

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus at night and said, Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him. <sup>3</sup> In reply Jesus declared, I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. <sup>4</sup> How can a man be born when he is old? Nicodemus asked. Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born! <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. <sup>9</sup> How can this be? Nicodemus asked. <sup>10</sup> You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus, and do you not understand these things? <sup>11</sup> I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup> I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No-one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

#### THY KINGDOM COME

- I. The kingdom come through regeneration
- II. The kingdom resides in the heart
- III. The kingdom reaches completeness in heaven

Dear citizens of the kingdom of our God,

The concept of the kingdom of God is something we often speak of in our church. It is something we pray about regularly. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we actually ask for the kingdom of God to come to us and to many more. In asking for the kingdom to come we are asking God to hallow His name among us and we are asking for God's will to be done in and through us.

If there were people in Jesus' day who should have understood what the kingdom of God is and known how the kingdom of God comes, they should have been the ruling seventy, called the Sanhedrin. They should have been men who were full of the Spirit and therefore able to lead Israel. However, what we have revealed in this text tells another story. Nicodemus doesn't seem to have a clue in regard to what Jesus is talking about, when He refers to the kingdom of God.

This morning we want to concentrate on the subject of the kingdom of God. We want to look at how the kingdom of God comes, where the kingdom of God is to be found and finally look at the fact of its eternal nature.

The text begins, **Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.** <sup>2</sup> **He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”** Pharisees were squeaky clean in their outward appearance and conduct. Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the publican in the temple emphasizes the general attitude of the Pharisees. Knowing how secure the Pharisees felt in themselves, you have to ask yourself why this man would have come to see Jesus.

Obviously it was not something he wanted known at the time or he would have come in broad day light. The answer to our question is that God wanted Him to hear what Jesus had to say. Certainly the man was curious. He had heard of the miracles. He and his friends had discussed Jesus’ activities. He undoubtedly believed in the miracles. He says as much when he refers to the fact that no one could do these things unless God was with him.

Jesus is not impressed by these remarks of Nicodemus. He could in no way be satisfied with such a faith. Jesus wanted Nicodemus to move beyond faith in miracles. The people who were witnesses to Jesus’ miraculously feeding five thousand had faith in miracles. They wanted this kind of miracles worker as a king. But when Jesus said He was the Bread of life, they left Him for better things to do. Nicodemus, however, remained.

Jesus doesn’t cut Nicodemus any slack. He gets right to the point. **In reply Jesus declared, I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.** Regeneration! Regeneration is the way a person enters into the kingdom of God. As a matter of fact, a person isn’t even going to see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Regeneration is an absolute requirement. There is no other way for a person to come into the kingdom. When Jesus repeated this requirement He added another element. Listen. **I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.** Now Jesus isn’t talking about seeing the kingdom. He is speaking of entering the kingdom. In place of ‘born again’ He substitutes ‘born of water and the Spirit.’

Jesus said this in response to Nicodemus’s question about being born a second time by entering again into his mother’s womb. Stop to think of it. If being born the first time from his mother’s womb resulted in his need for regeneration, it stands to reason that if he were to repeat the process, the result would still be the same. Jesus says as much. **Flesh gives birth to flesh.** Sinful parents bear sinful children every time.

On the other hand, **the Spirit gives birth to spirit.** How does He do that? He does it by bringing a person to faith in Jesus. This is not an observable action on the part of the Spirit. Jesus explains it this way. **The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.** The wind is not visible. Only the affects of the wind can be seen. I cannot see the Spirit implanting faith in a person’s heart, but I can hear the confession of faith that flows from the lips of the believer. I can’t see the Spirit

working through water and the Word in Holy Baptism, but I know the promise of God that says, "Baptism saves." Baptism can only save because it is a means through which the Spirit of God instills faith as He promises. Peter said on Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for whom the Lord our God will call." This is being born again.

This did not clear it up for Nicodemus. A second time he wanted to know how this can be. Wait a minute, Nicodemus. You are a leader in Israel. You should know the answer to your own question. What was his problem? It was the result of years of being taught wrong. He had been misled into thinking that he had to do some meritorious deeds to earn his way into the kingdom. Don't be surprised. There are a lot of Christians today who struggle with the same problem. Ask them why they believe they are going to heaven and they will list off a litany of things they have done. They have gone to worship regularly. They have supported the ministry of the church. They have been faithful to their spouse. They have been good neighbors. They have made their decision for Christ. The list goes on and on. Listen to Jesus. **I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe, how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?**

Okay, how does the kingdom of God come? It comes through the Holy Spirit regenerating a person by bringing him to repentance and faith in Jesus. This is the cleansing act of God that makes us fit to be received into His kingdom. Where then is the kingdom of God to be found? It is found in every heart that believes and trusts in Jesus. The kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. Therefore whoever enters must also be a spiritual person. The trouble is that we are born into this world with a carnal nature. **Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh.** We are spiritually dead, blind, enemies of God as we come crying and kicking into this life. We add to this devastating condition by committing sins consistent with our sinful nature.

It is clear that we and Nicodemus need help from someone apart from ourselves and from someone who is not flesh born of flesh. We need Jesus and we need the Holy Spirit to introduce us to Him and to open our hearts to believe in Jesus. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. As we had nothing to do with our physical birth, there is nothing we can do to bring about our spiritual birth.

This is how God made us His own. **No-one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.** <sup>14</sup> **Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,** <sup>15</sup> **that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.** <sup>16</sup> **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** <sup>17</sup> **For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.** God intervened. He sent His Son into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. Here is the help that we needed. Just as taking God at His Word and looking to the brass serpent on the pole in the wilderness in the midst of the camp saved every Israelite who did so; the Son of Man, Jesus, was lifted up on the cross and everyone who looks to Him in faith is saved from sin, death and hell. He is given citizenship in the kingdom of God and has a place secured for him in heaven. It is that simple.

The results, however, are far reaching. Can you imagine what it means that we will spend eternity in heaven? First of all the duration of this joy is incomprehensible for us. Our whole experience is joy mixed with trouble and disaster. There our joy will be pure and complete. We will not have to hold our breath thinking that it will suddenly come to an end. It will always be the same. Wow! Most significantly – we will be living in the presence of God. We will see Jesus face to face. You see, the best is yet to come. This God has done for the world of mankind. **God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.** Don't you think we ought to be letting more and more people know this? Amen.