

**RCC in the Word**  
**John 3:1-15**  
**Week of April 9**

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, comes to Jesus seemingly interested in what Jesus is doing, but not particularly open to the truth. To Nicodemus, Jesus' signs serve as a conversation starter, not as a trigger for faith as was in John 2:23. Yet eventually Nicodemus would come around to side with Jesus (John 7:45-52) and ultimately attended to Jesus at Calvary (John 19:38-42). Nicodemus sees Jesus' miracles not as works from Satan, that some had ascribed, but rather as signs that Jesus is no ordinary teacher, that he must be a teacher who has come from God and that God is particularly with Jesus just as he was with Moses. Nicodemus was curious about Jesus, but he is not ready to say that Jesus was a prophet, much less the prophet or the Messiah, rather simply a teacher endowed with God's power.

Jesus responds to Nicodemus without him asking a question. The implied question from Nicodemus is, "Who are you? You seem to be a teacher from God, but are you more? We have never seen anyone like you." Nicodemus, like other Jews (see John 2:18), want to set up criteria so they can determine who Jesus is. In his response, Jesus questions Nicodemus' qualifications for being able to assess "heavenly things." Nicodemus claims he can 'see' something of who Jesus is in the miracles, but Jesus insists no-one can 'see' the saving reign of God at all, including the display of miraculous signs, unless born again.

This certainly sounded strange to Nicodemus since he and his contemporaries thought all Jews would enter the kingdom of God, apart from deliberate apostasy or gross wickedness, because they were God's chosen ethnic people. But Jesus seems to expect that Nicodemus should have understood the significance of the new birth since he was a distinguished teacher of Scripture (see verses 7, 10). But if Nicodemus with his knowledge, gifts, understanding, position, and integrity can't grasp salvation, what hope is there for anyone?

Nicodemus was confused about Jesus as are many people in our world today. What are we to make of him? Can we call him a great teacher? Was he from God? But just as Jesus told Nicodemus, no one can understand who Jesus is and what to make of his signs and miracles, unless that person is born again. And we find in verses 7-8 that God alone can give a person understanding of who Jesus is, for God is the only one who can cause someone to be born again.

Using the imagery of human birth, Jesus wants to show us that just as no child has a say in being physically born, no human has a say in being spiritually born. In the new birth,

the sinner is passive, he can do nothing to cause himself to be born again. Rather, it is a gift from God in heaven. D.A. Carson writes, "Jesus' reply is not framed in terms of what Nicodemus must do to see the kingdom, but in terms of what must happen to him." In verse 8, Jesus also uses the imagery of the wind to make the same point, referring to the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about new birth.

This is the good news! We can't save ourselves. Nothing we could ever do could make us right with God. Any spiritual act of our will is conditioned upon God's sovereign decision to give us new life. And this is why we must always call sinners to repent and trust in Christ. We must tell them to trust in Christ. And if God has so moved in their hearts to cause them to be born again, then they will respond and trust in Him. This is what appears to have eventually happened to Nicodemus. He came to Jesus here in John 3 "by night" for fear of the Jews, but at the end of the Gospel Nicodemus openly purchases the necessary spices for the anointing of Jesus' body and joins in with Jesus' followers to bury him. God had done a great miraculous work in bringing a sinner like Nicodemus into the kingdom of God!

-Written by Nathan Renfro