

## \* The Sunday School \*

### BIBLE LESSON

Abridged from Peloubet's Notes.

First Quarter.

JESUS AND NICODEMUS.

Lesson VI. February 11. John 3: 1-18.

Read John 2. Commit Verses 14-17.

GOLDEN TEXT.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—John 3: 16.

EXPLANATORY.

In the discourse with Nicodemus Jesus presents a cluster of essential fundamental truths concerning the kingdom of God and the work of redemption, which is the bringing of men into the kingdom of God. It is a royal diadem set with priceless jewels.

I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD.—Vs. 1, 2. Jesus came to Jerusalem from Galilee to the Passover festival. During the feast he cleansed the temple, and taught in its pillared cloisters or porches.

1. THERE WAS A MAN OF THE PHARISEES. The strictest sect of the Jews, holding the most correct opinions (Matt. 23: 3) and looking for the Messiah. Many of them were very bad, mere whitened sepulchers, but the best of them, like Nicodemus and Paul, were the best soil for planting gospel truths. NICODEMUS. A Greek name in common use. All we know of him is recorded here and in John 7: 50; 19: 39, which implies that he became a disciple. A RULER OF THE JEWS. "Archon," a Greek term, applied to the members of the Sanhedrim. He appears to have been a scribe, a teacher of the law (v. 10), a man of wealth and prominence. His position as a member of the Sanhedrim, the Jewish supreme court and senate or parliament combined, was one of great dignity and influence.

2. CAME TO JESUS BY NIGHT. Not probably from fear, but (1) from common prudence, for why should he commit himself before he knew more about Jesus? (2) If so prominent a man had been seen consorting with Jesus, everybody would have known it, and great efforts would have been made to prevent his going farther.

RABBI. Teacher, master; a very respectful address. WE KNOW. And he soon gives his reason. THOU ART A TEACHER COME FROM GOD. Not that he was a believer in Jesus as the Messiah, but was sure that there was some divine influence upon him. FOR NO MAN CAN DO THESE MIRACLES. Signs. EXCEPT GOD BE WITH HIM. The signs were not only miraculous, but of a kind worthy of a prophet. He came for light, for answers to the puzzling questions of which the very air was full.

II. THE NEW BIRTH.—Vs. 3-6. 3. JESUS ANSWERED. Not to a spoken question, but to the condition he was in, to his needs, to the deeper questions of his soul. VERILY, VERILY. In the original, the Hebrew words, "Amen, amen," in Greek letters, "most assuredly," emphatically true. EXCEPT A MAN (any one) BE BORN AGAIN, or "anew," as in R. V. margin, "from above." Whosoever is "born anew," or is "born from above," is born again. So Nicodemus understood it (v. 4). "Anew" implies "again." HE CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD. The declaration is explicit that a new spiritual life is necessary, not only to enter into, but even to form any correct conception of the kingdom of God. "He cannot see the kingdom of God." Not only cannot enter in, but cannot see it, cannot understand what it is, or realize its glory. One must feel love to even know what love is.

4. BORN WHEN HE IS OLD. Nicodemus was old in the outward kingdom of God. To expect still a birth into the kingdom of God was inconceivable. He, in his own view, was already born into the kingdom.

5. Jesus replies by repeating his truth with emphasis. EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN OF WATER AND OF THE SPIRIT. Jesus now adds "born of water" to "born of the Spirit." As "water is not repeated," the emphasis lies on "the Spirit." To understand this, note several things in the circumstances: (1) John was baptizing with water as a symbol of repentance. (2) Baptism symbolized the cleansing of the soul from sin. (3) Baptism symbolized the outward profession, the entering into the visible kingdom. (4) Nicodemus was familiar with the rite with this significance. (5) His mind rested on the outward kingdom of God. Jesus, therefore, says to him, You must not only be born of water, i. e., enter the outward kingdom as you have done, but you must also be born of the Spirit, or you are not really in the kingdom. (6) Jesus enforces this truth by the statement of a general principle.

6. THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE FLESH. The visible man, including "the appetites, desires, faculties which govern the body," is *FLASH*, is of the same kind as that from

which it is born. Outward things can bring men into only the outward kingdom. THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE SPIRIT IS SPIRIT. Relating to the spiritual life of the soul, thus bringing men into the real, spiritual kingdom of God.

III. THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT.—Vs. 7, 8. 7. MARVEL NOT. For the same mystery is seen in natural things with which you are familiar. MUST BE. There is no escape from this law. It would be as easy to change the law of gravitation as this law. But when men see the blessedness of this law of Christ, they will thank God for the privilege that they may be born again.

8. THE WIND BLOWETH. The term for "wind" in Hebrew and Aramaic, as well as in Greek, was also the term for "spirit," the immaterial in man being represented in a metaphor by the invisible but life-giving breath. We may, with Canon Liddon, imagine that in the upper room the wind was heard in the p uses of the conversation. WHERE IT LISTETH (pleaseth), i. e., according to its own unknown laws, and not according to our pleasure or will. SO IS EVERY ONE THAT IS BORN OF THE SPIRIT. The Spirit's methods we cannot know, but the "facts" of the new life are as plain and certain as that the strong wind bends the forest trees. We may not know the day nor the hour when we are born again, but we may know the fact by the fruits, as we know not how life works in a peach tree, but that it does work is proved by the peaches that grow on it. The methods are an enigma, the fact is clear and well known.

IV. THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH.—Vs. 9-13. 10. ART THOU A MASTER, that is, teacher, AND KNOWEST NOT THESE THINGS? You will find this truth in the Scriptures you teach (Ezek. 11: 19; 18: 31; 36: 26; Jer. 24: 7; 31: 33). Have you studied the Scriptures enough to teach, and not noticed this great truth?

11. WE SPRAK THAT WE DO KNOW. The "we" may possibly include his disciples. They knew the truth from experience. It was not theory but personal knowledge.

12. IF I (now he speaks for himself) HAVE TOLD YOU EARTHLY THINGS. Things written and experienced in the earthly existence, which any one can put to the test, and verify. HOW SHALL YE BELIEVE. IF I TELL YOU OF HEAVENLY THINGS? Those truths which could not be learned without a revelation from heaven: divine forgiveness, the perfect, free, universal love of God, the divine nature of Christ, the atonement, the reality of life beyond the grave, the way to obtain it, the blessedness of heaven, the glories of the Messiah's kingdom on earth.

13. NO MAN HATH ASCENDED UP TO HEAVEN, and brought back the testimony of an eye-witness, BUT HE THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN. The "Word" of 1: 1-3, 14, who "was with God, and was God," and therefore knew absolutely the things which revealed to men about spiritual and heavenly things. EVEN THE SON OF MAN. Thus showing that he was the one who had come down from heaven. The "Son of man" is the true representative of humanity; not only God, but a real man, with all the feelings, hopes, temptations, possibilities of man; the ideal man, showing what man may become. WHICH IS IN HEAVEN. His home is in heaven, and he maintains continually a vital connection with heaven. So far as heaven is a state and a character, Jesus was always in heaven.

V. THE WAY OF SALVATION.—Vs. 14, 15. 14. AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SERPENT IN THE WILDERNESS. Jesus now uses an illustration which makes clear some of the heavenly things he came to reveal. Study the story in Num. 21: 4-9. The serpent poison, like that of sin, pervaded the whole system, produced great pain, and ended in death. EVEN SO MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP. On the cross. The cross still holds up Jesus before the world, the best known and most exalted person in all history.

15. THAT WHOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM. Accepts him as Teacher, as Guide, and as Lord. Believing is the act of receiving the new life from God. SHOULD NOT PERISH. From the effects of sin, naturally end in destruction of the soul. BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. Be born again, have the new spiritual life by which he shall grow into a perfect man in Christ Jesus, and live forever in heaven. Eternal life is the life which nothing can destroy, which endures beyond the grave, and grows fuller and richer as the ages roll on.

VI. THE LOVE OF GOD.—Vs. 16, 17. V. 16 is not only the central verse of this lesson, but of the Bible. All the Bible circles around this verse, as the planets around the sun.

