

John (Part 6)

Signs Reveal that God Alone Can Supply Our Every Need

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I am going to go back into John 2 again—right near the beginning of John 2—so I can kind of get myself up to speed and you up to speed right along with me. There are just a couple of things that I want to pick up before we go on from where we left off the last time.

One of the things I want to pick up is just an item of passing interest, but it was interesting enough to me to jot it down for you as I was doing a little bit of studying for this. In John 2: 5 is just a little thing, but I think it is very interesting.

John 2:5 His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

The thing that is so interesting is here we are in John 2, and these are the last recorded words of Mary. She had quite a bit to say very early in Matthew and in Luke, where almost an entire chapter is devoted to the things that she said in regard to her pregnancy and what she was beginning to realize was in her womb. But here we are in John 2, and of all the things recorded about the life of Christ, this was the last thing that she said. We still have about 3½ years to go of the ministry of Christ.

That is interesting enough of itself, but what is more interesting is *what* she said, because it is good advice to every single one of us, and it has a great deal to do with what happened here in John 2. The advice to you and me—the advice she gave to those servants—was, "Whatever He says to you, do it." That is what the advice of the entire Bible is. "Whatever He says to you, do it." Even though it may have seemed somewhat minimal or ridiculous or crazy to do what He said—to fill up the waterpots with water when you were at a feast that required wine—nonetheless you are to follow through with it. That has something to do, as I said, with the remainder of this chapter.

Far more important than that being the last recorded words of Mary is what it says in verse 11:

John 2:11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

The word "miracles" here—it appears as "miracles" in the King James Version; in my Bible it has been translated correctly as "signs"—is misleading. The word that is used there in the Greek does not mean that, even though what took place *was* a miracle.

Let us understand that. You might wonder why I am making such an issue out of one word. The reason is this: the entire book of John is structured around this word—not this word as it appears here, but as it appears throughout the entire book.

John uses this word more than all the other writers put together. What has occurred here is that every time He gives a sign, the instruction that follows relates to the sign. Once you begin to understand what the sign is, it opens up to you what the instruction is all about. It is much more understandable if you can understand what the sign is.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Now compare that with John 2:11, where He manifested His glory by the sign. What He did in the sign—what He did in the miracle—manifested (that is, it revealed, it showed) the glory of God.

As we were coming through John 1:14, it becomes very clear that the "glory of God" is the way that He lives. That includes His normal conduct. Jesus manifested the glory of God by the way that He lived. That included simply the way that He conducted His life. It included the attitudes He had about things. It included the conversations and so forth that He had with other people that are recorded here. It included the miraculous things that He did. It included *everything* that He did.

As I was trying to show you through John 1, what Jesus did is He showed the way that God lived. *He revealed God*. Up until this time, God was a shadowy figure—He was off in the heavens—and that is why it says in John 1:18 that "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." Well, that is what Christ did. He declared Him, not only verbally, but He declared Him by the way that He lived. He declared Him by what He *did*. He showed the glory of God.

These signs that are given place special emphasis on some part—some aspect—of the glory of God; some aspect of the way that God lives; some aspect of the attitude that God has; some aspect of the way that God looks at things; or how He responds to things; how He reacts to things—what His attitudes are regarding any given thing in life.

He manifested His glory by means of a miracle. But John did not use the word "miracle"; he used the word "sign." What occurred was miraculous, but it was not God's intention to draw our attention to the fact that some kind of a wonder took place. What He was drawing our attention to was the *significance* of the wonder—the manifestation of the wonder. Not the wonder itself, but rather the significance of it.

There are eight signs in the book of John. This is the first. That is why He said, "This is the beginning of signs." There are eight of them, and they all have something in common. Each one clearly shows a need of mankind—something that man needs. It is the clear manifestation of destitution. What was missing here?

What was missing was wine. But that is not the real significance. What does wine equate with symbolically in the Bible? It always appears in terms of joy. It symbolizes a quality of life. What did they need to make the wedding feast happy? They needed wine.

If you look back in Judges 9:13, it says that wine *cheers* the hearts of God and man—which is interesting in itself: it says that God can be affected by alcohol (if it cheers Him up). A little bit of wine will do the same for you. You drink too much, and it will put you under the table. But a little bit adds a quality—adds a dimension—to life that is good. But just a little bit.

That is what was missing from this feast. The wine was running out. Everybody was concerned that the whole event was going to turn out to be flat. Who wants to throw a party without wine? Who wants to have a party without happiness? This gets the symbolism.

What did it show? It showed that God was equal to the task. That is the other side of the sign. One side of the sign is that it shows that there was a need. The other side of the sign is that God is capable of—He is equal to—fulfilling the need. He has enough power, He has enough ability, to meet whatever the need is.

