

**The New Testament Church**  
***Behold the Lamb: Lifting up Jesus in the midst of Danger***  
**March 29, 2020 - Pastor Paul Jehle**

*“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’... And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” – John 3:1-17 (emphasis on excerpts above)*

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and a member of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin; one of the 70 members who were the final authority of Jewish law. In order to come to Jesus, he had to overcome the natural prejudice against Jesus as a Galilean, and an untrained one at that. The conviction in the heart of Nicodemus that Jesus was indeed a “teacher come from God” was met with the first full revelation from the Son of God as to who He really was and the nature of His mission. Most likely it was John who was present and the witness who took notes on the discourse.

To the Jewish mind at the time, miracles were “signs and wonders” that had little practical application as to their purpose and were not aimed at the transformation of a heart and mind. It was the miracles that Jesus performed that caught Nicodemus’ attention, as well as others. But Jesus did not dwell miraculous works, he focused on the heart of Nicodemus. *“Unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* In other words, an encounter with heaven is necessary for one to understand that there is another kingdom where Christ is King. But not only must we be “born from above” to understand the existence of his Kingdom, we must also encounter heaven if we are to enter it! Specifically, in addition to being born physically (of water), we must also be born spiritually.

There is a realm of the flesh, or the natural, and there is a realm of the spiritual. Jesus made it specifically clear when he said *“that which is born of flesh is flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* Each of us have a body, soul (mind, will and emotion) and a spirit (see 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:23). Our spirit has a deep longing to know God and the love He has for us which we receive from Him. This regeneration of our spirit by the Spirit of God was a foreign concept for Nicodemus. To the Pharisee, the new birth was the *consequence* of the good works embraced to advance the kingdom of God. To Jesus, the new birth was the *cause* for seeing it, much less entering into it! In other words, *you must be born from above.*

But how was Nicodemus to grasp such a shift in understanding? Jesus let him know that his training in the Old Testament Scriptures had already taught him this truth about conversion from above by faith. But how? Jesus reminded him of a story that happened to Israel around 1400 BC. Only five of the original generation that left Egypt 38 years before were still alive; Miriam (at 126), Aaron (at 123), Moses (at 120), Joshua and Caleb (in their 70’s and 80’s). Israel dwelt at Kadesh, the very spot where they had rejected the spies and their good report, and from where they had scattered and wandered. A new generation now stood ready to move forward into the promises of God.

But then, Miriam dies. She had led the praises of Israel 40 years before. The people rebelled against Moses, and in anger Moses rejected the people when he struck the rock to bring forth water. He then asked permission of Edom to pass through on a more direct route, but they refused. After this bad news, Aaron (the High priest) dies as well! When they were attacked by the Canaanites as they travelled, God delivered them with a great victory. But the way proved difficult, with intense heat, no vegetables, desolate, rough, and filled with terrible sandstorms and a lack of water. Furthermore, it was filled with poisonous snakes whose skin was marked with fiery spots! All this Nicodemus knew.

He also knew the rest of the story. The people began to complain. *“Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this weorthless bread.”* (Numbers 21:5) You see, the manna continued – that miraculous wafer that would appear in the morning but had to be consumed before night. But they were not content. *“So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.”* (Numbers 21:6) The serpents were already there, all God did was allow them to attack in force. Many died, even some who had not complained for the consequences of sin affect everyone. The new generation was learning what the older generation had already endured but no one enters the promised land on the faith of their parents.

This new generation went to Moses, the mediator between them and God, and said *“We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people”* (Numbers 21:7) But God didn’t take away the serpents, instead, He created a vaccine for its poison. The medical definition of a vaccine is this: *“a synthetic substitute, treated to act as an antigen without inducing the disease.”* A vaccine is a synthetic substitute for the disease. It is what God instructed Moses to do. It is the very thing Jesus said was a foreshadowing of his work on the cross, though He would be no synthetic substitute, He would be the real one.

*“Then the Lord said to Moses, make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”* (Numbers 21:8-9)

An image *that was a synthetic substitute* of the disease was raised on a pole for all to see. When one gazed on it in faith, they were healed. It was faith in God and His substitute for the very root of the disease that healed the people. It was not the pole, nor the image of the serpent, that brought healing. When Hezekiah introduced his reforms, almost 700 years later, he tore down the pole for people were actually worshipping it rather than looking to God in faith! (see 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18:4)

*“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”* – John 3:14

*“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, Go did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin; He condemned sin in the flesh...”* – Romans 8:3

We all have a virus within us, a poison that will cause us to die, not just physically, but spiritually. This virus is much more powerful than the coronavirus that is sweeping over the world. Instead of removing the agents of sin, God deals with its poison. He provided a substitute, a spiritual vaccine. Natural vaccines can have side effects and are not totally reliable. God’s substitute, his *propitiation*, is His Son, and He is totally reliable! In this day of danger and fear, *look on Him* who bore your sin and mine on the cross. Believe on Christ by faith that indeed He can take away the poison of sin that we might live to help others without fear. This is the message of the hour for all who hear us today.

*“And He Himself (Christ) is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”* – 1<sup>st</sup> John 2:2

So now is your time to thank God for His substitute. The serpents of sin are all around us. God does not send them to harm us, we need a remedy for the sin already within us from birth. Like the Israelites, God raises up a substitute that we might call on Him to heal us. He raised up Jesus on the cross, that we might look upon His sacrifice as a substitute for our sin. He will give us the inoculation within that can stop the poisonous affects of sin within us! *Lord Jesus, in this time, we come to you, repenting of ous sin that separates you from us, and looking on your sacrifice, we believe you died on the cross for our sin, and we surrender to you as Lord, that as you were raised, so we can live in you today!*