

## Great Discoveries

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## 大いなる発見

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The Gospel According to John  
 [International Standard Version]

3:1 Now there was a man from the Pharisees, a leader of the Jews, whose name was Nicodemus.

3:2 He came to Jesus at night and told him, "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher, because no one can perform these signs that you are doing unless God is with him."

3:3 Jesus replied to him, "Truly, I tell you with certainty, unless a person is born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God."

3:4 Nicodemus asked him, "How can a person be born when he is old? He can't go back into his mother's womb a second time and be born, can he?"

3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, I tell you with certainty, unless a person is born of water and Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

3:6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

3:7 Don't be astonished that I told you, 'All of you must be born from above.'

3:8 The wind blows where it wants to. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. That's the way it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

3:9 Nicodemus asked him, "How can that be?"

3:10 Jesus answered him, "You're a teacher of Israel, and you can't understand this?"

3:11 Truly, I tell you with certainty, we know what we're talking about, and we testify about what we've seen. Yet you people do not accept our testimony.

3:12 If I have told you people about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

3:13 "No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

3:15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

3:16 "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his unique Son so that everyone who believes in him might not be lost but have eternal life.

[International Standard version]

We all want peace. However, we all know that the next great war will occur sooner or later. The Bible—which consists of the words of God—clearly states that our future is not rosy.

There is nothing our politicians can do. In alluding to the future war, the Bible predicts that one-third of the whole human race will be killed at once. This is beyond our imagination. For a very long time, this has been believed to be impossible, as people couldn't comprehend how one-third of the whole human race could be killed instantly. But people nowadays don't doubt this anymore. If all of the nations used the nuclear weapons they possess, this could realistically come to pass that one-third of all humans are killed in a few minutes. We don't know when that will happen. However, the day will assuredly come sometime in the future. Happily, no true believer of Jesus will be there when this happens. They will be with Jesus by then.

What kinds of things should all human beings share? An aspiration to peace, a willingness for freedom and a desire to be in unity with each other. Although we all aspire to everlasting peace, in reality, no international organization or religion can give us true peace. Believers in the early churches testified with joy:

Ephesians

2:14 For it is he who is our peace.

One of the names of Jesus is "Prince of Peace." Those who have encountered Jesus and accepted the Lord Jesus inside of them have everlasting peace. We all have a desire for freedom. Nobody wants to be tied down. But in reality, when we just continue doing as we please, we are actually bound to our own desire. We become slaves to ego, servants of sin. Sin makes people blind.

True freedom can be attained only when we obey Jesus. We all have a desire for unity. This is because when we have conflicts with others, such conflicts bring up various problems, irritations and pains. However, unity made to suit the convenience of men is always tentative. It is limited to specific time periods and will eventually disappear. In contrast, the Bible describes the early churches as:

Acts

2:46 United in purpose, they went to the Temple every day, ate at each other's homes, and shared their food with glad and humble hearts.

True unity can be achieved only through Jesus. We have to reject any teaching that tells us otherwise. The most important thing in our lives is an encounter with

the Lord Jesus, who is as immovable as a rock; who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

It is to know Jesus in the true sense through an encounter with Him. The verses we read at the beginning of this sermon are from one of the most famous and most frequently quoted chapters. A religious leader, a scriptural scholar called Nicodemus, was changed by an encounter with Jesus. What did he find out? This man Nicodemus was sincerely in pursuit of the truth.

He belonged to the people of Israel and was a well-accepted teacher. As we can see from the chapter 3, verse 10, the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, 'You're a teacher of Israel'. According to the Bible, he was referred to as the only one, and a very special teacher for the whole land of Israel.

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As we can see from verse 1, chapter 3, he was one of the Jewish leaders, which implies that he belonged to the special class of teachers. Nicodemus received the most excellent education available at that time. He was widely recognized as a person of high integrity. He lived a highly ethical and exemplary life, yet he felt isolated and had an empty feeling at the deep bottom of his heart.

He was seeking the truth even after he reached old age. He never wanted to give up. He'd had enough of false teachings and he aspired to know the truth. He knew every detail of the Old Testament. There is no doubt that he knew about the promise of the coming of Messiah. Nicodemus had heard a lot about the Lord Jesus—the teachings of the Lord, as well as the miracles the Lord had done.

He had been in pursuit of truth throughout his life, and he aspired to come and see Jesus personally and know His thoughts better.

We know that the Lord Jesus was extremely busy throughout His life as we can see from the gospels. Every day, people with all kinds of sicknesses were brought to the Lord from all around the country and Jesus healed all of them.

He never asked for offerings. He could hardly find a time to have a meal according to the Bible. Furthermore, when His disciples were exhausted and fell asleep on the ground, Jesus went up to the mountain and prayed alone, standing on His feet. In such a situation, it was nearly impossible for anyone to have a private conversation with the Lord Jesus in the daytime.

That was why Nicodemus waited until late to come to talk with the Lord Jesus. Nicodemus came and confided his own problems to Him, and he found through his experience that coming to the Lord Jesus resulted in something meaningful. The Lord Jesus answers any questions, solves all problems and brings people to the truth.

