

Gospel of John - episode 6

Chapter 2 part 3 & chapter 3 part 1

Welcome to our series on Saint John's gospel. We are continuing to look at the wonderful moment of Jesus cleansing the temple. I want to begin by just reading some of the text again for you: "Making a whip out of some cord, Jesus drove them all out of the temple. Cattle and sheep as well scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over, and said to the pigeon sellers, 'take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's House into a market'". There was a very clear statement made by Jesus that he was the Son of the Person who was dwelling in the Holy of Holies. A greater shock couldn't possibly be given to the Judean leaders! The only reason why they wouldn't kill him on the spot is that they may not have heard fully what he said, or they may not have heard at all what he said.... but somebody heard because John has written it down for us.

Many people heard it. It was "my Father's House". He did not say 'the temple of God'. He did not say, 'this holy place'. He did not say 'our place of worship that we've had for time immemorial'. No! "My Father's House". So, what he's saying is that 'I have the right to take authority In my Father's House'. 'I have the right to do what my Father wants me to do in my Father's House'. Therefore, Jesus is saying that he is the one who has authority in the House of God. The Judean leaders will not let him away with that! That they will understand that either Jesus is right and he's the Messiah and he has authority.... or they are right and they have authority - but the both of them can't have it because the they are completely different. So, this is the first major challenge that Jesus gives to the leadership. Listen to it again..... "Take all of this out of here....."

He didn't ask permission from anyone. He acted like someone who owned the premises. "Take all of this out of here and stop turning my Father's House into a market"! Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: "Zeal for your House will devour me, which is Psalm 69:9. Of course, the disciples didn't understand it at that moment. They understood everything after the Resurrection of Jesus. At that moment, they would have been as amazed and shocked and surprised and shaken as anybody else. Even some of them might have been knocked over by some of the animals!

Verse 18, The UDAOI - the Jewish leaders intervened. Now these are the people running the temple. These are the members of the Sanhedrin. And they said, "what sign can you give?" I can't think of any greater insult than that. What sign? Jesus has just given them the sign that he is the Messiah! He has given them the sign that Malachi said: "The Lord would suddenly enter his temple.... and who would be able to stand when he appears? Because he will be like the refiner's fire and the fuller's alkali..... and he will cleanse the priesthood. Afterwards, they will offer worship that is worthy of God". So, nobody there would have misunderstood the sign. They knew. But when the Sanhedrin demanded another sign they were telling Jesus they were not going to take any message from him, Ever!

They were going to reject him out of hand regardless of the fact that he showed all the signs that he was the Messiah. "What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?" And Jesus gave them a sign - a prophetic sign - which was totally amazing. He said, "destroy this sanctuary....." Now it depends on whether you're on the level of 'below' or the level of 'above' as to what you mean by

'this sanctuary'. If you're on the level of 'below', this sanctuary is the huge building - this wonder of the world all around you. And they said, "It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you're going to raise it in 3 days?" See, they're at the level of below..... the level of complete incomprehension. But John tells us in verse 21 "that Jesus was speaking about the sanctuary of his own body. And it was when Jesus rose from the dead that his disciples remembered all of this". Now we know from the Synoptic Gospels that the disciples didn't remember the scriptures and didn't understand and didn't fully grasp who Jesus was until the Resurrection.

Everything slotted into place with the Resurrection. And so, these statements that John is giving, they're the statements of the church at the end of second century that 'now we know all of this, so we can give it to you logically'. But it took them to three and a half years of their experience as disciples of Jesus to come to this conclusion. They remembered all this, and they believed the scripture and the words that he said. So, let's come back and do a bit of digging on all of this. I mentioned to you already the prophecy from Malachi.

But there is a message also from the prophet Zechariah, who was one of the last of the prophets in the Old Testament as well. And he said that 'he looked forward to the day of the Lord when there would be no more traders in the temple'. This means that this marketing in the temple had gone on for a long time, and that people had been born and reared and reached adulthood thinking that this was the norm. It took the action of Jesus for them to realize it was not normal to turn the House of God into a market! This was not the reason for having a House of God. The House of God is a House of prayer. It's a House of communion with God. It's not a marketplace.