Another bit of instruction: the signs are connected to one another in more than just having things in common. It runs like this: the first sign is directly related to the eighth sign. The second sign is directly related to the seventh one. The third one is directly related to the sixth one, and the fourth and fifth ones are directly related. They are in pairs.

What was the eighth sign? The eighth sign appears in John 21, and it ends the book. Does anybody know what happened in John 21? What was the sign there? The eighth sign—the last one—involved the disciples. Peter said, "I go fishing"—and he did not catch any fish. Neither he nor anybody who was with him caught any fish.

The sign was this: as soon as Jesus came around, He said, "Throw your net out on the other side of the ship," and they came up with 153 fish. It was not the miracle of catching the fish that is the sign to you and me; it is the *significance* of it. What do the fish represent? They represented prosperity. It represented being able to eat. It represented getting money from business. See, Christ was able to fulfill whatever they needed so that they might be able to live. They were supposed to do the work of God (these men that this occurred to).

So in either case—whether it was with a quality of life, or whether it had to do with prosperity and sustenance, Christ was able to meet the need.

There is one more thing we have got to nail down here, and that is this: On the one hand, He is showing our spiritual destitution. That is the way we have got to approach it. He does not owe us a thing. On the other hand, we are destitute of all of the qualities of life that are things that we feel—and certainly need—are requirements if there is going to be a good quality to life. He begins with joy. Everybody wants to be happy. Everybody wants to have a sense of well-being. Everybody wants to have a pleasing life. If a person is happy in his life, great!

He ends it with Him being able to supply what we need on a daily basis: food, money, or whatever. He covers the whole spectrum with the first sign and the last one. What He is showing you and me is this: without Him, we can do nothing. We can do a lot on our own physically. But if we are going to become a part of Him—part of His body—if we are going to become a part of His work; if we are going to become a part of His Kingdom, we are absolutely destitute. Without Him, we can do nothing. It is a subtle way of getting us to look to Him as the source of every quality of life.

As we go through each one of the signs, we will add to this. But just remember that the first one had to do with joy. The last one had to do with providing our daily need in terms of food, sustenance, money, whatever. He is capable of meeting whatever our need is.

What follows chapter 2? It is Nicodemus, and being born again. Here was Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, and he did not have it—"it" in this case is the spirituality even to understand what Jesus considered to be the very basics of the Kingdom of God.

Here was a man who was educated in the law, and Jesus even got to the place where He *chided* the man and said to him, "You are a teacher—a ruler—in Judea, in Israel, and you do not even know this?" See how destitute he was? But He is capable of supplying the need. Back in chapter 21, what was the real source of the teaching? Jesus is able to supply the need.

What happened after they caught the fish, and they came on shore, and Jesus began asking Peter questions? What did He ask Peter? "Do you love Me?" Peter *knew* he did not have the love, because he kept he kept responding with, "Yeah, I—I like you like a friend." Do you get the point? God is able to give us the love, even as He is able to give us joy—love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith, self-control, etc.

The whole book of John is structured around these signs. That is why they are so important. "This is the beginning of signs. . ." They are pointing to something significant. The significance here is that God is able to supply all of our needs, and without Him we can do nothing. This means, in practical terms, we have got to have fellowship with Him every single day, because as the High Priest, He is the administrator of the Spirit of God. It is in the Spirit of God that the power to live an abundant life resides.

I have mentioned this before: our fellowship with God *is* salvation. That is what is opened up through the sacrifice of Christ. We have the way opened up to the Tree of Life once again, and the Tree of Life represents the Spirit of God. Having fellowship with God *is* salvation. He wants you to be fully cognizant of that fact that He is able to supply all of your needs.

Let us go on into chapter 2. We had just gotten through the hectic scene at the Temple when He had overturned the tables and chased the moneychangers out of there. I am sure it was a wild and noisy scene—with animals running in every different direction, and Jesus yelling, and the moneychangers yelling, and coins spilling out on the floor, rolling here and there. It must have been a wild scene. Then it is written in verse 17:

John 2:17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

That caused a reaction. We just read the reaction of the disciples to this occurrence: They remembered the Scripture. But what about the rest of the Jews that were there?

John 2:18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

They were aware of other messiahs. There had been a number of them prior to Christ—people

claiming to be the Messiah. They offered to do various kinds of miracles. Some that are recorded are: one guy said he was going to divide the Jordan River in two, like what happened when Joshua came through. Well, he was not able to deliver on that. Others said that they were going to change water into blood, or water into wine, or so forth.

Here was Jesus. It was obvious that He was doing things that seemed to indicate that He had unusual power. We are going to see this when we get into chapter 3. So they asked Him, "What sign do you show us, since you do these things?" They were looking for a testimony from Him as to His authority.

