

God So Loved (I)

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There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound

thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
(John 3:1-15)

You Must Be Born Again

I often wonder what kind of religion Christianity would have become if the Bible had not said, “You must be born again.” Without these words, Christianity would put more of a burden on its followers than any religion in the world. Trying to keep the Ten Commandments and the many other laws recorded in the Bible would impose a tremendous stress on the individual.

However, Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Christianity is distinguished from all the religions of the world because of the experience of being born again. This is what makes Christianity completely different from any religion.

The media likes to speak of the “rebirth,” or the “saving,” of society in its news reports. It talks of the need for society to be renewed or of the need

for the rebirth of some organization or government. Much is said of the need to save society. The concept of the rebirth of the individual, however, is not a frequent topic of discussion.

Despite all the cries for the rebirth of society, it cannot be born anew. All anyone can do is make plans and resolutions. This is far from the rebirth of the individual that is dealt with in the Bible. What happens when you try to apply this phenomenon to society? Can an organization, nation, corporation, or any such group actually experience rebirth? People cannot really do much more than cry out for reform.

These words that Jesus addressed to one particular individual regarding the need to be born again are very important. If it had not been for this message, Christians would be better off not believing or indeed doing anything at all. When we look back on the activities of Christians as a whole during the two thousand years of their history, we find that whenever this reborn faith has been absent, Chris-

tianity has been through a period of turmoil. There have been the conflicts between the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the matter of selling indulgences¹ and various other problems within the Catholic Church, and the clashes between the different Protestant denominations. It cannot be denied that the two-thousand-year history of Christianity, including both the Catholic and Protestant Churches, has been complicated and tumultuous.

Fortunately, however, Jesus told us to enter by the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13), and John chapter 3 explains the process by which a person can do this, in other words, the process of being born again. This is a very important message and it contains a warning for all the people in this world who follow some form of religion, all who are looking for some kind of god, and all who try to live good and pure lives.

Being born again does not require any action or righteousness on man's part, neither is any learning required of him.

What does it mean to be born? When a chick hatches from an egg, it does not make a conscious effort to do so. It does not learn to become a chick.

A seed of life simply develops within the egg. Life does not come about through education, ideologies, or training; it is simply born. The cultivation of moral standards, hard work, or good deeds is not required in order for life to come into being.

There are probably people who sometimes ask themselves, “Of all the countries in this world, why did I have to be born in one like this?” Others may say, “I do not know why I bother to live in a world full of so much crime.” Some people may be dissatisfied with their country even though it boasts a highly developed culture. Others live with the distress of a troubled or lost homeland.

When the Bible talks about being born again, however, it has nothing to do with the country in which a person has been born, or whether he was born in a mountain village or a highly civilized town. It is

something much greater than physical birth; it is a matter of being born into the world of true life. This is the point that is strongly emphasized in John chapter 3.

Nicodemus Came to Jesus

A man named Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night. At that time, Jesus was closely watched by the public eye, and the religious leaders followed His every move. Some people have speculated that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to avoid being seen and having people associate him with this infamous Man. They suggest that perhaps it was because he had to consider his position and reputation as a religious leader and scholar of the law.

Nicodemus, however, was not such a coward. As we read through the New Testament, we find that he comes across as a man who had no time for

fear. He had such courage and was so full of conviction that he was even bold in rebuking those who were criticizing Jesus and were ready to hand Him over for execution. As a result, he came under attack himself.

Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. (John 7:45-49)

The Pharisees sent officers to investigate and seize Jesus, but rather than laying hands on Him, the officers came back, having been moved by His words. So the Pharisees said, “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” (John 7:48). They attempted to make a display of their authority, pointing out that amongst the Pharisees, the

most orthodox sect of the Jews and the greatest scholars of the scriptures, there was not one who believed in Jesus.

The Pharisees also criticized Jesus and His disciples, accusing them of having broken the laws of the Sabbath. Jesus' disciples had picked some heads of grain and eaten them on the Sabbath day, and Jesus Himself had healed the sick on this day. Therefore the leaders of the Jews accused them of not knowing the Law and said they were cursed. On hearing these charges, Nicodemus became indignant.

Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? (John 7:50-51)

When we consider instances such as this, we can see that Nicodemus was not a man who would have come to Jesus by night because he was afraid of what others might think of him. He too was a

teacher of Israel who was well versed in the scriptures. At the time of the crucifixion, when the air was thick with unrest, this brave man came with Joseph of Arimathea to collect Jesus' body and anoint it with fragrant oils (See John 19:39-40).

We can see that Nicodemus was more than an ordinary man. He was not a person to sneak around by night to make sure that no one saw him. In certain respects, his character comes across in sharp contrast to that of Peter, who followed Jesus for three years and then denied Him three times, saying, "I do not know the man." Nicodemus was a fearless individual who would submit to no one.

Nicodemus and Jesus

Such was the character of this man who came to Jesus by night. The meeting that took place that night is the most important one in human history.

We know of many great figures who have appeared in the history of mankind, and their biographies have been written out in full for all to read. The Bible only makes brief mention of Nicodemus, but it seems to me that his conversation with Jesus that night was the single most important conversation that has ever taken place.

As a scholar of the scriptures, Nicodemus had been watching Jesus and the deeds He had performed, and they had given him food for thought. He had sensed that there was something deeply significant to all of this and so he came to see Jesus. He had come to the conclusion that this Man must have come down from heaven or He would never have been able to act with such daring. So he decided to come and speak with Jesus. He sought out this great Teacher in order to ask Him about a matter that concerned his whole life.

This man who would submit to no one was speaking as a teacher of Israel as he stood before Jesus

and said, “Having seen the things You do, I’m certain you must have come from heaven.”

Let’s try to imagine this scene. These two men had never met before. Nicodemus had come to Jesus with the greatest question of his life, but Jesus began to give him an answer that had nothing to do with the question. In fact, He told Nicodemus that there was something he had to do.

If we consider the respective backgrounds of Nicodemus and Jesus, we can see that there was a tremendous difference between these two men. Nicodemus was a member of the Council of the Jews. He was a scholar, thoroughly versed in the Law. But what kind of person was Jesus? Even His birth had not taken place in a proper human dwelling; He had been born in a stable. In the eyes of the world, He was “(as was supposed) the son of Joseph” (Luke 3:23). As far as His social status was concerned, He had grown up in the family of a carpenter.

Once Jesus had turned thirty, He began to appear in public and carry out His work. It was then that Nicodemus, this highly educated scholar of the Law, came to see Him. How do you think Jesus saw Nicodemus at that time? For Jesus, this was not a meeting with a scholar and religious leader. Nicodemus had eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah. He had searched the scriptures to find out all he could about Him, and he had even taught about Him. Now the Messiah he had sought for so long was standing in front of him and talking to him, but this Man was quite different from the person he had been expecting. Jesus did not regard Nicodemus with any form of human love, sympathy, or emotion; His words were full of the power of the One who is the very source of mercy. This was not a discussion between two religious leaders, two scholars of the Law, two people who understood the Old Testament scriptures and the words of the prophets. This was not an exchange of ideas between equals. Jesus' words were full of deep compassion for this man who had come in

search of something. Through whose eyes was He looking at Nicodemus?

Except a Man Be Born Again

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. (John 3:1-2)

Nicodemus said he was convinced that Jesus was a teacher come from God. He knew that no one could have done these signs that Jesus did unless God was with him. He was convinced of this. Nicodemus' words here were of extreme importance. Jesus' answer, however, had nothing to do with what Nicodemus had said; He began to talk about something completely different.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)

These words that Jesus addressed to Nicodemus were unlike anything that might come up in an ordinary everyday conversation. Jesus was talking about something that had been lost at the very beginning when man had first been created.

Nicodemus had studied and matured to a standard that qualified him as a ruler of the Jews. His wide knowledge as a teacher was a strength that he had acquired from his ancestors and those around him. Jesus' words, however, were quite different. When He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," His words related back to something that had happened in the beginning, at the time of Adam. God put the responsibility on Adam when He told him not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

and said to him, “for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). But Adam disobeyed God and sinned, and when he did this, he lost something. There was something that he could have received, but the moment he sinned, he lost it. What was it that Adam lost?