It's not the place for the world to invade.... not only that, but Isaiah had told them something 800 years previously which they had chosen to forget about. Isaiah 56:6-7 says, "Foreigners who have attached themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love his name, these I will bring to my holy mountain". And 'my holy mountain' is Mount Zion on which the temple is built. So, it's the same as saying, I will bring into the temple. "I will make them joyful in my House of prayer". Now notice that the temple is supposed to be a House of prayer, not a marketplace. "Their holocausts and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar".

We're told in Acts chapter 10 that Saint Peter had to deal with this when a gentile household came to believe in God before Peter came to preach the gospel to them, and that their sacrifices and their offerings to God were acceptable to God. "Their sacrifices and their holocausts will be accepted on my altar. For my House will be called a House of prayer....." but for all people, all nations, what the Jewish leaders didn't seem to understand at all was that all human beings were God's children, and He wanted all of them in heaven. God wants everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Colour, caste, age, sickness, health, anything else doesn't make any difference because in the eyes of God we are all his children.... that's the bottom line for Him.

So, when the religious authorities demand a sign, they're going to keep demanding signs from Jesus. As we go through the gospel, no matter what sign he gives them, they will demand a sign from heaven. But **Jesus is the sign from heaven!** Jesus himself is the sign, and they won't accept it. They will refuse every sign that he gives to them. Now you have to understand that these men knew the scriptures more than you and I know them. They knew every word. They had every commentary. They were teaching the scriptures all the time. There was no way they didn't see what Jesus was doing or understand it.... they understood!

What was happening here was that Jesus had challenged their authority on their own power base! He said, 'my Father's House'. And he acted without asking permission from anyone. In other words, he had authority in his own right. It did not have to be given to him by them - and that was their problem. So, in doing this, Jesus raised the question and John is raising it in the gospel for you and I who are reading and listening to this. 'Who is the leader of God's people or who should be leading God's people'?

Well, John himself is going to answer that in chapter 10 that Jesus is the good shepherd, and he alone is the leader of God's people. He is the gate to heaven. Nobody can get in without him. So, it should be answered fully there, but it's brought up here. So, Jesus here is doing what you read about in Ezekiel 34 when God challenged the false shepherds of Israel.... the people who were leading God's people, but they were not leading them correctly. And he challenged them. And God said, "I will look after my own sheep. I will take care of them". In other words, I will take it out of your hands, And I will take it into my own hands.

This is what you're looking at here, and this is what the Judean leadership actually hear, that the leadership is being taken from them, and they are not going to take it well, as you know. Jesus, According to Ezekiel 34, is also challenging them on the abuses of the worship which they allowed in the temple, and they allowed it because they alone were benefiting materially from it! Therefore, this was an abuse of their priesthood and it made their worship unfit for divine worship. And Jesus was telling them in his action that the worship they were offering to God was completely worthless. Now they had been warned in the past by the prophet Amos that that was so as well.

We have a very interesting text from Jeremiah, which I need to share with you. It's Jeremiah chapter 7:1- Now Jeremiah is six centuries before Christ so, the problem that Jesus is dealing with here is not new. Jeremiah said, "this is the word of the Lord. Go and stand in the temple of the Lord and proclaim this message and say this is the word of Lord" the to all of the men of Judah whom Jesus is addressing as well. The Lord of course, "the God of Israel says this, amend your behaviour and your actions, and I will stay with you in this place. You're to put no trust in delusive words like this is the temple, and this is the temple, and this is the temple, and therefore, we're fine. He said, but if you amend your behaviour and your actions and you treat each other fairly, which is not going on in this marketplace, If you do not exploit the stranger - which was going on at the time of Christ - if you do not exploit the orphan and the widow, he said, then I will stay with you". And then he goes on, and he says, "do not take this temple that bears my Name For a robber's den. I, at any rate, am not blind, says the Lord".

