

Sermon 23-4-23 "How can a man be born when he is old?" (CG) John 3:1-21

"THAT'S JUST ABSURD!"

Have you ever caught yourself saying that in conversation with a friend? Maybe in reaction to a statement from a well-known public figure.

It is always important when preaching from the Bible to look at the context of the passage under consideration. In the case of this encounter Jesus had with Nicodemus, look back at the last verse of chapter 2 where John records, "*He (Jesus) did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in man.*" Then John 3 begins, "*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus.*" Always remember when we encounter Jesus, he reads us like a book - our thoughts, our desires, our character, warts and all.

We read that this meeting took place at night. Maybe this was because it was the best time to have a real conversation with Jesus, or because he did not want his visit to be known to his fellow Jewish leaders.

Nicodemus' opening words were either a form of flattery or said out of genuine respect for who Jesus was, "*Rabbi, how do we know you are a teacher come from God? Because of the miraculous signs you are doing.*"

It is time to look back again to the end of chapter 2 where John tells us, "*Many people saw the miraculous signs Jesus was doing and believed in his name, BUT Jesus would not trust himself to them for he knew all men.*"

So, Jesus ignores the flattery and seems to say, "Let's get to the heart of the matter, Nicodemus." Jesus can always be trusted. He never pulls the wool over our eyes. He knows the truth about us, and he reveals the whole truth about God. He exposes Nicodemus' real spiritual need by saying, "No one (not even you, Nicodemus) can see the kingdom of God unless he is **BORN AGAIN.**"

I wonder if you have ever been taken aback by what someone said to you - an insult or a startling piece of news? We guess that Nicodemus was rocked back on his heels by Jesus' reply which ignored his assessment of Jesus ("*we know...*"). You see, Jesus was not really interested in Nicodemus' assessment of him. It was rather his estimate of Nicodemus that mattered.

By this time, Nicodemus reacts impatiently, sarcastically with the question, "**HOW CAN A MAN BE BORN WHEN HE IS OLD?**" He takes Jesus literally and says derisively, "*Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb!*" Flattery has now turned to ridicule.

Jesus repeats himself, "*I tell you the truth.*" This is not absurd. This is at the heart of what every human being needs to hear. "*Water*" cleanses the outer body - we use it every day. "*Spirit*" reaches our deepest inward being. So, Jesus asks, "*Why are you so surprised at my saying, you must be born again?*"

At this point, you can imagine Nicodemus scratching his head as he asks, "*How can this be?*" All that follows is Jesus' explanation of just what this means. He is amazed that this man who is an expert on the Old Testament has missed this truth. Listen to the words of the prophet Ezekiel which Nicodemus almost certainly would have read: "*I (God) will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a **NEW***"

*heart and put a **NEW** spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."*

"Your deepest need", says Jesus to Nicodemus, "is to receive a **NEW** spiritual **LIFE** from God through personal faith in me, the one who has come from God to whom the prophets had been pointing as the coming Messiah."

When Jesus used the words "**LIFTED UP**" Nicodemus would have known all about Moses lifting up the snake to heal all those who looked up to it in the desert. But now, Jesus, the Son of Man says he must be **LIFTED UP** on a cross so that "*everyone who believes in him may have **ETERNAL LIFE.***"

When you give a gift to someone in the family, it is an expression of your love for that person. When God gave up his one and only Son, his most precious possession, we can only begin to measure how much he loves us.

We live at a time when the admirable desire for **INCLUSIVENESS** for all in our society is being strongly encouraged as a top priority. Well now, **HERE IS REAL INCLUSIVENESS**. Notice the references in the passage before us to "Whoever". No matter who we are, rich/poor/intellectual/illiterate/famous/ordinary, God's gift of **ETERNAL LIFE** is offered freely to all. It is received by those who put their faith in Jesus alone, and sadly rejected by those who refuse the offer of his love for them. Listen to what John tells us in the opening chapter of his gospel: "*To all who received him (Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but **BORN OF GOD***".

You see, God is in the business of **SAVING** not condemning, but we condemn ourselves if we choose to turn away from Jesus.

So, we come to the verdict. Through coming to Jesus, **LIGHT** has invaded the darkness in us and the world. The choice is ours between these two. We will sing these familiar words in a few minutes, "In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song; this cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm."

If we choose **LIGHT** we are inviting Jesus, the **LIGHT OF THE WORLD**, into our inmost heart. When that happens to us, a brand new person is **BORN** and God begins his mighty work in us. Our priorities begin to change as Christ the Lord instead of us takes centre stage in our daily lives.

Many of us here this morning have taken that step of receiving Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, but some may still be asking the same question as Nicodemus, "*HOW CAN THIS BE?*" Well, it is fairly clear from future events that Nicodemus became a follower of Jesus over a period of time. The same can be true for you if you recognise who Jesus is and accept what he has done through his death on the cross to make it possible to become **NEW-BORN** children of God.

Such an encounter with Jesus can enable us to be transformed into his likeness and so become a brand-new person. So, thank God today that any man or woman "**CAN BE BORN WHEN THEY ARE OLD!**"