



STORY

Jesus and Nicodemus - John 3

7/17/03

TEACHER PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I thank you the privilege of coming to Jesus, Who is a teacher come from God. I thank you for the opportunity to learn more about Jesus so that I can better teach these children entrusted to my care. I pray that the Holy Spirit would work mightily to create and sustain the faith of these children. I thank you for the gift of baptism which is truly a washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

VOCABULARY

Sanhedrin - the seventy elders, religious and political leaders of the Jews

Kingdom of God - God's rule in our hearts through the Gospel

born again - being made a child of God by the Holy Spirit; it does not mean accepting Jesus as one's Savior

regenerate - to be born again or to renew

OUTER AIM

Jesus Reveals the Nature of the Kingdom of God

INNER AIM

Jesus Has Made Me a Part of His Kingdom By Water and the Spirit

BACKGROUND

This event takes place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. John tells us that Jesus had turned the water into wine at Cana of Galilee and manifested His divine glory. Jesus and His followers went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, the remembrance of God's great salvation act of the Old Testament. John's Gospel account centers around the three Passovers that Jesus celebrated in Jerusalem, the last one culminating in His death. Jerusalem was not only the political capitol of Israel, it was also the religious center. Here was Herod's temple and its additions to the temple built after Solomon's temple was destroyed. Jesus got the attention of the people and the religious establishment when he drove the money-changers out of His Father's house (John 2:13-22). The hopes and fears of many years began to stir as the Jews looked for that Messiah who would drive out the hated Romans and restore the kingdom to Israel. Jerusalem was filled with the news of this strange person, Jesus. "And many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did" (John 2:23). The actions and activities of Jesus attracted the attention of a leader of the Jews, Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin.

STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Jesus, come to us as You came to Nicodemus and reveal Yourself to us as the Promised Messiah. Thank You for having made us God's children by baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit. May we learn that God so loved us that we should not perish but have everlasting life. Be with us this day and bless us in our study of Your Word. Amen.

PRESENTATION

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of Jews, came to Jesus by night. Jesus had already ruffled the feathers of the religious establishment by driving the money-changers out of the temple. This action struck the pocketbooks of those elders who had a share of the profits. It also exposed their greed and hypocrisy to the people. So Nicodemus came to Jesus secretly, at night so that he would not be identified with this strange teacher and His doctrine. Nicodemus recognized that Jesus was a rabbi, that is a teacher. From the signs Jesus performed, Nicodemus even recognized that Jesus was a teacher from God. However, Nicodemus did not understand who Jesus was or why He had come into the world.

Jesus took Nicodemus right to the heart of the matter by speaking to him about the Kingdom of God. What a difference in how this concept was understood! Nicodemus immediately thought in terms of an earthly kingdom that would be ushered in by the Messiah. Jesus was speaking about God's rule within you, a spiritual rule by the Gospel. To this end, Jesus sought to instruct Nicodemus. He stated that unless a person was born again, he could not see the kingdom of God. This made no sense to Nicodemus. With his concept of an earthly kingdom, he could not understand how a person could be born again and enter into God's kingdom. His first thought was that Jesus was somehow talking about a new physical birth-a fresh start.

Jesus was speaking of a *spiritual* kingdom and entrance being only through the Holy Spirit. It is still true that what is born of the flesh is and remains sinful flesh, while that which is born of the Spirit is spiritual. You must be born of water and the Spirit to gain entrance into the Kingdom of God. Jesus here refers to the water of baptism and the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit. It is sad that in modern decision theology, being born again means that you have accepted Jesus as your Savior and dedicate your life to Him. The emphasis in Jesus' words to Nicodemus is the change God works in sinners through water and the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is like the wind in that it works when and how it wants. All we see are the results of the Spirit's activities.

Jesus goes on to proclaim the Gospel to Nicodemus by taking him back to the brass snake in the wilderness during Israel's forty-year journey to the Promised Land. Jesus would be put upon a pole (the cross), and whoever looked to Him in faith would be saved from eternal death. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

We hear no more of Nicodemus until the crucifixion of Jesus. John points out that Nicodemus stood under the cross and understood what Jesus was talking about that first secretive night. While Jesus' own disciples fled lest they be identified with Him, Nicodemus stepped forward and claimed the body of Jesus for burial. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea confessed their faith before the world. Nicodemus was born again.

APPLICATION

Jesus answers our questions with loving patience and leads us to learn more about the Kingdom of God as He led Nicodemus.

The Kingdom of God is not an earthly kingdom. Rather, it is His gracious rule in our hearts because of Jesus' love.

The Holy Spirit leads us to believe in Jesus. Luther's explanation of the third article confesses, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has

called me by the Gospel.” Faith is a direct work of the Holy Spirit. This fact is a direct contradiction held by many today who emphasize that each individual must decide to accept Jesus as his Savior.

The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace, that is, the Gospel in Word and sacraments. Where the Word is preached and the sacraments are administered, the Holy Spirit creates the Church.

Jesus emphasizes the power of baptism by speaking of the “new birth” as coming by means of water and the Spirit.

Nicodemus was later led at time of Jesus’ death to confess his faith and put his life on the line by claiming Jesus’ body for burial.

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

(John 3:5) Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

(John 3:16) "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

(Titus 3:4-7) But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, {5} not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, {6} whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, {7} that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

HYMN CHOICES

God Loved the World So That He Gave - TLH #245

Come, Holy Spirit, Come - TLH #225:1,4,5

Holy Spirit, Hear Us - TLH #229:7

Let the Children Come to Me - Worship Supplement #753