

## John – Lesson Four (2:13–3:21)

Welcome to this week's lesson! We have a lot to cover today, including some really crucial passages of Scripture. Please take a moment to pray and ask the Lord to speak to you and teach you as you study – He is the only one who can really instruct you and bring a message to your heart! Then take a look in your Bible at John 2 and get the context as we approach verse 13.

**<sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. <sup>15</sup>And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."**

Once a year, the Jews would all gather to celebrate the Passover. This was a remembrance of when the Lord delivered the people of Israel from the "plague of the firstborn" while they were in Egypt and led them out from the oppressive rule of Pharaoh. The Lord gave them instructions on how to set themselves apart so that the angel of the Lord would "pass over" them when it went through Egypt and killed all the firstborn. (If you have time, you can read this powerful account in Exodus 12.) Each year, they gathered together to commemorate this event and worship the Lord for His deliverance. Much of what we know about the Lord's timetable of ministry is marked by the Passover, as He faithfully went each year. This was the first time He went since going public with His ministry, and He entered a scene in the temple that He was not pleased with (to say the least!). What exactly did Jesus do, and does this surprise you?

Friends, there is such a thing as "righteous anger". Jesus never sinned and yet here He is driving people out of His temple with a whip and turning over their tables. This would have been loud and would have made a huge mess! He was dumping money all over the place and letting animals loose and shooing people out of the temple – people who were probably confused and extremely angry. I think sometimes we put Jesus into a gentle little feminine box . . . but He was strong and powerful and extremely passionate. In fact, it says here that the disciples related this to the quote from Psalm 69:9 that says "Zeal for your house will consume me". To put this in context, take a look at what exactly was happening here:

Judea was under the rule of the Romans, and the money in current use was Roman coin. However, the Jewish law required that every man should pay a tribute to the service of the sanctuary of "half a shekel" (Exodus 30:11-16), a Jewish coin. It became, therefore, a matter of convenience to have a place where the Roman coin could be exchanged for the Jewish half shekel. The money-changers provided this convenience, but would demand a small sum for the exchange. Because so many thousands came up to the great feasts, changing money was a very profitable business and one that resulted in fraud and oppression of the poor. Similarly, according to the Law, two doves or pigeons were required to be offered in sacrifice (Leviticus 14:22; Luke 2:24). Yet it was difficult to bring them from the distant parts of Judea, so a lucrative business selling the birds sprang up, with the sellers gouging the faithful by charging exorbitant prices. ([www.gotquestions.org/temple-cleanse.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/temple-cleanse.html))

Not only that, but these practices were happening *in* the temple! I see a couple of applications here... First of all, the Lord is protective of His church! Take a moment to ponder . . . what exactly was Jesus protecting? What was the temple to be used for? What is the church today to be about?

And secondly, I believe today's application can also follow from 1 Corinthians 6:19. What does it say is the temple?

I'd like you to keep your Bible open and read the context there – start with verse 9 and read all the way to verse 20. Jot down anything that stands out to you.

Oh sisters, zeal for the Lord's temple – YOU – consumes Him! Our bodies have been made to glorify Him. We have been bought with a price . . . therefore let's honor God with our bodies. I'm not sure what kind of application this holds for you, but its implications are far-reaching. What we look at, what we do, what we eat, how we spend our time, and so much more. As 1 Corinthians 6:12 tells us, what is "lawful" is not always "beneficial" . . . and we are not to be mastered by anything but the Lord. I think Jesus wants to come in and turn some tables over in our lives sometimes – wake us up to the reality of what we are doing. Because the exact same things you wrote down to the question about what the church is to be about are what we are to be about individually. Take a look at that list . . . is that what is going on in the Lord's temple today, namely *your body*? I know this is a prodding question . . . but sometimes the Lord wants to be more than a "gentleman" in your life . . . sometimes He needs to be the Man who cleansed the temple with a whip. Let's be willing to let Him. Reflect on these things here.

Then the Jews ask Him to do a miracle to prove that He had the authority to do what He just did. Check this out...

