

**John 3:9-21:** Whosoever Believes.

vv. 9-15: How Can These Things Be?

v.9 - Nicodemus has now shifted from a question about the necessity of the new birth (**cf. John3:4**) to how is the new birth even possible?

v.10 – Jesus is perhaps a little amazed that this teacher of the law (**John 3:1, 10**) did not grasp the concept of renewing. Of experiencing a radical transformation of one’s life by the power of God. Perhaps, Jesus had in mind **Ezekiel 36:25-27**:

25 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

26 “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Berry Kercheville, in an article on this text, offers this connection between **John 3** and **Ezekiel 36**:

“Did you see the “water and the Spirit” in the text? God would work in two ways. He would cleanse them by sprinkling clean water on them, and he would put his Spirit within them in order to change their heart and spirit, causing them to walk in his statutes and to be careful to obey his rules. It is of first importance to note that this work *is done by God*. It is not something man could do. Only God can cleanse with clean water; only God can change hearts – and this work of God is what Nicodemus needed to know.”

Kercheville goes on to explain that the point that Nicodemus was meant to understand was this:

“In other words, Nicodemus, you cannot enter the kingdom by physically descending from Abraham, by your own will (circumcision), or by human will or power. Only God can *birth* you, and that is the only way to enter the kingdom.”

v.11-13 – In these verses, Jesus is saying that He speaks not from speculation but of what He knows assuredly (hence His use of “*truly, truly*” in vv. 3, 5). The “*we speak... we have seen... our testimony*” all refer to Jesus.

“*do not accept our testimony*” – That is the party that Nicodemus belong to, the Pharisees, did not accept Jesus signs or words.

v.12 – What Jesus is saying here is that if you do not grasp something as fundamental as the new birth (“*earthly things*”), you certainly are not able to understand things concerning the coming of God’s kingdom and other spiritual truths (“*heavenly things*”).

v.13 – What this verse is teaching is what gave Jesus the authority to speak on heavenly and earthly things (**v.12**) is the fact that He came down from heaven, took on human flesh, and ascended back

into heaven. While on earth, Jesus existed in the fullness of man and of God. Thus, He had perfect knowledge of both realms. This is what made Jesus qualified to speak on these things.

Jesus, after showing how He has the authority to speak on these things (the new birth and the kingdom of God), now begins to address Nicodemus' question. He does so first by using the Bronze Serpent of Moses as an example

vv.14-15 – Jesus references back to an Old Testament (**Numbers 21:6-9**) historical event to draw the parallel between what happened then and what was going to happen to Himself at the cross. Note the parallels:

- Bronze serpent raised due to Israel's Sins – Jesus was crucified and raised on that cross for mankind's sins.
- The bronze serpent was the only solution for Israel – Jesus is the only solution for the world.
- An Israelite had to place their faith in God's plan (the bronze serpent) by obeying God's command (by looking at it) – Sinners today must place their faith in God's plan (the cross of Christ) by obeying His commands (being born again).

vv. 16-21: Whosoever Believes.

v.16- Jesus explains why the Son of Man must be lifted up (**v.15**). It is out of God's love that the Son of God is being offered as an atoning sacrifice for mankind's sins.

v.17 – Christ came into the world not for judgment but for salvation.

v. 18 – Christ did not need to judge at His first appearing because all those who did not or will not believe in Him are already judged. Why? Because, to use an illustration, like a death row inmate who refuses a full pardon right before their execution. They have refused God's gracious offer of redemption.

vv. 19-21 – Jesus further explains here what the judgment is. *“The Light has come into the world”* that is Himself (**cf. John 1:1-5, 9, 14**). Mankind as a whole did not and does not accept the Light, Jesus, because they are content in their darkness (**cf. Romans 1:18-25**) and happy in their life of sin, *“does evil”* (**v.20**).

Jesus says such persons do not come to Jesus because they *“fear that [their] deeds will be exposed”* (**v.20**). Until a person realizes their spiritual poverty without God (**cf. Matthew 5:3**), they will continue in their sins undisturbed. Until they have a love of truth, they will not seek *the* truth. This is why Jesus concludes this discourse with Nicodemus with *“he who practices the truth comes to the Light so that his deeds might be manifested as having been wrought in God”* (**v.21**).

v.21 – The one who loves truth will seek the source of truth, Jesus. Nicodemus is an example of this. While his understanding was lacking, here is a man who earnestly desired to know more. He loved truth, so he sought out Jesus when he could be all alone with Him.

Henriksen offers this explanation for v.21:

“He desires to show that his deeds, though by no means perfect, were, nevertheless, wrought with God’s approval (that they were done, in principle, according to God’s law) and that they retain this character forever.”

This discourse with Nicodemus ends with an invitation, of sorts, for Nicodemus to leave the realm of darkness (of rigid formalism and Jewish traditionalism) and to enter the light. It is the same invitation offered to all persons today and an invitation that all Christians should continue to accept, day by day.