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THE KINGDOM ATTAINABLE ONLY BY A NEW BIRTH.

– FEB. 11. – JOHN 3:1-18. –

Evidently he had been impressed by the teachings and the miracles of our Lord, for we find him ready to acknowledge Jesus as a great Teacher sent of God, altho not ready to confess him the Messiah. Our [R2572 : page 42] Lord's ministry, while commending him to Nicodemus, was evidently a very different one from what he had expected of Messiah. As a Jew he of course had the usual Jewish thought respecting the Kingdom of God, *viz.*, that Israel was that Kingdom, merely shorn of its power by the Gentiles until Messiah should appear for its deliverance and to subjugate all nations before Israel, that the Jewish Law might become the law of the world, going forth with power from Jerusalem. Nicodemus discerned the wide difference between such hopes and the kind of a kingdom proclaimed by Jesus and his disciples. We may reasonably infer, therefore, that his queries, tho not stated, were along this line, and our Lord's replies, quoted with greater detail, so intimate.

It was with astonishment that Nicodemus heard from the great Teacher that himself and others of the Jewish nation could not possibly enter the Kingdom without being born anew; and naturally his mind ran to the natural birth and he inquired how it was possible that a full-grown man could be born over again. Such a question was desired by our Lord, and gave opportunity for the explanation that the first birth which all experience, *viz.*, the birth of the flesh, by which mankind is born to human nature, and with a *flesh body*, is a type, a figure, an illustration of a higher spiritual birth, to a spiritual nature with a *spirit body*. "That which is born of the flesh *is flesh*, that which is born of the spirit *is spirit*." As a man cannot see trees, houses, flowers, etc., nor enter into the enjoyment of these, until after he has been born of the flesh, so likewise no one can either see or enter into, the heavenly Kingdom, except he be born of the spirit. In other words, a

human being can see earthly things, but only a heavenly or spirit-born one can see and share in the heavenly things: and the long promised Kingdom of God, the Millennial age, for which Israel was waiting, is to be a spiritual Kingdom and not an earthly one, composed of spirit beings and not flesh beings; and only those born of water and of the spirit would ever see or enter into that Kingdom.

The reference to water was probably suggested by some question from Nicodemus, respecting John and his baptism unto repentance – whether or not this had anything to do with the new birth. Our Lord's answer associates John's baptism of water unto repentance with the spirit begetting which began at Pentecost. Repentance from sin was essential to the right condition of heart which would prepare a Jew for transfer from the earthly typical kingdom, and make him ready for the begetting of the holy spirit [R2573 : page 42] through which, if obedient, he would finally be born into the heavenly Kingdom in "the first resurrection." This use of the word "born" as representing resurrection is a Scriptural one, for do we not read that our Lord Jesus in his resurrection was "the first-*born* from the dead" – "the first-*born* amongst many brethren" – and was it not in respect to these "brethren" who would with him be *sharers in the Kingdom* that he addressed Nicodemus? – Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15,18.

While we hold that this Scripture in its full, ultimate meaning, relates to the first resurrection of the Kingdom class into Kingdom power, glory, honor and immortality, we nevertheless concede that the word *genao* is sometimes rendered *begotten*. We concede also that everyone who is to be *born* of the spirit in the first resurrection must first be *begotten* of the spirit in the present life. We concede also that the new life now begun is frequently spoken of as tho the new creature were *already born* by a figurative resurrection to newness of life. "You hath he quickened [made alive, by a figurative resurrection] who were dead in trespasses and sins." But these partial and figurative uses of the words "alive" and "resurrection" and "born" should not be permitted to discount our thought respecting the realities and powers

and glories which can be attained only by a share in the actual first resurrection – "born from the dead."

While Jesus was talking with Nicodemus quite probably the wind whistled through the apartment in which they were sitting, rattling the doors, etc., and Jesus seized upon this as a good illustration by which to convey to the mind of Nicodemus the difference between human beings and spirit beings, and to give him a clearer conception of the nature and powers of the class who would compose the spiritual Kingdom when set up in power and great glory. He said, The wind blows where it pleases; you hear its sound, but cannot know whence it comes nor whither it goes; and so it will be with those born of the spirit – all inheritors of the heavenly Kingdom: they will be as invisible and can go and come as the wind, and men in the flesh will be unable to see them, as they are unable to see the wind, tho they will be everywhere present and influential, as is the wind.

Nicodemus was astounded at the thought that the Kingdom of God would be so different from what himself and others had expected. All this should not have been so strange to Nicodemus: he should have remembered that the powers which our Lord described as those which would belong to the spirit-born class were the very powers which in the past from time to time had been manifested through holy angels, who being sent on special missions appeared suddenly, and when their mission was accomplished vanished just as suddenly, coming and going like the wind, – none knew whence or whither. Nicodemus, as a teacher of the Law, should have had these things in mind, and **[R2573 : page 43]** our Lord rather reproves him for not grasping the subject quickly: Are you, a teacher in Israel, ignorant of these things? Is it difficult for you, who are acquainted with the Law, to realize these teachings? I have been telling you only such things as are known and to a considerable extent have been demonstrated amongst men through the ministry of angels, yet you are unwilling to receive the testimony. How could you expect to believe, if I should proceed to explain to you heavenly and spiritual things pertaining to that

Kingdom? You surely would be unprepared for such information. Nor would Nicodemus have been to blame for not understanding spiritual things if our Lord had told of them; for only the spirit-begotten can clearly grasp and appreciate those things. Our Lord was explaining to him that he must not expect a comprehension of such things at that time, but should merely expect a partial understanding, sufficient, however, as a basis of faith; clearer comprehension would come with the spirit baptism at Pentecost. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.... God hath revealed them unto us [spirit-begotten ones] by his spirit" (1 Cor. 2:14,10), and we may enter into the realities when born from the dead in his likeness.