John 2:19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

We are going to see something as we go through here that I think you are somewhat aware of, and I hope you will become better aware of. That is that Jesus very rarely ever answered questions directly. He either answered questions with a question, or He answered them with an enigmatic reply that confused the person who asked the question. Then after His reply, they would say, "Well, I don't get that; what about this?" (I am paraphrasing it.) Then after that, He would give an answer that was *evermore* confusing.

You can see He was not trying to convert them. If He was, He would have given plain and simple answers.

To those of us that have the Spirit of God, we are able to recognize what He said in His reply. But the people who heard Him immediately did not get it. You can see that so clearly here. The disciples got it, but they did not always get it right away. Sometimes Jesus had to take them aside. Other times I think what we are seeing here is a reflection of the apostle John, 70 years after the fact—he has had a lot of time to think about it.

So He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." That was the sign. They asked Him for a sign, and He gave them the answer. He said, "In three days, I am going to be resurrected." That was the sign, which is confirmed in Matthew 12. They asked Him for a sign again, and He said that like Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so would He be in the heart of the earth.

Here was an even earlier occurrence. They asked Him for a sign to prove that He was the Messiah, and He told them—but He did not tell them directly. I do not know whether He actually went like this—"Destroy *this* Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." I do not know whether He did that. He may not have done it—made no motion—because evidently they did not get anything at all from what He said.

The Jews remembered what He said, but they perverted what He said:

Matthew 26:60-61 Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'"

That is not what Jesus said. John 2:19 records what He said: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." They said that He said, "Destroy *the temple of God*, and in three days I will *build* it." He did not say that at all.

Let us look a little bit beyond the immediate effect of what He said, and carry an underlying theme a little further here.

The subject of worship is involved here, and Jesus is talking to the woman at the well:

John 4:21-23 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

Back in John 2, there is an underlying theme to what Jesus said. On the surface, we can see very clearly that what He was talking about was, "When you kill this body, three days later I am going to be resurrected." We can see that so clearly. But there is an underlying, secondary theme to what He is saying here. That implication the Jews did pick up on somewhat: that is, the destruction of the Temple.

The underlying teaching here is that Jesus is saying that the time is coming when the Temple would not be needed for worship. That did occur. Did the Christians need the Temple to worship? They did not need the Temple to worship. But did the Jews? Yes, they did, because in the Old Testament God commanded that that was to be the central place of worship. It was the only place in which they were allowed to actually make sacrifices and offerings. It was essential to their worship. That is why the woman at the well brought that up. The Samaritans disagreed with that; they said that you were supposed to worship on Mount Gerizim.

What Jesus said there is, "You are both wrong. Neither one of them is actually needed. The time is coming when you will be able to worship God in spirit anywhere. God will be accessible to man anywhere. It will not have to be done through the Temple."

So what Jesus is saying here—the underlying theme in John 2:19-20—is that the Temple worship, with all of its elaborate ritual and animal sacrifices, is going to come to an end. He says, "I am going to give you a way to God that does not require all this human elaboration." That is an underlying, secondary theme there. It is not really obvious, but once you begin to see that, you can begin to see the pieces.

John 2:20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

Actually it took a lot longer than 46 years. The reconstruction of the Temple began in 19 BC, and the Jews did not finish it until 64 AD. It lasted 6 years, and then it was destroyed. But this

is being spoken here about 31 AD, and it was still a long way from being finished.

John 2:21-22 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

We see it is very obvious what He said. But what scripture did they remember? It is in the Psalms. I will show you which scripture it was.

Psalms 16:9-10 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

They recognized that in the three days and three nights and the resurrection that scripture was fulfilled. So they remembered what He said.

In Acts 2:31, Peter repeats it, because it is important to understand the fulfillment of this:

Acts 2:31 [H]e, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades [that is the Greek equivalent of *sheol*; it means a pit, a hole in the ground], nor did His flesh see corruption.

His resurrection within three days was a fulfillment of that scripture, so then they recalled what Jesus said, which is recorded in John 2.

It is repeated one more time, this time by the apostle Paul in Acts 13:35:

Acts 13:35-37 Therefore He also says in another Psalm: 'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.' "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.

The disciples, later on, had their faith confirmed when they understood that Jesus understood the course that was plotted before Him at the beginning of His ministry—that He was going to suffer death for all men—and yet He set His will to follow that path.

John 2:23-25 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

It is simply saying that He was not looking for men to witness of Him.

Even though Jesus did the miracles, it says here that He really did not reveal *who* He was. That is why He gave an enigmatic answer in John 2: 19. He did not really commit Himself to them. He really did not manifest Himself to them plainly—at least at this time. It tells why: He had no need that any one should testify of man. He did not need men to witness to others that He was the Messiah. Then it tells why: "He knew what was in man." One Bible I read said "He knew what was in human nature," which makes it even plainer.

