

**PP Ghost Sightings: Seeing the Holy Spirit in Action Today**

**John 3:1-10, The God Who Gives Life**

**6/27-28/2015**

Illus There is a medical condition known as *myasthenia gravis*, where the muscles of the body cannot respond to the signals being sent from the brain. Normally, those signals are received in the muscle by an apparatus known as the motor-end-plate, but in this condition, those motor-end-plates are missing or blocked. The signals are sent, but never received, so the muscles cannot respond. The symptoms therefore are seen in a drooping eyelid, blurred or double vision, slurred speech, difficulty chewing and swallowing, chronic muscle fatigue and more seriously, difficulty breathing. There is no cure, but there are treatments to help

Now hold on to what I just shared, for it will feature prominently from our second point on We are in a sermon series called Ghost Sightings where we are looking to see the Holy Spirit in action, and we'll see Him in action when Jesus meets a Pharisee called Nicodemus

**PP 1-Every human being is in need of being born again**

As we turn our attention to John 3, we see that a Pharisee comes to talk with Jesus  
***“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.” John 3:1***  
 Several groups vied for spiritual leadership of the Jewish people at this time  
 Sadducees, who didn't believe in the supernatural work of God, today's Unitarians  
 Essenes who were strict, monastic separatists, basically Jewish monks  
 The Priests, kind of like the early papal class, many of who were corrupt and wealthy  
 And Pharisees, many of whom were called scribes, teachers of the law, or Jewish lawyers  
 Nicodemus belonged to the Pharisees, and even more, he was a ruler of the Jews, part of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, similar to our Senators  
 He had a Greek name, not a Hebrew one, which would have been rare  
 It was not uncommon then, with the spread of Greek influence and culture, that wealthy Jewish fathers would give their newborn sons two names, a Greek name and a Hebrew name  
 Going by his Greek name showed that he was a progressive Jew, powerful, wealthy, and curious  
***“This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.’” 3:2***

**PP ‘these signs’** were miracles Jesus performed in Jerusalem, bringing many to faith (**Jn 2:23**)  
 God gave these signs in order to confirm the preaching of God's Word and His servants

**PP “And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs” Mark 16:20**

**PP “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.” Acts 8:4-6**

Miraculous signs have a purpose: confirm the message, confirm the messenger

But **John 2:24-25** says, ***“Jesus on His part did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in man.”***

He knew they wanted the supernatural, not salvation, for He ***‘knew what was in man’***

What follows are several encounters where Jesus demonstrates that He knew what was in the heart of people, and in every heart is sin and unbelief  
 Nicodemus is his first concrete example, and the Samaritan woman at the well will be His 2<sup>nd</sup>  
 Nicodemus represents the best the world can produce, and one who will go to eternal destruction if he is not born again

**PP 2-In order to even see God's kingdom, you must be born again**

Notice I didn't just say, *'In order to be in God's kingdom, you must be born again'*  
 That's true, as we'll see, but in order to even *see* the kingdom of God, you must be born again  
***"Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"*** John 3:3

**PP** *'see'* here does not mean ocular vision, eyesight, but the ability to perceive, understand  
 Natural eyes, natural perception, the natural mind which we were all born with, cannot perceive, or understand the kingdom of God

It does not seem real or make sense, nor is it even visible to the natural mind  
 Every person ever born begins life with natural eyes, including you and me, and it can only perceive and understand and reach for what is in this kingdom  
 And there is a reason for that, and to see it, let's take a very brief journey back to the garden

God created man in His own image, a thinking, feeling, intellectual and living creation  
 We have bodies, souls, and we have what the bible calls spirits  
 Our souls enable us to think, feel, and have identity, knowing who we, and others and God is  
 Our spirits enable us to worship, to be conscious of God, to love and obey God  
 God created Adam and Eve, gave them the Garden of Eden to care for, and enjoy, all but one tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil  
 It was a symbol of dependence on God, the fruit of which they were not to eat, or they would die  
 But they chose to defy God and eat from it, and they died...just not yet physically  
 He died in his spirit, that part of him that had communion with God, and he ran and hid when he heard God walking near  
 He died in his soul, the seat of intellect and feelings and identity, full of shame at his nakedness, losing the perception of truth and the ability to comprehend

**PP** Romans tells us that when we forfeit the worship of the true God, people ***"became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."*** Romans 1:21

People haven't lost the ability to reason, we've lost the ability to reason our way to God

Remember my opening illustration of *myasthenia gravis*?

The spirit of a person was meant to play the part of the motor-end-plates, receiving signals from God in worship and resulting in the movement of obedience and communion  
 But when Adam sinned, the capacity of the spirit to perceive and respond to the signals of God's Word was destroyed, in him, Eve, and every human being

**PP** ***"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."***

**1 Corinthians 2:14**

There is no human being that can naturally receive or perceive or love God's Word

The unsaved are not unintelligent, for there are smart men and women who understand all sorts of complicated and complex matters

The problem they have is that there is no capacity in their fallen spirit to perceive God's truth Which lends such irony to Nicodemus, who begins with *'Rabbi, we know...'*

*No, Nicodemus, you do not know, your spirit is darkened, you cannot know the truth, which is what I am willing to restore in you*

So Jesus said to Nicodemus, ***"unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."***

The ability to perceive, to see, to understand, to receive signals from God must be regenerated, a person must be born again, in order to understand the kingdom of God

But the kingdom of God is vastly different than the kingdom of this world

It is the absolute, sovereign rule of God, which Jesus said would was about to break out on this earth God growing ever larger, the way a tiny mustard seed produces a massive tree

It is ultimately heaven, and made evident on earth through the church!