**<sup>18</sup>So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking about the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.**

So here He was, standing in the temple, and answering their question with a challenge to destroy the temple and He would build it again in three days. They were astounded by His response, because it had taken their people a long time to build it. But as John clarifies for us, Jesus was talking about the temple of His own body, which the Jews would indeed "destroy" with their crucifixion of Him just a few years later, and which He did indeed raise again in three days. I love John's note here that the disciples remembered His saying this after the resurrection and *believed* in Him. That certainly seems to be a theme of this book, and of Jesus' words and deeds . . . to bring about belief in Him. We are going to see this again in the very next sentence.

**<sup>23</sup>Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. <sup>24</sup>But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup>and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.**

This is a time when I wish we could see the Greek because our English does not do it justice. Look at the word "believed" in verse 23 . . . and then look at the word "entrust" in verse 24. Believe it or not (pun intended ☺), those are the same Greek word *pisteuo*. So it is literally saying that many people believed in Him, but He himself did not believe in (or trust) them. Verse 25 says that He didn't need anyone to "bear witness" (there's that phrase again) about man to Him, because He already knew what was in them. He knew what Jeremiah 17:9 told us, "The heart is deceitful above all things." He knew that in just a few years, those same people would turn against Him. Oh, Jesus, thank You for Your mercy upon us . . . we are an undeserving people. Thank You for your grace.

And now the context of the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16 . . . the account of Nicodemus. This narrative follows directly out of what we just discussed – this is one of the people Jesus did not "entrust" himself to. Nicodemus may have believed in his head, but he really didn't have true faith in Jesus. It's like John is moving directly into this story as an example of what he's talking about.

**<sup>1</sup>Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." <sup>4</sup>Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of**

the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup>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.” <sup>9</sup>Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” <sup>10</sup>Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? <sup>11</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup>If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

What is the context here – who is Nicodemus, and when does he choose to visit Jesus? Why do you think he does this?

Nicodemus is described here as a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews, and “the teacher of Israel”. He comes to Jesus at a time when not too many people were likely to be around, and tells Jesus that he knows that He is a teacher from God because no one else would have been able to do the kinds of things He was doing. And then what Jesus says is quite peculiar, if you ask me. Take a look at verses 2–3 and pay attention to what they both say. It’s like Jesus doesn’t even respond to what Nicodemus says, but instead responds to what He knows is going on in his heart. I think this is what Jesus sometimes does with us. We think we know what we want from the Lord, what we are seeking and what we want to say to Him . . . and then it seems as though He doesn’t even respond to that, but instead cuts to the heart of what we really need and what we are really deep-down seeking, even if we aren’t aware of what that is. We have an amazing all-knowing God! Any thoughts on this? Experiences with this?

And now for the heart of this narrative – the idea that we need to be “born again”. Nicodemus found this concept to be a bit strange, as you can tell with his questions. I think that we have heard this phrase so often that its novelty has worn off. But the only birth people had ever heard of was the one where you come out of your pregnant momma’s belly. The idea that you needed to be born *again* was a pretty foreign concept. Jesus was saying that there was a spiritual birth that needed to take place in a person’s life in order for them to see (v. 3) and enter (v.5) the kingdom of God. Because without that spiritual birth, we are spiritually *dead*. Take a look at Genesis 2:16–17 – what does it say would happen if Adam and Eve ate from the tree that they were commanded not to?

They did not physically die that day – they spiritually died. And that spiritual death was passed on to all humankind (Romans 5:12). We have already looked at this Scripture once, but I think it’s so important that we see it again, in this context of being dead spiritually and then the Lord making us alive again, or giving us that new rebirth. Open your Bibles to Ephesians 2 and read verses 1–5. Write down what it says about being dead and being made alive:

It’s amazing to me that Jesus tells Nicodemus he needs to be born again, because the truth of the matter is that when we are born, we really don’t have much to do with that process at all. You cannot make yourself be born again spiritually, no more than you can make yourself come out of your mother’s womb. It is a supernatural process that happens beyond our control. Look back at Ephesians 2 again and this time, look at verses 6–9. Please copy verses 8–9 here:

While there is a part that we play – we are told to repent and believe and receive and trust and have faith – the actual rebirthing process where the Lord saves us and makes us new is something only He can do. We repent, but He is the one who redeems. We surrender, but He is the one who saves. Thank You, Jesus, for saving us in a way that only You can!