What was He concerned about? He was concerned about *why* men would attach themselves to Him. You will see this ever so plainly as we go through the book of John. Remember early in the book of John that John said that men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. Jesus distrusted the reasons *why* they were going to attach themselves to Him.

Let us go to John 6. Here is as plain a scripture as I could find on this. This happened after another sign—the feeding of the 5,000. This happened the next day after that miracle.

John 6:25-26 And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You come here?" Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

It was not the *significance* of what He did—the sign—that they were looking at; they were looking to *get* something from Him (in this case, a full stomach). Men would flock after Him as long as He was healing them; as long as He was feeding them; as long as He was satisfying their intellectual vanity; as long as they could be pop-eyed at the miraculous things He did.

But as soon as He started talking to them about commitment; as soon as He started talking to them about self-sacrifice and self-denial and bearing their cross, they stared back at Him in blank incomprehension. "What are you talking about, buddy?" Then the questions began to fly.

Jesus confronted His disciples with this, because they wanted to get things too:

Matthew 20:20-23 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." [Listen to Jesus' reply:] But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." [They probably sealed their "doom" right there, because He was going to require it of them.] So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized [or immersed] with the baptism [immersion] that I am baptized with. . . "

Of course, it led to His crucifixion. That is what He was talking about.

Let us make this personal to you and me:

Luke 14:25 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,

Just imagine what was on His mind. Here He was attracting a lot of people. Why were they there? They were trying to *get* something from Him. If they were in the right attitude, He was more than willing to give it to them.

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

Are you willing to be baptized with the baptism that He is baptized with? If you have made that New Covenant, that is what you have agreed to—because you have become a part of His body. What the Head goes through, so does the rest of the body. This really has a great deal of import with regard to what we are being trained for.

Luke 14:27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

That is what He was after. He would not commit Himself to them, because He knew that all they were trying to do was get something miraculous from Him. You can see back in James 4 that a request that is made to God out of lust He will not respond to, because it will be used in a way that He does not intend that it be used.

Think back to John 2. That is the answer to *why* this is in there. You understand, do you not, that when we are baptized, we are giving ourselves to God unconditionally? We have nothing to offer Him. He owns everything. He does not need a thing from us. All He wants from us is our life. If we have any reservations, then we are going to resist Him.

He cannot use His creative powers in a human being who is going to use his free moral agency to fight against Him. It is going to take our free moral agency making decisions in agreement with His Word in order for God's creative power to work in us what He wants to create. It takes a free moral agent, freely making the right choices, for the mind, the heart, the way of God to be created in us. He distrusted what was in human nature because He knew that those people were just trying to *get* from Him.

In John 3, remember that this is still an explanation, or a further teaching, into the first sign—that God is able to supply all our needs. The business in the Temple is done. Now we are going to back to some more direct instruction regarding that first sign.

John 3:1-9 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a

ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 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.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

Let us look first at Nicodemus. In John 19, Nicodemus comes on the scene again. In verse 39, he comes with Joseph of Arimathea, and they ask for the body of Christ.

John 19:39 And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

There are two things here that indicate, pretty certainly, that Nicodemus was a very wealthy man. This is interesting from one aspect in that most of the time, in the Bible narrative, we find Jesus associating with what we would call common people—the people of the street, the ordinary middle class, the poor people, upper middle class, or whatever—but only rarely, on occasion, does He come in contact with people of much greater wealth.

Nicodemus, it says, came with a hundred pound weight of aloes, which indicates that he had a great deal of wealth—there is a lot of money represented in 100 pounds of that spice. Also, the fact that he was an *archon*, which comes a little bit later in the narrative—he was a member of the Sanhedrin, and certainly represented the ruling class of people.

A second thing: Nicodemus was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a brotherhood of men. They were never a very large group. I believe that some records from that period of time indicate that there were never any more than about 5,000 or 6,000 of them. They were a group of people that dedicated themselves, by oath before witnesses, that they were going to keep every word of the law—that they were going to devote their lives to it. It was going to be their life.

A person could certainly do that in an act of enthusiasm, emotionalism, or something—"I'm *really* *really* going to dedicate my life to God"—but the fact that there were never any more than about 5,000 or 6,000 of them at any given time indicates that the Pharisees themselves screened out those who just, in a fit of emotionalism, wanted to make that vow, but did allow those who, of sound mind and people of strong constitution and will, decided to devote themselves to that devotion. It gives you an indication that Nicodemus was not one of your run-of-the-mill individuals.

The apostle Paul was a Pharisee. He was a *very* highly educated man, and certainly a man of a great deal of religious zeal. There is no doubt about that Nicodemus, very likely, was of the same stripe. We will get into the Pharisees a little more later.

