

Spiritual Paternity from Above

John 3:1-8

While at the Passover feast in Jerusalem, many people “believed” in the name of Jesus. (John 2:23-25) But John tells us that the Lord did not entrust himself to them because he knew what was in man. There are different sorts of belief. And if faith is to be true it must spring forth from the proper source. It is in the third chapter of John’s gospel that we find recorded the teaching of our Lord about the inward change that must take place, if true faith is to be found.

A ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus, approached the Lord one night with an affirmation that Jesus was clearly heaven sent. He called the Lord “Rabbi” and said that the signs which the Lord had done demonstrated that God was with him. The Lord’s reply may have been a recognition that such a confession could only come from a heart that had been changed by divine power. Or, the Lord may have simply changed the subject. At any rate the Lord needed to teach truth and Nicodemus needed to learn a great deal more than he knew.

The Lord told Nicodemus that a person could not see God’s kingdom unless they were first “born again.” The Greek word “gennao” means to be born or to be begotten. A second birth must take place which involves divine action. There must be a begetting that only God can bring about. That truth is also suggested by “another” the Greek word that is usually translated “again.” In addition to “again” it also carries the meaning of “from above.” Of course Nicodemus and the Lord were not speaking Greek. They were conversing in Aramaic. But the truth is still the same. We must have a second birth that only God can bring about. We must experience a spiritual begetting that is heavenly in its origin.

Nicodemus would have understood the need for divine intervention. But what confused him was the idea of a grown man needing a second birth. He asked, “How can a man be born when he is old?” “Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” The Lord’s reply made clear the need for a spiritual birth for all who would be citizens of God’s kingdom. We must be born of water **and** of the Spirit. In other words, we must be born into this world. We must have a fleshly birth. We are born of water; we come from our mother’s womb. But we must also have a spiritual birth. We must be twice born. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.”

And, this new birth is mysterious and beyond our control. It is like the wind. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” “So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Can we control the wind? Of course not. Storms arise and we rush to find shelter. We do not say, “I believe that I will cause the wind to blow today, and I will restrain that wind to twenty miles per hour.”

In the same way we cannot control this gracious activity of the Lord. The Spirit comes; a human being is born again. But how do we know that this is so? When the wind blows there is evidence. The leaves of the tree are set in motion. If the wind is harsh enough, the tree is blown down. We do not see the wind, but we see evidence that it is there.

So it is when the spiritual winds begin to blow. We do not see what God is doing in the human heart. But the evidence will come. A life that was essentially self serving will become selfless in the service of others. The Holy Spirit, dwelling within, will move

us to imitate the self sacrificing love of our Savior. The love that took him to the cross for us will take us to a new kind of life. Where there was hostility there will be love. Where there was rebellion there will be joy in Christ. Where there was dissatisfaction there will be peace. Where there was impatience there will be patience. Where there was harshness in word and deed there will be kindness in word and deed. Goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control will come from an unseen work of the Holy Spirit. He will convict us of our sinful desires and call us to a new kind of life. In other words, he will make us citizens of God's kingdom and grant to us a new way of living because we have been born anew or begotten from above.

by Joe Nesom