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# **How Can These Things Be?**

**# 975-A**

**Series: Let God Be God**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Nicodemus had come to Jesus in the dark of night, you remember. Quietly, unobtrusively, he had come. As a ruler of the Jews, the fact that he had *even come to Jesus* was, in itself, no small thing. But he *had come*, and he had come as so many first come to Jesus, assuming that Jesus was simply a teacher who came from God. That assumption was based not on who Jesus was, but rather on what Jesus had done to reveal His power.

His visit to Jesus was significant for many reasons. It was significant because it further broke down the barriers between the religious elite and the common man. It was significant because it defined, even for the most sophisticated and intellectual Jewish mind, a simple, yet difficult choice that must be made for man to be saved. To the Jew, the only thing that was necessary to usher in the Kingdom was for the King to come. The fact that they were Jews meant that not only were they qualified to be in the Kingdom, it meant nobody else was. To them, the whole matter of salvation was a Jew vs. Gentile matter. To them, God was a Jew, and they were, by virtue of being born Jews, God's elect. But this incredible conversation, recorded for all eternity on the scrolls of Scripture, clearly redefined God's plan for redemption. It required more than being born a Jew. It required being born again.

There is a third thing this encounter does. It reveals once and for all that the Kingdom was not to be a physical, tangible, national entity. It was going to be something less tangible, but more eternal; less visible, but far more mind-shattering. The Kingdom was going to be born in the hearts of men. This was a concept so far removed from what the natural man was expecting, that Nicodemus' response can almost be recorded and replayed from the lips of the millions who would come through the ages asking, "who is this man Jesus?"

So in the very truest sense, Nicodemus came representing all of mankind. As we discussed in our last lesson, Nicodemus

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had an eye problem. He was looking at Jesus through the eyes of the *physical miracles He had performed*, and was assuming that He was a teacher come from God, “for no man could do these miracles that thou doest,” he exclaimed, “except God be with him.” Jesus responded, “No, Nick, I am not a teacher come from God, but you do not have eyes to see who I really am. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. If you want to see me and see my Kingdom, you must be born again.” Nicodemus was spiritually blind because Nicodemus was spiritually dead. If he was to see God, He must be brought to life. He must be born again.

In this study, we resume our look at this amazing confrontation and conversation between this representative of fallen man, seeking to resolve the issue of the King and the Kingdom, and the Living Son of God who came to earth to reconcile man to God. We have seen Nick’s original assumption, and we have heard Jesus’ immediate reply. We will take up there, and we will hear Nicodemus ask the question all men ask when confronted with spiritual truth. He asked, “How can these things be?” That is the title for this lesson.

Our Outline will take this form:

I- How can a man be born when he is old?

II- That which is born of the flesh

III- Marvel not

IV- How can these things be?

Our Scripture passage is found once again in John, chapter three. Jesus has just looked Nick in the eye and responded with a singular requirement for eternity,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3b NKJV)

We take up here:

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, 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.

Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

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The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”

Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

(John 3:4-12 NKJV)

### I- HOW CAN A MAN BE BORN WHEN HE IS OLD?

The statement of statements by the Son of God prompted the question of questions from his intelligent inquirer. Jesus had given Nicodemus a blueprint for eternity. But it was a spiritual answer to a spiritual question. Nick was still looking at and listening to one he considered to be a teacher sent from God. So his antenna was still tuned into the physical realm. Thus, there was, to say the least, the absence of effective communication. Jesus spoke to Nicodemus of a spiritual birth that would enable him to see God. Nicky looked a bit puzzled, fed this “re-birth” message into the computer of his mind, and it failed to compute.

“How can a man be born when he is old?” (John 3:4a NKJV)

Nicodemus questioned, his thought processes still operating in the realm of the physical;

“Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (John 3:4b NKJV)

How can a man be born when he is old? It is difficult to fault Nick simply for his failure to comprehend the Master’s statement. He did not have eyes to see. So his answer was man’s typical answer to a spiritual statement. He took the words Jesus used to paint portraits of eternity and literally attempted to apply them in the realm of the flesh. This was the exact same problem the rulers in the temple had experienced a short time before. While Jesus was speaking of the temple of His body, they were thinking of a temple made of stone. And so it was that Jesus spoke so often in parables. They were filled with spiritual truth to the one who had ears to hear. To the natural mind, they simply spoke

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of natural things. Nicodemus was the perfect portrait of a good man who has not been born again. He was asking questions, but he wasn't necessarily hearing the answers.

