

and especially to find out whether Jesus was the very Messiah. (Meyer). His visit at night may have arisen partly from a desire to have an uninterrupted private interview. He had not yet quite made up his mind and deemed it prudent to enquire further before compromising himself. He had courage enough to attend Christ's funeral, but not enough to bear his cross. **We know**—This may imply that there were others of his class who conceded this, or, perhaps, it is better to regard it as the indefinite plural, denoting the general opinion. **A teacher come from God**—The order of words in the original is "from God come a teacher" (see ch. 7: 16). He acknowledges him as "the coming One" (Matt. 11: 3), an expression used only with reference to the Messiah. (Alford). But instead of saying "come from God the Christ," he cautiously, but inconsistently, substitutes the term "teacher." Now, no Jew expected the "coming One" to be a *teacher*, he was to be a *king*. Nicodemus confesses Christ to be the Messiah and withdraws his confession in the same breath. **These miracles**—Miracles were a proof that the worker of them was sent from God. (Ex. 4). But only if the message he delivered was in harmony with what God had already revealed in his law. Deut. 13: 1; 18: 20. Compare ch. 9: 16, 33; Acts 2: 22. **God be with him**—Acts 10: 38. Surely Christ's miracles proved more than this if they proved anything. Either they certified his claims to the full, or they were wrought by Beelzebub. God could not be with one who claimed to be his Son, if he was not. Nicodemus here again shews his lack of courage. He timidly avoids saying what his acknowledgements imply.

II. THE NEW BIRTH. **3. Jesus answered**—Either Nicodemus made an awkward pause or Jesus interrupts the complimentary prologue with a startling answer to the question trembling on his lips, a question afterwards asked by the rich young man (Matt. 10: 17), the lawyer (Luke 10: 25), and some other pharisees (Luke 17: 20). Other instances in which Jesus answered the thoughts of men are John 1: 42, 47, 48; 4: 29; 6: 61, 64; 11: 4, 15; 13: 11; 21: 17. **Verily, verily**—"Amen, amen." Christ used these words in introducing a solemn and impressive truth uttered with all his authority as a divine teacher. **Except a man be born anew**—R. V. marg. "from above." This latter meaning is unsuitable here. Nicodemus evidently understood Christ to mean something that resembled a birth repeated a second time. The Greek word implies that the man's life must start over again from the beginning. **See**—"experience the blessings of." Compare the expression "see death" (Luke 2: 26; Heb. 11: 5; also Acts 2: 27; 1 Pet. 3: 10; Rev. 18: 7; 2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 6: 15; Eph. 2: 5, 10; Titus 3: 5; Jas. 1: 18; 1 Pet. 1: 23). **The kingdom of God**—John uses this expression on only one other occasion (ch. 18: 36). By this Nicodemus would understand

the kingdom of the Messiah.

4. How can a man be born when he is old?—Nicodemus must have been familiar with the "circumcision of the heart" (Deut. 30: 6; Jer. 4: 4), and the "new heart and new spirit" (Ex. 31: 10, 20; 36: 26, 27; Ps. 51: 12; 86: 4 &c.) spoken of in the O. T. Moreover, proselytes were spoken of as "babes just born." Nicodemus dimly understood what Jesus meant, and replied, in effect, "How can such a moral transformation take place in one whose habits and disposition have become fixed. It would be as impossible as for him to undergo the natural birth a second time." The answer of Jesus indicates the supernatural character of the new birth. The most common view is that Nicodemus did not understand Jesus at all and asked a singularly stupid question. Of this incapacity to grasp the spiritual meaning of strongly figurative language we have other instances in John 4: 14; and 6: 34, 52. But this hardly does justice to Nicodemus. That he came to Jesus at all argues some capacity for appreciating his teaching, and the style adopted by our Lord indicates that he believed that he was speaking to one who could grasp the truth enunciated. As a master of Israel, Nicodemus was not ignorant of these things, but they had never before been put to him in that light. "When he is old" does not mean merely "when he is grown up" but "when he is an aged man." Nicodemus puts a strong case in point to shew how incredible such a change must be. He may have felt that our Saviour's words touched his own case.

5. Born of water and of the Spirit—There can be no reference here to the Christian rite of baptism, although the truth stated is that which was afterwards embodied in this sacrament. Nicodemus was well acquainted with ceremonial cleansing ("baptisms" Heb. 9: 10) as representing the removal of moral defilement (Ps. 51: 2; Isa. 52: 15; Ezek. 36: 25, 26; Zech. 13: 1; 12: 10), and he could not have helped thinking of John's baptism. Baptism with water he understood, but to conjoin with this a baptism by the Holy Ghost as the efficient cause of being born again, was a new idea. Christ in effect says "Repentance must be accompanied by a spiritual renewal and this is the work of the Holy Spirit." Compare Acts 2: 38. There is no support here to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. The penitent thief, the apostles themselves (except Paul), and many saints and martyrs never received baptism, but they received the baptism of the Spirit which is the essential factor in the ordinance. **He cannot enter**—The omission of "water" in verses 6 and 8 implies that the Holy Spirit may produce regeneration without baptism, as he undoubtedly did under the Jewish dispensation and in the case of Cornelius; while on the other hand the example of Simon Magus (Acts 8: 23) proves that baptism may take place without being accompanied by spiritual regeneration.