

elders, priestly and lay, was permitted to direct in most matters. Nicodemus was a member of this council.

2. Came to Jesus by night. From the emphasis laid here and elsewhere upon the fact that this visit was "by night," we may infer that Nicodemus was unwilling to be publicly known as an adherent of Jesus, especially as the Sanhedrin had declared itself against him. While there was caution and timidity in his coming by night, there was earnest desire after truth shown by his coming at all. **Rabbi.** A Hebrew word meaning *master* or *teacher*, generally given to teachers of the law. **We know.** This is suggestive, for it shows that although the Sanhedrin was opposed to Jesus, yet its members generally recognized that he possessed divine power, and hence were fighting against their own deepest convictions. **A teacher come from God.** This, in the thought of Nicodemus, had no reference to the divine origin of Jesus as a person, but meant that his authority as a teacher came from God. He was ready to admit that Jesus was a prophet, but not that he was the Son of God or the Messiah of Israel. **These miracles that thou doest.** We have read thus far of but one miracle, yet this indicates that many more had been wrought, showing that the gospels contain only the merest sketch of the Saviour's life. The design of the miracles was to arrest attention to the Teacher and to attest his teachings as having authority. The Gospel has now become recognized, and as its power to change men is now apparent, such miracles are no longer wrought. **Except God be with him.** (1) *We too can have God with us, so far as we are in union with Jesus Christ.*

3. Jesus answered. The account here given of the conversation is doubtless only a summary, presenting its thoughts in the briefest form. **Said unto him.** Jesus struck at once at the heart of his questioner, without pausing to reply to his compliments. **Verily, verily.** An expression only found in John's gospel, and employed to introduce a statement of the utmost consequence. In Greek, as a translation of the Hebrew, it is *Amen, amen*. **Except a man be born again.** Christ meant to say that the entire inner man must be transformed, that a revolution must be effected in his character, aims and ideals. The spiritual nature must be awakened into life by a spiritual birth, just as the physical nature is by a physical birth. There is the germ of life before a child is born, and so there is a spiritual nature, but it is dormant, and is inactive until the hour when the new birth comes. **He cannot see.** For until the nature of man is corresponded with the divine order, spiritual things cannot be apprehended. The natural man cannot perceive the things of God; an unconverted heart has no true conception of what salvation is. **The kingdom of God.** Nicodemus had supposed that the kingdom of God was the new, imperial state which the Messiah should inaugurate; Christ would have him understand that it was a spiritual empire, wherein citizenship was to come through renewed human nature.

4. Nicodemus saith. His language shows that he was a literalist, without the fine insight which reads between the lines, and sees the thought under the illustration. **How can a man be born?** I do we wonder at his simplicity! There have been centuries when the whole organized Church, with the Bible in its hand, failed to understand the Saviour's meaning; and even now few comparatively comprehend what the spiritual life is. (2) *Lord, give us the eyes to read thy word!*

5. Born of water. This refers to baptism, which was not unknown in the Jewish Church, for it was the symbol by which Gentiles who embraced Judaism put off their old lives. John the Baptist had recently brought the baptismal rite into public notice by baptizing all who accepted his teachings, implying that even the Jews needed a purification. To be born of water, then, is to make public profession by baptism of the renunciation of sin. **And of the Spirit.** The internal change of heart by the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit, of which baptism is the external sign. **Cannot enter into the kingdom of God.** Because it is a spiritual kingdom, and only those whose spiritual nature has been quickened can belong to it.

6. Born of the flesh is flesh. That is, like produces like; a tree produces a tree; a weed can only germinate weeds; a rose produces roses; and men of a carnal, sinful nature can only reproduce their own. If saintliness is to be developed, it must come by the impartation of some higher life. **Born of the Spirit is spirit.** In a garden that grows only weeds, a rose must be planted if it is to blossom; so in a depraved human

heart the divine Spirit must sow the seeds of holiness if holiness is to appear. Every manifestation of a higher life must come from the operation of a higher power.

7. Marvel not. The Pharisee wondered that this teacher should declare that they, the children of Abraham, needed a new birth, just like the Gentiles. **Ye must.** Notice how Christ separates himself from all human teachers by saying "Ye," instead of "We."

8. The wind bloweth. Perhaps the illustration was suggested by the sound of the night wind rustling about the house. **Cannot not tell.** Human knowledge has made great progress since the days of Nicodemus, but the highest science has not yet mastered the laws of the winds. It may forecast the weather for a few days, but fails to predict it for a longer period. **So is every one . . . born of the Spirit.** The laws of the spiritual life are known to human intelligence. The converted man is himself conscious of a new experience, but he cannot explain it to others. They may see its results in his life, but not its principles. (3) *We can understand salvation only as we receive it.*

9. 10. How can these things be. Many things Nicodemus knew. He could know the meaning of letters in the Old Testament, or how many fringes a sacred garment should have, or what were the rules for the Sabbath; but these spiritual things were beyond his range. **Art thou a master** (Rev. Ver., "the teacher") **of Israel?** Nicodemus held himself in a position as a ruler, but as a teacher of the law, Christ would show him how little he really knew of his divine essence.

11. We speak. Christ here refers to himself and those who follow him by his teaching. **That we do know.** The Christian heart testimony is not to matters of theory or of opinion, but of experience. If a blind man has had his eyes opened, he knows it; and so does a converted sinner. **Ye receive not.** Christ here refers to the fact that the Jewish leaders as a body rejected the teaching that the Jewish leaders, though individuals like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea did accept him.

12. Earthly things. These statements concerning the new birth and Christian experience, which belong to the present life. **Heavenly things.** The higher mysteries, such as the atonement, the triumph over the future life, of which Christ said little, but left the teaching to be given by the apostles after his ascension.

13. No man hath ascended. Jesus means to say that no person has ever ascended to heaven and returned to bring to earth a revelation of the unseen world. **But he that came down.** Though no one has ever gone up to heaven to seek knowledge for men, one has come down from heaven bringing knowledge to men. **Even the Son of man.** A term expressive of Jesus as the complete, representative man, and the head of the race. **Which is in heaven.** Heaven was the home of Jesus Christ even while he was on the earth.

14. 15. As Moses lifted up. See Num. 21. 4-9. When the Israelites in the wilderness were bitten by fiery serpents, Moses lifted up a brazen serpent on a pole, and whoever looked upon it recovered his life. Christ, in the likeness of sinful flesh, is lifted up on the cross to save men. **Son of man be lifted up.** A clear prediction of Christ's crucifixion. **Whosoever believeth.** Trusts in him, and accepts him as a Saviour. **Eternal life.** The Israelite who looked to the brazen serpent had a new lease of life; we who look to Christ have the life of God, which is eternal.

16. God so loved. This verse is an epitome of the whole scheme of redemption; its motive, the divine love; its means, the divine Son; its method, the sacrifice on the cross; its requirement, faith; its result, eternal life. **Everlasting life.** Rev. Ver., "eternal life." Not merely an endless life, but a life which is divine, the life of God in the soul.

17. God sent not. Christ came to earth not only by his own will, but also by the will of his Father. **To condemn the world.** Rather, as in Rev. Ver., "to judge the world." Christ will one day come as a judge, but now he is a Saviour. **Might be saved.** This was the prime object of the Saviour's appearance, to make it possible for men to be saved.

18. Believeth not is condemned. Because by not believing in Christ his true nature is shown, and thus, in fellowship with God, and having no affinity with true goodness. Of course the reference here is to those who have heard of Christ and have deliberately rejected him.

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