I have to flat-out ask . . . have you been “born again”? Really think about that question, and then either write a response of thanksgiving to the Lord for His salvation, or be honest in where you are at with God and what you are seeking.

I could point out a lot more things from this passage, but there is just one more that I want to mention – the “wind”. That word is actually the same Greek word as is translated “Spirit” in verses 5–8. The word can be translated either “spirit” or “wind”. I don’t know about you, but I just find that kind of thing fascinating! I think there are a lot of possible applications here, but what stands out to me is the mystery of it all. Salvation is something that just can’t be explained logically sometimes. There is evidence of this spiritual rebirth – you can see the effects of a changed heart and life (just like you can see the leaves rustling in the wind). But you can’t exactly “see” the rebirth itself – sometimes you can’t even pinpoint the exact time it happened or explain exactly how it happened – you just know it happened. The Lord has made you new, and you know that you were walking in darkness and now are walking in the light . . . you know that you were spiritually dead, and you are now spiritually alive. This makes it hard for people who have not been saved to understand everything . . . they don’t have the spiritual eyes to see it, because they have not been spiritually reborn. But somehow, when you get to the other side, when the Lord saves you and makes you new, it all just starts to make sense. Can you relate? Do you have any experiences in this area?

Jesus continues talking with Nicodemus. If you need to, look back at verses 9–12 to see Jesus’ train of thought here.

**<sup>13</sup>No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup>And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**

We are going to jump straight to a commentary by John Piper on this one because I don’t think I could explain it any better. This quote begins right at the point where he is explaining the verses we just read – He is speaking of Jesus:

“In other words, the reason I could give you heavenly explanations is that I have come down from Heaven. No man has gone into Heaven so that he can do what I do. I was in Heaven with the Father, and I have come down. And now I am going to tell you what I came to do. And this is the key to your question about how you can be born again. I will tell you how you can enter the kingdom of Heaven (v. 5). There are more obstacles to your entering the Kingdom than merely your need to be born again, Nicodemus. Something has to happen to remove the wrath of God so that He will release the power of the Spirit to cause you to be born again.”

Jesus is giving an Old Testament reference in John 3:14 here, so let’s take a look at it and then we will continue with Piper’s commentary. Please read Numbers 21:4–9 and jot down a quick summary of what was happening.

At this point, John Piper explains how surprising this analogy is and then later makes a few statements as he draws the comparison from the OT snake to Jesus Himself.

“We know that Jesus read the Old Testament believing that it was all pointing to Him. There were pointers and types and foreshadowings everywhere. But we might expect Him to skip this one. It is shocking to compare the Son of Man to a snake. But Jesus doesn’t skip this one. He goes out of His way to choose it to help Nicodemus.

Observations:

–Jesus is the Son of Man who is lifted up on the cross the way the snake was lifted up.

–Jesus, in the place of the snake, is the source of healing, the source of rescue from the poison of sin and the wrath of God.

–Jesus in the place of the snake is portrayed as evil and a curse. This is what is so shocking. The snake is evil. The snakes were killing people. The snake on the pole is a picture of God’s curse on the people. So it was with Jesus. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:21, ‘For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the

righteousness of God.’ And in Galatians 3:13, he said, ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.’ In becoming like the snake, He was the embodiment of our sin, and the embodiment of our curse. And in becoming sin and curse for us, He took ours away.” (<http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/the-son-of-man-must-be-lifted-up-like-the-serpent>)

That verse from 2 Corinthians is one of the most humbling verses in all the Bible, in my opinion. For our sake, God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin for us . . . so that we might become the righteousness of God. That, my friends, is the message of the gospel. That is the good news of the Bible. That is what Jesus came for. Please take a moment to reflect on this and pour out your gratitude to Him for all He has done. Feel free to write any of your thoughts here.