This is why Jesus doesn't have to say anything. It's all been said by the prophets. But the prophets did say that somebody would take action someday and that is what Jesus did. Now I want to read the rest of what Jeremiah said here because that is the consequence of what goes on here in the cleansing of the temple. The Lord said to Jeremiah, "now go to my place in Shiloh - which was their first shrine, where at first I gave a name and a home for myself. See what I have done **to it** because of the wickedness of my people". And then he goes on, and he says, "I will treat this temple that bears my name and in which you put your trust and the place where I have given you and your ancestors, I will treat it just as I treated Shiloh. I will drive you out of my sight". That's very, very interesting because what Jeremiah said in that text actually happened in his own day. When Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians came and destroyed the temple and destroyed the city. But the reason why I'm

giving it to you It's because John wants us to remember this and to remember that a much more drastic judgment came to Israel in the destruction of the temple and the city and the expulsion of the nation from Israel after their killing of the Messiah.

But it all had been said. That's why Jesus doesn't have to say anything here. It was also an expectation of the people that the Messiah would rebuild the temple. Hence Jesus said, "destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days". This is what Hosea said in chapter 6:1- 3: "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us. He has struck us down but he will bandage our wounds. After a day or two, he will bring us back to life. On the third day He will raise us, and we shall live in his presence. Let us set ourselves to know the Lord, that he will come is as certain as the dawn. His judgment will rise like the light. He will come to us as showers come, and as the spring rains come, so he will come". So, When Jesus says 'destroy this temple' some of them will have remembered that text from, Hosea. But John wants to tell us something else, that if you hear Jesus saying, destroy this temple - pointing to himself - that was exactly what the Judean leaders were going to do.

They were going to set out. He was setting out to bring Israel back to God, but they tore him to pieces, literally, in the Passion. And he was raised on the third day. And he came back to them completely new, completely healed. And later, he ascended into God's presence. So, he fulfilled this text of Hosea absolutely in the most incredible way. The judgment of Jesus comes like the dawn of a new age for them and he was spreading his light..... and he did come like the spring rains.

As Isaiah told us in chapter 55:10-11, "yes, as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not turn without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the Sower and bread for the eating, so, The word that goes forth from my mouth does not return to me empty". And the Word Incarnate came from God and went back to God having accomplished all that he set out to do. So, what John wants you to hear is that the temple of stone which was in Jerusalem - **that** had failed, but the temple of Jesus's Body - the New Temple - will never fail God. It will glorify God instead. And the temple of Jesus' Body is pure and holy.... a fitting place for God's holiness.

And they should have known that the temple needed to be holy because in Leviticus 19:1-2, God had said, "you shall be holy because I am holy, says the Lord". They knew from all the washings that they did and all the ablutions that the priests had to go through before offering sacrifice to God that they had to be holy in God's presence. But they left it absolutely on the level of below, and they did the physical washing without washing their hearts. The New Temple of God would be opened on the Cross, and it would be opened when their eyes would be completely closed and they wouldn't be able to see.

The risen Temple of God, Jesus, risen and ascended will be the focus of all the worship of God in Spirit and in truth - which we will hear in chapter 4. Jesus himself will be the Shrine of God's Presence because he is the Word made Flesh 'tenting' among us as we read in chapter 1:14. It is from **this Temple** of the risen Lord that the living waters of grace will flow out to the whole world - not just to Israel. It was after the Resurrection that the apostles began to realize all of this.

It was after the Resurrection, and most particularly after the coming of the Holy Spirit, that they went back to the scriptures because Saint Luke tells us in chapter 24 that Jesus showed them how to

go back to the scriptures and find out all about him there. And it was then that they realized that he was the fulfilment of Ezekiel 47.

John finishes this chapter by saying, “during his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave. But Jesus knew them all, and he did not trust himself to them. He never needed evidence about any man, he could tell what a man had in him”. This is a key text for understanding all the controversies that are coming. Jesus, being God as well as man, knew everything that was inside of human beings. He knew exactly the condition of all the leadership in Jerusalem, he knew everything about their moral life, their Spiritual life, and the absence of it and so on. He knew all about their actions. And the strange thing is they knew all about him.