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
(Genesis 2:7-9)

It says that in the midst of the garden there were both the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Which of the two did Adam chose? We all know—as the Pharisee, Nicodemus,

also knew—that Adam chose the fruit of the tree of knowledge. But what had God said to Adam before he ate this fruit?

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Genesis 2:15-17)

God told Adam that he could eat the fruit of any tree in the garden except for that of the tree of knowledge. This means that he was also permitted to eat the fruit of the tree of life, doesn't it? God said, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat," but then He made one restriction: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat." Despite God's words, Adam ate the fruit of this tree. God had said, "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,"

and sure enough, as soon as Adam ate the fruit, he died. This was not a death that meant the end of his physical life; this was a death that meant a breakdown in the communication between man and God. Adam could no longer remain in the Garden of Eden and he was cast out.

How might we understand this death that Adam experienced? If you cut some branches from a tree, the leaves on those branches will remain green for a while, but eventually they will wither and die.

It is only a matter of time. The same is true of man. Adam ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and after that, descendants were born to him. All of mankind is descended from Adam. Before we came into the world, Nicodemus had also been born as a descendant of Adam. Ever since the forefather of all mankind received that death penalty, all of his descendants have slowly been walking the path to death. What was this death that came to Adam? He was driven

out of the garden of Eden and was cut off from all communication with God. This was the death that began at that time. Adam actually died when he ate the forbidden fruit, but the death that we associate with the decay of the flesh would come later.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead
in trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1)

We who were dead in Adam have been made alive
in Jesus.

The Kingdom of God

What did Jesus tell Nicodemus?

“You must be born again. I’m telling you, you must be born again. Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.” One nineteenth-century believer wrote the following hymn to express his experience of being born again.

*Since Christ my soul from sin set free,
This world has been a heav'n to me;
And 'mid earth's sorrows and its woe,
'Tis heav'n my Jesus here to know.*

*O hallelujah, yes, 'tis heaven,
'Tis heav'n to know my sins forgiv'n;
On land or sea, what matters where?
Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there.²*

Let's turn now to Luke's Gospel.

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:20-21)

In answer to the Pharisees' question, Jesus said, "Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there!" Where did He say the kingdom of God is? He said it "is within you," in other words, "It arises in your

hearts.” Jesus was already there, moving around in the midst of the Pharisees. The kingdom of God had actually come upon them. The Pharisees knew the Old Testament scriptures, but their eyes were veiled, preventing them from seeing the truth.

Jesus once said to His disciples, “all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44), and He then proceeded to explain the scriptures to them. Those who already know the Bible only have one more step to take in order to come to the moment of realization and for the truth to arise in their hearts. This is what Jesus was saying.

This was also the case for Nicodemus as Jesus spoke to him.

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man
be born again. . . (John 3:3)

In Romans chapter 5 it says that through the sin of one man, Adam, sin spread to all of mankind, but

through the righteousness of one Man, Jesus Christ, all have been made righteous. It explains how those who are dead in Adam are made alive in Jesus. What does all this mean? Let's consider here the fundamental nature of God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.
(Genesis 1:1-5)

Darkness needs light. The light of the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the other lights in this world exist merely as a shadow of a much greater, more

brilliant, and perfect light that will appear in the future. Men's hearts are gathered in the darkness that surrounds them. It was from the midst of this darkness that Nicodemus sought the true light.

The Jews built their temple, and in it they placed the table for the showbread and they lit the lampstand. They installed the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies and there they sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial animals, but all of this was only a shadow of something else. All these ceremonies were given as an example of what was to come and served a purpose only until they found the true light. Just as animals and insects are drawn to the light, man also seeks the light that will shine in his heart. This was the light that Nicodemus sought when he came to Jesus.

The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord,
searching all the inward parts of the belly.
(Proverbs 20:27)

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a
light unto my path. (Psalm 119:105)

When these words are accomplished in the heart of an individual, he will find the light by following the words of the Lord.

Every year the Jews came from Persia in the north, from Ethiopia and Egypt in the south, from Greece, from Rome, and from wherever else in the world they had been scattered. They came to the temple in Jerusalem to bask in God's light. This temple, however, was no more than a shadow of the body of Jesus Christ.

