

2 S. in Lent 3/8/20  
John 3:1-17 A

“TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS ONE IS BORN AGAIN HE CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD.”

One night, a man named Nicodemus went to visit with Jesus and they spoke about how it is that one enters the kingdom of God. Now, if you look at Nicodemus, this is an odd and strange conversation. Because if anyone knows what it takes to enter the Kingdom of God; well, it's Nicodemus.

He had a pretty good life; He lived a pretty good life, and everyone knew it. He is a Jew. He is a Pharisee. He is a teacher of Israel. He is a member of the Sanhedrin.

He was born a Jew. As a Jew, he knows he's the offspring of Abraham. He knows being born a Son of Abraham makes him one of the chosen, blest people of God. And, the Pharisees know how to get into the kingdom of God because they are not like other people. He's not like the unjust, the murderer, the adulterer, the thief, the liar; oh no, he's better than all of that. As a Pharisee, he keeps the law. And he keeps it in such a way that he believes his conduct, his behavior, makes him righteous before God. As a teacher of Israel, he's taught people for many, many years, teaching them how to be holy before God, so they have what takes to enter the kingdom of God. And don't over look the fact that he's a member of the Sanhedrin, the council of 70 who ruled over the Jewish nation. That means he was held in such high regard by his own peers, that they chose him to rule over them.

And yet, when it comes to entering the Kingdom of God, Nicodemus seems to have a lot of doubts, questions wondering: will I see the kingdom of God? That is because Nicodemus' religion was a religion of works,

which taught you always to look to yourself for salvation. And, that only left uncertainty, no guarantee, just a lot of nagging questions.

Nicodemus knows Jesus is a teacher come from God. When Nicodemus comes to Him by night asking how one can enter the kingdom of God, the Teacher says this, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God (v. 3).” In other words, you must be born again to enter the kingdom of God. You must, as in, it has to happen. You must, as in no if’s, and’s, or but’s about it. If you want to get in, you must be born again, because there is no other way to get into the kingdom of God. That is what the teacher said, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Given who he is, given what he believes, Nicodemus only has more questions for Jesus about this whole being born again business, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born (v. 4)?” For Nicodemus entering into the kingdom of God boils down to who you are – are a Jew, are you a son of Abraham, one of God’s chosen people? For Nicodemus, it is all about physical birth. He is thinking if it didn’t work the first time; maybe, just maybe, it will work a 2<sup>nd</sup> time.

Jesus says this, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’ (v. 6).” Jesus is teaching that even if you could be born of your mother’s womb a 2<sup>nd</sup> time, you would still be flesh; because, well, that which is born of the flesh is flesh. In other words, you are the offspring of Adam and Eve. As such, you are born sinful, you are born unclean, you are born an enemy of God. You are not getting into the Kingdom of God the way you were born.

Do you ever see a little Nicodemus in you? You look at yourself, you look at your life, and you say I am glad I am not like other people. I've never murdered anyone, I've never had an affair, I've never stole from my neighbor, I've never thrown rocks through my neighbor's window, I've never lied on my taxes; I'm better than most people. I try hard to do my best. Other people think that I am a good person. That should count for something, right?

Well, ok. Maybe to your neighbor it does. But not before God. In His Word, God says "That which is born of flesh is flesh." And the Bible says this about being born in the flesh, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these (Ga 5:19-21)." Then the word of God adds this, "Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Ga 5:21)." So, do you see why Jesus says you must be born again, because the way you're born, you are doomed to hell for all eternity.

This is why the Teacher come from heaven says to you, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." It doesn't matter if you are born of Abraham or good German stock, that which is born of flesh is flesh; which means you are sinful and unclean, you deserve only God's temporal and eternal punishment.

But, that's not the only thing the Teacher come from God has to say. Jesus says, "God so loved the world (v. 16)." The Father loves the world so much that He His only begotten son into the world not to condemn the world, but in order to save the world through Him. The only-begotten Son of God is born in the flesh, born of the Virgin Mary, to take on the same

flesh as have, except for one thing – He is without sin. He lived a perfect life, in perfect obedience to all of God's commands for you.

And then, because you did not live in perfect obedience to all of God's commands, He takes into His flesh all the sins that you have committed. He is lifted up upon the cross of Calvary in punishment for your sins. That punishment is death upon that cross. Jesus dies upon that cross so that you may have the forgiveness of all your sins, so that you will not be condemned.

Jesus rises the 3<sup>rd</sup> day to give you that forgiveness and He delivers you from the condemnation of sin, death, and hell in the water and spirit of Holy Baptism. At the font, you are joined to Jesus Christ, His perfection becomes your perfection. You are joined to Him, so that His death, His burial, His resurrection, become yours. In the water and by the Spirit, you are born again and you enter the kingdom of God.

Being born of water and the Spirit, your entrance in the kingdom of God is not dependent upon you, who you are, what you have done, what you have not done, your thinking that you are better than anyone else. Your entering the kingdom of God is solely dependent upon the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for you

And what a kingdom it is! It is a kingdom where you live under your King Jesus in forgiveness, life, and salvation today, and forever and ever without end. It is a kingdom of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness today, and forever. All that is yours because you were born again of water and the Spirit.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.