16. GOD SO LOVED. With the greatest conceivable love, love put to the highest possible test. THE WORLD. Not merely heavenly beings, angels, and seraphim, and saints, but this poor, sinful, unworthy world, so far from him in character. It was this wonderful fact which the angels sang on the fields of Bethlehem.

# Pearline

THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON. There has been an impression that Christ came to make God love men instead of hating them. One or two of our hymns, wrongly understood, have favored this impression. But here we are told that God's love was the origin of salvation for men; that Christ came because God loved men before he came. Nature gives us so many hints of God's love; but there is so much which is terrible, which seems contrary to love, that we cannot be sure that God loves us, except by this gift of his Son. THAT WHOEVER BELIEVETH. The offer is unlimited. The only condition—faith—is not arbitrary, but is the necessary condition of salvation.

17. IS NOT . . . TO CONDEMN THE WORLD. OR R. V. "to judge," for the world was already in sin, condemned, under judgment, as v. 18. BUT THAT THE WORLD THROUGH HIM MIGHT BE SAVED. The condemnation is no part of the gospel, any more than the disease is a part of the doctor's remedy. He often has to make men feel that their hidden disease is dangerous that men may be willing to be cured; but his work is to cure.

### \* \* \* NORMAL LESSON. NO. 10.

#### A GOSPEL CHURCH.

God the Father decreed to erect on earth a Kingdom. Predicted, Dan. 2: 44; Declared, Matt. 12: 28; Established by Jesus Christ, Luke 16: 16; Col. 1: 13; 1 Cor. 15: 24; Not of earth earthly, John 18: 36; Entered only by regeneration, Luke 17: 20, John 3: 3-5.

The executive of this great Mystic Body is the Gospel Church, Matt. 18: 17, Eph. 3: 10, which is a company of baptized believers banded together to witness Christ's gospel. Acts 5: 32; observe Christ's laws, Eph. 1: 22, and maintain Christ's ordinances as delivered, 1 Cor. 11: 2.

In apostolic days wherever the gospel of the kingdom was believed the church of the kingdom was founded. Of the church of Samaria it is recorded when they believed "they were baptized both men and women." (No unbelievers, no babes). Acts 8: 21. Of the church at Jerusalem: The same day they gladly received the word they were baptized and joined the church. Acts 2: 42, 47. (No three or six months' probation). To the seven churches in Asia Jesus Christ addressed his message. (Not to the church of Asia, England or Rome, but to His churches in Asia). Rev. 1: 4. Will our pupils please note, the Bible recognizes only one spiritual kingdom but many churches. Keep clearly before you that this kingdom is only entered by the new birth wrought by the Holy Spirit. While the church or local organization is entered only after baptism.

THE CHURCH'S MISSION AND AUTHORITY. A. "The church has the receiving of members," Rom. 14: 1.

B. "The church has the casting out of the wicked," 1 Cor. 5: 4-5.

C. "The church has the restoring of the penitent," 2 Cor. 2: 7, 8.

D. "The church has the sending out of missionaries," Acts 13: 3; 2 Cor. 8: 10.

E. Unto the church is committed his ordinances to be observed till he comes, 1 Cor. 11: 2; 11: 23.

F. Under the church's care, by Divine decree, is all appertaining to his kingdom, Eph. 1: 22; 1 Cor. 12: 28; Col. 1: 18; 2: 19. And in as much as the aim of the S. S. is to bring to Christ and build up in Christ, the church that is true to her mission is true to her S. S. The soul that has an interest in Christ must have in his work. We do not condemn the individual who is not a church member for trying to teach in the S. S., 1 Cor. 5: 10. Mostly their aim is to do good, but can they teach, see 1 Cor. 2: 12-16. But the church and church member, whose indifference has made it possible, much less necessary, for an unregenerate teacher to be appointed, should read Judges 5: 23; Heb. 5: 12; Rev. 3: 14-16.

#### III. CHURCH ORDINANCES.

A. Baptism. Christian baptism is the immersion in water of a believer on Christ, in the name of the Trinity. This baptism was ordained of God by Jesus Christ. Commanded by him, Matt. 28: 19. Commanded by him, Matt. 3: 15; and observed by him, Matt. 3: 13-16.

