

The Change Needed for Heaven

Jesus said, “Ye Must be Born Again”

The Pharisees for a time could boast that no Pharisee ever believed on Jesus. They claimed superior thinking unlike the ‘ignorant, common’ people. Well, that was not for long. Soon even among the smug self righteous elitist Sanhedrin there were converts to Christianity.

Imagine the embarrassment of a ruler of the Jews going over to the support and discipleship of Jesus, the heretic - as they considered him.

Nicodemus was one such convert and he was later to demonstrate a mighty witness to the Lord as he had part in the burial of the Lord Jesus. He provided spices for the embalming of the Saviour’s crucified body. That was Nicodemus in the full light of the gospel. But here we have him coming in the darkness. At first the fear of man is quieting his opinions, but reason is at work, and there is something that he cannot deny. The works of Christ proved his genuineness. The deeds of Christ are the persuasive stubborn facts which just won’t go away.

We ask men this question today, “If Christ was not sent from God and if he was to God in the flesh then how did he do such miracles?”

From studying the O.T. Scriptures the Jews were programmed to so think that a prophet is accredited by his works. So it was with Moses. His works gave him authority that he was sent by God to deliver the nation of Israel out of Egypt.

Christ’s miracles were also given so that people would believe on Him. (John 20:30,31). Now here was Nicodemus and his confession was rolling out of him, “*We know that thou art a teacher come from God for no man can do these miracle that thou doest, except God be with him.*”

The evidence was before him and he could not deny the fact that Christ was sent by God.

Today you may try ever so hard to deny the evidence of Christ and His miracles, but you will be brought back to stand face to face with the reality that no one could multiply the signs and wonders that Christ performed unless God was with him. What then will you do with Christ?

But note how the Lord handled this inquiry. The issue was not merely the acceptance of facts relating to the Lord’s genuineness. The spotlight turned on Nicodemus to reveal that *his* fallen works betrayed the need for a radical conversion. This New Birth was the ultimate need in Nicodemus’ life.

You see facts will not save your soul. You could go to hell from the theology class with all the facts, but still have a heart that is rebellious to God.

The important thing was that Nicodemus be made fit for heaven. He needed to be born again – or born from above – or born of the Holy Spirit. So to be fit for heaven a dramatic miraculous change is required in the hearts of men and women.

EVEN NICODEMUS WAS NOT FIT FOR HEAVEN

This is almost laughable, isn't it? That such a ruler of the Jews, an elite member of the most privileged and enlightened people in all the face of the earth should be told by the Lord that he was in no way fit for heaven. If that was so then there is something wrong with all men and no one is ever ready for heaven. That is what our Lord was saying: *"Except a man be born again..."* It does not matter who that man is. The Jewish Rabbi, the Pope, the President, the Prime Minister, the Hindu Guru, the Protestant born into the an evangelical church, or even the Protestant preacher in the pulpit, all need to be born again. There are no exceptions. This prompts us to ask in what way was Nicodemus unfit for heaven?

He was a son of Adam. Adam's guilt falls on each and everyone of his offspring. Rom. 5:12 tells us, *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."* As a part of the human race Nicodemus was also banished from God's presence. The temple worship and sacrifices all taught this estrangement of the natural man from the presence of God.

He was still in a fleshly nature. Jesus said I verse 6 of this chapter, *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh."* Nicodemus needed a new nature – a spiritual nature before he would be fit for heaven.

He was party to a class of people who boasted in self righteousness. With all that the Pharisees only deluded themselves through sheer hypocrisy. They offered long prayers in public but offered no repentance over sin. They emphasised the outward show of works, but inwardly they cared less about man or God. Phariseeism became a club for the boys to promote themselves. They had a strictness to the law but in every way the law condemned them. The law demanded perfection of deed and motive, but these Pharisees were only hypocrites in light of the law of God.

Even the most religious will give account on the eternal day. 2Cor 5:10 states, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."* Nicodemus was not then a converted man. His heart was still full of sin therefore he was not fit for the kingdom of heaven.

THIS CHANGE WAS DESCRIBED AS A NEW BIRTH

This change was no small one as the Lord likened it to a New Birth – a second birth – and a birth from above. This is very dramatic language. It is the difference between night and day to be in your mother's womb and to be born into the world. The unsaved, unconverted soul is in darkness and has no light and has no life.

Nicodemus got the wrong end of the stick on this one. He took this too literally. The Lord was speaking of the nature of this spiritual birth it is like starting all over again from the beginning.

The new Birth is the point when life starts. You have a birthday for your natural life. There is also a birthday for the spiritual life. Regeneration takes place in time. One day going to hell without life. The next going to heaven with life abundant.

A Theology teacher once said to a young student, “Where were you born? “I was born in Dublin and in Liverpool,” the student replied. “Ah! How can that be?” inquired the doctor. The boy preacher paused a moment and answered: “*Art thou a master in Israel, and understandest not these things.*”

The new Birth is life from out of yourself. A baby does not deliver itself. It owes all life to the parent who conceived nurtured and brought forth that life which you now enjoy. A dead thing cannot raise itself. Lazarus could never have called himself forth from the tomb. This life comes only from the great life giver Himself. It a gift. It is the bestowment of the life giver. He who is the resurrection and the life is the one who giveth life to his people. Thus you need a Saviour for you cannot give life to yourself.

