The Core of Evangelism - Lesson 9

Born Again... How Can This Be Possible? (John 3)

There are conversations we remember for the rest of our lives.

Nicodemus went home that night more confused than when he arrived.

Not because he failed to understand Jesus' words, but because those words were pointing him in a direction completely different from the one he had followed his entire life. You may be able to relate.

People today often read one thing and understand another. It should not surprise us that the same thing can happen when we read God's Word.

Some people speak of baptism as a symbol, something that represents a reality that already exists. Before we discuss that idea, let's make sure we understand it fairly.

Many Christians view baptism as an outward symbol of a salvation that has already taken place. Within this perspective, which is common in many evangelical churches, a person is saved by faith before entering the water. Baptism is not seen as the moment salvation is received, but as a public declaration of a faith already possessed.

This position seeks to protect an important truth: salvation is a gift from God, not a human achievement earned through rituals or personal merit.

Now that we have presented this view as fairly as possible, we must ask a simple question:

Is this how the apostles explained baptism in the New Testament?

More importantly:

Is this how Jesus explained it?

A question that continually returns to me is this: Why are there so many different interpretations of such important subjects?

My experience has taught me that all of us, consciously or unconsciously, approach Scripture with assumptions. Some teachings feel natural to us. Others challenge our traditions, our culture, and even our understanding of what it means to walk with God.

Nicodemus came to Jesus carrying assumptions of his own. That night, he discovered that some of them needed to be challenged.

There is another issue running parallel to this one: trust.

When I describe what a mature marriage looks like, I often explain that when my wife asks something of me, my first instinct is not to search for reasons to avoid it. Likewise, when I ask something of her, we do not begin an endless negotiation. There is trust. There is a shared conviction that each of us seeks the good of the other.

Our relationship with God works much the same way.

We do not obey because we understand every detail of His plan.

We obey because we trust the One who designed it.

Nicodemus had to face that reality.

Jesus did not ask him to understand everything first.

He asked him to believe enough to accept that he needed to be born again.

There is no way to be born again by the Word without being born again.

I am not the one saying that.

Jesus is.

Water is not magic.

No one arrives at baptism by accident.

Before it comes curiosity.

Then faith.

Then repentance.

Then a confession of trust in Christ.

Then a conscious decision to give God His rightful place in the heart.

Baptism does not replace these things.

It presupposes them.

So let us return to the source.

Jesus speaks of His blood, "which is poured out… **for** the forgiveness of sins." **Matthew 26:28**

Peter uses the same construction: "Repent and be baptized… **for** the forgiveness of your sins." The same word, *eis*, that no one disputes in connection with Christ's blood appears here as well. **Acts 2:38**

Paul places faith and baptism within the same statement: "For you are all sons of God through faith… for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." They are not presented as two events separated in time, but as one reality described from two perspectives. **Galatians 3:26-27**

Paul does not say baptism merely symbolizes Christ's death and resurrection. He says that in baptism the believer is buried with Christ and raised with Him "to walk in newness of life." **Romans 6:3-4**

The same truth appears again, with faith explicitly included in the act: "Buried with Him in baptism… through faith in the working of God." **Colossians 2:12**

This verse answers the objection that baptism is a human work: "Not the removal of dirt from the body, but the appeal of a good conscience toward God." It is not the water that saves. It is faith responding obediently where God has appointed. **1 Peter 3:21**

Curiosity.

Faith.

Repentance.

Confession.

Decision.

Nicodemus possessed the first five that night as he sat before Jesus, yet he went home without taking the sixth step.

We do not know exactly how the rest of his story unfolded. We know that he appeared two more times in the Gospel record. Scripture does not tell us everything.

But as with everything God uses, there is a difference between the messenger and the message.

What we do know is that our greatest problem is often not a lack of information.

It is the very step Nicodemus struggled to take.

That is why we speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible remains silent.

But where Scripture speaks clearly, we do not have the right to remain silent either.

This is not a subject that should be treated lightly.

Even those who are close to the Kingdom may find that a serious study of God's Word shakes the very foundations of their being.

And perhaps that is exactly the point.

Because when God's truth reaches the foundation, something always trembles.

Our traditions tremble.

Our conclusions tremble.

The confidence we have placed in ourselves trembles.

Yet whatever remains after the shaking is built upon a firm foundation, an immovable and eternal one.

"For no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." **1 Corinthians 3:11**

And I still hear the echo of Jesus' words:

"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." **John 3:5**

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