And that is the context of John 3:16.

**<sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

I don’t often just stop at one verse, but I need to here. There is so much I want to say! It is a powerful verse, and I want us to take time to reflect on how much God loves us and how He expressed that love in the form of sending Jesus for us. Let’s look at some verses about that love in the Word of God. Please write down a few notes about each section as you read it, meditating and expressing your gratefulness to God along the way.

Romans 4:25–5:8 –

Romans 8:31–39 –

1 John 4:7–16\* –

\*If you have time, keep reading all the way to 1 John 5:12 – that whole section relates so well to what we’ve been talking about in regards to being born again & other things in this lesson!

Sister, the Lord LOVES you. More than you could possibly know! For many though, especially those with a broken and hurtful past, this is not an easy thing to digest. Where are you at in this journey of understanding and experiencing the love of God?

There’s one other thing that I feel like I need to point out here. John 3:16 is one statement in the middle of a long monologue by Jesus and we are prudent to keep it in context. It is in between a statement that you cannot enter the Kingdom of God without being born again, and a statement that He is going to make in a moment about how anyone who does not believe in Him is condemned. Jesus doesn’t mess around. It’s not that God doesn’t love us – HE DOES – but I think sometimes we can focus so much on the love of God that we neglect some of the hard things in the Word of God. Jesus came, full of grace *and* truth. Both. So many times, we emphasize grace, to the neglect of truth. Can we do some introspection and ask ourselves some hard questions? Please wrestle through these along with me and write some responses down. Do we sometimes hesitate to share truth with people because “God loves them” and we don’t want to offend them? Do we minimize the seriousness of our sin, because we know how much God loves us anyway? Do we neglect the realities of judgment because we want to believe that in the end, God loves everyone so much that it won’t matter? Oh sisters, I know these are hard questions, but they are worth the asking. Please reflect here...

We are going to move on with Jesus’ continuing conversation with Nicodemus...

**<sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

Why does Jesus say that the Son was sent into the world?

What truth does Jesus speak loud and clear in verse 18?

Unbelief = Condemnation. Not a popular proposition, by any means. But spoken by the Word and the Truth, Jesus. A sobering reality we need to have in the forefront of our minds as we consider the lost among us. Oh Jesus, give us compassion for those who do not yet believe!

And secondly, Belief = No Condemnation. Let's go back into Romans again and see what it has to say in Chapter 8. Start at Romans 7:21 to get some context and then read on into chapter 8. Verse 1 is really what we want to focus on, but verses 1-4 explain the gospel so well, so let's read that whole portion.

Sisters, if you have believed in Christ – truly put your faith in Him – you are *not* condemned! The voice of condemnation is not the voice of God in your life. Jesus wants to speak words of life into you. Sure, there is also conviction at times, but never condemnation. “There is therefore NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1 NIV). None, zero, zilch. Be encouraged that God does indeed love you and does not condemn you! If you wrestle with the voice of condemnation, take some time to surrender that to the Lord and pray about it – you are a daughter of the King! Feel free to write your thoughts down here.

Ladies, we are almost done!! If you've made it this far, you are doing great. This is the last passage we will cover today, and the last piece of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, as recorded in our gospel. Jesus is going to begin by mentioning a “judgment” – the context that is important to see is that the word “condemned” from the previous verse in John that we just talked about is often translated “judged”, as that is characterized in the definition as well. So Jesus goes on to say what that “judgment” is:

**<sup>19</sup>And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup>For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”**

Wow, there is so much I want to comment on here. But I think this is a good time to ask you to write down what you see here. What kinds of things do you notice? What truths jump out at you from these three verses?

I just want to pluck out one statement to comment on . . . “whoever does what is true comes to the light”. *Come to the light* – I love that phrase. Maybe Jesus is beckoning you to come to the light. Maybe you have been running from Him. Maybe you have been hiding sin in the darkness. Maybe you have yet to place your faith in Him. He tells us so many times in the book of John that He is the Light. “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.” (John 8:46) Jesus is calling to us to believe, be born again, and to come to the Light. Let's come.