



"THE KINGDOM OF GOD" John 3:1-21

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John 3:1-21 (1) *There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.* (2) *This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."* (3) *Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (4)

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he

is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (5) *Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (8) "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (9) Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" (10) Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?(11) "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. (12) "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (13) "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. (14) "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (15) "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (16) "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (17) "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (18) "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (19) "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (20) "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. (21) "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*

This before us is arguably the most famous story in all of scripture, especially considering the conspicuous presence of the great verse John 3:16. Sadly, because we know the verse and hear it echo in our heads, often that is ALL we hear when we read this passage. And there is so much more here than one verse, however great the verse is.

This man Nicodemus came to Jesus in the night. I doubt it was because that was the only time he could schedule an appointment! No, he no doubt came in the night for the benefit of the cover of darkness. He was a religious leader, and thus was supposed to have the answers, yet he was as empty and needing as the next guy. But because of his position he moved to protect his reputation. His street cred at this point was more important...or at least *as important* as the vacuum of the emptiness in his soul.

In the text Jesus says that unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. We tend to most often think of the “kingdom of God” as synonymous with the concept of heaven. And yet the “kingdom of God” is *something* ...some *place* that scripture speaks in terms of the present as well as the future. The Bible ...even Christ Himself, had much to say about this subject, and it gives us many attributes, qualifiers, and descriptive elements of said “kingdom.”

We are told in Matthew 6:33 that we must “seek” it. Matthew 19:24 says it is extremely hard...maybe nearly impossible, for a rich man to know its reality. Mathew 21:43 and Luke 9:62 tells us that we can firstly have it and then have it subsequently ‘taken from us’ because we fail to bear fruit in the fertile presence of its reality, because we fail to keep our eyes of the goal. Mark 4:11 tells us that in that place there is a “mystery” that is evident to us and we have an understanding therein that those on the outside do not. “Open eyes” that are not found beyond its borders. However, Mark 4:30 paints a picture of how unsavory folks can still inexplicably corrupt elements of that kingdom.

Mark 9:47, Galatians 5:21 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 speaks of the demand for purity to exist in this kingdom, so corruption and unfaithfulness can apparently exist for a time there, though it is eventually seriously dealt with. Elsewhere we read the language that such is “tossed out and burned”...*weeping and gnashing of teeth*. (Luke 13:28) Luke 17:21 tells us that this “place” is not a place we *go to*, but rather a “place”...a “state of being” that lives in us and possesses our whole life dynamic. Luke 18:17 says we must “receive” this kingdom and we must do so with the heart and faith of a child.

Acts 14:22 and 2 Thessalonians 1:5 burst the bubble of American religious entitlement by telling us that to enter into this “place” we must suffer much. It is therefore not the “free ride” that much of the greater church is attempting to embrace. It is not the “genie in the bottle” ready to grant us three wishes. Romans 14:17 adds to that thought by clarifying that this kingdom is not about stuff...nor comfort and consumption, but rather about “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” It holds within it an inexplicable “power” (I Corinthians 4:20)...and in this place we do not travel alone but with others on the same journey (Colossians 4:11). And if all of that is not mysterious enough, lastly herein, Jesus tells this man that, to know such a place and state, he must be “born again.”

Jesus told Nic that he needed to be “born again.” Ahhh yes...that oft overused phrase with the ambiguous meaning! What does such look like? Well, essentially, being born again is nothing less than the rejection of your citizenship. Not in America, but moreover in this world at large. This is not merely an act of *believing* in this “other country.” I believe there is a country called France, but I don't know the place and I don't place my allegiance in it. This is speaking of actually rejecting your citizenship to this worldly paradigm and moving to a new country. In this new country, the people speak a different language, spend their time differently, interact in an unusual manner, and are ruled by and love their king and each other very much. Our allegiance is “to the death’ and we don’t vote for our King but rather we literally worship Him!

In the book of Hebrews, the author speaks of this in the application of the great biblical Father of the Jewish nation, Abraham. Hebrews 11:8-10 *“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”*

Sadly, today there is this concept and understanding of “belief” that has entrenched itself in the greater protestant religious world. One that essentially entitles the bearer of a “belief of Jesus” to the “keys to the kingdom.” Meaning, I *believe* so “poke me with a fork, I’m done!” This convenient position has allowed for literally hundreds of thousands...if not *millions*, of folks to walk around with a mere mental ascent as to the reality that Jesus is the Son of God, and yet still know nothing of this “kingdom” of God that is so promised and manifested in our midst!

Said “belief” is instead our “lucky rabbits foot.” Our magic elixir to ward off difficulties in life and scary midnight scenarios that dance in our heads. It is our “ticket to eternal life”...our “get-out-of-hell-free” card. But what about this “kingdom thing” that is so vividly described in scripture? We don’t know what that is. So many who believe that Jesus is the Son of God still fail to live in or experience this "kingdom of God" in a real and powerful way.

