

## **WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY**

### Putting the Professor in His Place

#### **Introduction**

Most of us involved in teaching and preaching ought to know that we are all subject to criticism, rebuke and contradiction. Some of this is good for we are all to be “Berean” in our Christian life, “. . . *examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.*” (Acts 17:11, ESV). And this discipline is not just your local pastor and elders, but it should encompass everything you read and listen to – from anyone.

Sometimes the critiques are not valid. But if Jesus assesses you, you better listen. That’s what happened to Nicodemus.

**Context:** [John 3:1-8](#) Nicodemus a devout religious Jewish leader is wondering if what he and others are seeing in the unfolding of the promised Kingdom of God. Jesus tells him that he cannot see, experience or be part of the Kingdom of God unless he is born from above. Jesus then gives him a theology lesson on this miracle called the New Birth. The conversation continues.

**Text:** [John 3:9–15](#)

**MAIN POINT** → Jesus confronts the professor’s ignorance.

#### **Exposition**

To all that Jesus has taught, the very learned man says, “How can these things be?” When we read words like that, we don’t know the tone that he used. Was he asking in a respectful way like Mary to the Angel: “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”<sup>1</sup> Or is he mocking and skeptical? I think it’s the latter because of how Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” Jesus retorts: “You are Reverend, Professor, Doctor Nicodemus and you don’t get it?” More than that we note that Jesus uses the definite article: THE teacher. You are the top dog, the head of the pack, the one and only leader and you don’t get it!

So, we notice that Jesus does not debate or argue. In fact, this is the last recorded words out of Nicodemus’ mouth. So how does Jesus respond to this unbelieving remark? He hits him with 4 big punches.

1. My authority and credibility exceed yours and you don’t believe me. For the third time Jesus uses the phrase, “truly, truly”. It is uncertain what he means when he says “we speak of what we see.” Is he talking about “we” meaning he and the disciples? Is he speak of “we” as in the

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 1:34). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Triune God? I think it's the latter<sup>2</sup>. As to himself he says that he is the only one who has ever come from Heaven. As the Son of Man, he was enthroned as King of kings. He has taken on human flesh and come to earth. Who better could speak with authority about the Kingdom?

2. Because you fail to understand the most elementary of Kingdom truths you will never understand the complexity and the fullness of the Kingdom. Jesus did not say, "I tell you about earthly things and you believe them." He said, "I tell you about earthly things and you DON'T believe." What are these earthly things? Does he mean things like a washing, heart change, wind, etc.? A better understanding would be: "I tell you about things that occur here on earth, within your experience – things like the new birth, conversion, a transformed heart, etc. and you don't believe me, how are you going to accept the magnitude and the mysterious of the established, culminated Kingdom, yet to come?" What Jesus is saying to Nicodemus (and to us) is really important: if you stumble over elementary things like God's sovereignty, the New Birth, genuine faith, etc. – entry level things in God's redemptive story – you won't get the included in the glorious, consummated Kingdom.
3. You fail to understand that the Old Testament and how to interpret it. [Verse 10](#) is a sharp rebuke to THE teacher in Israel. The implication is clear. The doctrine of regeneration or New Birth is not a new concept. It is taught clearly in the Old Testament. Let me just give you a "bird's eye view", a sampling of what Nicodemus missed:
  - a. In [Deuteronomy 28-30](#), Moses repeats the commandments of God for Israel with the consequences if they do or they don't. but notice Deuteronomy 29:4 (ESV) "But to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear." What's he saying? "Here's the commands but you can't obey them unless God gives you a new heart." He repeats the idea in the very next chapter: "*And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*" (Deuteronomy 30:6, ESV)
  - b. In [Psalm 87](#) (we won't look at it) but latter you should note that the psalmist mentions foreigners to Israel that were not physically born in Zion, but in a sense, they experienced a second birth whereby they were counted among those who belonged to God's realm. Psalm 87 may be one of the passages from which Jesus expected Nicodemus to recognize His teaching on the new birth from above.
  - c. From [Ezekiel 36](#) and [37](#) we have powerful images of the new birth. Ezekiel 37 is the infamous valley of dry bones. They are dead. How shall they live? Answer: "*Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus*

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<sup>2</sup> "The "we" represents the voice of the Triune Godhead. Jesus is the Living Revealer, the voice of God, and the witness is that of the Spirit also behind what Jesus is saying." - Osborne, G. R. (2018). [John: Verse by Verse](#). (J. Reimer, E. Ritzema, D. Thevenaz, & R. Brant, Eds.) (p. 81). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

*says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army." (Ezekiel 37:9–10, ESV)*

- d. And finally, we should never miss the tremendous statements of new birth, a new Spirit-empowered heart found in [Jeremiah 31](#) and [32](#).

And of course, not only did Nicodemus miss the very specific promises of regeneration in the Old Testament, he completely failed to interpret it correctly. Jesus gives an example of the account in [Numbers 21](#). The fact that many in Israel were saved physically by looking in faith to the bronze serpent actually typified, pointed to, the fulfillment when Christ would suffer and die on a Cross for sinners; and those that put their trust in Him will be saved. Nicodemus knew the Old Testament, but he did not know how to interpret it.

4. Finally, I have the authority to grant eternal life to anyone who believes in me. The last punch that Jesus gives is found in verse 15: *"that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."* Eternal life cannot be experienced unless one is born from above and it is not obtained apart from faith – faith in Jesus Christ alone. It has nothing to do with national or family heritage. It has nothing to do with education or social standing. It is faith alone in Jesus alone. How could Jesus make such a brazen claim? Later in this Gospel he will explain. Notice John 5:21 (ESV):
  - a. "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will."

### **Application**

I think the most important thing that this passage teaches us is not about Nicodemus' ignorance, nor about how to argue with a religious expert, no, it gives us amazing insight into the authority, the supremacy and the glory of Jesus Christ. We note 2 points in particular:

- #1. First (v. 13), Jesus is the Son of Man who descended from heaven and who alone can reveal heavenly things. Jesus' favorite designation of himself was Son of Man. The Son of Man was seated on his throne in glory and pictured in [Daniel 7:13–14](#). This glorious king, the Son of God, came to earth as the Son of Man to seek and to save the lost. We know people who have gone to heaven, but only Christ, the Son of Man has come from heaven. This overrules all claims of so-called revelation, whether it is Mohamed or Joseph Smith, or whomever. Jesus is the uncontested authority on spiritual matters.
- #2. Second (vv. 14-15), the purpose of the Son of Man's coming down from heaven is to be lifted up on the cross "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

It is the very next verse John 3:16 that provides for us the motivation for such a merciful act. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16, ESV).