

Introduction: When he was 82 years old, John Newton said, 'My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner – and that Christ is a great savior!' *** This is a good summary of God's grace in Jesus from the author of 'Amazing Grace'. God gives us salvation into eternal, abundant and meaningful life (John 3, 10, 15) that we do not deserve. He gives it to us IN Jesus Christ, through The Holy Spirit. If we receive His forgiveness of sin by faith IN His Messiah-Savior, then we are adopted into His family and enter into His Kingdom as citizens. This happens when we are 'born from above' as a gift of grace through The Holy Spirit. *** The professor of my Christian ethics course said that the only fitting response for people who receive forgiveness and life by the grace of God is to give gratitude to God. In other words, God's grace to people inspires gratitude in people. Grace filled people will live every day thanking God through acts of loving obedience done by humble dependent childlike faith. *** This principle of God's grace and human gratitude is the background for the encounter between Nikodemus and Jesus at night. The leading Pharisee only saw the physical reality with his eyes of what Jesus was doing. He was not able to understand what The Savior Jesus explained to him of heavenly truth. This truth can only be discerned through The Spirit. Without The Spirit, Nikodemus was lost. *** It is not natural for any of us, who are sinners as John Newton was before he received Christ, to understand spiritual truth about God in heaven. This is the fate of all who are only 'born of women'. Think of what Jesus said about John the Baptist compared to the 'least' in the Kingdom of God. (Luke 7:28) *** This is grace. Even as God is intimately involved in physical birth from the mother's womb, so He is involved in our 'birth from above'. He is also the giver of eternal life. Our responsibility is to let go of our desire to control our life and to also surrender our pride in our incomplete knowledge to God. Then, we must allow God to give us birth a second time, teach us and remake us to do His good works. *** We are now ready to consider our passages.

I. God's Kingdom is entered by being 'born from above' of The Spirit by receiving the witness of The Son of Man. (John 3:1-13)

A. The only way to enter God's Kingdom is to be 'born from above' of The Spirit. (Verses 1-8)

1. There was being a man of the Pharisees, Nikodemus his name, a ruler of the Jews, this one came to him by night and said, 'My great one, we have known that teacher from God Thou have come, for no man is being able these signs to do which Thou are doing, unless God may be with Him'. (Verses 1-2)

Greek name: This member of the Jewish Sanhedrin (John 7:45-50) has a Greek (not Hebrew) name meaning 'conqueror'. Two of Jesus' disciples had Greek names: Andrew ('manly') and Philip ('lover of horses'). He came to Jesus at night because he feared what men would think (John 12:42-43)

Immanuel: He recognizes God is with (Immanuel) Jesus.

2. Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly (twice 'amen' in Hebrew), I am saying to thee, unless someone may have been 'born from above' he is not able to see The Kingdom of God'. (Verse 3)

Born from above: Nikodemus is talking about what he has seen with his eyes; but, because he is not 'born from above' (by God's Spirit) he cannot either see its fullness or enter it.

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3. Nikodemus is saying to Him, 'How is a man being able to be born when he is old? He is not being able into the womb of his mother a second time to enter and be born.' (Verse 4)

How: Men entered the priesthood at age 30 (1 Chronicles 23:3), and it took time to become a leader, so Nikodemus is middle aged. Again, he takes 'born from above' as literal and physical – and impossible!

4. Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I am saying to thee, unless someone may have been born from water and of Spirit he is not able to enter The Kingdom of God; that which has been born of the flesh, flesh is being, and that which has been born of the Spirit, spirit is being'. (Verses 5-6)

Also water and Spirit: In addition to 'born from above' one must also be born from water and of Spirit to enter God's Kingdom. Nikodemus, an insider ruler of the Jews, is an outsider in God's Kingdom.

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Flesh and Spirit: All people are born of the flesh, but only some are also born of (God's) Spirit. As always, there are two types of people: those IN Christ by Spirit, and those outside only of flesh.

5. 'May thou not marvel that I said to thee: it is necessary that y'all to be 'born from above'; the wind, where it is desiring, it is blowing, and the sound of it thou are hearing, but thou have not known where it is coming and to what place it is blowing: so it is being everyone that has been born of The Spirit.' (Verse 7-8)

Marvel not: Jesus encourages Nikodemus to not marvel at all He is saying, even though it is humanly mind-blowing! He switches to the plural to let Nicodemus know that all need to be 'born from above'

Wind-Spirit: In both Hebrew and Greek the same word is used for: spirit, wind and Spirit.

Born of The Spirit: Here, The Spirit means God's Spirit. God's Kingdom is only entered by those on whom God has acted, and who have received God's action.

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B. Even a teacher of God's people cannot know the things of God's Spirit without receiving the witness of The Son of Man. (Verses 9-13)

1. Nikodemus answered and said to Him, 'How is being able these things to be?' (Verse 9)

Question: The question suggests Nicodemus is beginning to grasp Jesus is presenting a 'Divine Paradox' to him. He would have known that through Isaiah God told His people His ways are beyond theirs; and, he is hoping that God's Word will accomplish its purpose in him (Isaiah 55:8-11).

