

10. MUST BE BORN AGAIN (JOHN 3:1-10) 03/11/12
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ATCHISON, PASTOR LEE HENDON

THE SALES REP FINALLY GOT HIS CHANCE TO MAKE THE REALLY BIG SALE. HE WAS GOING INTO THE FINAL INTERVIEW ON HIS BIGGEST CONTRACT EVER. AS HE WAS USHERED INTO THE EXECUTIVE BUYER'S OFFICE AN ASSISTANT BROUGHT COFFEE & LEFT. THE ATMOSPHERE WAS CORDIAL & HE KNEW HE WAS GIVING HIS BEST PRESENTATION EVER.

THEN THE ASSISTANT TAPPED ON THE DOOR, RE-ENTERED THE OFFICE & SPOKE BRIEFLY WITH THE EXECUTIVE. SHE STOOD & SAID, "I APOLOGIZE BUT I HAVE TO TEND TO ANOTHER MATTER. I WILL BE JUST A MOMENT OR TWO." SHE FOLLOWED HER ASSISTANT OUT OF THE ROOM.

THE SALES REP LOOKED AROUND THE BEAUTIFULLY APPOINTED OFFICE. HE SAW HER FAMILY PHOTOS ON HER DESK. THEN HE NOTICED A COMPETITOR'S PROPOSAL ON HER DESK. LEANING FORWARD HE COULD SEE THE COLUMN OF FIGURES BUT IT WAS COVERED BY A DIET SODA CAN. HE WAS TEMPTED TO MOVE THE CAN TO SEE HIS COMPETITOR'S BID. WHAT HARM COULD THERE BE IN READING HER PRIVATE INFORMATION? AFTER ALL SHE HAD LEFT IT OUT IN PLAIN SIGHT, **ALMOST**. AFTER WRESTLING WITH HIMSELF A WHILE HE FINALLY DECIDED TO TAKE A PEEK.

WHEN HE LIFTED THE SODA CAN HE DISCOVERED THAT THE CAN WAS NOT FILLED WITH SODA AT ALL. IT WAS A BOTTOMLESS CAN FILLED WITH THOUSANDS OF BBS WHICH SPILLED OUT ALL OVER THE DESK ONTO THE TILE FLOOR. **BUSTED!** HIS DISHONEST ATTEMPT TO SHORT CUT THE COMPETITION WAS EXPOSED.

NOT EVERY TEMPTATION IS SO OBVIOUS. NOT EVERY FAILURE IS SO EMBARRASSING. BUT EVERY TEMPTATION IS A CHALLENGE - **TO SIN OR NOT TO SIN** - THAT IS THE QUESTION. PARADISE IS LOST - THE HUMAN STAIN RUNS DARK & DEEP. JESUS KNOWS THE SIN IN OUR HEARTS - NOT TO BE APPLAUDED BUT ACKNOWLEDGED & DEALT WITH.

IN JOHN 3 JESUS HAD A VERY HUMOROUS ENCOUNTER WITH NICODEMUS - IT WAS LIKE THERE WERE TWO SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS TAKING PLACE - LIKE TWO SHIPS PASSING IN A FOG BANKED NIGHT. NICODEMUS WAS A PUZZLED MAN, A MAN

WITH ALL THE HONORS & OPPORTUNITIES - YET WITH SOMETHING LACKING IN HIS LIFE. IT WAS UNCERTAIN AS TO WHETHER OR NOT HE WOULD CATCH ON? MUCH LIKE OUR ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS - TWO DIFFERENT VANTAGE POINTS - THERE ARE TIMES THAT WE EXPERIENCE THAT GNAWING HUNGER OF EMPTINESS - WE CAN BE SO ON TOP OF OUR GAME - WINNING ALL THE AWARDS & ACCOLADES - YET SOMETHING IS MISSING - **DRAW NEAR TO JESUS** - LISTEN UP - DO NOT ALLOW JESUS TO PASS YOU BY.

WHEN NICODEMUS CAME TO JESUS HE SAID THAT NO ONE COULD HELP BUT BE IMPRESSED WITH ALL THE SIGNS & WONDERS JESUS DID. **DING-DING-DING** HERE IS THE CONFESSION OF AN IMPARTIAL WITNESS - NOT YET A DISCIPLE - THAT JESUS WAS REALLY **HOT STUFF** - SOMETHING REALLY EXTRA SPECIAL & GODLY ABOUT THIS JESUS! EVEN JESUS' ENEMIES RECOGNIZED THAT IN JESUS - *HE MUST BE FROM GOD.* NICODEMUS UNDERSTOOD THAT MUCH ABOUT JESUS BUT THAT WAS NOT ENOUGH. ALL THE BOOK KNOWLEDGE - TO HAVE EVEN WALKED & TALKED WITH JESUS - TO HAVE SEEN ALL HIS WORKS & WONDERS - **NOT ENOUGH.** INTELLECTUALISMS & KNOWLEDGE ABOUT JESUS CAN BE A DEAD END ST TO NOWHERESVILLE. WE CAN BECOME PRISONERS OF OUR OWN INTELLECT - NICODEMUS WAS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THAT.