In the presence of the Lord Jesus, Nicodemus discovered an astounding fact, which was that in spite of the ethical and sincere life he had been leading, he was spiritually blind and dead. In all actuality, he was the lost one.

He did not understand the most fundamental truth regarding the kingdom of the God. To this day, some people never fail to attend worship, get baptized and serve the Lord enthusiastically, and as such are proud of their many good deeds. Nevertheless, just like Nicodemus they are spiritually blind, spiritually dead and spiritually lost in the eyes of the Lord God. There were many such people in the time of Paul. Let's look at another example from the Bible;

2Timothy

3:5 They will hold to an outward form of godliness but deny its power. Stay away from such people.

3:6 For some of these men go into homes and deceive foolish women who are burdened with sins and swayed by all kinds of desires.

3:7 These women are always studying but are never able to arrive at a full knowledge of the truth.

What a tragedy if people "are always studying but are never able to arrive at a full knowledge of the truth." Of course, it is because their motives are not pure. They would never think of humbling themselves and bowing their heads down. Through his conversation with the Lord Jesus, Nicodemus made "seven great discoveries." Today, I would like to explain what these discoveries were.

What was the first discovery? The Lord is always ready to meet any soul who wants to meet him. Jesus never refuses anyone. Rather, he always accepts us, listens to us and helps us.

In other words, he understood that God cares for each person. Nicodemus spoke to the Lord with these words:

John

3:2 He came to Jesus at night and told him, "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher, because no one can perform these signs that you are doing unless God is with him."

Here, Nicodemus stated three things: that the Lord Jesus had come from the Lord God, that the Lord God always stayed with the Lord Jesus and that the Lord could do anything He wanted.

The question that Nicodemus had deep inside his heart was how people could enter the eternal kingdom of God. However, before Nicodemus put his question into words, the Lord gave him the answer.

Actually, when people seek the truth and want salvation, Jesus already has the answer for them. The Lord is always the same – yesterday, today and forever. We are given this same invitation from the Lord:

[3]

John

7:37 On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink!

7:38 The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have rivers of living water flowing from his heart."

Matthew

11:28 Come to me, all of you who are weary and loaded down with burdens, and I will give you rest.

He is not asking us to become religious leaders or to study the Bible. He does not encourage us to be strong and establish ourselves. He is just telling us, "Come to me just the way you are. I'll never turn away the one who comes to me."

Psalms

107:9 He has satisfied the one who thirsts, filling the hungry with what is good.

Those who are hungry and thirsty for the truth will eventually experience that the Lord Jesus is the one who can satisfy the hunger and thirst of their minds. Nicodemus sought the truth, and he discovered that, if he asked, it would be given to him. He was a seeker of the truth. His heart, which had been filled with hunger and thirst for truth, could not be fulfilled by knowledge of the scriptures.

Although he was a widely accepted and well-respected scriptural scholar, very knowledgeable about scripture, scriptural knowledge could not give him true salvation. His heart was not truly satisfied by obeying the commandments in the Bible. What he needed was the 'water of life' and 'peace of mind'. If you truly desire to obtain eternal salvation, you need to put aside all

preconceived ideas, stop relying on yourself and just seek the living God of salvation.

Isaiah

55:6 "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.

55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous person his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord, So he'll have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he'll pardon abundantly.

Isn't it a wonderful promise? While he was with the Lord Jesus, Nicodemus realized that all the efforts he had made – all his religiosity and his own righteousness standards – were totally valueless in the presence of this everlasting Lord.

He experienced this: The Lord Jesus accepts all souls that seek Him. The Lord Jesus makes time to talk to all of them. The Lord Jesus knows all kinds of pains and worries, and thus can help us to resolve any problem. This was the first thing that Nicodemus discovered.

His second great discovery was that 'Jesus was someone more than just a great teacher'. Before Nicodemus met the Lord Jesus, he was certain that Jesus was incomparable to any others in terms of His teaching and His deeds. The conclusion that Nicodemus drew from what he had heard was that the Lord Jesus was the one sent from God, and that the Lord God Himself was with the Lord Jesus.

However, scarcely had Nicodemus met the Lord Jesus before he instantly realized that Jesus was someone far greater than he could have imagined. Needless to say, Jesus has been the best teacher throughout history. No one has ever taught like Jesus. The words of the Lord are far superior to any other teachings by humans. This fact was already recognized, even back then. Nobody doubted him. This can be seen from the last lines of the famous Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew

7:28 When Jesus had finished saying all these things, the crowds were utterly amazed at his teaching,

7:29 because he was teaching them like a person who had authority, and not like their scribes.

But more importantly, the Lord Jesus is 'the savior', rather than being a teacher. He is not someone just to educate us, but is the one who can save us, which is what we truly need. Even the most comprehensive scriptural knowledge will not save people. Salvation is what only the Lord God can produce inside the hearts of the people. Salvation is the solution to our sins. At the Nativity of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit clearly

explained the reason why the Lord was coming down to the world.

#### Matthew

1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he is the one who will save his people from their sins."

The meaning of the name Jesus is 'the savior from all sins'.

