

“Be Born of the Spirit, Believe and Come to the Light!”

This Reading serves several important functions.

→**It reports Jesus summarizing the Christian Gospel.**

→**The Text serves as a transition between Jesus’ following the path of the Judge, which John the Baptist had urged upon him, and Jesus’ shift to a ministry of healing, forgiveness, and his being God’s Suffering Servant – the manifestation of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love.**

→**It also demonstrates the process through which one receives and lives out salvation and eternal life.**

Many Christians have memorized the King James Version of John 3:16. It is especially meaningful because through it Jesus testifies to why God sought to save humanity through the sending of the Divine Parent’s Son. One historical note about translating today’s Scripture is how **Jerome incorrectly translated the original Greek of this text into the Latin Vulgate. In doing so, he changed verse 16 to say, “only begotten Son,” instead of “only Son.”** Jerome intentionally did that to bolster his position in an argument, which was going on in the larger Church over the subject of whether Jesus was begotten by God or made by the Creator. The translators of the King James Version did not go back to the original Greek New Testament but, instead, used the Vulgate, as if, it was the original source, even though, the original source of the Gospel of John was in Greek and John 3:16 in Greek does not include the word, “begotten”.

Today’s Reading, John 3:1 through 21, is the report of a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the religious authorities in Jerusalem. The Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not even mention Nicodemus. The failure of the Synoptics to mention him is further evidence of how the Gospel of John is often more historically based than the Synoptics because it is an eyewitness account. Not only was Nicodemus important to the gospel story because of today’s Scripture and since he was a member of the Sanhedrin but, also, because he helped Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus.

Evidently, being part of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus believed it was only safe for him to come to Jesus at night because he was afraid of what the Sanhedrin would do to him, if they found out what he said when he visited Jesus. I suspect Nicodemus initiated their discussion in Greek, so most persons, who might happen upon them, would not understand what they were saying. Amazingly, Nicodemus acknowledged Jesus was sent by God, saying in **verse 2, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher sent by God. No one could perform the miracles you are doing unless God were with him.”**

In verses 3 through 8, Nicodemus repeatedly misunderstood what Jesus was talking about. In order for this scene to make sense, the conversation had to take place using the Greek language. Since the Official Language of the Roman Governor’s Court and of the Sanhedrin, the religious council in Jerusalem, were both Greek and Jesus participated in a meeting of the Sanhedrin and was interrogated in the Governor’s Court, **Jesus most likely spoke Greek.** Nicodemus, as a member of the Sanhedrin, had to speak Greek. Again, **Nicodemus’ misunderstanding of what Jesus meant only works, if they conversed in the Greek language. The main reason this is the case is only the Greek language uses the same word to mean either “again” or “from above”.**

Nicodemus kept thinking Jesus was telling him he would have to be physically **“born again” or “born a second time”**. The translators of our Pew Bible’s version and many of our sisters and brothers in Christ, evidently felt comfortable making Nicodemus’ mistake of thinking Jesus meant “born again”, instead of “born from above”. The Pew Bible acknowledges another meaning, in the footnotes. Using this other meaning, what Jesus Christ revealed was one needs to **“be born from above” to see the Kingdom of God.** Clarity comes as **verses 5 and 6 read, “I am telling you the truth,’ replied Jesus, ‘that no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. A person is born physically of human**

parents, but is born spiritually of the Spirit.’”

After Nicodemus questioned how he could be *“born spiritually of the Spirit”*, Jesus chastised him for being a great teacher but not knowing the answer to his own question. **In verses 14 through 17, Jesus explained one obtains this Spirit through God’s Self-Giving and Suffering “Agape Love” shown in God’s Son, who was sent to us to die – as proof of the Divine Parent’s Love for us – for the salvation of the world!** Verse 17 reports Jesus telling Nicodemus about his path, which was not to be the Judge as John the Baptist urged upon him but to be God’s Suffering Servant – the Embodiment of God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love – to be our Savior! **Jesus said in vs. 17, “For God did not send His Son into the world to be its Judge, but to be its Savior.”**

Jesus knew he did not need to do the judging. He gave a broad outline of how judgment works in verses 18 through 21. Jesus, specifically explained how some had brought judgment upon themselves in **verse 18, “Those who believe in the Son are not judged; but those who do not believe have already been judged, because they have not believed in God’s Only Son.”** The way many have translated and interpreted verse 18 suggests everyone, who does not believe in God’s Only Son is “already” judged.

However, I perceive Jesus was speaking directly to Nicodemus’ situation where many of his fellow members of the Sanhedrin had “already” decided to not believe in Jesus, and thus, had “already” brought judgment on themselves. Indeed, the Sanhedrin had “already” been plotting to kill Jesus! Some scholars have indicated the Sanhedrin was considered corrupt by many long before the public ministry of Jesus. Those scholars found one of the motives for the Qumran movement – enemies of the Sanhedrin was their unhappiness with the corruption of the Sanhedrin. **So, the identity of the persons of whom Jesus spoke when he said they had “already” been judged, clearly applied, at least in part, to the nonbelieving members of the Sanhedrin.**

Nicodemus was different from the nonbelieving members of the Sanhedrin, for he recognized Jesus was sent by God. Jesus went on to describe the tendency to hide by those like the Sanhedrin, who choose the path of corruption and evil. **Jesus disclosed in verses 19 through 20, “This is how the judgment works: the Light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the Light, because their deeds are evil. Those who do evil things hate the Light and will not come to the Light, because they do not want their evil deeds to be shown up.”** Most members of the Sanhedrin sought to hide their evil scheming to kill Jesus throughout his public ministry. Indeed, they wanted Jesus dead, so his truthful revelations of their corruption and hypocrisy would come to an end.

On the other hand, Jesus went on to say, in **verse 21, “But those who do what is true come to the Light in order that the Light may show that what they did was in obedience to God.”** Yes, those, who live the way of truth, seek the Light to reveal they are obedient to God. Indeed, those who believe in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God – *“the Light”*, follow his example of living out God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love in obedience to God’s Love!

Summing up, Jesus revealed being *“born from above”* comes through the Holy Spirit. One is thus enabled by the Spirit to seek and live the truth and to come to the Light. Our openness to the Holy Spirit comes because God’s Self-Giving and Suffering Love was demonstrated in *“the Only Son”* when he was lifted up in his death and resurrection! **Remember, Jesus said in verses 14 through 15, “As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”** Be born from above by the Spirit, Believe in God’s Son, and Live in the Light. **Be guided by the Spirit – live self-giving love, be agents of Jesus’ loving acceptance and invitation, and seek God’s Loving Purpose! Amen.**