

## SAVED

### Part 5 of 6

Jesus in John 3:3 has just called Nicodemus to spiritual rebirth, and in doing so, Jesus was asking him to acknowledge his own spiritual insufficiency and turn away from everything he was committed to. What a shock this must have been for Nicodemus. He heard an answer to a question that was never asked.

Jesus makes it clear, no matter how religiously active someone might be, no one can enter the kingdom without experiencing the personal regeneration of the new birth. Shocked and staggered by the words of Jesus in verse 3, and not what Nicodemus was expecting, Nicodemus replied in verse 4 “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”

Nicodemus was a highly educated Pharisee, he was not a foolish, or unlearned man. He should be credited for his knowledge – he did not get where he was by wealth alone. However, when Jesus said unto him “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” it does appear that Nicodemus answered as a foolish man when he replied to Jesus’ statement. Nicodemus replied by asking, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” Now this does seem to be foolish questions, but they aren’t. Nicodemus was very serious about his questions.

We cannot at this time go into all that’s been said about Nicodemus’s questions in verse 4; however, we will look at the structure of the language.

When the Lord confronted Nicodemus with the need for the new birth he did not ask why. He asked how. Somewhere in the depths of Nicodemus’s soul the Lord struck a chord that awoke echoes of deep longings that no religion or moral code could satisfy. Nicodemus did not present the Lord with an argumentative why but with an astonished how.

Nicodemus does not turn his back upon Jesus and walk away. No, Nicodemus wants to know how that this is possible – he acknowledges his ignorance in verse 4. One writer said, that Nicodemus was saying in verse 4 “Lord make me to understand this, for it is a riddle to me; I am such a fool as to know no other way for a man to be born than of his mother.” Nicodemus knew that Jesus was not talking about being physically reborn, but he replied in the only context that he understood. How could he start over, how could he go back to the beginning?

Jesus was telling him that entrance into God’s kingdom was not a matter of adding something to all his efforts, or adding to his religious devotion, but rather canceling everything and starting all over again. This much Nicodemus understood. At the same

time, however, he clearly could not grasp the full meaning of what that meant. His questions convey his confusion, as he openly wondered at the impossibility of Jesus' statement. Jesus was asking for something that was not humanly possible (to be born again); He was making entrance into the kingdom contingent on something that could not be obtained through human effort. But if that was true, what did it mean for Nicodemus's works-based system? If spiritual rebirth, like physical rebirth, was impossible from a human standpoint, then where did that leave this self-righteous Pharisee?

By calling Nicodemus to be born again, Jesus challenged the most religious Jew to admit his spiritual bankruptcy and abandon everything he was trusting in for salvation. Nicodemus did not understand that spiritual rebirth is something one undergoes, not something he produces.

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