It's this Contest between these 2 groups that we're going to be dealing with as we go into the gospel. You cannot say that these Jewish leaders didn't understand Jesus. They did. Because they knew the scriptures off by heart. But the problem they had with Jesus is that he never sought their approval for anything. He had authority within himself. He had not been trained by them in the temple. He had not been to their rabbinical schools. He had not been taught by them. He was not one of them. Jesus remained in the position of a lay preacher and a prophet. They were extremely jealous of his authority, his power, his miracles, his signs, and the extraordinary attraction that the people had for him.... the people were like moths drawn to the light. They just couldn't get enough of him. And what was worse, Jesus actually showed the leaders where they were going wrong as he did here in the temple.

And Jesus will approach them in chapter 10 and accuse them of being false shepherds..... He knew them all as God knows all of us Cf. Psalm 139. ‘You know my thoughts before I think them. You know my words before I say them. This knowledge is too wonderful for me’. He knew them and so he didn't trust himself to them naturally.... and he never needed evidence about any man. This, You're going to see this right the way through the Gospel.

Jesus talks to people as someone who knows you from the inside, and he could tell what was there. Jesus knew exactly what he was dealing with in these false shepherds.... and a final word. I told you already that Jacob's name had been changed to Israel because he'd been strong against God. And these children of Jacob, the leadership of the Judean area and the leadership of the temple, the Sanhedrin, they're going to show themselves strong against Jesus the whole way right up to and including the Passion.... and they will not accept him in the Resurrection... and they will not accept him in the church. It's a very frightening mystery. We've come to the end of chapter 2. Thank you for listening.

INTERVAL

Welcome to our sharing on Saint John's gospel. We're now going to go into chapter 3, and we have the mystery of the Spirit about to be revealed to Israel. John tells us that there was one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus who was a leading Jew. That means, one of the Sanhedrin. He was a Judean, who came to Jesus by night. And he said, rabbi, “**we know**”: That means the Sanhedrin knew who Jesus was. “We know that you are a teacher that comes from God”. That makes all their

opposition totally vile. “We know that you are a teacher who comes from God for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him”.

And then Jesus answered, “I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born from above, he cannot even enter the kingdom of God”. Let us begin this new discussion in John's gospel. Jesus is going to try and get across the fact that the people of Israel have to be born again. Now you need to understand that to be born into the people of Israel meant that you went through a physical operation called circumcision, and then you became a child of the covenant. They of course, had descent from Abraham. They were sons of God as a result of the descent from Abraham.

Jesus is going to have to clear things up for them; He is going to tell them that descent from Abraham It's not actually going to be the issue in the kingdom of God because he wants to bring in all nations into the kingdom of God. He is going to bypass the physical operation of circumcision for he wants everybody be to be born of God. So, no matter what nation you come from or what generation you live in, the New Birth will be the same for everybody. Everybody will be born of God, born of water and the Spirit. That's going to be very difficult for the Sanhedrin to take on board because as far as they are concerned it will be cancelling their religion.

Jesus is approached by a member of the Sanhedrin. Very often we give very negative comments about Nicodemus because he only appears at the beginning of the text in John and then he appears after Jesus' death.....People don't realize that Jesus actually had some friends in the Sanhedrin, but in order for the whole business of Israel to continue and until Jesus could bring the new kingdom into reality they had to keep their jobs; they had to continue their everyday lives, but they couldn't speak up in the Sanhedrin. And when the Sanhedrin became very negative towards Jesus - which they did right from the beginning men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea – two members that everybody knows about - they had to keep very quiet, but because they kept quiet they were able to alert Jesus and his disciples about what was actually going on. So, it's not all negative. But John wants to show it to you from the level of below because Jesus wants to raise everything to a high level. He wants to raise it to the level of above.

Therefore, when John emphasizes that he came to Jesus by night - now the ordinary meaning for that is that Nicodemus couldn't come during the day because of the antipathy of the Sanhedrin. But for John, coming **by night** means he's coming from a very low level; he is coming from the agency of darkness that will oppose Jesus, so he wants to emphasize that part of it. But I've already given you a text from Isaiah chapter 9:1, “that the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light”. Now darkness in this gospel means **unbelief**. It means being at a very worldly level. It means not understanding Jesus, and it might even mean something worse that you're living a sinful life and therefore open to the influence of Satan in your life, so ‘the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who live in the land of deep shadow, a light has shone’.

