

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16.

If I had to pick one verse that summarized the entire Bible, I would pick John 3:16. In the corporate world we are always looking for the Executive Summary. I recently had an experience with this. I had called a meeting to discuss a large expenditure of money on a new antenna lab and for the first time, the head of the staff personnel was at the meeting. I started to launch into my presentation and he interrupted me and indicated that I was waxing too eloquent whereupon a colleague of commented “just an Executive Summary, Al.” I knew exactly what he meant and severely condensed my presentation to basically one paragraph giving all the salient points of my presentation.

John 3:16 is like that - an Executive Summary of Christ’s Eternal Life being offered to all sinners. Read this verse, allow the Holy Spirit to convict of sin and the sinner has all he needs to come to Saving Faith in Jesus Christ. Towns calls John 3:16 “The Greatest Verse in the Bible.” He made up a table developing this point and I share it with you now:¹

John 3:16 The Greatest Verse in the Bible	
For God	the greatest being
so	the greatest degree
loved	the greatest affection
the world	the greatest object of love
that He gave	the greatest act
His only	the greatest treasure
begotten	the greatest relationship
Son,	the greatest gift
that whoever	the greatest company
believes	the greatest trust
in Him	the greatest object of faith
should not perish	the greatest deliverance
but have	the greatest assurance
eternal	the greatest promise
life	the greatest blessing

¹ THE GOSPEL OF JOHN BELIEVE AND LIVE, John Towns, page 30.

Amen!

To Nicodemus: “You must be born again.”

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: [2] The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. John 3:1.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee but was different in an important way to others in his sect. Actually, this account connects quite naturally with 2:23, 24:

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. [24] But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, John 2:23, 24.

The difference was that the miracles of Jesus Christ produced a holy curiosity - a curiosity engendered by the Holy Spirit in Nicodemus.² The original tells the story quite plainly. ἦν δε ἄνθρωπος “*But there was a man...*” the second word in our Greek is the contrasting disjunctive *de* “but.” We are comparing two different responses to Jesus’ miracles. The first group is found in 2:24 - this group did not have a holy curiosity engendered by the Holy Spirit - rather they were merely attaching His miracles to their mythical belief that Jesus was a prophet, or maybe even their messiah whose sayings were being confirmed by “the voice of God.”

Nicodemus on the other hand was on the other side of the disjunctive *de* (but) and his response was quite different. The difference was that he did *not* reject the Call but responded - not much differently than the disciples, although we do not see the enthusiastic response on Nicodemus’ part as we did with Philip when he told Nathaniel, **“We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write,...”** But nonetheless here is an intimate account of a sinner honestly responding to the call of the Gospel and John records it for all eternity for all to read - we could almost call this account “a detailed anatomy of a sinner coming to saving faith.”

We do not see much understanding at this point of Nicodemus’ understanding of Who he was talking to - only that Jesus was come from God.³ But that’s all right. The stage is set for the miracles of miracles a sinner coming to Saving Faith. Oh, one other thing - let’s talk about the original (*semeion*) from which “miracle” was translated. Classical Greek used the word as a sign from the imprint that a signet ring would leave - lending authenticity to a document upon which it was sealed. The LXX used *semeion* in passages such as Genesis 1:14 where the sun and moon were “signs” that marked the seasons. God empowered His servants with signs with the result that His people

² It certainly wasn’t that Nicodemus was “special” or particularly “good” in the religious sense - he was a sinner responding the call of the Gospel.

³ Prep.. *Apo* = lit.. a man sent *from* God.

would turn to Him.⁴

Of the prophets, Isaiah had the most frequent use of this word in the LXX - 15 times. A good example of this is found in Isaiah 7:11-14: **Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. [12] But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD. [13] And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? [14] Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.** The word "sign" was translated *semeion* in the LXX. The intent in this passage was to cause the king, Ahaz to not seek an unholy alliance but rather to rely on the LORD. The sign was intended to engender belief in Jehovah - that the fate of Judah was in the hands of the LORD - not some heathen king.

Luke used *semeion* in a similar way in chapter 2:

[8] And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. [9] An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. [10] But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. [12] This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Here it is used much in the same way that the LXX used it - as a sign of authenticity to the actual baby, Christ.

So Nicodemus comes with this rich background and it is no small thing that he has said that Jesus *must* have come from God - much in the same way that Isaiah and Moses did because *no man* in and of his own self - nor (and this is important) no demon-possessed man could do these signs (miracles) because of the very nature of the signs. A comment from Lenski might be good here: **"...Nicodemus, too, saw "the Glory" (1:14) in these signs;..."**⁵

The Cruc of Possessing Eternal Life.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:3.

Jesus is not abruptly changing the subject here. The construction of the original indicates that Jesus is certainly responding to Nicodemus' assertion but there must be a clarification about this "kingdom" stuff. He does know what is in the heart of Nicodemus - that he is trying to verify that Jesus is the Man that the Jews have been looking for. There is an inference of Nicodemus wanting to know that Jesus is the Messiah but, as

⁴ Exodus 4:17, 28, 30.

⁵ Interpretation of ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL, page 230.

we will see, there is more to this conversation and Nicodemus does not protest Jesus apparent changing of the subject.

“...Except a man be born again...” brings us to the crux of understanding what the true kingdom of God is. The first matter to cover is the problem of spiritual blindness. As a sinner, Nicodemus cannot even perceive⁶ the true kingdom of God in his present condition of spiritual death. Nicodemus as good a man that he was, was still a walking testimony of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 2:

[2] Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: [3] Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. Eph. 2:2, 3.

What we are witnessing here is supreme evangelism in the hands of the Master. Jesus saying that Nicodemus needed to be born again certainly drew his attention and Nicodemus launches into a typical Pharisaical dialogue - let’s not be too rough on him - listen how Jesus responds to Nicodemus’ question. First the question:

[4] Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? John 3:4.

He wasn’t being disrespectful - this was his way of discovering what was obviously unclear to him but that he was interested in clarification.

[5] Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. [6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. John 3:5 - 7.

We can get into a long discussion about the water and the Spirit - I happen to think the water refers to the Word of Christ (in this case) and the Spirit is self-evident. The point is that Nicodemus had to have a rebirth - a spiritual birth as did all who received Jesus as Lord and Savior.

[12] But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: [13] Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12, 13.

Thus the subject of Salvation is introduced by John. We see that we do not come into salvation by our nation citizenship, our family name nor by belonging to a religious sect but by being born again - spiritually - not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man. We’ll pick this up next time, Lord willing.

⁶ Actually, we get our word idea from this word (*eidon*) - means to see or perceive a thing - to experience a thing.