The new Birth is life begun in the soul in time, but endures through all eternity. It is, therefore, called “eternal life”. Jesus said in John 10:28, “*I give unto my sheep eternal life and they shall never perish...*” The word “*eternal*” is the same word used elsewhere for hell fire. That fire which cannot be quenched. Do you have that eternal life? If not, you are facing eternal death which is eternal ruin. You will lose your soul to eternal perdition and never be in heaven.

THIS NEED FOR A POWERFUL CHANGE IS SEEN IN THE SOVEREIGN POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Lord emphasized this sovereignty of the Spirit in conversion when in v8 he spoke of the wind blowing where it pleases. By this statement the Lord illustrated the absolute dependence upon the Spirit of God, who is the gift of Christ. Dependence on the wind shows we are not in control. All you can do is cry out for mercy.

Today the Spirit of God is blowing on other souls in other places. We hear of many conversions in these times in S. America and China. Some are being converted here and there. What about you? You need to call out and cry to God for the Spirit of God to blow upon you.

His sovereignty in whom He converts, when He converts and where He converts must drive away your self confidence. You are not in control of your own soul’s destiny. You cannot say I will put this off until the end of the year or until the end of life. What if the wind of God’s spirit does not blow upon you? You will be left to perish. But if now the spirit of God is striving and you hear the call to conversion you must come now and be born again.

THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Too many people think that if they are good enough for earth they will be good enough for heaven, but the kingdom of God is not earthly. It is heavenly, holy and exquisite. It is a place where every creature is like God and enjoys the presence of God. Right now that scares you. Right now you tremble because your heart is in opposition to the very will of God.

How could you enter heaven with a worldly heart? The bingo player the gambler, the lover of sensual pleasures, the follower of Hollywood movies and hero worship will never fit into the kingdom of God. You are too married to this world. So many things still have a grip upon your life. You are not free here to worship God and your heart is running off into the ways of vice.

If you were to enter heaven now as you are you could not be happy there. Holiness and godliness are foreign to you. Purity, worship, delighting in God, praise to the Father, praise to the Lamb, and praise to the Holy Spirit would be alien to you. You would be a fish out of water. You would be a captive instead of a free spirit.

For you to talk about going to heaven without conversion is a joke. The only answer is for you to be born again. A renovated nature is imperative. A need a new mind and heart to love God and serve God. The problem is that right now you do not love God. You have no heart to follow him.

You are a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. Prayer meetings, praise and worship are all extraneous or irrelevant things. You can take them or leave them. If I was to drag you to a church prayer meeting you would tell me, "I have no heart for that anymore. I will opt out for a while." My response would be, "Well, you can't do that in heaven." This only underscores the fact that you are not fit for the kingdom of God unless you are dramatically changed by the grace of God.

THE IMPERATIVE LANGUAGE USED BY THE LORD WHEN SPEAKING TO NICODEMUS

Could the Lord put it any more assertively than he did in verses 3,5, and 7. He did not say it would be a good insurance to have. He did not say that maybe you need to be born again.

Oh dear soul, unsaved, lost and on the way to perdition, you must hear the voice of the Lord in this. "YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN." You have natural life. You have life in the body but you must also have spiritual life. You must also have the New Birth experience. You cannot depend on some hazy, fuzzy experience of the past. You cannot depend on mere religion. Nicodemus had all of that. You must be born from above through faith in the Lord Jesus. It is absolutely essential. You do not stand a chance of entering heaven any other way.

Now I hope that you see the urgent need for your soul to be converted. Please see the way in which you must come, - by simply believing the message of the gospel. That gospel was presented to Nicodemus in verses 14–18. Jesus said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up." So you look unto Jesus for new life.

By simply believing in Jesus as your Saviour, sent by the Father to save your soul, you are saved. You are born again when you believe this message. You are converted the moment you put your trust in the Saviour.

Now if you want to be lost you need do nothing. It says you are "...condemned already" (v18). But if you want to be saved you must believe, because "He that believeth on him is not condemned..."

Let me tell you of the prayer of a penitent young soldier on the battle field. He was wounded in battle and taken aside to die. As he lay bleeding to death and hopeless of any help his whole life flashed before him. Then he remembered what he had learned as a little boy on his mother's knee.

“For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

That young soldier there and then caught the end of the gospel rope for his salvation. He prayed, “Lord, I believe; save me, or I perish!” That is a prayer never uttered by the penitent soul in vain.

Someone on the field heard that cry and took the news to his family. What hope it gave them. Do you have this hope of salvation today? If you died today would there be any hope that you have been saved and fitted for the kingdom of Heaven? It is crucial to your soul's salvation that you take heed to the warning of the Saviour, “Ye must be born again.”