Nicodemus represents the whole leadership of the Sanhedrin; his problems are identified with all the problems of the Sanhedrin. We're going to find when we go into chapter 4 that the Samaritan woman's problems are identified with the problems **of her people** as well. And this is a device that John uses to get across to us that there are very different ways in which we have to approach different people. It depends on where they come from and what their circumstances are, so in order to really understand this dialogue with Nicodemus, let's go back to the last sentence of chapter 2, the one we left just in our last episode.

It says in Chapter 2:24. “that Jesus knew them all, and he didn't trust himself to any of them. He never needed evidence about any man. He could tell what a man had in him”. Nicodemus is at a great disadvantage because Jesus can read them like a book. But Nicodemus cannot read Jesus! He's going on the signs and that was what the Judeans went for all the time - and the Galileans as well, in fact. So, he's at a disadvantage that he doesn't have the knowledge or the wisdom that Jesus has because Jesus' knowledge and wisdom are Divine. Nicodemus represents the fact that the Sanhedrin absolutely refused **to go beyond the signs** to penetrate the mystery of the person of Jesus.

And John has already got across to us very eloquently, in my opinion, that if you don't penetrate the mystery of the Person of Jesus, the signs are not going to do anything for you. We know even from modern times that people can experience miracles - and it doesn't increase their faith.... depending on signs is not a good thing. At the end of the gospel Jesus is going to say to Thomas, “look, blessed are those who have not seen and have believed”. In other words, they have believed in Jesus himself, not just in the works.

Nicodemus also comes to Jesus full of religion - we're going to see the great need to shift from religion to spirituality. Nicodemus represents a real problem within the church today as well, that people can have an awful lot of religion and forget that the essence of religion is to have a personal relationship with God..... to have a personal relationship with God expressed in prayer and in everyday life as well. He has all the laws and the regulations - and he has the knowledge - and he has the books.... and he has the education. He has The job; he has the clothes, he has the meetings; he has the privileges, he **appears** to have everything. In actual fact, he has nothing. Jesus calls him in verse 9 a teacher of the law. That means that this man is a skilled person.... he knows the Bible..... he knows all the commentaries..... he teaches it!

Nevertheless, he comes across to Jesus as somebody who just doesn't get it, just doesn't understand. He is not even aware of the arrogance and the self-complacency that he has when he says, **we know**. That means they're already talking about Jesus behind his back. They're already discussing what's going on, and they've already come to conclusions, either for or against him - the vast majority against him. Yet he does an amazing thing for a member of the Sanhedrin. He actually calls Jesus rabbi; that's really something. Those of us who are laypeople and who are not the children of Abraham don't appreciate that to call somebody rabbi was a term of real respect.

We shouldn't look at Nicodemus too negatively, although he represents the problems of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus gives the game away completely when he says that ‘we've already decided that you have come from God’. Now the rest of the Sanhedrin wouldn't like Nicodemus to say that! They tried to give Jesus the impression that they considered him a complete fake, but that wasn't so. Nicodemus says, No! We know very well you come from God. We know very well that your signs actually prove this, which means, of course, that their rejection of Jesus was entirely without excuse. But Nicodemus is coming on this low level of law and religion and all the rest of it, and he's going to have to be raised up to the higher level of spirituality and entering into a personal relationship with God.

He is going to find that difficult because once Jesus says to him, “I tell you most solemnly”. Jesus only used that expression when he was making a very serious revelation. He said, “unless a man - that means **any man**, not just you personally, “unless a man is born from above”. Now we know - we, the readers of the gospel know that back in chapter 1:13, we were told that those who did accept him he

would give them the privilege of becoming children of God. Now Nicodemus is at a great disadvantage to you and me. He doesn't know that. Jesus says, unless there is this radical fundamental change in you, you cannot even be part of the kingdom of God. Now for Nicodemus is that is a complete shock.

