

- I. Prologue: The Identity of the Son of God (1:1-18)
- II. Jesus Proven to be the Christ & the Son of God in His Public Ministry (1:19-12:50)
 - A. The Son of God Revealed (1:19-4:54)
 - 1. Beginning of Jesus' Ministry: John's First Witness, First Disciples, First Sign (1:19-2:11)
 - 2. Beginning of Jesus' Public Ministry: Cleansing the Temple, Personal Witness, John's Final Witness, Samaritan Harvest, Second Sign (2:12-4:54)
 - B. The Son of God Rejected (5:1-12:36)
 - C. Conclusion (12:37-50)
- III. Jesus Proven to be the Christ & the Son of God in His Passion and Resurrection (13:1-20:31)
- IV. Epilogue: The Future Mission of the Son of God (21)

You Must be Born from Above

Gospel of John, Part IX

John 2:23-3:21

Stuart W. Bryan

I. A Pharisaic Primer

A. The Pharisees and the Kingdom of God

1. Nature of the Kingdom

The Pharisees believed that the basic nature of the Kingdom was twofold:

(1) _____ and (2) _____. God would send His Messiah, a military figure, to vindicate the Jews and crush the Gentiles by force of arms.

2. Preparing for the Kingdom

While the Sadducees were *syncretists*, accommodating Roman culture, the Pharisees were _____, distinguishing themselves in every way possible from Roman culture.

B. The Pharisees and John the Baptist (1:24; 3:11; cf. Lk 7:30)

The Gospel of Luke tells us that "*the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him*" (7:30). They refused to accept John's witness.

C. Nicodemus the Pharisee

II. Summoning Nicodemus from Darkness to Light

A. Setting: God's Kingdom Requires Spiritual Birth (2:23-3:3 cf. Mt 3:9)

John uses a play on words to set the stage. Though Jesus declined to perform a sign for the Jews in the Temple, He had been performing signs throughout the feast and many "_____" in Him. But their "*trust*" was of such a kind that Jesus did not "_____" Himself to them.

Jesus tells Nicodemus: *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* Jesus' response strikes right at the heart of Pharisaism which was centered on ethnicity, on race. How do I know that God is on my side? The Pharisee responds: I am a Jew; I am a child of Abraham.

John the Baptist confronted this error in his ministry: "*And do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones*" (Mt 3:9).

B. Earthly Matters: God's Kingdom is not Ethnic but Spiritual (3:4-8 cf. 1:12f)

Jesus insists that God's kingdom is not _____ in nature – it is _____ or *religious* in nature. Its foundation is the work of the Spirit not the copulation of a couple.

What Jesus is saying is basic biblical doctrine: mere physical descent has never granted anyone an automatic ticket into God's favor. Paul declares in Romans 2:28-29, "*For he is not a _____ who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*" Paul's words reflect Jeremiah 9:25f.

C. Heavenly Matters: God's Son Has Come to Save the World (3:9-18)

Jesus goes on to expose Nicodemus to the fullness of God's plan for the world: God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world but to save the world. God's kingdom is not *militaristic* but *salvific*.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (14f). The very creature that had struck the Israelites became the means of rescuing those who had faith; so too it would take the death of a *Son of _____*, of the very instrument that was causing the pain and suffering of humanity, to rescue those who had faith from their plight.

And why would God send His Son, the Son of Man and Son of God, to be lifted up, to die? Because of His great _____ for His entire creation, not just for the Jews.

D. Conclusion: So Come to the Light (3:19-21 cf. 1:10-11)

But here's the sober reality: *This is the judgment: that the light has come into the world and men loved the darkness rather than the light.* By nature, men would rather have a life of violence, injustice, tyranny, and perversity, despite protestations to the contrary.

III. The Dead End of Pharisaism

The Pharisaic view of God's kingdom does not address humanity's real problem. If the Messiah came and by force of arms delivered the Israelites from Gentile oppression, then what would happen? They would just degenerate and oppress one another.

Jesus did not come to deal first and foremost with the symptoms of our problem as fallen human beings. He came to _____ us that we might be new men and women. He came to take away the guilt of our sin, to restore us to fellowship with God – for this is our central problem.

IV. Conclusion