2. Jesus answered and said, 'Thou are being a teacher of the Israelites and these things thou are not knowing? Truly, truly, I am saying to thee, that which we have known we are saying to thee, and what we have seen we are witnessing; and, the witness of us y'all are not receiving.' (Verses 10-11)

Teacher not knowing: First, Jesus questions how Nikodemus can teach the people of Israel without knowing the things of The Spirit.

Jesus' plural witness: In mid-sentence He switches to refer to Himself in the plural – equating Himself with His Father God. He says both are witnessing to the full knowledge of all they have seen.

Unable to receive: Not just Nikodemus, but all the Jewish leaders, have not yet received God's witness.

3. 'If earthly things I have told y'all and not y'all are believing; how if I might tell y'all heavenly things will y'all believe?'
(Verse 12)

Contrast: Jesus continues contrasting what is discerned by physical senses with heavenly things understood by The Spirit. If they cannot believe everyday earthly things, they cannot believe Divine Paradoxes from heaven.

4. 'No man who had ascended into heaven if not out of heaven having come down: The Son of Man'. (Verse 13)

Incarnation: Jesus refers to The Son of Man Daniel saw in a vision (Daniel 7:7-14). He is saying He is that one. He is the very incarnation of God.

II. God shows His LOVE by sending His Son to save from judgment by faith in Him in order to come out of darkness into His light; God is The One who wonderfully formed all people in the womb. (John 3:14-21; Psalm 139:13-18)

- A. Believing in God's crucified Son, sent in LOVE, gives salvation into eternal life and delivers from the judgment into which all are born. (John 3:14-18)

1. 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so The Son of Man is necessary, to be lifted up, that each one believing in Him may be having life everlasting'. (Verses 14-15)

Moses' serpent: When Israelites were dying of poisonous snakebites, Yahweh told Moses to lift a brass snake on a pole, and all who looked would live (Numbers 21:4-9).

Son of Man: So, Jesus is saying anyone who is believing in His death on The Cross to ransom him from the death he deserves will have life!

2. 'For in this manner God loved the world with the result The Only Son He gave, so that each who is believing in Him, not he may perish, but he may be having life everlasting'. (Verse 16)

Manner of God's LOVE: God demonstrated His LOVE for the world when He gave His Only Son (to die for it).

Purpose: The result is that people may not perish, but have life by believing IN Him. Life starting now is conditional on continued faith, a gift from God to people to be received.

3. 'For God sent not His Son into the world in order to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him'. (Verse 17)

Contrast: Jesus did not come (the first time) to judge the world (Hebrews 9:27-28). In fact He came for the opposite reason: that all might be saved through Him.

Choice: Again, people are given a choice to believe IN Him and receive Him. All who do are saved by being born of The Spirit.

4. 'He believing IN Him is not judged; but, he not believing is already judged because he has not believed in The Name of The Only Son of God'. (Verse 18)

Default: The default condition into which all people are born is to have God's judgment on them. Unless people receive the grace to believe and receive God's Son, they cannot be 'born from above' by God's Spirit to enter life in His Kingdom.

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- B. Do not love and do evil works of darkness, but come into the light to do the truth and show the works being done by God. (John 3:19-21)

1. 'This is being the judgment: light has come into the world, but the men loved darkness more than the light because were being the works of them evil'. (Verse 19)

Evil-darkness: People doing evil love darkness more than light because they don't want to change.

2. 'Because each one practicing evil is hating the light and is not coming to the light that they might not be rebuked, his works'. (Verse 20)

Hate: They hate light because it rebukes them as long as they succumb to the inertia of evil works.

This must be overcome by a powerful external source: God and Jesus!

3. 'But the one doing the truth is coming to the light that the works of him might be shown, (those) being worked in God'. (Verse 21)

Truth and light: Truth and Light are united IN Jesus Christ so by grace through faith people may live the instruction of God in Torah.

Good works show God's work: The bottom line is God is glorified by those who allow Him to do His works through them by His grace. May we express gratitude to God for His works done through us.

- C. Let us acknowledge God's hand in His wonderful formation of who we are, and what we will be in Him, from the womb. (Psalm 139:13-18)

1. For Thou had possessed my emotions / Thou will cover me in the womb of my mother // I will praise Thee because being feared I am separated / being wonderful Thy works / and my soul Thou are knowing exceedingly. (Verses 13-14)

God and people: The worshipper acknowledges the care with which God made him in his mother's womb, God's wonderful works including full knowledge of his soul, so he praises His God!

2. It was not hidden, my frame from Thee / when I was being made in secret / I was skillfully woven in the depths of the earth // my fetus was seen (by) Thy eyes / and in Thy book all were written / the days were ordained / and not one of them (yet). (Verses 15-16)

God's plan: Even while he was still in his mother's womb, and God was skillfully working on him, God had a detailed plan for every day of the worshipper's life!

3. And to me how precious were Thy thoughts, God / how great was the sum of them // I will count them, from the sand they are more / I have been made awake and I (am) still with Thee. (Verses 17-18)

Union with God: What a wonderful blessing to know God is with us from our mother's womb, right up to today, and until the day we meet Him IN Jesus!

God is continually with people as He makes them

Conclusion: People enter God's Kingdom by being 'born from above' through receiving the witness of The Savior by faith.

Then, they respond to The LOVE God showed when He sent His only Son to die for them in order to save them from the judgment on darkness. Finally, people enter into a close relationship with Immanuel – God with us.

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