Incidentally, there is a difference between the scribes and the Pharisees. They are always mentioned together, but there was a great deal more scribes than there were Pharisees. The scribes were the ones who worked out the regulations that the Pharisees agreed to obey. They devoted their lifetime to studying the Scriptures, and codifying them in such a way that they were able to come up with hundreds and thousands of minute regulations regarding obedience. I will show you some of these a little bit later on.

We have a tendency to disrespect the Pharisees. I hope you will not. Misguided they were. But zealous they also were. Sincere—I think there is no doubt about it. They devoted themselves sincerely to what they believed was the right thing. Jesus said that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, we will not inherit the Kingdom of God. I just wonder sometimes if we can even begin to measure up to what they did. It takes an unusual person to devote your entire life to all of the rigmarole that they devoted themselves to.

In verse 1, "a ruler of the Jews"—*archon*—meant that Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin. He was one of 70 men that were in charge of charting the course of the daily life of the Jews under the Romans. So we are seeing here an unusual individual.

The next thing is that he came by night. I think that certainly shows an element of caution. It may have been that he came by night so that he would not be committing the Sanhedrin to the act that he was doing. Because he was in the Sanhedrin, wherever he would go, he would represent it. So coming at night, under the cover of darkness, would permit him to see Jesus without really exposing the rest of the Sanhedrin to what he was doing.

A second thing here is that by coming at night, it is very possible that he would catch Jesus as undisturbed as possible. During the daytime, the crowds would be coming to Him. At nighttime, there was the possibility that Jesus would be less disturbed and they could have a more uninterrupted conversation between the two of them.

John 3:2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, *we know...*

That is quite an admission. The "we" is the Sanhedrin. They already *knew!* We are barely into the first year of Jesus' ministry, and they already knew He was somebody sent from God. That sets up, as it were, the entire rest of the book. It puts the Sanhedrin in direct conflict with Jesus, because if indeed He was the Messiah, it meant that they were on a collision course because they—if their belief was held—were going to be unseated. They were going to have to give up their power and authority to the Messiah. So the question is, would they do it willingly? It is obvious from the book that they were not going to do it willingly.

The second fear that they had was that He would drag them into a confrontation with the Romans—and they did not have the heart for that. Because if He really was the Messiah, then you see He was also on a direct collision course with the Romans as well.

We understand that their perception of the Messiah was wrong, because their perception was that the Messiah would come and establish the Kingdom of God and Israel at that time. So their perception of it was wrong. But their perception that indeed He might very well be the Messiah was correct. "We *know* that You are a teacher come from God."

Notice the word that was used: ". . . for no one can do these signs. . ." The significance was not escaping them. It was not just the wonderful thing that was being done; the significance of it was being at least partly understood. This has great import later on because, like I said, it brings them to opposing sides. They did not want to give up their office. They did not want to fight the Romans. They had only one course then: cooperate with the Romans, and get rid of the Messiah.

Can you understand why Jesus said in Matthew 13: 15 that "this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes *they have closed*"? He is showing that it was an act of the will on their part. They closed their own eyes. It was not just that they were blinded by Satan, but when the truth was presented to them, they turned away from it and shut their eyes. That is why John said that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

"We *know* that You are a teacher come from God." Can you see any question that Nicodemus asked? He did not even ask a question. If he did ask a question, it is an implied question. In verse 3, Jesus answered the implied question:

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Please, pray tell me, what does that have to do with what Nicodemus said? Well, it has *everything* to do with what Nicodemus said. Actually, He got right to the heart and the core of the matter. In this case, there was no beating around the bush. They *knew* that His message was about government—about the government of God—and that is why Jesus said what He did about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is going to execute—it is going to administer—the government of God. "We *know* that You are a teacher come from God." They feared that He was the Messiah. So Jesus jumped right in and said, "You cannot even be in the Kingdom of God unless you are born again.

Actually, what He said *should* have relieved them. But they took what He said wrong. They should have understood that the Kingdom of God was not yet to be established, and so therefore they had nothing to fear from Him. He was not there to overthrow them. He said, "The government of God is not going to take over until people have been born into it." Has anyone been born into it? No, nobody has been born into it. That should have relieved Nicodemus. But it did not, because he did not get it.

He was not threatening the overthrow of government. That is why He replied the way He did. The Pharisees, because of their perception about the Messiah, and because they heard His message about the Kingdom of God, feared that Jesus was preaching the immediate takeover of the government by the Kingdom of God. So Jesus was actually confronting the issue. He was

telling him, "No, this will not happen until somebody is born into it."

Let us begin in verse 3, and pick up a principle: one cannot see the Kingdom of God until one is born again. Most of us understand that the word "born" comes from the Greek *gennaō*, and *gennaō* can mean either "begotten" or it can mean "born." It depends on the context.

