

Research: Nicodemus and being 'born again'

John 3:1-8

In an article in one of the early Christian Science periodicals, one of Jesus' sayings is translated.

"Jesus was asked, 'When shall the dominion of death cease?'

Jesus saith: As long as [material] birth continues, for I came to destroy the works of birth"

(Van Arsdale, Henry. "The Logia of Jesus." *The Christian Science Journal* 25 no. 8 (November 1907): 490.

1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

"Nicodemus was introduced as a man of the upper class, conservative in his beliefs, and definitely interested in Jesus' teaching. As a Pharisee he belonged to the strict religious sect of Judaism in contrast to the Sadducees, who were less rigid in their belief and were more politically minded. As a member of the ruling council or Sanhedrin, he would have been sensitive to the prevailing doctrinal trends of the time. His interest in Jesus had been prompted by the miracles he had witnessed, and he came for an interview to obtain more information. His approach shows that he was cautious, open minded, and ready to receive a new revelation from God if he was sure of its genuineness" (*EBC* 9.46).

2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

"The design of his coming seems to have been to inquire more fully of Jesus what was the doctrine which he came to teach. He seems to have been convinced that he was the Messiah, and desired to be farther instructed *in private* respecting his doctrine" (Barnes 275).

"It is not mentioned why he came by night. It might have been, being a member of the Sanhedrin, he was engaged all the day. Or it may have been because the Lord Jesus was occupied all the day in teaching publicly and in working miracles, and there was no opportunity for conversing with him as freely as he desired. Or it may have been that he was afraid of the ridicule and contempt of those in power and fearful that it might involve him in danger if publicly known" (Barnes 275).

"This interview took place by night, on account of the timidity of Nicodemus and probably in John's house at Jerusalem, the evangelist himself being present" (Dummelow 779).

“Except God be with him...the miracle is the proof or the credential that he came from God” (Barnes 275).

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

“Nicodemus had asked no question, but Jesus knew what he wished to ask, viz. ‘If Thou art the Messiah, as some of us are inclined to believe, tell us how we must enter that Kingdom of God, which Thou hast come to establish, and of which Thou hast said so much.’ Our Lord answers that a new birth, i.e. a new heart and a new nature, are necessary, according to the testimony of the OT prophets: ‘I will put my Law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts’ (Jer. 31:31)” (Dummelow 779).

“**Again**” is *anothan* in Greek and means “from above or things which come from heaven” (Thayer 52).

“**Kingdom**” is *basileia* in Greek and means royal dominion...[t]he kingdom of heaven...Spiritually the kingdom of God is within the human heart” (Hebrew-Greek Key 1698).

We might say that the kingdom of heaven is the “royal dominion of the human heart.” Furthermore, Jesus teaches us that “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” – within us (Matt. 10:7).

Jesus turns the conversation from the miracles he has done to the concept of our nativity. What is man’s true origin? Jesus tells Nicodemus that there is a prerequisite to seeing this kingdom or dominion within. We cannot perceive our dominion within *unless* we understand our nativity or spiritual origin. In *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, Mary Baker Eddy makes this statement:

262:27-28

The foundation of mortal discord is a false sense of man’s origin.

Jesus says that “no man hath ascended up to heaven but that he came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13).

“This change, or the beginning of this new life, is called the *new birth*, or regeneration. It is so called because in many respects, it has a striking analogy to the natural birth. It is the beginning of spiritual life” (Barnes 275).

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

“Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit — That is, except he be renewed by the Holy Ghost, working as water, leaving the same effect upon the soul in cleansing and purifying it from sinful defilements, as water doth upon the body in washing off contracted filth.” (Benson Commentary).

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

“That water points definitely to the rite of baptism, and that with a twofold reference - to the past and to the future. Water naturally suggested to Nicodemus the baptism of John, which was then awakening such profound and general interest; and, with this, the symbolical purifications of the Jews, and the Old Testament use of washing as the figure of purifying from sin” (Vincent's Word Studies).

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh — Only flesh, void of the Spirit: or is carnal and corrupt, and therefore at enmity with the Spirit. *And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit —* Is spiritual, heavenly, divine, like its author” (www.biblehub.com, Benson Commentary).

We can't be part wet and part dry: we are either one or the other. In a similar way, we can't be both spiritual and fleshly: we must be one or the other.

“**Spirit**” is *pneuma* in Greek and means “to breathe, blow....the spirit which, like the wind, is invisible, immaterial, and powerful....the Holy Spirit....Spirit is the element in man which gives him the ability to think of God” (Hebrew-Greek Key 1750).

“This language was fitted to show that the thing intended was no other than a *thorough spiritual purification by the operation of the Holy Ghost*” (Jamieson 3.362).

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

“Therefore it was no cause for wonder that a new birth was required for entrance into the spiritual kingdom” (www.biblehub.com, Expositor's Greek Testament).

“Marvel not, &c.—If a spiritual nature only can see and enter the kingdom of God; if all we bring into the world with us be the reverse of spiritual; and if this spirituality be solely of the Holy Ghost, no wonder a new birth is indispensable” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, www.biblehub.com).

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

“The wind bloweth ... - Nicodemus had objected to the doctrine because he did not understand how it could be. Jesus shows him that he ought not to reject it on that account, for he constantly believed things quite as difficult. It might appear incomprehensible, but it was to be judged of by its effects. As in this case of the wind, the effects were seen, the sound was heard, important changes were produced by it, trees and clouds were moved, yet the wind is not seen, nor do we know whence it comes, nor by what laws it is governed; so it is with the operations of the Spirit. We see the changes produced. Men just now sinful become holy; the thoughtless become serious; the licentious become pure; the vicious, moral; the moral, religious; the prayerless, prayerful; the rebellious and obstinate, meek, and mild, and gentle. When we see such changes, we ought no more to doubt that they are produced by some cause - by some mighty agent, than when we see the trees moved, or the waters of the ocean piled on heaps, or feel the cooling effects of a summer's breeze. In those cases, we attribute it to the "wind," though we see it not, and though we do not understand its operations. We may learn, hence:

1. that the proper evidence of conversion is the effect on the life.
2. that we are not too curiously to search for the cause or manner of the change.
3. that God has power over the most hardened sinner to change him, as he has power over the loftiest oak, to bring it down by a sweeping blast” (Barnes' Notes).