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Nicodemus's third discovery was that 'what is born of the flesh is flesh'. Flesh remains as flesh forever. We can't change our own nature, what we were when we were born.

Ours is a sinful nature—a nature that allows us nothing but to commit sins. We are all familiar with the famous saying, "Failure breeds success." But is this really true? I actually see the truth in the old popular song that goes "I know it, though I can't stop." David experienced the same thing three thousands years ago:

#### Psalms

51:5 Indeed, in iniquity I was brought forth; in sin my mother conceived me.

Some people say that men become sinners when they commit sins. But the Bible says the opposite. Humans commit sins because they are born as sinners.

#### Isaiah

64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy rag;

Flesh, or humanity's innate nature, might look very polite, sincere and good to the outside world, but in the eyes of the Lord God it is unacceptably stained with our sins. Are we still in our flesh? Or have we experienced regeneration through the spirit of the Lord God?

The fourth great discovery of Nicodemus was that 'true salvation had nothing to do with any religion'. It also had nothing to do with knowledge. All kinds of human deeds are nothing but obstacles in the way to obtaining salvation. The Lord Jesus made this very clear.

#### John

3:3 Jesus replied to him, "Truly, I tell you with certainty, unless a person is born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God."

3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, I tell you with certainty, unless a person is born of water and Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

3:6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

3:7 Don't be astonished that I told you, 'All of you must be born from above.'

Those who want true salvation must go through a regeneration. More importantly, it has to achieve not just a noticeable outward change, but a totally new creation. Paul explained this fact in his second epistle to the Corinthians:

#### 2 Corinthians

5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in the Messiah, he is a new creation. Old things have disappeared, and—look!—all things have become new!

Regeneration is not just about making a decision, such as "I will attend the gathering today," "I will start to read the Bible" or "I will pray." These are all just outward changes, external changes. The salvation of the Lord God begins with regeneration. People will obtain a totally new life when they come to Jesus as miserable sinners and accept the Lord as their savior. Those who have Jesus have eternal lives. Regeneration is to obtain eternal life, and it is what required of us.

The fifth great discovery of Nicodemus was that 'this regeneration was absolutely necessary'. Let's go back to the Chapter 3, verse 3 again. Jesus explains in His own words that 'unless we are born again for the second time, everything we do is meaningless, empty and useless'. At the verse 7, Jesus explicitly used these words: 'all of you must be born from above.'

Those who wish to be saved have to be born again. Those who want to go to heaven must be born again. This is why it is extremely important whether or not we are truly reborn. Without regeneration, all humans are destined for eternal destruction. Without regeneration, there will be no true joy or peace. Without regeneration, there will be no hope to have a vibrant life.

The sixth thing Nicodemus found out was that 'no one is too old to be saved'.

#### John

3:4 Nicodemus asked him, "How can a person be born when he is old? He can't go back into his mother's womb a second time and be born, can he?"

The Lord Jesus gave Nicodemus a clear and definite answer: 'Nicodemus, you too can be born again into

new life.' Of course, He does not refer to a natural phenomenon, but one that is supernatural. This refers to a spiritual awakening. Even if you have been spiritually dead until today, you can be born again into a totally new life. You can be connected to the living God, your debts will be redeemed and you can experience the certainty of true salvation. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus and accept Him will be saved and become the children of the Father God.

John

1:12 However, to all who received him, those believing in his name, he gave authority to become God's children

[5]

Nicodemus' seventh great discovery was that there was only one way to be born again. There are many different routes to reach the top of Mount Fuji, but there is only one route that leads to salvation. This is why the two verses we read at the beginning are extremely important. Let me read them one more time.

John

3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,  
3:15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

Those who have eternal life won't be judged. This is because the one who sacrificed Himself and took our judgment upon Himself now pleads for us and mediates for us to God. Those who have the Lord Jesus have passed from death to life. Those who are saved are 'those who discovered the same seven great facts' that Nicodemus found. They all make the following confessions:

First. The Lord Jesus accepted me and found me before I even started to seek him. The Lord Jesus not only understood my pains, but He cleaned all my sins and solved all my worries.

Secondly, the Lord is far more than just a great teacher. He is my savior and my redeemer. The Lord forgave my sins and paid all my debts. The Lord gave me true peace of mind.

Thirdly, they learned from their own experience that flesh is always the flesh and that flesh can't change flesh, as clearly stated by the Lord Jesus. Any effort of the flesh did not help them to obtain the joy of true salvation.

Fourthly, Jesus does not create any religion. It was through regeneration that I was given an eternal life.

All believers will thus testify.

Fifthly, Not only did the Lord Jesus grant me a new life through the regeneration, but He also gave me true joy, profound peace and strength to live. Without His regeneration, I would have had no hope.

Sixth, I was saved. Even someone like me was redeemed. Thus, the possibility of salvation is open to all. The grace of Jesus is sufficient for anyone, and Jesus wishes to have mercy on all men.

And seventh, there is only one way that leads to eternal salvation and it is Jesus. To know the Lord is vital to living a truly meaningful life. What Jesus gives us is perfect satisfaction. These are the testimonies of the saved brothers and sisters. May the name of this amazing Lord be praised and revered through the lives of all our brothers and sisters.

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