

May 25/25 Leader's Guide - John 3:1-15 "You Must be Born Again"

1. What is wrong with the world? What is needed to bring change to the problems to our world?

This is obviously a personal reflection question to get your group thinking through the main point of the conversation.

Pay attention to the themes that come out and perhaps name them as they arise.

More than likely they will include externalizing those problems – not me them..

Speaking of structures, lack of education, social security – rather than bearing any personal responsibility that relates to something fundamentally flawed within our nature.

Read John 3:1-15

2. Who was Nicodemus from the details of the passage? What has Nicodemus seen in Jesus?

(vs.1) A Pharisee – meaning separated one – one who has set aside their lives to honour the law out of a deep deep yearning for national renewal – this would be one of the most highly respected group of people in the culture – many would have looked to them to say – if there is any hope for our world it is in them

(vs. 1) A ruler – a member of the 70 person Sanhedrin or Jewish supreme court.

(vs. 9) Not only a teacher in Israel but THE teacher in Israel – the primary religious authority of the Jewish faith at the time.

From the sermon (some may remember these details – if not – feel free to add them as they might help in the discussion)

Tim added something what will come up in chapter 19 – he was wealthy providing 75 lbs of spices worth hundreds of thousands in today's dollars.

Some commentators note that his name gives us an indication that he was from a family of national heroes.

It is the "signs" that he is doing that are bringing him to Jesus. The only sign that Nicodemus could have known about was the cleansing of the temple – for

the other sign – water into wine – was only a private sign known to the disciples and the servants.

3. In the sermon Tim brought to the surface the detail that the “sign” that brings Nicodemus to Jesus that night was the cleansing of the temple. The cleansing of the temple was a central act of every revolutionary moment in Israel’s history against foreign rule. Nicodemus is coming to Jesus in hopes of sparking a revolution. What does this tell us about Nicodemus’ perspective of what is wrong with the world and how to address it?

The problems are out there with the Romans, the lack of a Jewish King on the throne, the land occupied, the temple defiled by pagan images, the priestly class (Sadducees) collaborating with the Romans- turning the temple practices into a racketeering scheme – gouging the poor to line their own practices

What we need to address it is a revolution – armed rebellion – the seizing of the throne – the pushing the enemies from our borders – the cleansing of the temple.

4. (vs. 3) How do you think Nicodemus would have heard Jesus’ response? How does it impact you personally, to hear Jesus saying you are part of the problem with the world?

This would cut hard at any pride in Nicodemus heart. An invitation to consider that he was part of the problem with the world – the problem with Israel.

Everything about him in his culture would tell him that he was the solution to the problems of the world.

No Nicodemus – you need an entirely new nature.

In the personal portion of this question – going back to your exploration of question 1 might help – for to hear Jesus say this we may need to speak of the inter-relationship between our fundamentally flawed nature and human involvement in the things we utilize to address the problems of the world – be it education, structures, leadership, relationships etc...

5. Read Ezekiel 36:22-27. Jesus expects that Nicodemus as *the* teacher of Israel should understand what he is talking about from his knowledge of scripture. How does this passage help us understand what it is to be born again, to be born of water and the Spirit?

God would cleanse us from not only our sins but also our false worship.

God would give us his Spirit to remove the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh – an entirely new nature that will enable us to live in the way God has called us to live

This is something God does – an act of his grace – not our doing.

6. Read Numbers 21:4-9. The way we come to be born again is to see Jesus lifted up on the cross, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert. What do you make of the comparison between Jesus and the snake being lifted up? What is Jesus trying to tell us by this comparison?

Both the problem and their solution is a snake – the means of their judgment is also the means of their salvation.

The link – what is our problem? We look to the cross and we see it there – it is our very humanity. In Jesus we see our humanity judged in him, dying in him. But looking to him we can also receive new birth by the work of the Spirit.

7. The linkage above invites us to repentance – the problems of our world begin with me, Lord Jesus you are my only hope, make me new by the power of your spirit. What are some of the ways we avoid repentance and why?

In the sermon Tim highlighted three ways in his own life he avoids repentance.

1. *Remorse and resolution. I can't believe I did that, I'll do better next time. Believing by an act of the will we can change our selves.*
2. *In keeping with our cultural leanings to separate out the world into victims and perpetrators we often respond to our sin by playing the victim – I'm only that way because of my upbringing, that trauma, that hurt, that thing that person did to me.*
3. *Comparative justifications. Eg. You have a nasty temper – my anger – simply righteous indignation. Your greedy – I'm wise with money. Your proud – I have good taste. Your stubborn – I have convictions.*

We often think of repentance as misery – why would we want to feel bad about ourselves. But we don't understand repentance for what we choose instead is misery.

For if we respond to our sin with remorse and resolution – we will very quickly discover we can't change ourselves – if we respond to our sin by playing the victim – I'm only this way because of – we will be replaying the wrong – the trauma – the hurt – over and over again to try and cover our sin – deepening

the bitterness and resentment that is already stealing our joy - if we respond to our wrong with justifications that will be the constant dialogue in our heads - and that - that is the misery

But Repentance is no misery - for with our eyes fixed on Jesus we see the one who loves us with an everlasting love - who knows us all the way to the bottom and loves us none the less - for with our eyes fixed on Jesus we see the one who was bruised for our iniquities - that by his stripes we may be healed - for with our eyes fixed on Jesus we see the one who promises us life - full life - a life of joy - repentance is not misery - it is love - healing - life - joy - repentance is not one and done - it is lifestyle - it is not the first step of the Christian life - it is every subsequent step

8. Read John 7:50-51, John 19:38-40. The new birth is likened to the wind. We don't know where it is coming from or where it is going, but you can feel, see, hear the results. Do we see the evidence of the new birth in Nicodemus? in us?

He seems to have walked away from thinking that armed revolution will address the problems of the world.

Courage - in the face of great risk - the potential of losing everything - he approaches Pilate and asks to be able to remove Jesus' body - to align himself with Jesus in this way took great courage.

He and Joseph take the body from the cross, wash it and prepare it for burial. No man in this culture would ever do that - this was a job for slaves and women. He has been enabled to lay down male pride, class pride, and cultural pride to do something no man would every do.

He has been enabled to let go of any attachment to money, money holds no hold over his heart - as he spends a huge amount of money on spices to prepare Jesus for burial - how we use our money says much about who we are.

The results of new birth in us can be explored here. It will be hard I would think for people to reflect on their own rebirth - as we think by doing so - we are "tooting our own horn" - but no this is a gift from God from start to finish - to talk about it is to give Jesus the glory. Perhaps saying that up front will allow for some personal reflection on the question