

# You Must be Born Again

By Rev. C. Harinck

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**THE BANNER OF TRUTH**  
Tract Committee  
540 Crescent Street N.E.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

**John 3** records the conversation between Christ and Nicodemus. This conversation is one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. We are informed how Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to ask direction in religious matters.

Who was Nicodemus? What type of a man was he? He was among the best of his day. He was a sincere religious man. He was a Pharisee. He belonged to that strict Jewish sect that adhered very diligently to the law of God. Furthermore, he is called a "ruler of the Jews." This denotes that Nicodemus held a high ecclesiastical position. He had become so knowledgeable in God's law and lived such a strict moral life that he was appointed a member of the select group of Jews called the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one members, all men of the highest calibre. It served as a religious Supreme Court. Its members were obliged to conform to the highest religious codes. They lived a clean moral life. Therefore it is not an exaggeration to assert that Nicodemus was one of the best of his day.

This man came to Jesus under the cover of darkness for he feared that people might see him going to the contemptible Jesus of Nazareth. Since Nicodemus himself was assumed to be a master of Jewish law, he was reluctant to be seen going to Jesus for direction in religious matters. That is why Jesus was visited by this highly esteemed religious ruler of the Jews during the night.

What information did Jesus give this man? Did He try to make Nicodemus one of His disciples? Did He prove from the Old Testament prophecies that He was the promised Messiah? No! Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily I say unto you: Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus what he needed to obtain to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom of God. Jesus said to him: "The first thing you and everyone needs is to be born again. You need a new birth."

## **Your Soul Must Be Reformed and Remolded.**

What purpose did Jesus have in saying “you must be born again” to Nicodemus and thereby to all men? Jesus meant to say: “Nicodemus, you have religion, honor and power; but more is necessary. You must be born again.” The Lord Jesus recognized the real need of Nicodemus. He saw that Nicodemus had a heart concealed under his long robe that was hungry for more than he presently possessed. Christ sensed that Nicodemus was not satisfied either with his power and position or his piety. Christ knew that Nicodemus could not find rest or peace with God in the rites, strictness and ceremonies of the Pharisees. Consequently, he had been driven to Christ by night.

Therefore Jesus informed him of the new birth. It was as if He said, Nicodemus, your trouble is within. Your trouble is not cured by putting on a new front and living religiously. You must be brought into a new relationship with God. Your heart must be renewed. It is necessary that God again makes His dwelling place in your heart. The Holy Spirit must make you a new man and work a new nature in you.

Dear reader, Jesus recognized the real need of Nicodemus and He also knows your real need. You may possess wealth and position, religion and esteem, pleasure and joy and hopes and intentions. However, you need something better than these. You need God in your heart and life. You need to be made a new man. “You must be born again.” Your soul must be completely remodeled and remolded by the Holy Spirit. Your trouble is within. As long as the problem is not solved, nothing will avail. You must be made new within or you can never see the kingdom of God.

When a goldsmith makes a vessel of gold that is a failure, he has no choice but to melt down the vessel of dishonor and remold it into a vessel of honor. Thus it is with man respecting his spiritual state. Man has become totally corrupt because of sin. He is entirely disjointed by the fall. Every faculty of the soul is as it were dislocated. In regeneration, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord loosens every joint and sets it in its proper position.

## **Regeneration Is A Necessity For The Best And The Worst Of Men.**

Nicodemus was one of the best men in Jerusalem. Nothing was recorded against him. Nevertheless, he must be born again. When we hear about the necessity of a new birth, a new beginning, and conversion, we are prone to say: “Surely these publicans and harlots, these worldly men and women, must be converted. But I am an upright man. I go to church and keep God's commandments. I do not need to be converted.” However, Christ told even Nicodemus that he must be born again. No man is fit for the kingdom of God until he has been born of another

Spirit. By nature man is sinful and corrupt. Without a renewal within, he can never enter God's kingdom.

