

John 3:1-17

1 Now there was a **Pharisee** named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by **night** and said to him, "**Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.**"

3 Jesus answered him, "**Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.**" 4 Nicodemus said to him, "**How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?**" 5 Jesus answered, "**Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.** 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and **what is born of the Spirit is spirit.** 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8 **The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.**"

9 Nicodemus said to him, "**How can these things be?**" 10 Jesus answered him, "**Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?** 11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 **And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,** 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may **have eternal life.**

17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Transformation in Nicodemus

Who was Nicodemus?

A Pharisee - teachers of law - clashed with Jesus when he challenged law; upheld cleanliness laws; opposed Roman occupation but colluded to maintain Temple worship.

He is called '*The* teacher of Israel'. 'The' is a better translation than 'a' and suggests irony. The contrast between the divine teacher, Jesus, who Nicodemus calls 'a' teacher, and *The* teacher who cannot comprehend is stark.

He approached Jesus by 'night.' Is John suggesting he was fearful - a Pharisee associating with Jesus; or does this refer to his inability to understand?

Why do you think Nicodemus might be seeking out Jesus?

What does Jesus expect of Nicodemus?

To be born from 'above' (ανωθεν) also means 'again' (3). 'Above' is the better translation, partly because it implies being born in a new way. Nicodemus mis-understands (4). Jesus is saying, this new birth is of the Spirit (Πνευμα). The word is related to the wind or breath (8) and implies God's Spirit breathing into someone - giving a new life.

What does a human 'new birth' feel like? What has to change?

If Nicodemus is born from above, then, he will see the 'Kingdom of God'. Was this what he was expecting? This is the only reference to the Kingdom of God in John. The Kingdom of God describes Jesus' radical, inclusive love - after meeting Nicodemus, he talks to, and respects, a Samaritan woman at a well who has had a troubled life.

The picture cannot be shown on the internet for copyright reasons.

Can you think of a time when you were, or the church was, changed or transformed by encountering the Kingdom of God?

Look at verse 8 and the picture - what does this tell you about the Spirit?

To have eternal life, in John, begins *now*. The word **εχη** - 'have' (16) is in the present tense, so not some future reality. Verse 14 tells us that the transformation will not happen without suffering - referring here to the crucifixion. (The reference to Moses is Numbers 21: 4-9). But does Nicodemus begin to follow *now*? We meet him next in chapter 7: 50, defending Jesus against arrest when people claim he is the Messiah. Later, Nicodemus brings expensive myrrh and aloes for Jesus' body (19:39). Each encounter refers back to Nicodemus's first meeting with Jesus.

In each encounter with Jesus, Nicodemus takes a risk. Does risk help transformation?