The word "again" is one that we do not look at too frequently. It can mean one of three things. It can mean "from the beginning." It can mean "again"—that is, a second time. It can also mean "from above." The translators translated it exactly right, because the other two do not fit. They do not fit this context. So that is a correct translation.

Jesus' reply leaves Nicodemus confused, so Nicodemus comes back with a question: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (verse 4) Nicodemus at least understood that Jesus was talking about a literal birth; a literal delivery into the world—a change of environment, if I can put it that way. He was talking about a literal birth—being delivered into the world. At least Nicodemus was way ahead of most of the religious people of this day, because they do not take that as meaning a literal birth. But that is exactly what Jesus meant: a literal birth, being delivered into the world.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

What Jesus came back with was to again reassure Nicodemus that this birth He was talking about was *not of this age*. He did that in the use of the word "Spirit." We are now flesh and blood. Being born again involves being born as spirit. Nicodemus should have understood that what He was talking about there did not have to do with this age. So, again, Jesus reaffirms what He said in verse 3 in that He is not trying to overthrow that government, that the Kingdom of God will not be established until people are born again as spirit beings. We are all flesh and blood.

Then to make even surer that Nicodemus understood, He said,

John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

That directly relates to verse 5. It directly relates to Jesus' attempts to show, or to console, or to appease, or to assure Nicodemus that He was not going to challenge the government, that He was not trying to overthrow the Romans, that He was not going to establish the Kingdom of God here and now, but that had to wait for a different age when people would be born of the spirit.

John 3:7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Then He gives another illustration because He could see that it was slipping right by Nicodemus' mind:

John 3:8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

He said that just so that Nicodemus would understand that He was talking about a literal birth into a new age in which the beings would be spirit. See, that does not fit today. That does not fit the flesh-and-blood time. But Nicodemus missed it all together.

John 3:8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Invisible, but powerful. You cannot see it, but you can see what it does.

John 3:9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

He still did not get it.

We are going to double check this—what I have said to you—with the apostle Paul, because evidently there were some in the Corinthian church who did not understand this either, so they asked questions regarding the resurrection.

I Corinthians 15:50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

There is a parallel between flesh and corruption, and between spirit and incorruption. As long as we are flesh and blood, we cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. That exactly parallels with John 3: 3-7, where Jesus said that we must be born again.

I Corinthians 15:47-49 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. [Notice the comparison.] As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust [That is you and me. We are mortal]; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. [We are not there yet. That is why verse 50 had to be put in.] And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also [future] bear the image of the heavenly Man.

So the conclusion is "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Jesus apparently expected Nicodemus to understand it. So evidently it must be taught in the Old

Testament. It should have been understood. Jesus expected him to understand it.

A couple of conclusions:

- 1) Until one is born again, one cannot literally see the Kingdom of God.
- 2) Until one is born again, one cannot *enter* the Kingdom of God.
- 3) Until we are no longer flesh, but changed into spirit, we cannot enter in to see the Kingdom of God.

Those are easy conclusions to reach, just by comparing these scriptures with those in John. So then, until the resurrection, we cannot see, enter into, or inherit the Kingdom of God. Therefore the conclusion has to be that we are not now born again. That is the only conclusion that can be reached that is agreeable with the Scriptures.

Therefore we cannot be born again until the resurrection of the dead. That is so easy to understand. How in the world has the world gotten so far off the track? It is so simple, is it not?—just a matter of deduction, that is all. Simple deduction, and *believing* what the Scripture says. There is the key: they do not believe what it says. And neither did Nicodemus.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Here what Jesus is doing is showing the essential elements in the process that leads to being born again: water and spirit. Water represents something. It symbolizes cleansing. Water is what we use to clean ourselves.

Baptism is a ceremonial cleansing of sin. We know that the sins are not actually forgiven when we go under the water; the sins are forgiven because of God's promise to forgive them by the blood of Jesus Christ. But He symbolically, nonetheless, makes us go through a purification—a cleansing—in the waters of baptism. It is something that you will never forget. I have never yet run into any person who ever forgot that he was baptized. It makes an indelible impression in your mind. Even if the baptism was no good—even if we "got dunked"—we still remember that we were baptized. It makes that significant of an impression on our mind. It is an absolutely essential part of the conversion *process*.

This process does not take place all at one time. Ephesians 5:26 talks about "the washing of the water by the word," so it is a continuous process that is highlighted by baptism.

The next step in that process of being born again is being born of spirit. This has to do with attitude, nature, and composition. That is shown very clearly by verses 6 and 8. It has to do with power—we have been given a spirit "of love, of power, and of a sound mind." It has to do with attitude. It has to do with nature. It has to do with composition. It has to do with impregnation. It has to do with growth. All of it is a process, and it is very clearly shown by human begetting, growth in the womb, and birth as a human being.

John 3:9-10 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

I almost get the impression that Jesus was surprised. I do not know—we have to kind of feel that from what He said—but it seems to me that He was somewhat surprised.

