

High and Lifted Up – Nicodemus Part 3

Copyright 2009 C.S. Countryman, TruthMill.org

So in our text, we see that after this statement about the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the necessity of the new birth, that Nicodemus is still confused. I don't think he is so much confused about the statements that have been made by Jesus, but I think rather he is confused about how such things that Jesus has said, can actually come true.

That's my conclusion to this, because I think the following text reveals this to be the case. In the NIV in John 3:9, Nicodemus replies to all these things: "How can this be?". But if you look at alternate translations, such as the amplified bible, you find there this translation:

Jn 3:9 Nicodemus answered by asking, How can all this be possible?

That throws some more light on this I think. The Greek verb under this is a verb that speaks of something coming to pass – something coming into existence... something happening... not the idea of the thing itself.. but the idea of the thing becoming real, being made manifest. That's where our man Nicodemus was confused.

So Nicodemus is merely saying... ok, I understand there is this seemingly unnatural thing called the new birth that only God's Holy Spirit can give... So...how can something like the new birth happen? How is it possible to remake a man or a woman into someone new?

And it is this question that Jesus then answers in verses 10 – 21.

To Nicodemus' questioning about these things, Jesus replies in v 10:

Jn 3:10 **"You are Israel's teacher,"** said Jesus, **"and do you not understand these things?"**

Jesus clearly felt that with all of his training in the law and the prophets, that Nicodemus should have had an understanding of everything Jesus has been saying. No doubt Jesus was thinking about things like Jeremiah chapter 31:33, Ezekiel 36:26, and other places.

But there is another angle on this that Jesus wants Nicodemus to see. And it's another angle that He wants us to see too..

There is of course the first angle of understanding – trying to wrap one's head around the reality of what is being said. But there is the second angle of simple acceptance.. in other words, trust. The second angle is the conscious choice to simply accept what is being said – not because it is completely understandable, but because the one doing the saying is completely trustworthy! And I hope you'll see, that if you have the second angle of trust locked down and personally applied, the first angle of complete understanding is optional. And actually, the more of the second angle of trust you have, the less of the first angle of understanding you will require.

Are you a person that requires that God explain everything to you? Are you a person that demands to fully and completely understand everything about God's revelation to us before you'll follow Him? If so, I can tell you from God's word that you are having that struggle

because you are not trusting Him. And unless you trust Him, you cannot be saved.

So many people, just like Nicodemus, approach God first with their brains. They want to have an intellectual lock on everything before they decide whether or not they will trust God. Now, I understand that approach, believe me. But let me say this, and I say it gently but truthfully – that approach is very, very prideful. Here's why:

When we approach God in this way, we are basically setting ourselves up in judgment against God and what He is saying, aren't we? We want God to run all the facts by **us**, and then we'll do some research and pondering, and get back to Him and let Him know whether we like it or if we think He's full of it. Isn't that the truth?

What man is sufficient to judge God and His plan of salvation? What man is sufficient to make a determination that what God has done is worthwhile? Are you kidding me?

What person thinks they can take the infinite truths birthed from God's infinite mind, and squeeze them fully and completely into their own very finite mind?

Yes, God wants to reach us. Yes, God has revealed Himself to us, and part of that revelation is God showing us His plan of salvation. Yes, God wants us to understand. But at the same time, the co-equal fact remains that we **cannot** understand everything. God has given us more than enough to come to saving faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. The only remaining question is this: will we decide to trust God and follow Him because we believe Him to be trustworthy, or will we reject His revelation because we find Him to be untrustworthy, or worse, non-existent. That's the situation, and the only situation.

Well, towards this end, Jesus tells Nicodemus that He is in fact telling Him the truth, and that He is explaining these things as best He can. But the main point is not that Nicodemus understands these things. The main point is that Nicodemus accepts these things as being true simply because Jesus has said they are true. It isn't about Nicodemus and his abilities. It's about Jesus and His character and capabilities, and our response to His invitation.

And by the way, Jesus expects exactly this same thing today. Our understanding of God's plan of salvation will not be complete this side of the grave or Christ's return. Sure, some people will understand more, some less. But what is critical is our acceptance with childlike trust that what God says is true, and that we walk forward with Him with that special kind of trust that the Bible calls faith. Our understanding, like the thief on the cross, can be many different places on the board – there is a minimum requirement, but no maximum. But our acceptance through trust that these things are true and apply to us.. that can only be total and complete. Otherwise we will indeed perish because our trust will not be in Christ.