The question before the Master was pointless, and yet not uncommon. This learned theological professor was asking this unknown carpenter's son, how a grown man could enter into his mother's womb and be born a second time. Jesus, undaunted by the fact that his visitor had misinterpreted the greatest truth in history, simply takes the time to elaborate. He always does. He answered this way:

"Most assuredly, 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 3:5,6)

### II- THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE FLESH

Jesus now gives to Nicodemus and to all mankind the invincible formula of the two spheres of life. It is so simple, man cannot grasp it. It is so revolutionary, man dare not miss it. Jesus is carefully warning Nick that he and we live in two worlds at the same time. One is the world of the flesh. The world of the flesh is physical and temporal and is satisfied by things which are likewise physical and temporal in nature. It is the world our bodies live in. It is the only tangible, visible world we have at present. In that world, we can feel what we touch, see what we look for, and we can thus receive genuine, measurable results, good or bad, that can also be seen, heard, felt, or touched. The flesh.

But now Jesus was opening the horizons of eternity to man and explaining to this educated religious authority that there was a second world, an unseen world, a realm called the spirit world. In this world, life is not measured by the same forces, because life does not have the same dimensions. Life is not measured by the same results, because life does not have the same objectives. And even while we live in these physical bodies, Jesus was saying, it is possible for the Spirit to come alive in us and for us to live physically in this world, while beginning to enjoy that wonderful world which is spiritual, a world that would one day be ours to enjoy in its totality. To do that, we must be born again. We must have God's Holy Spirit ignite our dead human spirits, and breathe into us His very life, which is

spiritual.

But Jesus was saying even more than that. He was saying this: even though we can be alive in the Spirit while still in the flesh, the two worlds are so completely at odds with each other, that the flesh CANNOT ever produce anything spiritual—not ever. Remember, the flesh profiteth nothing. And to be sure Nicodemus gets that picture, Jesus explains to him that there are two distinctly different births one is of the flesh; one is of the Spirit. One produces physical life; one produces spiritual life. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The flesh cannot produce anything spiritual—not anything. What the flesh *can do* is to produce cheap imitations, imitations that appear to be spiritual or moral or religious, but which when tried in the furnace of reality turn out to be nothing but cheap imitations. The flesh can produce religion. The flesh can produce morality. The flesh can produce acceptable social behavior, in most cases behavior more acceptable to the world than that which the Spirit produces; but the flesh *cannot produce* godliness. It cannot produce one ten-trillionth of an ounce of spiritual fruit. That's why Galatians 5 so clearly lists the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, and if you can find any similarity between the two lists, you have a vivid imagination.

### III- MARVEL NOT

So Jesus has defined and described two different worlds to his inquiring friend; two worlds so distinctly different that the one cannot possibly produce fruit in the other, and then He proceeded to explain to him why being born again had nothing to do with reentering his mother's womb. His physical birth was physical. It was a beautiful picture of the spiritual birth which could one day be his; but once it was done, it was done. He would never be "unborn", and he would never need to be physically born again. Once was enough. But there was a totally different birth, a spiritual birth, that was incompatible with the first, because it so transcended the first that it had to take place if Nick was to see God.

In the light of this amazing two-world concept, then, Jesus went on to tell Nicodemus, "marvel not that I say unto you, ye must be born again." Now for a second time, Jesus clearly defines the miracle of spiritual birth, only now He adds an absolute dimension. He says, "don't be so stunned; don't you see, this is a

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totally different kind of birth; therefore, forget having been born physically, if you are going to see the Kingdom, you *must* be born spiritually; you must be born *again*.

The absolute is the word must. It means, in this case, that which is required for something to happen. It is a word which defines a necessity, the same word Jesus used in John 3:14, when He said, “even so MUST the Son of man be lifted up.” It is the same word used in John 9:4, where Jesus said, “I MUST work the works of him who sent me;” the same word used in John 20:9, where it reads, “he MUST be raised again from the dead”. The Eternal God has just engraved on the tablets of time an essential for eternity. He has just lovingly defined death and life. Just as there would be two distinct realms of life, the physical and the spiritual, so were there to be only two kinds of people, saved and lost.