The Temple of His Body

The body of Jesus Christ was torn, and He shed His blood on the cross, but what is the significance of all this? In Old Testament times, the Israelites would shed the blood of sacrificial animals in the temple or transfer their sins to a scapegoat that would be released out into the wilderness. All of

these procedures came to an end the moment Jesus said, “It is finished,” as He hung dying on the cross.

Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). He was talking about the temple that Nicodemus had come to find—the true temple, the culmination of all the feasts of the Jews, the body of Jesus. All the teachers of the Jews who guided others toward this temple through the Old Testament scriptures were also gathered there in the physical temple building. What was the purpose of this temple building? The temple and all the ceremonies carried out there were a model, a shadow of the true essence that was to come.

In Hebrews chapter 9 we have a brief explanation of all the sacrificial rites of the Jews.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of

Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13-14)

If the blood of the animals sacrificed each year could cleanse the defiled, how could the eternal blood of Christ not cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? Will His blood not be able to revive man's spirit that died when Adam sinned? The blood of the sacrificial animals was a shadow of the blood of Christ.

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building. (Hebrews 9:11)

There was to be a greater, more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands. Christ had to be destroyed and killed for the sake of this great temple that He would complete in the future. It is also for the sake of this perfect temple that the believers on this

earth continue to have fellowship with one another through the Spirit of Christ. Thus the temple is being built up.

In the future, when we go to heaven, we will see Jesus Christ and then we will understand that He Himself is the perfect temple. Nicodemus had not come to meet an ordinary man. Nicodemus was not aware of it at the time, but Jesus was speaking to him in order to invite him into this perfect temple.

It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. (Hebrews 9:23-24)

Now is not the time for the offering of the blood of animals. The apostle Paul once spoke of offer-

ing a living sacrifice that is acceptable to God: the sacrifice that we make when we serve other believers and guide others to salvation. The time will come when the believers will meet the Lord as they stand before Him. It is when we see this perfect temple that we will meet Jesus.

When Jesus said, “Destroy this temple,” He was not referring to the temple that had taken the Jews 46 years to build; He was speaking of the temple of His body that was soon to die. The apostle John wrote, “But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:21-22). At the time, not even the disciples knew what Jesus meant when He said these words.

The Lamb Is Its Temple

Let's take a look at what it says in Revelation chapter 21 about the heaven that is to come.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write:

for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. (Revelation 21:1-7)

Then verse 10 says,

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. (Revelation 21:10)

There is a hymn that begins with the lines,

*Jerusalem, my happy home!
Name ever dear to me.³*

“Jerusalem, my happy home.” What is to be found in this Jerusalem? The temple of God is there. John

wrote that he saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, but we do not have an explanation of the temple within the city yet.

Revelation chapter 21 describes this perfect heaven as having inexpressible beauty, being adorned with every kind of precious stone—sapphire, emerald, and amethyst, amongst others—and its streets being paved with pure gold.

John also wrote that there were no lights in the city. Does that mean that it was dark? If it had been dark there, it would not have been heaven. There were no lights and yet the city was bright.

*Come to Christ! Before His throne
We shall stand, robed in white,
In the bright and shining home,
In eternal light.⁴*

Heaven is a truly bright and shining home.

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. (Revelation 21:22)

Who does it say is the temple? The temple that had taken 46 years to build was just a shadow of the true temple. Now, however, in the new Jerusalem, there are no more shadows, since Jesus Himself is the temple. For as long as the believers are on this earth, the Church that is the body of Jesus Christ is the temple.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God,
and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?
(1 Corinthians 3:16)

What? know ye not that your body is the
temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you,
which ye have of God, and ye are not your
own? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

This is what the Bible says, isn't it? And this is what we believe.

*I'm rejoicing night and day,
As I walk the pilgrim way,
For the hand of God in all my life I see,
And the reason for my bliss,*

*Yes, the secret all is this:
That the Comforter abides with me.⁵*

The Comforter, that is the Spirit of the Lord, abides with me. When we enter heaven, we will not be able to see a temple since Jesus Himself is the perfect temple. It is through the Lamb of God that we see the temple.

In Revelation chapter 21 it says,

And the city had no need of the sun,
neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the
glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb
is the light thereof. (Revelation 21:23)

There is no need for any other lights in this city
because Jesus Himself is the light.

