

Stage III. The Early Judean Ministry

C. The First Passover of Jesus' Ministry

3. Jesus' Conversation With Nicodemus, Part I: The Holy Spirit's Role in the Work of Salvation

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #038 JN 3.1-10

1 Now there was a person who was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jewish people. 2 This man came to Jesus under the cover of 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 said to Nicodemus, *"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again from above."*

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 That which has been permanently born of the flesh is flesh, but that which has been permanently born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 I command you to stop being shocked that I said: 'You must all be born again from above.'*

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."*

9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

10 Jesus answered: *"You are the teacher of Israel, and do you not understand these things?"*

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	Jerusalem
Timeline	Early April, 30 AD (Month Three)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage III: The Early Judean Ministry
	C. The First Passover of Jesus' Ministry
Title	3. Jesus' Conversation with Nicodemus, Part I: The Role of the Spirit in Salvation

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COMMENT:

Today's reading introduces a crucial section of the gospel chronicle of Jesus' ministry: JN 3:1 to 4:42.

We have noted before that the gospel material covering the Early Judean Ministry is limited in quantity, but it is of the highest, priceless quality. The record of Jesus' first spoken words in ministry; the audible voice of the Father, and visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit; Jesus' 40 days of prayer and fasting, and his tenacious fight to overcome temptation from satan; the narrative of the first week of his disciple-making ministry, as the first five believers were led to faith and began to follow him; his first specific miracle; the first cleansing of the Temple and his declaration of his resurrection as the coming proof of his Divinity; his first season of extended healing in the Temple courts--all these events laid the foundation for everything that was to come.

Having laid this foundation for understanding Jesus' ministry, John shifted his approach a bit in chapters Three and Four. For the first time in the gospel record he took the time to narrate an extended conversation between Jesus and two key people: Nicodemus (3:1-21) and the Samaritan woman (4:1-42). This section contains some of the most important words ever spoken by Jesus, including the Biblical Blockbuster of the ages: John 3:16.

John's choice of these two people was deliberate, and brilliant. They represent the most contrasting possible extremes of people, as absolute opposites. Look at the contrasts in these two summaries:

Nicodemus	The Samaritan Woman
Man	Woman
Elite, top-tier social class	Social outcast
Super Rich	Dirt poor
Leading Bible scholar and teacher	Religious outsider
Influential political leader	No political voice at all
A spiritual seeker	Given up on religion
Considered an ideal man of his day	The woman no one wanted to be
Blessed of God	Cursed of God
Respectable moral life	Divorced 5 times; shacking up
A Jew--God's covenant people	A pagan and a Gentile--living in former Jewish land

We could keep adding to this list, but you get the point. John could not have chosen to highlight two more different individuals than these. And that's his point. Everyone in the world--everyone who hears the gospel is somewhere on a continuum between these two extremes. By showing the way Jesus dealt with these two people, John is representatively describing the way Jesus deals with everyone.

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Everyone needs to know the what, how and why of salvation in Jesus; these two epic conversations deliver it in different ways, so we can all know--once and for all--how Jesus is "God who saves."

This view is borne out in the conversations. Jesus spoke to everyone in the world through his conversation with Nicodemus. At key points he used the second person plural... *"all of you,"* to make this clear. Jesus gave us a Trinitarian explanation of salvation in this passage. In today's reading Jesus set forth the role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation (3.3-10). Next, he revealed his own role in saving us (3.11-15). Finally, Jesus described the Father's work in salvation (3.16-21).

John 3.3-21 is the most comprehensive explanation of Jesus' ministry about the nature of salvation. Nicodemus was a theologian and Bible scholar. So this section gives a comprehensive, logical, Biblical and theological explanation of salvation. As followers of Jesus we should know this portion of Scripture with the familiarity of our own name.

I have added a link [here](#) to my notes containing all the necessary background information and commentary on each of Jesus' six crucial statements about the role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation in this text (JN 3.3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10). There is lots of material in these notes, but I urge you to take the time to read through them as a starting point for life-long mastery of this passage. I will refrain from commentary on this passage here, in the hope that you will read the notes. Download the pdf file, print it, and read it at your leisure.

Remember: JN 3.1-21 contains the most important words ever spoken about salvation. They are Jesus' gift to the human race.

The central point of what Jesus said in this first section (3.1.10) is that none of us can earn our salvation in our own strength. We cannot become a christian by our own effort. Only God himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit, can make us into something totally new, in a way that is radical enough to be called "a second birth," or a complete new beginning. In other words, everything in our life changes when we believe in Jesus, because the Holy Spirit enters into us. HE brings the power, values, love, and reality of God's own presence and perspective with him when he comes to live in our hearts. HE creates "the Kingdom of God" within us.

APPLICATION:

Have you experienced the "new birth from the Holy Spirit" that Jesus described here?

If you have, you know it. If you have not, don't despair. Jesus told Nicodemus plainly in the next section, verses 3.11-21, that the Holy Spirit does his work of making us new on the inside as a free gift of grace, when we believe in Jesus as our saving Lord.

The way to experience the new birth that comes from the Holy Spirit is to believe in Jesus with all your heart. That's all there is to it.

Have you done that? If you haven't, what is stopping you from believing in Jesus right now? Will you do that now?