John 3:11 Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

He says, "Look here, Nicodemus. You are supposed to be teaching these things to people, and here I am, representing God. I have come from the Father. I have come down from heaven. You have admitted that you know I am a teacher sent from God, and yet you do not accept what I have said." He could undoubtedly detect in Nicodemus some reservation—some resistance—to what He said about being born again. That is why He said, "You do not believe the things that I tell you."

Why? Why did not Nicodemus believe? I do not mean to make light of Nicodemus at all. I am sure that he was a very intelligent man—like I said, a leader. He was a person of training—a disciplined man, I am sure; a very strong-willed individual. I do not mean to make light of him at all. But he was not making the right connections out of the Old Testament.

Daniel 2 talks very clearly about the Kingdom of God—about it being a Kingdom that is going to be established *after* the fall of the first four major kingdoms. He should have understood that the Kingdom of God would not be established until the Roman Empire fell. He should have understood that it was not of this age—not of this world—that it is written of in the Old Testament.

That is why Jesus said, "You do not believe Our witness." Witness of whom? Not just of what Jesus was saying here, but the witness of God through the Old Testament prophets. He was not putting the parts together. David, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—every single one of them talked of the cleansing of the heart, of a new spirit, of a new heart. They had sections of prophecies devoted to that, and the Sanhedrin and Nicodemus should have known that would not take place until after Israel is regathered from their captivity. They should have understood that Jesus was not going to establish the Kingdom of God—the government of God—at that time.

They were rejecting the witness that was in the Old Testament. It was there! In fact, the apostle Paul said in II Timothy 3:16 that there is sufficient in the Old Testament to give a person salvation; you do not even need the New Testament. It was there, but they did not put the pieces together.

We are confronted with the same reasons as to why we—modern man—reject. Jesus very simply put it in Mark 7:9, "Full well you reject the commandments of God that you may keep your own traditions." The keeping of the traditions of men blinds a person.

Psalms 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a

good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.

"A good understanding have all those who do His commandments"—that is the phrase that I want. The keeping of the commandments of God gives understanding. It gives insight. It gives comprehension. It enables one to put the pieces together in the right way.

If that is true, then the opposite side of it is also true: if a person rejects the commandments of God, and keeps traditions instead, the keeping of those traditions are going to blind. It is going to take away the understanding of the heart. That is what happens.

"Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition." We understand that there is some self-will in that as well, but that is the essence of the problem. When Adam and Eve decided to obey Satan rather than God, the blindness began. If they had obeyed God, their enlightenment would have come from God. But instead they chose to obey Satan, and in their disobedience to God they began to become blind. All mankind has followed in their footsteps. So the blindness manifests itself in the failure to put the scriptures together correctly. The pieces do not fit.

That is why they had a wrong perception of the Messiah. They were looking for a conquering King who was going to establish the Kingdom of God, and put Israel on high. But because they would not obey God, the blindness set in, and even though they were diligently looking at the scriptures, they put the pieces together wrong. That is what has happened in modern Christianity. God confronts us in His calling with the choice of obeying His truth. If we obey it, then the enlightenment continues. If we disobey it, then darkness begins to settle on us again.

Do you remember in Mr. Armstrong's autobiography how he described the man who came and prayed over Mrs. Armstrong and she was immediately healed overnight? Mr. Armstrong was so grateful that he wanted to share with that man some of the knowledge that he was getting out of the scriptures, so he gave him a paper on the holy days. The man took the paper and read it, read it with his pastor, and then *rejected* it, and came back and told Mr. Armstrong he did not want to have anything to do with that. The man lost his power to heal. He rejected the truth of God, and God withdrew from him.

That is the principle that is involved here. We have done it on a universal basis. That is why Nicodemus was blinded to these things. He certainly had the intelligence. Apparently Nicodemus later became converted, which is a wonderful thing. He did not give up, and apparently enough of it sunk in that he began to yield himself to God, and became one of the few friends that Christ had within the Sanhedrin. Maybe he was responsible for slowing things down so Christ could get His ministry done.

This thing with Nicodemus is in here to show you how destitute of truth the leadership of Israel was. The first sign was the manifested glory of God, that He is able to supply all of our needs. How could the people of Israel be supplied with what they needed of God, and the very leadership did not understand the Scriptures? He is showing how destitute even the leadership was, and how God is able to supply the need. How was He able to supply the need? Through repentance; through the waters of baptism—the process that leads to salvation.

John 3:13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

This verse is there to lend authority to verse 12. He says, "You do not believe; how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." Remember, John was looking back on this from 95 or 100 AD. That is why he said "the Son of Man who is in heaven." But what Christ originally said is that "there is no one who can reveal the way of God to you any more plainly, authoritatively, or truthfully than I can. I was with the Father. I experienced these things with Him. I came down from heaven, and I am able to tell you more clearly than anybody else can." So it gives authority to what He said.