And there shall be no night there; and they
need no candle, neither light of the sun;
for the Lord God giveth them light: and
they shall reign for ever and ever.
(Revelation 22:5)

Now we have an idea of what heaven is like. John looked for a lamp, but there was none, and he looked for the temple, but could not find it. But the true temple was there. It is only when we actually go to heaven that we will really know what it is like.

When By His Grace I Shall Look On His Face

An astronaut once went up into space and said that there was no God there. The universe is so enormous, I wonder if even the scientists can truly measure just how big it is. The heavens are so deep and wide, but is that the heaven that the Bible is talking about? When we talk about going to heaven, you might imagine that it is a very long way away and you would have to travel many miles to get there, but let's think about this.

*His perfect salvation, His wonderful love,
I'll shout with the millions on high.⁶*

On the day of perfect salvation, our bodies will be completely changed. What happened when Jesus' body underwent this transformation? His followers were worried and confused as they gathered behind locked doors to mourn the loss of their Teacher, and then suddenly He appeared in their midst. It was eight days after the Sabbath.

Some of the women had been to see Jesus' body and found the tomb empty. They said an angel had told them that Jesus had risen from the dead, but what did Thomas say when he heard this?

“There's no way I'm going to believe that! Unless I see the imprint of the nails in His hands, put my finger into the place where the nails went through, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

Thomas wanted to believe Jesus with his fingers. He wanted to actually touch Jesus' wounded side. Then Jesus suddenly appeared to the disciples when they were gathered behind closed doors. Can you imagine this scene? What will it be like on the day

when we experience this complete salvation and we are physically transformed to receive perfect bodies?

In the past it might have taken a month or more for a letter to be delivered by hand from New York to Chicago, and you could never be sure if it would actually arrive. That was the way people lived back then. If a neighbor moved away or a child got married and moved to another state, there would be little hope of ever seeing them again. It took such a long time to travel any great distance.

Life these days, however, is very different. We can make a telephone call:

“Mom! How are you doing?”

“I’m just fine. I’ll be over to see you this afternoon.”

Now we can communicate within seconds. Life has become much faster. It is just as the prophet Daniel said: “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge

shall be increased” (Daniel 12:4). Europe is practically right next door. Someone in New York can call a friend in London and reach him in an instant.

In a similar way, when we go to heaven, the moment the Lord calls us, we will be right beside Him. Other people will probably be very surprised. We will just disappear into the heavens. In a moment in time, our thoughts and everything about us will suddenly be taken up out of this world.

Right now, we are living within the confines of time as it flows along, so it takes a while for us to move from one place to another. But God is Lord over this hour, the next hour, and the last hour, over one end of space and the other. He said,

“I am the Alpha and the Omega.” We are restricted by time and space, but God is not limited by anything. On the day when we stand before this God, heaven will stretch right out before us. Such is the heaven toward which we are heading.

*Friends will be there I have loved long ago;
Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet, just a smile from my Saviour, I know,
Will through the ages be glory for me.*

*O that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me;
When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me.⁷*

When heaven opens before us like this, we will look on the face of the Lord. It was this same Lord Jesus, the perfect temple, that Nicodemus met that evening. He met face to face on this earth with the One who is perfect and had come from eternity.

Except a Man Be Born of Water and of the Spirit

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I

say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (John 3:4-5)

Various people have had a great deal to say about the meaning of “water” and “the Spirit” in this verse. Some people claim that “water” here means the water used in baptism. If you examine the general flow of the Bible, it becomes clear that being “born of water” means being born again by the word of God. Those who heard John the Baptist preaching repented in their hearts and were baptized. This was the baptism of repentance. We should understand this to mean that once a person has been through this process of repentance, the Holy Spirit enters his spirit.

In verse 3 it says that unless a person is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God, and here in verse 5 it says that without being born again, a person cannot enter the kingdom of God. This first step has to be taken, and then the individual comes to know the kingdom of God during his life on

this earth. That is seeing the kingdom of God. Then there is entering the kingdom of God.

It is not just anyone who is able to enter the gates of heaven; it is only those who have been born again.

