

6. John 3:1-21

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Getting started

Where do you see humour in the Bible? How funny ('funny ha ha') do you think God is? Is God's humour one of the things you look forward to exploring in the age to come?

Observation

1. Who was Nicodemus?
2. Why might Nicodemus come to Jesus at night (and is there any significance to this given the light/dark imagery John uses throughout this gospel)?
3. Do you think the incongruous image that Nicodemus' question in verse 4 draws is intended to be humorous?
4. Why does Jesus use the imagery of wind in vv 5-9?
5. Nicodemus came asking for an explanation of signs, which we saw in 2:23-24 are an inadequate basis for faith. What does he get instead?
6. Verses 12-13 have been translated in a number different ways. What point is Jesus making? (The point is not that, at the time Jesus met Nicodemus, Jesus had already ascended into heaven and had come back. Rather, Jesus is the Son of Man, whose home is in heaven where all wisdom resides. No one has been there and returned. Jesus reveals the wisdom of heaven in a way no one else can.)
7. What is the link between Jesus and the bronze snake on the pole from Numbers 21:4-9? (God provides new life. It comes from Jesus being lifted up on Cross.)
8. In what ways do verses 17-21 clarify verse 16?
9. What images in this passage were introduced in John 1:1-18?

Interpretation

1. How well does Jesus seem to know the heart of Nicodemus? (Bear this in mind when you get to the Samaritan woman (4:1-26), the gentile official (4:43-53), the man at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-15), and others.)
2. How complete or far-reaching is this new birth/regeneration/transformation?
3. In what ways may a non-Christian not understand someone born of the Spirit (verse 8)?
4. According to John, when does the Kingdom of God, or the new Spirit given life of 3:16, start?
5. Is there a 'third way', or only perishing or eternal life?

Implications

1. What must we do to avoid perishing and have eternal life? (Yes, the ultimate 'Dorothy-dixer'. But just because 'we know this', don't skate over it. Everything flows from trusting this truth.)
2. What care do you need to use when talking about 'being born again' with people who come from a different Christian background (e.g. those less familiar with the Bible or who are wary of evangelicals)?
3. How can being 'born again' be reconciled with the experience of some Christians who have always known God and have not had a period or time of 'conversion'?
4. Based on verse 16, how would you define 'love'? How similar or different is this from contemporary uses of the word 'love'?

Prayer suggestions

1. Thank God for his acts of creation and re-creation, birth and new birth, through his love.
2. Ask God to help us understand the depth and glory of being reborn.
3. Ask that our family and friends, and the whole world may believe in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Notes:

Nicodemus reappears in 7:50 and 19:39. You might like to think how his relationship with Jesus develops through this gospel.

The meaning of 'born of water and spirit' (not 'Spirit) is unclear, and many suggestions have been made. Given that Nicodemus knew the OT, and was not yet a Christian, it is likely that 'water' is not a metaphor for baptism. It is more likely the background is the cleansing and purification associated with water in the OT. The phrase is parallel with 'born from above' and probably means purification and new life from God.

It is not clear whether verses 16-21 are words of Jesus, or John's commentary on Jesus, or some amalgam of the two. These verses are probably John's meditation on Jesus, but, either way, they are from God.