He goes right on in verse 14 and continues the thought:

John 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.

Numbers 21:4-5 Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "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 worthless bread."

Incidentally, this ties directly into something I said earlier about why Jesus distrusted people: He was suspicious about what they wanted to get from Him. Then I went on and showed you how we have to be willing to give ourselves to God as a living sacrifice—wholly, totally. This is why: If we have not given ourselves to God *wholly*, there is a very good chance we are going to become discouraged along the way. God's way of life is not easy. He promises great things, but there are many difficulties to go through. God is going to put us through the paces because He wants to create something in us: Himself.

So, He is going to give us trials and experiences that are going to produce what it is in the way of personality, in the way of character, in the way of understanding, in the way of qualities and abilities that He wants to refine or enhance. He is going to put us through things that are going to develop them. We are going to have to have the will, the discipline, and the *faith* to go through them without becoming discouraged—without losing sight of what we are doing and why we are going through what we are going through.

If we do become discouraged, the chances are very great we are going to do exactly what the Israelites did. We are going to begin to blame God or those that He appointed to be leaders along the way.

Numbers 21:5-9 And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "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 worthless bread." So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

Therefore the people came to Moses, 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. 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.

That is the episode that that is taken from, and it appears in John 3: 14:

What happened when the people looked at the serpent? They were healed. The key to this strange episode is, "What did the serpent represent?" The serpent, in the Bible, is a symbol of Satan—and Satan is the epitome of sin. The serpent then always brings to mind either Satan or sin. But Christ, the sinless one, is the one who was lifted up—He was put on a stake. What relationship is there between the serpent and the sinless one who was put on the stake?

Christ became sin. He became the epitome of sin (II Corinthians 5). Whenever He took our sins on Him, everything—all of the sins of mankind—was dumped on Him, and He literally became sin.

II Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Back to John 3. The connection between the two is this: the fiery serpents represented the sin of the people, and it was nailed to a stake. The people were to look beyond the snake that was nailed to the stake to God, who was their actual healer. Christ made a parallel with that in Himself—that He was to be lifted up on a stake as well, and He was going to become the epitome of sin. All the sins of mankind were going to be put on Him. But our responsibility is to *look through* Him, as *sin* being nailed to the stake, and look to God who forgives sin through that sacrifice, and then we are healed spiritually.

All those things have a connection with being born again. It is part of the process. Here He is prophesying of something that had just occurred (remember He said in chapter 2: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"). Now He is telling—He is filling in the gaps—about how He is going to be killed. It is going to be by a crucifixion. He was going to be lifted up.

There is one other connection I want to make with this. (It also appears in Philipians 2: 9.)

Acts 2:33 Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

The word "exalted" is the same word that is translated "lifted up" in John 3:14. It says there, "Therefore being *lifted up* to the right hand of God. . . ." That is where He is in glory, if I can put it that way. We started this Bible Study with the manifestation of the glory of God, and we are going to end with the manifestation of the glory of God.

What if Christ had avoided the cross? There would have been no glory. That is the connection that I want to make. The way to receive the glory of God is to sacrifice yourself to Him.

Remember I said earlier that whenever Jesus started talking about self-denial—when He talked about disciplining oneself; when He talked about bearing one's cross; when He talked about self-sacrifice—these people looked at Him in blank incomprehension. I read to you Luke 14:26-27, where it says "unless a man is willing to bear his cross, he cannot be My disciple." What He is saying here is the way to be exalted—the way to be lifted up; the way to receive the benefits of God's way—is to give yourself in sacrifice; to bear your cross.

This is a lesson that comes through over and over, over and over again, six different times. If Jesus says something once, it is pretty important. If He says something twice, it is pretty important. If He says something six times, it is *awesomely* important. He says, "The way to life is to deny yourself" in six different contexts—six different ways. Even though this one does not directly say this, He is also saying it again. That is the way to life. That is the way to the kind of exaltation that God wants to give.

Philippians 2:5-9 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation [He denied Himself; He bore His cross. Whatever came His way as a result of the way of life that God wanted Him to live, He made Himself of no reputation], taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. [This is the Creator doing this.] And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him [lifted Him up] and given Him the name which is above every name

That is the lesson here of John 3 up to verse 14.

We will pick it up next time in verse 15. I wanted to finish this chapter. He is still talking to Nicodemus here. He is still showing Nicodemus how destitute he is of understanding, but that He is able to fulfill. Wherever Nicodemus is destitute, He is able to fill Him to the full, and give him the very things that he needs to have an abundant life. God is equal to that task, and that is the first sign that He gave: He is able to meet man's need in regard to having an abundant and full life.