There is only one mode of baptism, Eph. 4: 5. Christ when he was baptized said: "Suffer it to be so . . . thus it becometh us," etc., Matt. 3: 15. Christ went into and came out of the water. Baptism requires water, Acts 8: 38; much water, John 3: 23, going into and coming out of the water, Mark 1: 9-10; Acts 8: 39; Matt.

3: 16. It is a form of burial, and only those buried in baptism are baptized, Rom. 6: 34; Col. 2: 12; Eph. 4: 5.

Baptism's prerequisites are repentance and faith, Acts 2: 38; 8: 12; 8: 37-38; Mark 16: 16. Without faith no service can be acceptable to God, for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin," Rom. 14: 25; and "without faith is impossible to please God," Heb. 11: 6.

B. The Lord's Supper.

(a) Ordained of God by Jesus Christ, wherein by the sacred use of bread and wine, his redeemed ones commemorate his dying love as he commanded, "till he come," Matt. 14: 22-25.

(b) Binding on all his, Luke 22: 19; 1 Cor. 11: 24; Matt. 26: 26-27.

(c) How worthily to partake.

1. Let a man examine himself, 1 Cor. 11: 28. The sick are worthy of a physician, the sinner is a fit subject for a Saviour.

2. 'This do in remembrance of me,' 1 Cor. 11: 25. Forgetful of all else save Christ's vicarious work as shown in this ordinance. With backward look we behold Calvary, as Isa 53: 5; 1 John 1: 7. With forward look to his return, as Heb. 9: 28; we thus worthily partake, as 1 Cor. 11: 25-26.

(d) Its Prerequisites.

1. Repentance. 2. Faith. 3. Regeneration. 4. Baptism. John 3: 5; 1 Cor. 5: 11; Eph. 2: 1-2; Acts 2: 38-42; Rom. 6: 11; Matt. 28: 19-20.

(e) Restricted Communion.

The Jewish Kingdom everywhere prefigured Christ and his Church. The Jew by birth entered the Jewish Kingdom, his circumcision marked him a member after which the privileges of the kingdom are his. No uncircumcised Jew could partake of the passover, see Gen. 17: 14; Ex. 12: 48. Note the order, born, marked, admitted to privileges.

Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: 1. Born of the Holy Spirit by which we are made children, John 3: 5; 12-13. 2. Baptized. Not made but marked a Christian, 1 Peter 3: 21; Gal. 3: 27. 3. Now identified, the privileges of the kingdom are granted, Rom. 6: 17-18; Acts 2: 47.

Communion a church ordinance, Cor. 11: 19, 20; 11: 23. In Rom. 16: 17 Paul beseeches the church to mark them that cause division and avoid them. Has sprinkling caused division? How can a church hold church fellowship with the unbaptized and avoid. In desperate earnest, in the name of the Lord Jesus he commands withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly, 2 Thes. 3: 6. Note this is not the unregenerate, but a brother from whom we are commanded to withdraw because of disorder. Sure am I there is but one mode of baptism. My pedo brother says and practices sprinkling, I say and practice immersion. Is he right? then I am wrong. Am I right? then he is wrong. Someone is walking disorderly. If he is right he is commanded not to commune with me. Am I right, in Christ's name I have been commanded to withdraw. How dare I refuse. See also Tit. 3: 10; Eph. 4: 14-16; 1 Tim. 4: 16; 2 Thes. 3: 14-15.

Christ's command was, go make disciples, then baptize, then teach them to observe. Thus the apostles understood, for it is recorded of the first church they first repented, then gladly received the Word, then baptized, then brake bread, Acts 2: 38-42. Moses is commanded, "See thou make all things according to the pattern I showed thee," we have a more sure word whereunto we do well to take heed. If we would receive his approval, we must keep the ordinances as he delivered them, 1 Cor. 11: 2. We are stewards, and it is required of a steward that he should be faithful, 1 Cor. 4: 2.

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness: But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ," 2 Pet. 3: 17, 18.

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