God rules over all of creation, He is, as Revelation says, the King of all nations

Jesus ruled the sea, over death and disease, over powerful guards sending them to their knees

He rules over the kingdom of this world with absolute might, but only in His kingdom is He in communion with His people, blessing us with His presence

But this kingdom cannot be perceived unless the eyes of the heart are enabled to see it

What must happen is exactly what Jesus said: a person must be born again

Of course, Nicodemus couldn't understand: ***"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*** **John 3:4**

You don't need your mother to birth you again, because you will be just as fallen as you were the first time and just as unable to perceive or enter the kingdom of God

**PP** Jesus had used a word for *'again'* that, in John's gospel, always meant *'from above'* or *'from the very first or beginning'*

And it takes us back to the birth of the first man, Adam, in the beginning of human history

**PP** ***"the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."*** **Genesis 2:7**

Now listen to what I tell you: the One Who breathed into that pile of dust, was the Holy Spirit

**PP** Job understand, ***"The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."*** **Job 33:4**

Nicodemus, you must be re-born, this time from above, by the Holy Spirit

He must re-create you, breathe life into your spirit, then you will be able to see God's kingdom

### **PP 3-To be born again is the work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God**

***"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'"*** **John 3:5-8**

You must be *'born of water and the Spirit'*, or you *'cannot enter the kingdom of God'*

Notice now, Jesus changed from *'see'* the kingdom of God, to *'enter'* that kingdom

You must be born from above, your spirit regenerated and able to perceive God's kingdom, then you can enter it

*'born of water and the Spirit'* doesn't refer to the water of physical birth, the release of embryonic fluid of the mother

Neither does it refer to water baptism, the sign and not the means of salvation

So what does *'water'* refer to?

If you were here for the Nehemiah series, when we toured the gates of Jerusalem, you may remember that the Water Gate was the gate of the Word of God

At the **Water Gate**, the Holy Spirit fills us with the Word of God to sanctify and purify our hearts

**PP** *"...Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word"* **Ephesians 5:25-26**

**PP** *'water'* is God's living and abiding Word, which Peter makes clear gives us this new birth

**PP** *"you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God"* **1 Peter 1:23**

The Spirit of God restores the motor-end-plates of the human spirit, enabling people to see, perceive and respond to the signals of the Word of God

In natural man, that capacity was destroyed through Adam's sin and only God can restore it

And once it is restored, the Word of God can stir someone to faith and response!

**PP** *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."* **Romans 10:17**

This is why we share, teach and preach the gospel, the Word of God, it's why all that we do must be scripture-centered

*Nicodemus, you must be born of the Word of God and the Spirit of God*

*Your efforts to keep the law, your efforts to make yourself acceptable to God, they are worthless*

*Salvation is an inside job that is completely of grace, completely something that God the Holy Spirit does in you through His Word*

Jesus couldn't have been clearer on this than this: *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."* **John 6:63**

Paul echoed it later, *"Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."* **Romans 8:8**

**PP** This is what John means in his gospel by *'flesh'*, the weakness and frailty of our whole being

The flesh is absolutely unable to restore the ability of the human spirit to perceive God's truth

How difficult this was for Nicodemus, for his whole religion was a system of law and works

Judaism, the Jewish religion, was a system built on control, all forms of legalism are

Layer after layer had been built around the law of God, a legal defense erected to protect it

They took the core of the Moral Law, and added layers of human responsibility to it

Yes, you must rest on the Sabbath, one day a week given to the Lord

But then, adding to it, a woman was forbidden to look into a mirror on that day lest she be tempted to pull it out and break the Sabbath

Or you could swallow vinegar on the Sabbath for a sore throat, but could not gargle it

Hundreds of these artificial fences formed the Talmud, and later the Mishnah

This is legalism, something very different with grace, which necessitates giving up that control to receive a gift that you couldn't earn, deserve or create

So Jesus told him: *"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."* **7-8**

The word *'wind'* is often a word for the Spirit of God, and it blows, breathes where He decides  
Jesus is telling Nicodemus he is struggling because he cannot figure this out or control it

Nicodemus is being confronted with the truth that he is dead in his sins, helpless to change it  
His spirit was unable to perceive and enter the kingdom of God unless/until it is reborn, alive to  
the Spirit and able to perceive the truth of God's salvation through the cross of Christ

Read with me verses **14-15**, "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the  
Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.*"

In summary, the best of our efforts are birthed by our flesh, and it can only produce trust in our  
ability to please God

But the Spirit of God can restore our ability to see the kingdom of God, and the Word of God  
brings faith, so we can believe in Jesus Christ and enter the kingdom of God

Born again, regeneration, salvation is entirely a work of God's Spirit and God's Word!

Someone is going to say as I conclude: *This message wasn't practical at all, I can't apply it*

**PP** Friends, the way you apply this is three quick and simple ways:

**PP** 1-Be *compassionate* to unbelievers who are rejecting God, for they cannot help it

**PP** 2-Be *consistent* in praying that God would regenerate them by the power of His Spirit

**PP** 3-Be *confident* to share with them the truth of God's Word, they are words of life

Compassion, consistent prayer, confidence in God's Word...our take-aways this morning

Amen?

Pray