That is a complete NO..... this is just not on, and yet Jesus says that **just to begin** the conversation. He's trying to say to Nicodemus - which Nicodemus could **hear** - that from now on it was not enough to be a child of Abraham. For the entire Old Testament period being a child of Abraham was the most privileged thing on this planet..... all their privileges came to them by natural descent from Abraham. And so, you're going to hear them saying to Jesus, "We're children of Abraham!" but Jesus is going to say NO! The issue from now on is to be **a child of God**, is to be **a son of God** in the image of Jesus, and this made a huge difference. When they really get what he's saying, they will retort in chapter 8:53, "are you greater than Abraham? Who do you make yourself out to be?" And then he will shock them to the core of their being by saying, "before Abraham ever was, I AM".

Nicodemus is completely shocked even at this. He said, "how can a grown man be born?" Here is Nicodemus down here at this lower level.... and, of course, it's completely impossible for an adult to go back into their mother's womb. How can you go back into the mother's womb and be born again? Now as far as Nicodemus is concerned. the only spiritual birth he knew was circumcision..... that was going into the womb of the Covenant of Moses and being born into the Covenant of Moses. He says you can't do that a second time because the sign of the physical circumcision remained.

That was it! But Jesus isn't talking about that; Jesus doesn't pander to any of his problems. He challenges him to rise to a higher plane and to start listening at a higher plane. Jesus said, "I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit....." therefore, circumcision is gone! Yet when you come to the Acts of the Apostles the leaders of the church will struggle when they move out to deal with the Gentiles.... with 'is circumcision **really gone**'? Is water and the Spirit **absolutely** enough? Saint Paul will be wonderful in defending that 'unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God'.

Nicodemus is a scholar..... he can hear what Jesus is saying.... he is hearing that whatever Jesus is doing, you cannot even participate at all unless you have this New Birth. He hears that clearly.... and he also hears that it hasn't anything to do with circumcision. He also hears it has nothing to do with being a descendant from Abraham. Jesus underlines this by saying to him, "listen. What is born of flesh is flesh". Whatever is down here at this lower level... that is not spiritual; it doesn't belong to the Spirit level. "What is born of the Spirit is spirit....." so, here is the difference between flesh and spirit.

Now we got this the opposite way in chapter 1 when the Logos became Sarx - this infinite distance between the Word and flesh. And now we're being told that the flesh cannot take you into the spirit world. Only the Spirit of God can take you there, and you've got to have this New Birth. A birth that will not come from the will of man or the urge of the flesh - that each one of us will be born of God in Baptism. Jesus said, "don't be surprised at this, that you must be born from above. The wind blows wherever it pleases....." now the wind is the Spirit of God (RUACH ADONAI). And the Spirit of God will blow wherever it wants.

Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, 'You will be very surprised at who will accept this new life, and you will also be very surprised at who won't accept it as well'. We learned in chapter 1:12 that all who did accept him he gave them power to become children of God, "not born of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man, but born of God". So, Jesus is saying, that you need a new Father to beget you in the Spirit, and that new Father is the Father in heaven, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore, **we** can say, **Our Father (AVINU)**.

Jesus alone can give us this gift, but the Sanhedrin are never going to accept this. They're never going to accept that Jesus can do something that is completely above their authority and beyond their understanding, so, they're not going to accept it. But some people will rise with him to the higher plane and allow Jesus to work in them. But what John wants - because I told you at the very beginning that the very reason why John wrote the gospel was that you and I - who are the readers of the Gospel would put our faith in Jesus, and that because of that, that we would accept this life from him. That's the important thing. Not Nicodemus now. He was 2000 years ago; you and I are now. Therefore, Jesus is telling **us** that we have to be up at this ('above') level. Nicodemus couldn't even **enter** the kingdom of God (at that moment in time).

Now John has already given us the testimony of John the Baptist Back in chapter 1:33 where he said, "the man on whom you see the Spirit rest, He's the one who's going to baptize you in the Holy Spirit". So, John the evangelist has prepared you and me - the reader - in order to understand what's being said right now. This is God's action and it brings about a relationship between us and God, a relationship of Father and son so that we all become beloved sons. Jesus is THE BELOVED SON with capital letters, and we're the beloved sons with the lowercase letters, but we are in his image. Saint Paul expressed this very well in Romans 8:29 "They are the ones that he chose especially long ago and intended to become true images of himself". A true image is 'vero icon'. A true image that we would become icons of Jesus.

