Church this in I Corinthians 1: 18, ¹⁸ "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."^[c]

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (NIV – www.biblegateway.com)

I remember before I was saved, I had a hard time understanding many things in the Bible. Jesus was patient with Nicodemus and He is with us as well. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he has to be born again spiritually, not physically. The Holy Spirit gives rebirth to our old sinful spirit. Some say the water part is for physical birth. Some say it could mean the washing of our past sin away. What we do know is that Jesus is telling us a spiritual rebirth is needed to be born again, not going back into the womb.

Jesus continues by stating this in John 3: 10-16, ¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell

you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.^[a] ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,^[b] ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”^[c] ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Now, Jesus tells Nicodemus how this is possible and this is so important. Jesus states that He will be lifted up just like the snake was with Moses. Jesus is talking about the event in Numbers 21: 6-9 where God was punishing Israel with a plague of snakes and Moses had to lift up a bronze snake to save the people from the plague of snakes. So Jesus was raised high on the cross to save us from the plague of sin. Jesus became human, like we talked about last week, to take our place on the cross. He carried our horrible sin upon the cross even though He was sinless. John tells us that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to die on the cross. Anyone who believes in Jesus will not die a spiritual death. Plus, Jesus states twice in verses 15 and 16 that those who believe in Him will have eternal life in heaven. This is the only way to be born again. Just doing good works will not get you to heaven. Doing whatever you want and telling everyone that you believe in Jesus won't get you to Heaven. There has to come a time in your life that you have to make a choice. If we make the choice to believe in Jesus, there has to come confession of sin to Jesus at the same time. We can also say a time where we confess knowingly that we are a sinner and we need to tell Jesus this. Paul tells us this in Romans 10: 9, “For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. (NLT)” This is the only way to spiritual rebirth and the only way to eternal Heaven with Jesus. I watched a movie a few weeks ago about mountain climbers trying to find a passage to the top of a very high mountain. There was only one direct way to the top. Many climbers tried different areas only to fail. They finally found a small tunnel that went close

to the top of the mountain. It was the only way to go. There is no other way to God and Heaven, but through Jesus and this means having to make a choice to believe and confess He is Lord of your life and confess you are a sinner.

Jesus goes further here by stating this in John 3:17-21 where He states, ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (NIV-www.Biblegateway.com).

Jesus shows us love here by warning us there has to come a point in our life when our brain is able to make intelligent choices, to make the choice between living for Him or for ourselves. If we make the choice to live our life for ourselves and reject Jesus, we will be condemned. We are condemned for not believing in Jesus and allowing His will for our life. We make that choice. Some say God is mean for condemning those who make the choice to not believe in Jesus. It is out of love that God allows us to be able to make the choice to believe and love Him. Jesus knows the human heart. It is wicked and most people love the darkness more than the light of Jesus. They prefer to live in darkness – that is their choice. We see today how people hate the light of Jesus. Charlie Kirk was killed because someone loved the darkness and hated the light. The killer made that choice. A man shot five police officers this week close to Spring Grove because that person made the choice to live in darkness and to hate the light. They made a choice. Some say they are a Christian because they grew up in a church. That is wrong. There has to come a time in your life you have to make a choice. When the Holy Spirit is allowing you a moment to make a choice for Jesus or for this world, we must not waste that moment and this grace. God allows us to make a choice for Him and when we do, we are born again spiritually. All our past sin makes us a prisoner to satan. When we tell Jesus we believe and tell Him we are a sinner, His

blood that was shed on that cross unlocks the chains of our sin, washes the sin away, and we become spiritually clean. His Spirit now makes residence in our heart and soul and we become reborn. Now, as Jesus tells us in verse 21, we now live in His light and no longer live in total darkness. John wanted the people of his day and our day to enjoy this relationship that He enjoyed with the Savior. I don't know about you, but this sounds so beautiful. Who wants to live in darkness? It can be so dark. If Jesus is knocking on your heart's door, let Jesus in. Ask Jesus to forgive your sins and tell Him you believe in Him and you love Him with everything you have. Nicodemus left Jesus a different man. How do we know this? Scripture tells us so. During Jesus ministry, the religious leaders meet to talk about arresting Jesus. John tells us that Nicodemus made this statement in front of them, "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing? (NLT)" I think he really wanted these men to hear the Words of Jesus. This man who went to see Jesus at night was now a bold man. We also read in John 19: 39 that Nicodemus and Joseph took care the human body of Jesus after His death on the cross. Nicodemus had a rebirth spiritually. How about you?

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996