JESUS WOULD TO GET TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER - **YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN!** NICODEMUS KNEW THE JEWISH LAW FORWARDS & BACKWARDS - UPSIDE DOWN - INSIDE OUT - EVERY JOT & TITLE - KNEW THE LITTLE FRAGMENTS OTHERS WOULD MISS. NICODEMUS WAS STUCK IN THE QUAGMIRE OF RELIGIOSITY & LEGALISM - THERE WAS NO WIGGLE ROOM FOR GOD - THE LIFE OF GOD'S MOVEMENT & SURPRISES HAD BEEN CHOCKED OFF & STRANGLERED BY THE VOLUME'S OF RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATIONS & APPLICATIONS. **WARNING:** WE CAN GO THRU THE MOTIONS & MOVEMENTS OF CHURCH LIFE - BE GOOD CHURCH GOERS & BE DEAD IN THE WATER LIKE NICODEMUS. KNOW THE BIBLE & CREEDS & CHURCH GAMES TO THE NTH DEGREE - TO MISS OUT ON THE WHOLE JESUS THING. **WE MUST BE BORN AGAIN!**

NICODEMUS MISUNDERSTOOD - WAS IN A DIFFERENT PLACE FROM JESUS - JESUS PLAY FAIR - **BORN AGAIN!** SILLINESS! TAKEN AT FACE VALUE & ON AN INTELLECTUAL LEVEL REBIRTH IS IMPOSS-IBLE - CAN A GROWN MAN RE-ENTER HIS MOTHER'S WOMB?

YUK, ABSURD & DISGUSTING! HOW CLEVER WE CAN BE IN RESISTING THE LORD WITH MIND GAMES THAT BLOCK THE CHANGING OF OUR HEARTS. WE CAN BE OH SO CORRECT TO BE ALL SO WRONG! IT IS QUITE CLEAR THAT LEFT IN OUR OWN STRENGTH WE ARE QUITE UNABLE TO FOLLOW JESUS IN OUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEYS. WE MUST NOT STAY THE SAME. WHEN THE SPIRIT OF GOD ENTERS US TO TAKE POSSESSION OF US & CHANGE US FROM THE INSIDE OUT - THE MIRACLE OF REBIRTH HAPPENS - MADE LORD TOUGH. IT IS JESUS WHO CAN WORK THE CHANGE IN US; IT IS THRU HIM THAT WE ARE BORN AGAIN. IT IS BEGINNING LIFE ALL OVER AGAIN WITH NEW PERCEPTIONS & NEW RELATIONSHIPS. BRAND NEW!

NICODEMUS THOUGHT THE KINGDOM OF GOD WAS REALIZED BY FOLLOWING ALL THE RULES & REGULATIONS OF THE JEWISH LAW. THAT IS A HEAD THING. MANY A CHRISTIAN THINKS THEY CAN LOOK THE PART & BE HOME FREE IN HEAVEN. SURPRISE, SURPRISE! OUR SIN STAINED HEARTS MUST BE CHANGED - FROM THE INSIDE OUT BY BEING BORN OF THE WATER & THE SPIRIT. TO COME OUT FROM THE QUAGMIRE OF SIN A TRANSFORMATION MUST TAKE PLACE. HOW WE LOVES TO RESIST BEING BORN AGAIN.

THE WATER OF BIRTH & BAPTISM GIVES NEW LIFE. SOME-TIMES THAT NEW LIFE RUSHES IN SUDDENLY SOMETIMES IT IS ELONGATED. HOW LONG YOUR BIRTH PANGS BEFORE YOU BECAME A BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN? ALL AT ONCE, GRADUAL OR STILL IN PROCESS? SOME OF US, LIKE NICODEMUS, THINK ABOUT IT TOO MUCH - ST. PAUL WAS THAT WAY UNTIL ON THE RD TO DAMASCUS SLAM BAM- BORN AGAIN! ST. PETER - SLAM - BAM - LET ME OUT OF THIS BOAT WALKING ON THE WATER RIGHT NOW! THING OF IT IS - DO NOT STOP THE BIRTH UNTIL NEW LIFE IS GIVEN. CAN YOU SAY, WITHOUT STUMBLING, I AM A BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN? CAN YOU SAY IT NOT ONLY WITH YOUR LIPS BUT WITH YR HEART & SOUL? FOCUS: I AM A BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN! THE SINS OF THE PAST ARE FORGIVEN & FORGOTTEN - LIKE A BABY BRAND NEW!

BIRTH OF THE SPIRIT TAKES US OUT OF THE MIRE OF SIN. IT IS A NEW BALL GAME NOW, BABY! A NEW POWER ENTERS OUR LIVES WHICH ENABLES US TO BE WHAT BY OURSELVES WE COULD NEVER BE & TO DO WHAT BY OURSELVES WE COULD NEVER DO. TO SIN OR NOT TO SIN - WE HAVE THE SPIRIT OF A NEW LIFE TO

TAKE THE "NOT TO SIN" OPTION - HIT THE EASY BUTTON - IT IS **EASIER** TO LOVE THAN IT IS TO HATE - AS BORN AGAIN WE BEGIN TO THINK OF LIFE IN A JESUS WAY! IT IS **EASIER** TO FORGIVE THAN HOLD A GRUDGE. **EASIER** TO EMBRACE THAN REFRAIN FROM EMBRACING. **EASIER** TO LIVE IN PEACE THAN IN HOSTILITY. GOD - WE COULD GET USE TO THIS NEW LIFE! WHY NOT! JESUS IS OUR **EASY BUTTON** TO GET OUT OF THE MIRE OF SIN.

THE SPIRIT GIVES NEW LIFE AS IT WANTS TO - LIKE THE WIND IT CANNOT BE CONTROLLED OR DIRECTED - WE MAY NOT KNOW HOW THE SPIRIT WORKS & MOVES YET WE SEE & EXPERIENCE THE SPIRIT'S EFFECTS IN OUR LIVES. AT THE HEART OF CHRITIANITY THERE IS A MYSTERY - MYSTERIOUS ONLY BECAUSE IT IS A GOD THING & NOT OUR OWN. **WE MUST BE BORN AGAIN!**