



“Trying to Understand Jesus”

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Scripture (NRSV):

John 3:1-17

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. **2** He came to Jesus^[a] by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” **3** Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”^[b] **4** Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” **5** Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. **6** What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.^[c] **7** Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You^[d] must be born from above.’^[e] **8** The wind^[f] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” **9** Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” **10** Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

11 “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you^[g] do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.^[h] **14** And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.^[i]

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Sermon:

Alright, let's try reading this again, and see if we can understand it a bit more, with a little bit of scripture context thrown in...my thoughts are in red.

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. **2** He came to Jesus by night (because he was either embarrassed or afraid to be seen with Jesus in broad daylight) and said to him, “Rabbi, we (the leaders of the Jewish people, we, the Pharisees who study the Law and the Prophets with great passion and devotion) know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” (We have reasoned this all out, it seems logical, sensible, that you are from God. We have thought this out, and that is our conclusion.) **3** Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, (the whole bunch of you), no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (Reason and common sense won't show you the Kingdom of God, this is a profound reality of God, which is bigger than reason. And no, I don't trust you, because I know better than to trust people who are impressed by externals, like the “signs”, the “miracles” that have convinced you. You are not looking deeper, below the surface of things, to the deepest meaning of the message of God that I am trying to share with all of you.) **4** Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?” **5** Jesus answered, (See, there you go, listening on the most literal level, you are not listening to the meaning of what I am saying. I'm talking about a profound spiritual truth; about a new life with God, a new world for all because it is in congruence with the love and the vision of God [which is why I call it a *kingdom of God*...it is clearly different than any of the kingdoms that men come up with] and all you are thinking about is babies!) “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. (Listen, there is a physical birth that we all have; we are born in a rush of birthing water...that is one birth. But the birth of a new life, a life filled with God's Spirit, is also real, but it is available to you at any age of your life and it is for all people, for the whole world.) **6** What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. (You have a physical life and a body that was born years ago, and you have the possibility of a new physical life, centered around the glory of God, the Kingdom of God, the design of God, that I am inviting you to find, live, cherish right now. You are so much

more than just a body; you are a child of God; a beloved of God if you would just reach inside and realize this.)

⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’⁸ (Try not to be so literal minded and slow! Try to see that you can be born from the Spirit, or “born again” with new understanding, new insight at any time,! It is not the same as your babyhood birth, it is a new life with new imagining, new priorities, filled with God’s passion in your heart and mind.) The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. (Surely you can agree, the Jewish people have seen God inspired prophets and poets and visionaries, men and women of God’s Spirit and power, and you didn’t know them, or know their message until they came to you...and then they spoke and acted with God’s powerful voice. You couldn’t control the prophets and the poets, you just needed to listen to them! Heed them, learn from them, change your focus because of their teaching!) So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (God will not be limited...God is as free as the wind, the air, the storm.)⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?”¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? (Good God, man! You call yourself a leader of the people, and you can’t even imagine that God’s Spirit can fill a person, change the trajectory of their very life!? You don’t believe God is eager and willing for humankind to join in the work of healing, restoring and renewing all creation? What is wrong with you!)

¹¹ “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what **we** know and testify to what **we** have seen; yet you do not receive **our** testimony. (Now, we have another voice in Jesus’ speech, this happens a lot in the gospel of John; Jesus speaks as the leaders of the earliest Christian churches, he is speaking with their voice. He is speaking to the Jewish leaders who do not approve of this new sect, still following the Nazarene leader from 70 years ago and naming him Messiah.)¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? (You folks don’t believe anything we tell you about Jesus of Nazareth as the message of God...how the heck are we to convince you?)¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (O, I know that you think that Moses ascended the mountain and became holy in the presence of the Most High there. But I come from the Most High and I am here, living in your midst and you don’t see God in me, yet God is in me, God is pleased with me, I am

God's representative to you, and you won't believe it.) ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (I, the writer of the gospel of John assure you that Jesus lived and taught, died and arose, and ascended/returned to God, so that we might all know that God seeks us, and desires communion with us in love and care. A life of love and joy and peace, knowing God's heart is for us, is a life of eternal joy that begins today, here and now. This is "eternal life", it isn't about going to heaven after you die, it's about heaven on earth! The way things are now, is not the way things are supposed to be!)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (Yes, I, the writer of the gospel, believe utterly that Jesus is God's most intimate spokesman and his teaching can transform our human lives, our human societies, beyond all that is broken and awful here and now. How many of us are "perishing" right now because of injustice, because of despair, because of the many ills of this world? We can begin to change the world, give it a new design, God's design of peace and justice, of life and welcome, of love and care and sacrifice for others; this will change the world, when we accept this Jesus way of being in the world. We can feel joy, and hope and peace, right away. This feels like heaven on earth!)

¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (When we speak of Jesus "saving" the world, let us remember that this means "healing" the world. God loves the world so much, and it is so sad and messy, so filled with violence and injustice... Jesus is the messenger of God, sent to tell us that it doesn't have to be this way. He begs us to join him in healing the world.)