

✠ John 3:1-17 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Here is the heavenly thing: for God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

The kingdom of God is not made up of things born according to the flesh; things born according to the will or desire of man. For the will and desire of man is tainted, spoiled, ruined. It is sinful and wicked. And what is sinful, what is rotten, cannot produce that which is holy, that which is good. Therefore, the kingdom of God is not born according to man's will or desire. The kingdom of God is born of God. For that which is spirit is born of the Spirit.

Neither is this kingdom like earthly kingdoms. You can't travel across the globe and find it. You can't make a journey through troubled waters to find the kingdom of the Spirit. It is not in a location specific to size and dimension, marked off by castle walls or boarders or oceans. It cannot be measured and polled. It can't be numbered or taxed. It is greater than all of creation yet is smaller than the mustard seed. And if you do travel to find it, if you pick up and leave and go here or there saying that this must be where the kingdom is, if you try and measure it according to population or income, then you'll lose it. For such searching is always done on our terms, according to our thoughts and preconceived ideas of what the kingdom should look like or what it should sound like. But the Spirit blows where it will and we do not know from where it came to search out its beginnings, not where it goes to try and control its course.

That is why Nicodemus, a man not far from the kingdom of God, is confused. He tries to reason from where Jesus comes and where He is going. "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God." If Nicodemus has listened to his own statement he might have been born of the water and Spirit right there. Who comes from God but God Himself? But Nicodemus said, "we know". But what he knew was not all there was to know, for he knew according to the flesh. True, Jesus came from God as Nicodemus thought, according to the line of the prophets. But Nicodemus did not know that Jesus came as One greater than the prophets, greater than Moses, greater than Abraham. Jesus came from God as One born of God, according to the will and purpose of God. Jesus came as the Son of God, not merely as a prophet of God.

Jesus came not as one saying, "God says", but as the One who is doing the saying. He has the power to make Nicodemus a child of God. He has the words to give new birth to Nicodemus. And so Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one can enter the kingdom of God, no one can see the kingdom of God except that he be born again. Born with new eyes and a new will and a new mind; born of the Spirit. For that which is flesh gives birth to flesh, but that which is Spirit gives birth to spirit.

And so to find the kingdom of God, to see the kingdom of God, one must be born again, born from on high, born of the Spirit. Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. But do not marvel at this. That is, do not think this absurd and difficult to understand. For we speak of what we know. And if we are born of the Spirit then

we will speak like the Spirit and say what the Spirit says. But if we are not born of the Spirit, then we will not speak like the Spirit but will speak according to the flesh.

And what the flesh says is, "How can this be?" The flesh doubts. That is why it depends not on the works of the flesh but on the work of the Spirit, which is faith. The works of the flesh only and always produce doubt. Have you been to church enough? Have you read your Bible enough? Have you prayed enough? Have you been nice enough? Have you been understanding enough to enter the kingdom of God? Have you given enough? Never. You can boast of nothing before God. All our works are like filthy rags good only for burning.

So also does the flesh try and make the work of the Spirit it's own work. It takes faith, a gift of God, and asks if it's big enough or if it's strong enough. Anytime we try to measure we are seeking the kingdoms of men rather than the kingdom of God. A better question is whether or not the things of the kingdom, baptism, the Lord's Supper, confession, faith, etc. are your work or God's. If they are my works I want nothing to do with them for I am unclean and my works are born of the flesh. But if they are God's work then I must live in them and turn to nothing else for my salvation for God's works are born of the Spirit and able to give life.

The work of the Spirit is faith, which is what the promise of salvation depends upon. But not some obscure faith, believing in God and in the spirit world. Show me a man who does not believe in the spirit world and I'll show you one who is not a man. It is hardwired into us. That is why even the atheist finds himself believing in fate or random chance; things beyond himself and his control. We all think there is something greater than us, even if it's just the human spirit.

But the work of the Holy Spirit is specific faith; faith that your lawless deeds are forgiven, that your sins are covered. That is seeing with eyes born of the Spirit. Almost everyone believes in God or in a god. But knowing is believing in the promise of God fulfilled in Jesus, the One born according to the promise given to Abraham, "in you all nations shall be blessed." And Jesus is He who comes and tells us the secrets of the kingdom of God, for no one has ascended into heaven except He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

If you, like Nicodemus, believe that Jesus is a greater teacher sent from God, then hear what the Spirit has to say to the churches. The Son of Man opens the kingdom of God. He holds the keys of life and death. He is able to loose the bonds of sin and death and free you from the slavery to sin. Indeed, He has done so. He has been lifted up like the Moses' bronze serpent in the wilderness. He has redeemed you, a lost and condemned person. All who gaze on Him will not suffer the effects of sin's poison leading to death. But rather, all who gaze upon Him lifted high will be healed and will live.

For all those who gaze upon the Lord of Glory as He is lifted up, see what the Spirit gives them to see, and so bear witness to what they know: that He was delivered up for the sins of His people. But those who do not look upon the Son of Man have not been born of water and the Spirit. They have not been born again. They see with eyes of the flesh and see only a dead man hanging on a cross. They believe nothing, not even earthly things. So much more do they not believe the heavenly things.

And this is the heavenly thing: God has loved the world in this way, that He gave His only-begotten Son so that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.
✠ AMEN ✠