There are some people who claim to have seen the kingdom of God with their own eyes. They say that while they were praying they saw a brilliant light or some other vision. But we must see the kingdom of God with the eyes of our hearts.

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote, “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened” (Ephesians 1:18).

When you are feeling dismal and frustrated and everything seems to be going wrong, and then suddenly a good friend turns up, what happens to your face? It becomes more cheerful, doesn't it? Your heart brightens because somehow it is on the same wavelength as that of your friend. The true light is emitted in the same way.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh;
and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must
be born again. (John 3:6-7)

Jesus said, “Marvel not.” In other words, do not think this is strange. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” To put it simply, everyone who is born of the seed of Adam is a descendant of Adam. All of mankind has inherited the blood of Adam and therefore all are sinners. It is not a matter of how much a person has studied the Bible, or whether he has studied, or even taught, theology. That is not the way for a person to enter the kingdom of God. The individual must become a new person. We are born in the flesh, but our spirits must be renewed. In other words, we must be changed. We must be born again.

*Ev'rything is changed since my sins were forgiven,
Ev'rything is changed since I knew the Lord;
Now my feet are walking the pathway to heaven;
All the guilty past now is under the blood.*

*Ev'rything is changed, praise the Lord!
Now I am redeemed thro' the blood:
Free from condemnation, God is my salvation,
Ev'rything is changed, praise the Lord!*⁸

On one occasion, Peter too had a glimpse of the light of heaven and he said to Jesus, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

These words of Peter were very different from what Nicodemus said. Peter was simple and uneducated, but when the Spirit of God came upon him, there was no comparison between his words and those of Nicodemus, the scholar who had studied the scriptures all his life. Just for a moment, Peter had heard the voice of God deep down in his spirit. He had seen the true light, and his words were a reflection of that light.

On the other hand, how did Nicodemus see Jesus? He said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” (John 3:2).

This scholar and teacher of the scriptures was simply acknowledging the presence of a certain power from God that was beyond his own sphere of understanding, and indicating that he was ready to submit to this power.

Nicodemus had been groping around in the dark, waiting patiently. Then he had made up his mind that he just had to meet this Man and so he came to see Jesus. Nicodemus' words were very refined, but if you compare them with the words of the uneducated Peter, you can see that his eyes had not yet been opened to the kingdom of God. Jesus said to him,

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit (John 3:8).

We cannot trace where the wind comes from or where it goes, and it is the same when a person is born of the Holy Spirit. "That which is born of

the flesh is flesh.” That which is born of the flesh is visible. When we are born in the flesh, we have bodies that are visible and tangible. When a person is born of the Holy Spirit, however, it is just like when the wind blows; we do not know where it has come from or where it is going. We do not know how we are born again. That is not to say that the individual is unaware himself that he is born again. The rebirth takes place in the spirit of the individual and is not a visible experience.

How Can These Things Be?

Nicodemus answered and said unto him,
How can these things be? (John 3:9)

How can these things be? When Nicodemus heard that he had to be born again, he became concerned and asked Jesus, “Are you saying that a man must enter into his mother’s womb a second time and be reborn?” Jesus explained that being born again is

not a physical experience but a spiritual one. Then Jesus said,

Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? (John 3:10)

The Israelites had been waiting eagerly for the birth of the Christ. They had put all their hope in His coming. But the Christ had actually come, and they did not realize it.

Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

The teachers of Israel should have understood all these things. The Jews had a highly developed system of worshiping and offering sacrifices to God, based on the five books of Moses. As they carefully observed all these ceremonies, they cleansed themselves of their sins once a year.

Even in the Old Testament, there are frequent references to the Holy Spirit, but it seems that Nicodemus had completely forgotten about these important passages. So when this teacher of Israel

asked, “How can these things be?” Jesus said, “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” In the book of Ezekiel it says:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:25-26)

What did God say that He would give to man?

He said, “a new spirit will I put within you.” He announced in advance that He would put a new spirit, the Spirit of God, within the hearts of men. The prophets preached this message, and those who had studied the Old Testament scriptures had heard it and knew it. It seems that Nicodemus, however, had completely forgotten about this new spirit. Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus about the workings of this spirit.