Perhaps you might say, "I go to church every Sunday." That is good and in accordance with God's Word, but it is not regeneration. Others might say: "I am trying to do what is right. Am I therefore not a Christian? Isn't that a new birth?" No, the new birth is not turning over a new leaf. The new birth is not being baptized and partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is not being active in missionary work.

The new birth is being renewed inwardly. It is the receiving of a new heart and a new nature. We must not consider patching up the old building, but begin at the foundation. The problem lies in the heart and the cure must begin there.

### **How Can These Things Be?**

Do you know the question Nicodemus asked after hearing these things? He said: "How can these things be?" He realized he was confronted by a great impossibility. I hope this is also your reaction to Christ's teaching concerning the necessity of a new birth. You have heard that church attendance is not the new birth. Attempting to do what is right is not the new birth. Baptism is not the new birth. Becoming religious and turning over a new leaf is not the new birth.

According to the instruction Christ has given you, the new birth is a change of heart. You now must realize that it is the implanting of a new principle from above in our dead hearts. The new birth is a complete change of heart and character.

I hope, believing the necessity of this, that you have tried to renew yourselves, to change your heart, will and character and have now learned one lesson: the new birth is a change which I cannot effect myself. I can neither renew my heart nor instill a new principle.

Dear reader, I hope it is a question that comes from your heart: "How can these things be?" Do you experience the following things? The harder you try to rectify matters, the more you experience that you cannot improve yourself. You come to realize that the trouble is within, namely, that your heart is corrupt and sinful. Can you understand what Jeremiah says: "As the Ethiopian cannot change his skin and the leopard cannot change its spots, so you who are accustomed to do evil cannot do good"? Do you sense that the disease lies deep within you and that you can never make your heart right and qualify yourself for entrance into the kingdom of God? Do your sins and sinful heart burden you? Blessed are you! Do you say, "Blessed? I feel I am a lost, undone sinner. I feel myself to be a sinner without hope, for all my efforts to improve myself have brought me even further from God's kingdom. I see that it is possible for everyone to be saved but not such a vile wretch as I." Yet, we insist upon it: "Blessed are you, for...They that

are whole need no physician, but they that are sick." Christ came into the world to save such sinners. His blood was shed on Calvary for those who cannot save themselves. You are a fit subject for the balm of Gilead and the great Physician Jesus Christ. If you ask: "What recommends me to Jesus more than others?", my answer must be: Your wounds and need of Him.

### **The Only Entrance Into God's Kingdom**

"How can these things be?" asked Nicodemus. From the beginning it had been Jesus' purpose to bring Nicodemus to that question. He wanted to change the proud Pharisee into a humble publican. He wanted to bring the learned man to the confession: "How can these things be?" It was necessary that Nicodemus learn this lesson, for he could now be led to the blessed doctrine of salvation merely by grace and faith in a crucified Savior. In the despair of his soul Nicodemus must say: "How can these things be? How can I ever become right with God?" The Lord Jesus taught the way of salvation by saying: "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." Christ opened the door by which sinners can enter God's kingdom of peace, justice and bliss. We are taught that this is the door: an entire self-commitment unto a crucified Savior as a lost and undone sinner. Faith in the crucified Jesus is the only entrance into God's kingdom. Christ Himself is the door of the kingdom of God. If you ever enter that kingdom, you must enter through that door. This means that you must be brought to the feet of Jesus as a lost, penitent, helpless sinner, crying in the distress of your soul: "How can these things be?" By faith in Him such sinners find that Jesus opens the kingdom of heaven. Is not this a blessed spot—to be brought as a lost and undone sinner to Christ Who bled and died in your room and stead on Calvary's cross? There we find the way by which we may enter the kingdom of God. If you are truly one of those who must, in the need of your soul, exclaim, "How can these things be?" and if your confrontation with the necessity of a new birth and a new heart has brought you into this poverty, then listen to the gospel of Him Who was lifted up as the brass serpent in the wilderness and remember the only fitness which is required is a felt need of Him.