Now the next few moments of this lesson may tend to offend some of you. I pray not. But if it offends you, please cautiously consider why. For we must, no matter how difficult it is, take dead aim at the heart of what Jesus was saying to this searching but confused leader of the Jews. He was saying that every man or woman who had ever lived, was living, or ever would live, was either dead or alive, spiritually. They were not nearly alive, not almost a Christian, not kind of saved, not nearly born again; either reborn and alive in Christ, or dead in trespasses in sins and separated from God for all eternity; either transformed into a new creature by the blood of Christ, or bound for an eternity in hell, where the fire is never quenched, and the worm never dies.

Jesus was defining the Kingdom in clear, certain terms. Either a man or woman was saved or lost; either he or she was a Christian or a non-Christian, and *all non-Christians were bound for an eternity separated from God*. He was saying that every man and woman and every child who has reached the stage of accountability (I say *stage*, not *age* for there is no indication that all reach that stage at the same age) are, by virtue of their relationship with Jesus Christ, either IN CHRIST, and therefore eternally secure, or they are outside of Christ, and therefore eternally judged. You say, “but I know some unbelievers who are more morally upright than most of the Christians I know.” So do I. But moral uprightness is not a qualification for the Kingdom; the only qualification for the kingdom is *you must be born again*. You say, “but I know some people who are in pseudo-Christian

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cults who behave like angels and live like saints, but don't claim to be born again." So do I, Beloved, and they are lost and on their way to an eternal hell.

The reason is, that our salvation is not dependent on what we do or how we live. It is dependent on who we know and what He did. Jesus Christ died to save sinners, Paul said, and I am the worst of the lot.

What that means is that every relative you have is either saved or lost. I don't care how moral or good or sweet or religious or charitable or just or self-righteous or self-denying that dear soul may be; except a man or woman *be born again*, he cannot, he cannot, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. Therefore, Jesus added,

Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You MUST be born again.'  
(John 3:7 NKJV)

You must. You must. You must.

What that means is that every neighbor you have is either saved or lost. They may have been born in church and raised in a pew, but if they have never allowed their dead human spirit to be brought to life by God's Living Spirit, they are bound for an eternity in hell, apart from God, apart from hope, apart from joy.

What that means is that every man or woman on the face of this earth who lives in the nations to which we send missionaries, and for which we so casually and so seldom pray, many of whom have not even heard the name of Jesus, are either saved or lost, alive or dead, based on whether or not they have been *born again*.

And don't ever say, "that isn't fair." What right does the clay have to say to the potter "why hast thou made me thus?". What right does sinful man have to say to a Holy God, "Sure, I rebelled against all that is holy, and sure, I have sinned and come short of your glory, and sure, you died on a Roman Cross to save me, but what right do you have to set the terms of salvation?"

Can you imagine being on a fishing trip, where you were warned not to go out beyond a certain point or you would be certain to be in danger, and yet you dared to go beyond that point, only to be thrown overboard, caught in a deadly current, and left to drown. Can you then imagine the Captain, the one who had cautioned you in the first place, diving in and swimming out to you, knowing he would lose his own life in the process,

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reaching out to you and handing you the only rope that would lead you to safety. Can you imagine looking him in the eye and saying, “What a narrow plan. I’d rather be saved by a boat, or by my own swimming ability, or by a helicopter, or by the coast guard. Thanks for giving your life, but your plan is too narrow. I think I’ll pass.” Can you imagine doing that? Then how can you dare to look in the face of a Holy God who was willing to leap into the contaminated waters of sin and face certain death just to save you, and in the process deny Him the right to do it His way?

Beloved, marvel not that He says unto you, “you must be born again.” Marvel not. Simply believe. You say, but I can’t see salvation that way. Of course not. It’s spiritual. You can’t see it, but you can see the results of it. You can see the drug addict whose life was a hopeless mess until Jesus entered his life and gave him a new heart. You can see the broken marriages that were destined for the scrapheap that Jesus entered and made into treasures of eternal love. You can see the world’s success stories, people who were destined for physical greatness and yet so empty inside that they thought of taking their lives until Jesus entered their lives and gave them treasures that would not fade. Jesus said to Nick, “Of course you can’t see it, Nick. But look at the wind. You can’t see that, either. You don’t know where it comes from, and don’t know where it’s going; but you can hear it and you can feel it, so you accept that it’s real.”