We Speak That We Do Know

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. (John 3:11)

Let's think about these words for a moment. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know." Some people say that "we" in this verse refers to Jesus and His disciples, or Jesus and John the Baptist, but if you look at this passage in context, you can see that there was no one else there at the time. Who was Jesus referring to when He said, "we" here? He was including Himself in the trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In verse 11, where Jesus says, "ye," He was referring to the Pharisees.

He had come to the society of the Pharisees and taught them, but they did not accept His testimony.

In John chapter 8, Jesus said,

. . . ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come. (John 8:21)

People asked Jesus, “Who on earth are you?” and Jesus answered,

Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. (John 8:25)

When exactly was “the beginning”? In the Old Testament we read how God said to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee” (Genesis 12:1), and Abraham obeyed and set out on his journey. At that time, the whole of the nation of Israel was already in Abraham’s loins. All of the Israelites are the seed of Abraham.

The God who spoke to Abraham continued to instruct the Israelites through the Old Testament scriptures. What is this God like? He is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

So it was that when Jesus came into the world He said that He was the One who had been speaking to them from the beginning.

We speak that we do know. (John 3:11)

“We speak that we do know.” God knows everything. From His throne on high, He looks down and knows everything that is going on down here below, but that is not all that is meant here. Even while the Old Testament was being prepared, and the words that God spoke through the prophets were being written down, God could already see all the events of the future. When Jesus came into the world, He knew everything that was going to happen and this is what He meant when He said, “We speak that we do know.”

Jesus was alone as He spoke to Nicodemus here. Nicodemus saw Jesus simply as one Man, but when Jesus used the plural “we,” in verse 11, He was revealing that He was God.

The One Who Hath Ascended Into Heaven

... and ye receive not our witness. (John 3:11)

What is included in this “witness”? In verse 12, Jesus said,

If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? (John 3:12)

They did not even believe when Jesus spoke of earthly things, so how would they be able to believe if He spoke of heavenly things? Even though they had the words of the scriptures that God had given to them—the words that had been passed down to them through the prophets—and even though they had heard the parables Jesus had told them, they did not believe. How then would they believe if He spoke to them about heavenly things?

To what can we compare the message Jesus gave Nicodemus regarding the path to the kingdom of heaven? Perhaps an example from daily life will

serve to explain. When I was in the United States some time ago, I noticed that the person driving me around always used a map to find his way. He had a map of the area, and it covered not only the main roads, but all the side streets as well. Wherever we went, he consulted the map. A map is a kind of guide. It tells us how to arrive at our destination.

Our guide to the kingdom of God is the holy Bible. Even though Jesus taught these people the way to the kingdom of God, they failed to understand Him. Let's take another look at what Jesus said.

If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. (John 3:12-13)

Who is the One who came down from heaven? It is Jesus. And no one except Jesus has ascended into

heaven. He was also in heaven at the time of the creation. In Proverbs chapter 8 it says,

Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him (verse 30).

*The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell,
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.*

*Oh love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure
The saints' and angels' song.⁹*

God's Son came down from heaven, such a far away place! He came from a distance beyond our imagination, and yet the Bible says,

Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:24)

As it says in this verse, God fills the whole of the heavens and the earth. Let's turn now to Proverbs chapter 30. As you can see, these verses are full of the humbleness of the writer before God.

Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in his fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell? (Proverbs 30:2-4)

More than 700 years before Jesus came to the earth, the writer of the Proverbs asked, "What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" No one knew at that time, but 700 years later, an angel appeared to Mary and said,

“A virgin shall. . . bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel” (Matthew 1:23).

Two thousand years have passed since then, and now we know what the Son’s name is. There is a hymn that says:

*A little child may know
Our Father’s name of love;
’Tis written on the earth below,
And on the sky above.¹⁰*

This is a hymn that children often sing. We know the name of Jesus, but this great name of the Son of God is not known to just anyone.

Even So Must the Son of Man Be Lifted Up

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up . . . (John 3:14)

Man seems to share a close relationship with the serpent for better or for worse. What was it that caused man to sin? It was the serpent, wasn't it?

In Genesis chapter 3, we have the words that God spoke to the serpent:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

God's plan was accomplished when Jesus was lifted up and nailed to the cross, but this was also what Satan wanted. Jesus was lifted up to hang on the cross.

Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. (John 8:28)

Here, too, Jesus was speaking about His crucifixion. He referred to Himself as the Son of man, since He

had come into the world in the flesh. He said, “When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he.” In other words, they would come to understand after He had been crucified.

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth,
will draw all men unto me. This he said,
signifying what death he should die.
(John 12:32-33)

What does it mean that Jesus would be lifted up from the earth? God spoke continually through the prophets in the Old Testament, telling of the crucifixion of Jesus.

When the Israelites had come out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, they began to complain against God and against Moses, and so God sent fiery serpents among them. These were poisonous snakes, and most of the Israelites who were bitten by them died. So Moses prayed to God, making an earnest plea for help. God told him to make a bronze serpent and set it up on a pole. (See Numbers 21:4-9)

Let's try to imagine this situation. When Moses told the people to look at the serpent, the more naive and uneducated people would have raised their heads and looked up right away. Those who trusted more in their intellect and powers of reason, however, would have found the solution completely illogical and refused to look up. If they had been told to melt down the bronze serpent, break it into pieces with a hammer, or grind it into powder to make a tonic that would heal them, they might have tried it, even though it would involve a great effort on their part. Would they have found it easy, however, to believe that they could be healed just by looking? Jesus also said something similar:

I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. (Matthew 11:25)

The Israelites were told simply to look at the bronze serpent. All they had to do was look. In our case, too, all we need to do is look to the cross, and yet

there are so many pitiable people who will end up in hell because they continually discuss the cross from every possible angle instead of just looking at it. The Israelites who had been bitten were told to look and they looked. They did not question or try to rationalize what was happening. They simply looked and they were healed.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.
(Numbers 21:8-9)

Doesn't this sound like a dream? Here when it says to look, is it used in the ordinary sense of the word? Just as Moses lifted up the serpent on a pole in the wilderness, Jesus was lifted up and nailed to the cross. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, it was not

merely a case of the death penalty being carried out; He was crucified in accordance with the words that had been recorded in the scriptures. It was as the Bible says: “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him.” (Matthew 26:24; cf. Mark 14:21)

Let’s go back to John chapter 3.

And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:13-15)

When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, what happened to the people who looked at it? They were healed and they lived. “Even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” God’s aim in giving us His word was not

so that we might lead religious lives of reading the Bible and singing hymns and yet not be able to go to the kingdom of God. He gave us His word in order that we might receive eternal life. Being born again itself is a matter of becoming connected with eternal life. The path that had been cut off between man and God has been reestablished. As Jesus was lifted up and nailed to the cross, He became the path to the kingdom of God. In the above verse, Jesus was explaining the moment when we come into contact with this eternal life.

Nicodemus probably heard the voice of God in his heart on that day and was deeply moved. The path to the kingdom of God is opened only through Jesus Christ. But it is a narrow path. Many people make all kinds of efforts in their attempts to prepare themselves to be able to go to heaven, but there is no need to make such efforts or to do anything at all. Just as the Israelites were healed simply by looking at the serpent, we become born again by looking to Jesus. In other words, we experience

rebirth. When we read the Bible after we have had this experience, we find that it also explains to us the paths we are to take as we live our lives as children of God.

About the Author:

I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

- Acts 20:33-34 -

These were the words of the apostle Paul as he spoke to the elders of the Ephesian church. This has also been the attitude of Byung Eun Yoo since he first began to live for the sake of the gospel in 1961. For more than forty years he has worked as an inventor and businessman to support the spreading of the gospel all over the world.

In recent years his weekly sermons have taken his listeners through Matthew's Gospel, John's Gospel, the Book of Acts, and the Letter to the Romans, chapter by chapter and verse by verse. He has preached in Korea, Germany, and North America, and he has given his full support to the work of spreading the gospel in countries all over the world.

His sermons and books have been translated into ten different languages.

Even as he now approaches the autumn of his life, he continues to work for the sake of the gospel with the same energy as he had in his younger days and with the firm belief that everyone needs to hear this message.

Other books by the author:

God So Loved (II)

The Anchor of the Soul

As the Father Hath Loved Me

The Love that Frees the Spirit

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