Nicodemus has another problem. And that is that when you go back into the Old Testament - you will notice that all the time I'm going back, because, to understand the gospels, you have to go back into the foundation, which is in the Old Testament. But there's also a forward look also in the Gospels towards the church and the future. If we go back to Exodus 4:23, the whole nation of Israel - they weren't called 'Israel' at the time. **The chosen people** is the better term for them. The whole group of the chosen people were called **the son of God**. "This is what the Lord says, Israel is my firstborn son" (among the Nations). Now Israel was the name given to Jacob. In Hosea chapter 11:1, "when Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt". Now that was **the whole nation**. But Nicodemus is hearing that the privileges that were given to the entire nation **as a nation** before are now being given **to each individual!**

And if you think Chapter 3 is challenging. you're going to chapter 4 where Jesus chooses the most unlikely human being on the planet! And he offers the entire gift to this one individual. God doesn't think the way we do! Not at all. So, They knew that by meditating on the Word of God that they would receive life. But Jesus is talking about something completely different - that this new life is the life of **agape love**, the life of heaven, that we live upon the earth. Therefore, the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is the difference between flesh and Spirit!

Nicodemus can hear that, theoretically, but he's not ready yet to take it on board at all. A lot of discussion went on among the scholars about him, but they didn't come to any conclusion. The other

thing that we have here is in verse 8 that “the Wind or the Spirit blows where it pleases. You hear its Sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. And that's how it is with all who are born of the Spirit”. Jesus - I should really say John - in putting this text here together for us, is telling us, that we need to remember that when Jesus speaks about the mysterious coming and going of the Spirit that we need to remember the mysterious coming of Jesus himself in the Incarnation and the even more mysterious going of Jesus in the Passion and Resurrection!

If the Incarnation challenged them, the Passion and Resurrection is going to challenge them much, much more. If the Sanhedrin wouldn't accept the mystery of his coming, they're not going to accept the mystery of his going either. I'd like to bring in a text here from Isaiah 43:18-19. Nicodemus needs to accept a bit of advice, and the advice is in Isaiah, “There is no need to recall the past. There is no need to remember what went before. Behold, I'm doing a new thing. Even now, it comes to light. Can you not see it? Look. I am making a road in the wilderness and paths in the wilds”. Now John the Baptist already identified himself as the voice in the wilderness of Israel. He's already done that. And here is the reminder from Isaiah that if God is coming in an absolutely unprecedented divine visitation, the like of which the world has never known or could never guess, then we have to leave the past behind and let God do His new thing.

God is a creator, so He doesn't patch. He creates something completely new. All Nicodemus hears is that whatever Jesus is talking about is completely new. It's not anything like what we had before. And he just said to Jesus in a kind of a lame way, how is that possible? Where would you start? Is it even available now? He cannot understand this new revelation. He's not ready. He doesn't say to Jesus, look. I don't understand this, but can I have it? You're going to find when you come to chapter 4 that the Samaritan woman - who won't understand the living water that Jesus is talking about will say, ‘give me some of that water’. When we go into chapter 6 the crowds of people in Galilee won't understand where the living bread is coming from either, but they will say ‘give us some of that bread’. Because they actually ask for it Jesus can work the miracle for them.

He can't do anything for Nicodemus when Nicodemus doesn't ask. The extraordinary thing is that God has given us a very, very dangerous gift, and it's the gift called free will. We can close somebody out when we want to. We can take somebody in when we want to. We can say ‘yes’ to a revelation that's given to us; we can say ‘no’ to a revelation that's given to us. But we have to take the responsibility of our yes or our no. The sadness is that here, you don't know whether Nicodemus is saying yes or no! He's sitting on the fence. Nicodemus had come to Jesus with the heavy ‘We know’. Jesus gives him an answer which is on the level that he actually understands. And he says, ‘Nicodemus, **we also know**, and we speak about what we know and what we have seen from above.

I'll give you that revelation in our next episode. Thank you for listening.