“So is every one who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8c NKJV)

### IV- HOW CAN THESE THINGS BE?

Nicodemus listened intently, just as so many have since. He listened, but at that point, he simply could not comprehend. And so he honestly turned to Jesus and exclaimed:

How can these things be?

Jesus answered, “No, Nick, I’m not going to play that game. I’m not going to get into a complicated theological discussion; you don’t have ears to hear.” He said, “Nick, you’re a Bible teacher; and I have shared with you simple truths that are living reality.

“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

(John 3:12 NKJV)

Jesus said, “Nicodemus, I have given you the simple gospel in terms a child could understand. I have put it in the vernacular

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of the earth; birth, death, wind, water. I have drawn for you word pictures that require only the slightest amount of faith to appropriate, but still you do not believe. You do not accept as absolute the words I have spoken. Why, then, should I launch into a theological dissertation of great spiritual significance? No, Nick, I shouldn't, and I won't. *You must be born again.*

Can't you just see this religious mastermind scratching his head in utter disbelief at the simplicity of what he was hearing, and then uttering to this amazing carpenter, "*How can these things be?*" Jesus, how can it be so simple? How can it be so narrow? How can it be so conclusive? How can it be so absolute? How can it be so easy? How can it be so final? How can it be so illogical? How can it be so uncomplicated?

And down through the ages, man, under the influence of the adversary, has cooperated in the project of making the Christian message complicated. We have added to it, covered over it, dressed it up, dressed it down, painted it with robes of self-righteousness, and built for it a platform of good deeds and charitable behavior. We have accepted it as fact, and at the same time dismissed it as narrow. We have acknowledged it as eternal, and yet at the same time, stopped preaching it, because it was offensive. We have proclaimed it to be Truth, and yet at the same time, pretended that Truth is not so simple; nor is man's dilemma so conclusive. We preach that Jesus is THE WAY, but we live as though our unsaved friends are "almost saved". We buy "one way" stickers for our cars, but fail to share Christ with those we know are lost, because they live "such good lives". We know that salvation is clear, concise, eternal, and real; and yet instead of building our lives on the reality of it, and giving our lives to the proclamation of it, we walk past hundreds of people every week who are dying and headed for an eternity in hell with an unconcern that is so foreign to our professed conviction, that our lives come across as the height of hypocrisy.

We read letters from missionaries on foreign fields who are laboring with undying unselfishness to reach men and women who do not have Christian bookstores in every mall, Christian radio stations in every city, and Christian churches on every corner; and we yawn as though we were listening to a report from the City Council. We pray for Aunt Susie's sore knee and Uncle Bill's broken arm, and that God will give us a parking place when we get to the symphony tonight; but we fail to agonize on

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our knees before God for the unsaved millions who will go to sleep tonight without Christ, and the unsaved thousands who will wake up tomorrow in hell. And we wonder why the world around us hasn't caught the urgency of our message. The reason is: It isn't urgent to us.

We are claiming to have found THE WAY, THE TRUTH, and THE LIFE. And indeed we have. A lost and dying world hears our message, looks at our lives, and asks, "How can these things be?" It's time we abandoned our complacency and told them.

You say, "told them what?" I say, it's time we told them this:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3b NKJV)

They may respond, "How can these things be?" At least we will have told them. But they may respond, "Lord have mercy on me, for I am a sinner". They may respond by asking the King to establish His Kingdom on the throne of their hearts. Yes, they may.

And if they do, the courts of heaven will erupt in an anthem of praise; angels will fold their wings in utter awe; the heart of the Eternal God will leap for joy; and the King of Glory will proclaim, "enter thou into the joy of the Lord".

So His message must become our message. It is utterly simple and utterly profound at the same time. It is as timeless as the ages, but as current as the second hand on the clock. It is simply this:

"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (John 3:7 NKJV)

You must. I must. Everybody must. Or we cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven.

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