We seemingly fail to grasp the nuances of the text. One of which...*and this is so very crucial to this matter*, says that to attain to eternal life one must believe IN Jesus. Not OF, but IN! I wonder about the multitude of souls that will be lost to the peace and joy of kingdom life here, and the perfection of eternal life *there*, all because of the absence of the clarity of those two little letters. TWO LETTERS for which I stand to lose *everything!* But the meaning of those two words...IN and OF are very different! One is merely a head action, and the other a head, heart and body action. And I dare say that in *this* principle lies the distinction between so many who all together hang their hat on the existence of Christianity. All will claim they are Christians, and yet so many, again, honestly know nothing of this “kingdom of God.”

So what does this kingdom look like? Well, it is a country unto itself. This one is not a democracy like America, but rather a *monarchy*. (Perhaps that why we often have such a problem with how it is run...no one is asking us our ‘2-cents worth’ and we don’t get to vote or blog our comments!) Admittedly, it is at *this* point and in *this* place manifested in the form more of an *embassy* than a nation with borders. But we know that an embassy in the midst of another country is still essentially the sovereign nation of the people who dwell there. Recently some of us drove past the Russian embassy in Prague. Quite an impressive gated community! To invade the Russian embassy there would be akin to invading Russia. So people tend to watch their manners when they visit “Russia away from Russia” in whatever nation it happens to appear.

As a child of God, my identity is to be first a Christian not an American, *and hear this*...it is not the same thing! Just as Christ spoke that truth to Nicodemus, I have been “reborn” not as an American but as a citizen of the nation...the *kingdom*, of Jehovah God. Here today, I may not be living in the bordered nation of that kingdom, but I live in its embassy. Or specifically and exacting, the embassy lives in me! I am an embassy of the kingdom of God! I am the sovereign soil of the king of that nation, Jesus Christ. That’s why a real Christian never dies, he just “moves home.” The king calls his ambassador home.

The misdirected effort of so many of us who sit in pews and chairs throughout America this morning, is the attempt to maintain "dual citizenship." But no such status exists in the plan of God. Such is not true salvation. Such is not truly born again. For in such a plan there exists the innate aspect of compromise, for which in actual Christianity there is no room. Jesus said, “*No servant can serve two masters*” (Luke 16:13). And James put it this way: “*Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God*” (James 4:4).

Ahhh...but we are talking literally about defecting here aren't we? Surrendering our citizenship and allegiance to this world. It's a much bigger step and decision than merely a visa visit. Jesus told Nicodemus "*We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.*" All I have today is to tell you the things I have seen. If I say I know this as truth, you have to decide for yourself. And that is what Jesus on this earth was saying. I as your pastor have shown you glimpses and moments of this kingdom. You have witnessed the miraculous here amongst you. The "kingdom" has been laid manifest before you. If you have been here amongst us in this fellowship for any amount of time, you too have seen these glimpses. You have seen the miraculous kingdom if but for only just a moments glimpse.

The IRS recently reported that in the first quarter of 2015, more Americans gave up their citizenship than at any point in history. Some did it for tax reasons, others for convenience, and some for love. The scripture says that God...He loved us so much...that He *gave*. He gave the life of His very Son so that we might have a "new country." He was that committed to this plan. Heb 11:15-16 says "*If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*" How much do you love Him today? Enough to give up your "earthly citizenship" for a new country? Because again, that is true rebirth.

Outside the gates of the embassy today the world seems to be a mess...a lost cause. There will be no fixing it. That king "has no clothes" and everyone seems afraid to say it. It's a wash. It has no answers for man. It has no peace and no solutions for purpose and reason. Jesus pointed out that "*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*"

How is a man born again? In the 1st chapter of this Gospel we read, "*He (Jesus Christ) came unto his own, and his own (according to the flesh, that is Israel) received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he the authority to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

One would be amiss if we were not to acknowledge the "end of the story" herein. After the events of chapter 3 of John, we see Nicodemus 'resurface' in chapter 7...where he stepped up, albeit somewhat tacitly, to defend Jesus before the "powers-that-be." He was obviously "on his way" to his new country! Then in John 20...Nicodemus and another guy who was in a similar situation of having trying to keep a low profile on this Christian thing...a guy named "Joseph of Arimathea", came out as followers of Christ. (John 19:38-40) The two had come and sought permission to take the body of the crucified Christ. They then took Christ and placed Him in the tomb that eventually would not hold Him!

Oh to have been a 'mouse in the corner' and to have heard the conversation that day between these two guys! What a wonderful and scary and daunting and miraculous and exciting moment in these two guys lives. In my mind's eye I imagine them taking out their passports from their pockets, and laying them down on the body of Jesus before they rolled the stone over the tomb that day. They wouldn't need them any longer. No more would they just live in Israel. They lived now in the "kingdom of God." They were gone, and they weren't coming back.