

John 3:17-21

17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

Jesus is talking with a man named Nicodemus. He has an inquiring mind and wants to know more about who Jesus is and what he is all about. Jesus explains in great detail a spiritual concept that answers his question. You have to be a spiritual person to get it. Jesus explains the kingdom of God is a spiritual realm and requires a spiritual birth from above to be able to understand it all.

John chapter 3 introduces Nicodemus. He comes to Jesus at night. The most popular theory is because of fear. That is not likely the case this early in the gospel. Other possibilities are that he came after work, came after a group discussion elected him to talk with Jesus. In such a case, they needed discretion for their investigation. What we do know is that Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a leader of Jews, and probably a member of the Sanhedrin. He represents a small group of Pharisees that are open to Jesus. Their concern is to find if this is the Messiah. They know that Jesus is a miracle worker, a faith healer, and a teacher that is sent by God. Nicodemus gives an assessment of Jesus that is based on what they think they know about him. He is a teacher sent by God. They know this because of the signs. He interprets the signs as divine accreditation that demonstrates the presence of God. The miracles indicate that Jesus is a prophetic figure that is sent from God. These are important characteristics of the Messiah. While his colleagues are forming opinions and making assumptions, Nicodemus and his group are probably thinking this might be the Messiah. This is a very big deal! The disparity between the identity of Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus as the Son of God is the big divisive issue with the Jews. The Messiah is a great prophet that has the word of God, healing abilities like prophets of the past, but is also a great warrior like King David. The Son of God is a different ball game. The Son of God is much more than a prophet or Messiah, the Son of God is here to save the world.

Jesus explains to Nicodemus the concept of a spiritual birth. Jesus is not talking about a physical rebirth. Nicodemus misunderstands Jesus as it is necessary to be born again when Jesus is talking about the necessity of being born in the spirit. Nicodemus does not understand Jesus because he does not have the spirit. He is confused because his understanding is limited to the physical aspects. He can understand the Messiah but he cannot understand the Son of God. Jesus explains that no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. Nicodemus tries to understand but cannot get beyond a physical interpretation. Jesus explains further no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit. It is both, not one or the other. People that embrace the "born again" slogan make the same mistake of Nicodemus by focusing on the physical aspects of birth. Even though the lesson clearly shows that Jesus is talking

about a spiritual concept of birth not a rebirth. Born again is the misinterpretation of Jesus by Nicodemus. The “born again” slogan is a founded upon this misinterpretation and a common mistranslation of born from above as born again. Jesus tells him what his problem is. He does not believe the eye witness testimony of the things that the people have seen and reported. If he can’t grasp the things that are easier to understand, he is not going to be able to grasp the heavenly things. Jesus descended from heaven. Those that choose to believe have eternal life. The problem Nicodemus is facing is one of belief.

The Bible reveals on many separate occasions that people fail to understanding who Jesus is and what Jesus is all about. As early as chapter one in the Gospel of John, Jesus is identified as the Son of God. Chapter 3 is about the very nature of Jesus, who he is, and what he is all about. The Scripture also tells God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world; God sent the Son to save the world.

I am not fond of slogans. We need all of the words of Jesus; not just a few of them. We need to know what Jesus is all about with our minds open to the full Jesus experience. The light has come into the world. The light is knowledge and truth. People that do evil hate the light because they want to hide their transgressions. The Scripture deals with the most important theological concepts about what God did. God took action and sent the Son into the world to save the world. Salvation comes from belief as the Lord shines a light on the darkness of the world.

I have an idea for a story about a hero that dies to save the woman that he loves. It is a great idea for a love story. I know it has been done before a hundred times over again in various songs, books, and movies. It is about the best love story you can think of. There is no greater love. Real love will sacrifice for the other. Real love is sacrificial love. It didn’t take long reflecting on the idea to realize that this is exactly what God has done for us. Except, what God did was on a much grander scale than this. God sacrificed for all us. In my perspective, Jesus lifted up on the cross is not a *sign* of God’s love, Jesus lifted up on the cross *is* God’s love.