Continuing, our Lord reminded Nicodemus that no man had ever ascended into heaven [none had ever been there, or seen heavenly things] except he himself, who had come down from the heavenly condition to the earthly condition – even the Son of Man.* Altho aside from the main line of this lesson, it is not amiss that we here note the harmony of our Lord's words with the words of the Apostle Peter in his discourse on the day of Pentecost, "David is not ascended into the heavens." (Acts 2:34.) All the testimonies of the Scriptures are in harmony on this subject, altho opposed by nearly all uninspired writers, heathen as well as Christian, who follow the traditions of men instead of giving heed to the sure Word of God.

**Oldest Greek MSS. omit the words, "which is in heaven."*

Having thus answered Nicodemus' questions to the very limit of possibility at the time, our Lord turned the subject, and by way of showing the grand basis for this spiritual Kingdom of God, and that he himself could not enter into that Kingdom while still in the flesh, (1 Cor. 15:50) but that he must also be "changed" to spirit conditions by resurrection, he points out his coming ignominious death, and how it was illustrated and typified by Moses and the brazen serpent in the wilderness. The whole world is bitten by the fiery serpent of sin. The whole world is dying, and it was needful that our Lord Jesus should

be lifted up as a sin-offering on behalf of the world, that he might subsequently be lifted up in glory, and in order that having thus paid the penalty for all, eternal life might be offered to all – "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

In passing the point, let us notice that our Lord said not a word respecting any danger of the world going into eternal torment, nor did he utter a word respecting the salvation of any in ignorance. His declaration was that the world was *perishing*, and that the only way in which they could obtain eternal life at all would be through believing in him. So then to all who are willing to take the simple statement of God's Word, it is clear enough that the wicked who reject the Lord cannot have eternal life, and hence could not spend an eternity in misery, because without life there can be no feeling – without life they are *perished*. It is clear enough also that whoever shall be saved in this age or in the age to come must be saved by *believing* in Jesus, and cannot be saved through ignorance, according to this Gospel, which is the only authorized one.

Then our Lord gave Nicodemus a brief statement of why the Heavenly Father has provided the blessing which he had been describing – the Kingdom, and the lifting up or sacrifice of the Son of Man as a prerequisite. The reason is God's sympathetic love for humanity. He beheld that altho mankind were sharers in father Adam's sentence of death, yet many amongst them would, if granted an opportunity, gladly accept the divine arrangement, and come back into at-one-ment with their God, and rejoice to abide in his favor and to do his will. On this account God had sympathy for mankind, and prepared a great plan of salvation, of which the first coming of Jesus in the flesh as a *sacrifice for sins* was the first step or manifestation. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son [to humiliation and sacrifice in death], that whosoever believeth in him should not *perish*, but have [obtain] everlasting life." It has been said by some one that this 16th verse is the golden verse of the Bible, containing more than

any other one a condensed statement of the Gospel. Luther called this verse "the little Gospel," or "the little Bible."

Perhaps in answer to another question, or perhaps merely as a part of the further discourse to Nicodemus, our Lord next explained to him that God's object in sending his Son into the world was not to have the world condemned, for the world was already condemned, sharing with Adam the original condemnation or sentence of death. On the contrary, God sent his Son to save the world – *to recover mankind from that sentence or condemnation*. This is in harmony with another statement of Scripture which declares of believers, that "There is now...*no condemnation* to them that are [R2573 : page 44] in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1), yet only believers have thus escaped; all the remainder of the world are still under wrath, "children of wrath," and there is no other way of escape except through Christ, for "There is no other name given under heaven or among men whereby we must be saved."

The 18th verse is in harmony with this thought, that believers escape the condemnation that is on the world, but that those who do not accept of Christ *remain under the condemnation* already upon them at birth, as Adam's heirs. Nevertheless, as is declared in the 19th verse, the condemnation already upon men is justified by their course, if after seeing the light they do not love it, but reject it, and fight against it. However, we are to remember in this connection the Apostle's declaration that many in the present time see only in part, the god of this world blinding them more or less completely. (2 Cor. 4:4.) And we rejoice in the assurance of the same Apostle (John 1:9) that Jesus is the true Light, which ultimately, in the Kingdom, shall be a great Sun of Righteousness, with healing in his beams, which shall shed forth light and knowledge to every member of the human family during his Millennial reign; so that all shall have the fullest opportunity of ceasing to be "children of wrath," and of escaping the condemnation that is on them through Adam's disobedience, and of coming back through the Mediator, during the times of

restitution, [R2574 : page 44] to all the good things lost through sin.
– Acts 3:19-21.

While our Lord in his discourse to Nicodemus dealt only with the new birth of "the Church which is his body," and which with him, born of the spirit, shall constitute the Heavenly Kingdom that shall bless the world, he nevertheless elsewhere intimates that the restitution blessings which shall come to mankind will be also after the nature of a new birth, tho not a birth to spiritual conditions. Speaking to his disciples of the Millennial Kingdom, when they should sit with him in his throne – the times of restitution – he calls that Millennial age and work *regeneration* – Greek, *palingenesia*. (Matt. 19:28.) This is not the same word rendered "born again," but signifies more nearly restitution, restoration or renovation.
