

“Religion meets Regeneration!”

I. **INTRO:**

- A. **Prayer:** Good teacher, we come to You w/what we **know not, teach us!** We come to You w/what we **are not, make us!** We come to You w/what we **have not, Give us!**
- B. The year **1505**, a young man named **Martin** returning home found himself caught in a **violent storm**. Terrified, he vowed to become a **monk** if he were allowed to live!
1. Martin Luther made it through the storm & fulfilled his vow. He entered the Augustinian order of monks in Erfurt, Germany. By his own admission, he entered the monastery more out of **constraint** than **commitment**.
 2. In Wittenberg, he obsessively performed his religious tasks. His hard work, confessions, & penances never seemed enough. He wrestled with his own salvation. He hungered for acceptance by God. He realized his emptiness.
 3. On a trip to Rome, which he thought would earn him some form of spiritual merit, he climbed the steps of Pilate’s house on his knees. This is where many church historians believe Luther first gained a true understanding of the gospel. A verse came to mind that changed his life. Rom.1:17 “**the righteous man shall live by faith.**” Like a flash of lightning, it struck him, “It is faith that justifies...not works!” He said, “I felt myself to have been born again, & to have entered through open gates into paradise itself.”
 4. Luther had lived a **rigorous religious life**, pounding on heaven's door in the strength of his own works. **Exhausted**, he fell on his knees before that door & realized a liberating truth: **Christ Himself is the door, & it opens to no human effort**. Rather, the door swings on the well-oiled hinges of **Christ’s righteousness...& opens by faith**. (Chuck Swindoll pg.39,40)
- C. Here we have the first of Jesus’ **12 discourses** in John.
1. In ch’s 3 & 4 we eavesdrop into **2 private conversations** Jesus had with a couple of Israel locals (1 man & 1 woman)
 - a) **The Man** - a respected religious leader; a Jew; one people looked up to.
 - b) **The Woman** - a not so respected woman; a Samaritan; looked down upon.
 - c) **Both** took Jesus’ words too **literally & miss the deeper meaning**.
 - d) **Both** were **sincere inquirers**.
 - e) **Both**, Jesus works very patiently with **& offers both** eternal life.

II. RELIGION MEETS REGENERATION!

A. **NIC AT NIGHT!** (1,2)

B. Jesus doesn't condemn Nicodemus for coming at night so neither will I. (yes, all 3 x's mention)

1. It's amazing he came to Jesus at all! - *Better to come at night than not at all! :-)*
2. Jesus always accessible, to the one who **comes!**
 - a) *The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.* Jn.6:37

C. Nicodemus, what an **impeccable resume!**

1. If heaven could be **earned** from one's accomplishments, Nicodemus would have had change left over.
2. Nicodemus at the top of the religious ladder, looking down. Yet now we see him stepping down from that ladder to **walk the streets** looking for answers!

D. **Three Facts** about Nicodemus: "*conqueror of the people*" [he had **power, prestige, & position**]

E. In spite of all he had, he wanted to know more about Jesus' teaching.

1. **A Pharisee** - "*to be separated*", stood aloof from society in self-rt smugness. They were dedicated to preserving, interpreting, & defending Jewish Law; which they legalistically forced upon the people of Israel.
 - a) *E.g.* These theological hair-splitters devoted **64 columns** in the *Talmud* to Sabbath requirements; wrote **24 chapters** in the *Mishnah* defining what qualified as work on the Sabbath.
2. **Member of Sanhedrin** - court of 70 men, who had religious jurisdiction over every Jew in the world.
3. **The Teacher of Israel** - indicates he had preeminent status in religious circles

F. What we know of Nicodemus is only found in John's gospel.

1. **Ch.3** he **Desires** Jesus; **Ch.7** he **Defends** Jesus; **Ch.19** his **Devotion to** Jesus

G. **Religion** attempts to *turn over new leaves*; **Regeneration** *transforms lives*.

Religion is *man's* effort to reach *God*; **Regeneration** is *God's* effort to reach *man*.

H. **Man's plan of salvation** involves an external series of good works (church attendance, baptism, giving, benevolent deeds)

God's plan is an internal gift from Himself (impartation of new life by means of a sp. rebirth)

I. It is not a **change** of **my name**, but a **renewal** of **my nature**, so that I am not the man I used to be, but a new man in Christ Jesus.

1. To **wash & dress a corpse** is a far different thing from **making it alive**: *man* can do the one, *God* alone can do the other! (Spurgeon)
2. To be unregenerate is to be **unsaved, unpardoned, w/o God, & w/o hope**.

