

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-2 Telling the Good News

From early childhood, everyone loves to hear a story. And, storytelling comes quite easily to most parents. As believers, we have heard the greatest story ever told—the story of Jesus. This story is good news to every person who is lost in their sins. In your previous lesson, you learned the basics of the good news story.

You learned about the creation and fall of the first people on earth. God created them for communion with him throughout eternity, but they went their own way without him. Thank God, he provided a way, through his Son, for us to be restored back into full fellowship with him. The good news story does not end there with God sending his Son to die on the Cross.

It certainly does begin there. But, there is more. God sent his Son to die, that our sins might be forgiven. More than that, God also raised him from the dead to demonstrate to us what eternal life is all about. Christ's life, death, and resurrection give us all hope for the future. That brings us to the part you and I play. The role for believers in this story is what we call *evangelism*.

The Bible tells us about a religious man who came to Jesus seeking spiritual truth. His name was Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee and a member of the council that ruled Jerusalem's Jews. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." Why did he come at night? Perhaps he thought Jesus was too busy during the day. Maybe he also did not want to be seen seeking a conversation with Jesus. Most of the Pharisees hated Jesus.

Jesus knew the heart of Nicodemus in spite of his compliments. He replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

This caused Nicodemus to respond like any ordinary person might to such a puzzling statement. He asked, "How can someone be born when they are old? Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'" In his reply to the religious man seeking spiritual truth, Jesus focused on an important concept—being "born again." The word Christ used has two shades of meaning. It means to be "touched from above" by the Spirit of God, and also to be "made new."

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ... I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of

heavenly things? ... Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:1-15).

Jesus was referring to an event which took place hundreds of years earlier. The Jewish people had begun to grumble and complain against God and against Moses. They said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them. They bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us." So, Moses prayed for the people.

The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So, Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived (Num 21:5-9).

In his answer to Nicodemus, Jesus made a connection between this Old Testament story and being born again. God delivered the Israelites from the sting of death by the vipers, through their looking at a brass snake. All of us face the sting of death because of our sins. So we must look upon Jesus, who was lifted up on the Cross. If we believe in his life, death, and resurrection, we too will be delivered from death to life. When we believe in Jesus we are born again, 'touched from above' by the Spirit of God, 'made new' in him.

God's Spirit now comes to dwell in us. Our bodies become the temple that God fills with his presence—the precious Holy Spirit. He is part of who God is—the three-in-one—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We call them the Trinity. It is another divine mystery, like the incarnation, and somewhat hard to understand. These hard to understand things are made known to us by the Holy Spirit, as we pray in faith.

When we are born again by the Spirit of God we do not go right to heaven. Instead God leaves us here on earth to tell others about the good news. Now he wants us to share the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. He wants more people to be born again and receive eternal life as you testify to them.

Why does God do it this way? We don't know. It is another mystery! God can communicate directly to people about his Son and sometimes he does in various ways. But the primary way he has planned is that believers tell others this story. Then others will believe in Jesus' work on the Cross on their behalf and be saved. They too will be born again by the Spirit of God. This is the essence of what evangelism is all about.

Jesus gave us this command in his last words after he was resurrected, before he ascended into heaven: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:18-20). The remainder of this course will be about

doing what God has told us to do in the Scriptures. He has instructed us to tell others this good news. We are to invite them back into the relationship that God intended for them from the beginning.

This story is **important** because it makes clear that God is not interested in religious status, church attendance, or external appearances. What matters is that we are born again. When we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, sent to die for our sins, then we are born again by the Spirit of God.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God does not just take us up into heaven after we believe on Jesus. He leaves us on earth to tell others the gospel, so they too can be born again.

Review Questions

1. Why did Nicodemus visit Jesus at night instead of during the day? [Pause 5 seconds.]
 - A. If you said, "He may not have wanted to be seen talking with Jesus because of his religious position," you are correct.
2. What does the word Christ used for "born again" mean? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered that it has two shades of meaning: "touched from above by the Spirit of God" and "made new in him," you answered correctly.
3. Why did Jesus link being born again to the story of Moses and the brass snake? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "He wanted to link God's delivering us from sin and death through the Cross, to God's deliverance of the Israelites from the deadly snakes," you are right.

Your **assignment** is to memorize the words of Jesus from Matthew 28:19-20: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Secondly, listen to this lesson until you are able to tell others about the importance of the story of Nicodemus and the meaning of being born again. Then try to follow Jesus' instructions by finding at least one person who is not born again. Share with them the story of Nicodemus. Explain why every person needs to believe on Jesus and be made new by the Spirit of God. Ask if you may pray with that person to receive Jesus.