

A Study of John's Gospel

Lesson 4: The Beginning Public Ministry of Jesus, Part 3 (3:1-36)

December 25, 2011

Jesus began His public ministry in Jerusalem by cleansing the Temple from the greed and hypocrisy of the Jewish leader's accepted practices. He performed many signs that confirmed His claim as the Son of God (He declared that the Temple was His Father's house). Many believed. Jesus, however, knew the fickleness of man and the shallowness of their faith (2:23-25).

"How can a man be born when he is old?" (3:1-21)

One man, stirred by the actions and teachings of Jesus, was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus. The whole discussion recorded by John contrasted the spiritual nature of the prophesied eternal Kingdom with man's earthly anticipation. Jesus challenged the heart of Nicodemus through profound reasoning that should have been grasped by a "teacher of Israel". The Son of man came down from heaven, he explains, "to reveal to them in language spoken by human lips and in actions wrought by human hands what they could never have discovered either by human intuition or human striving" (Tasker). It is in this context that Jesus states, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...." Jesus talks more about how those in darkness react to a shining light. I wonder if John recorded the fact that Nicodemus came to Jesus "at night" to emphasize a sinful man acknowledging the true light that can offer eternal life.

"He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:22-36)

The last recorded testimony of John the Baptist is included in these verses. To his disciples, he describes the fulfilled joy that he experiences as he witnesses his God-given purpose unfold. He was the chosen forerunner of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. John the Baptist hears of the multitudes that are now following Jesus and encourages his disciples to transfer their allegiance from himself to Jesus. Again, we see John's humble heart; he truly understood his mission.

Questions:

1. Who was Nicodemus and what do other passages of scripture lead someone to conclude about his loyalty to Jesus (John 7:44-52; 19:39-40)?
2. What did Jesus say one must do to see the kingdom of God? How did Nicodemus respond?
3. How is the bronze serpent raised by Moses (Num 21:4-9) compared to God's eternal plan for man? (Consider what Jesus says in John 8:28; 12:32-34 in your answer.)
4. From verses 19-21, what does Jesus say about those who do not come to the light? How can Christians today be guilty of this?
5. What was John the Baptist's point of comparing himself to the friend of the bridegroom (vs. 29)?
6. Summarize John's testimony of Jesus. What does John say abides in those who do not believe in Jesus?