- J. **WHERE DO BABIES COME FROM?** (3-7)
- K. **Most assuredly/truly truly** - (vs.3,5,11)
1. Jesus uses verily or truly **101 x's** in the 4 gospels.
 2. He uses the 2 words **most assuredly**/verily verily together **24 x's** in John alone.
 3. In the **original** the word is **amen!** (ἀμήν ἀμήν Amen, Amen)
 - a) Also translated “*so be it*”. It’s a word of finality - it is Jesus’ “last word.”
No more can be said. Jesus said Amen to His promises & that settles it.
 - b) **Q: Do you need more from the Savior then His *Amen*?**
- L. Little did Nicodemus realize, that when he met Jesus, he, *the leading teacher of Israel*, would be the one *raising his hand* as the **student**.
1. Jesus doesn't go for the *jugular*, but for the *heart*, the **heart of the matter & heart of His message!**
 2. Instead of **jots & tittle of the Law**, He speaks about **words of life**.
- M. Nicodemus’ response was not a foolish question. He knew what it meant in his Jewish dictionary. He was not *gynecologically challenged*, he understood the whole birth process
1. He understood a radical change was necessary. But **HOW does it happen?** (9)
 2. Listen to his **heart cry**; he desires a **change**; he wants to be **different**.
 3. **Tennyson Poem:**
“*And oh for a man to rise in me, That the man that I am may cease to be!*”
 4. **Q: Maybe you long for the same today?**
- N. **First Birth** - born of water; born of the flesh.
- O. **Second Birth** - born from above; born again; born of the Spirit; reborn; regeneration(latin).
1. Our **first birth** leads to *death*, **but** our **second birth** brings *eternal life*.
- P. Some think *born of water* refers to **water baptism**. I think context defines it, in comparison to *born of flesh* in next vs.6.
1. Also, baptism speaks of **death** not life (Rom.6:3)
 2. The **birth of the flesh** coming in *a sac of water*.
 3. **Flesh is flesh; spirit is spirit; a vegetable stays a veggy; a pig stays a piggy; there’s no evolution from flesh to spirit!**

4. **Illustration:** 2 men sought to prove to their king whether a person [a] had to be *born a gentleman*, or whether [b] he could *become one by training, discipline, & ingrained habit*. Time passed, 1 sitting gloomily at an inn, ordered a cup of chocolate. Much to his amazement, bring it out was **the innkeepers cat**. Trained to stand up on its hind legs, balancing a tray in its forepaws. He bought the feline & off he went. **The other man** heard of this, discourage, then saw something in a window & purchased it, but kept it hidden, he showed up before the king. The 1 man showed his cat. The king applauded. Then the other pulled out his box & let a ½ dozen mice go...The cat forgot its training; It's natural instinct surfaced, & off ran the cat!
- a) Like Nicodemus, a *man in sin*, is still a *man in sin!* - It is not training, discipline, or ingrained habit that will help; but to be **reborn** a gentleman!

Q. Faith that does not drastically change my behavior will never change my destiny! Redpath

R. **WHERE DOES WIND COME FROM?** (8)

S. *Hmm, Did a breeze kick up?*

T. **Wind** - this can also be translated *the Spirit breaths where he chooses*.

1. Same word in both Hebrew & Greek, for both, *wind* & *Spirit*.
2. *Ruach*(Heb) *pneuma*(Gk) both are governed by the context. [pneumatic wrench]
3. **2 kinds of wind:** man-produced, God-produced.
 - a) Same way we must distinguish between *spirit of man* & *Spirit of God*.
 - b) *Only the Spirit of God can give power & it is a sovereign gift of grace.*
 - c) *The H.S. produces power, the flesh produces only confusion.* [The wind must turn the windmill, for the windmill cannot produce the wind]
4. *It's like the man who* tried to return his windmill because it didn't make wind. The owner said, "well there wasn't any wind". He said, "why would I buy it if there was already wind!" - Foolish, yes, but no more foolish than to live a Christian life by your own efforts, w/o the power of the H.S.
5. Like the **Scriptures**, we are *living epistles* that are God-breathed & energized.

U. **Just as** you don't know where the **wind** comes from or where it is going, **so** it is impossible to explain being **born of the Spirit!**

V. **JESUS, THE HEAVEN-MAN?** (9-13)

W. (13) No man has gained the heights of heaven. What Jesus spoke, came from the very secrets of heaven, that HE brought down.

X. **HOW IS JESUS LIKE A SNAKE?** (14,15)

Y. Familiar story in Numb.21:4-9. Israel murmured against God & Moses, so He sent fiery/*poisonous* serpents. The serpents killed a number of them, & made many others sick. As a **remedy** for their sin, God had Moses make a bronze serpent & **raise it on a pole for all to see**. If the people **looked at** the serpent with even a hint of faith in God's provision, they were healed.

1. All this was a striking **foreshadow** of Christ being **lifted up on the cross** to save those who were dying of sin & looked to Him in faith.

Z. Note 2 things: (1) The poisonous bite was **terminal** (2) Only **one cure** was provided!

AA. **Look with faith!** Not, concoct some remedy. Not fight the serpents. Not make an offering. Not pray. Not even look to Moses.

1. All that was required was a **simple look of faith**.

2. Didn't even matter how many times they were bit or how infected they were!

a) Jesus took our **infected nature** upon Himself, bore our **venom**, & imparts a **new nature** to us.

3. Like the **thief** on the cross, who merely looked to Jesus & said, "**Lord, remember me when You come into your kingdom.**" And Jesus said to him, "**Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.**"

BB.Q: Are you **more religious** than Nicodemus? And yet Jesus told him he was still missing heaven by 18" so to speak.

1. **Christ** had to **die** (14); **Sinners** have to **believe** (15).

CC.Q: Today, will **you** look to Jesus & receive **His serum** for your **snake bite of sin?**