

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONG OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

CD 91-2

Gospel of John

Chapters 3 and 4

Nicodemus and the Woman of Samaria: Born of the Water and the Spirit
The Closing Message of This Series

Editorial Note: On many occasions, Sidney Cox delivered what were a series of either sermons or Bible lessons on the Gospel of John.

This was the closing sermon of such a series delivered to an unknown church or group.

J. Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney and Violet Cox. August 10, 2010

...a moment or two, and having the chance to preach the Word to you, to unfold this beautiful book of the Gospel of John. And it has been a great privilege. Will you remember it and thank God for it? A man said to me on one occasion after we had had a series of studies similar to this, he came to me at the close and he said, "You have made that book a new book to me. You have made it a new book to me." And we shall be happy forever if just one person out of this crowd would feel that about our studies. If there has come anything to you that has given a freshness, a newness to it all, then we're very thankful indeed. And we shall continue to thank God for you and to remember you when we pray.

One of the things that we said, perhaps incidental things that we said in our studies of the Gospel of John, was this – that in that gospel you find our Lord in private conversation with people. That is the particular emphasis of the Gospel of John as far as the ministry of our Lord is concerned. You find Him rather giving His great messages and unfolding His great truths to individuals rather than to crowds. You find Him preaching to crowds, of course, but the emphasis in the Gospel of John is rather on the private conversation rather than the public address. And I believe we remarked that there are, in the Gospel of John, fifteen private conversations of our Lord.

Tonight, I want us to have a look at two of them. Not intensively at all, but just to take a glance at two characters and two conversations, the content of which may seem to be quite different. Sometimes when you think of what the Lord said to Nicodemus and what the Lord said to the Woman of Samaria, we may come to the conclusion that the content of His message was entirely different. But what I want us to see tonight is that the content of His message was exactly the same. All the difference was, He used a different figure of speech, that's all. But the content was the same. The word was exactly the same. And the reason for that was that the need of both was exactly the same. Now with that introduction, let's have a word of prayer and then we'll go on and look at these folks and see what our Lord said to them.

(Prayer)

Our Father, we pray for Thy blessing upon us in this, the closing message of this series. We pray, our Father, that Thou will take the wonder and the marvel of Thy Word and open it up before us that we

may see it again, not merely as we see it sometimes when we just skim over the surface. Oh God, our Father, wilt Thou help us to see the great eternal truths that are here - truths that meet the eternal need of men. May there be a transformation in some life in this room tonight because of the power of the Word. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Nicodemus was a most remarkable character. The more you look at him, the more you wonder why our Lord had to say to him, "Unless you are born again, you cannot even see the Kingdom of God, let alone enter into it."¹ And that was the substance of what our Lord had to say to Nicodemus. Why would He have to say that to a man like Nicodemus? After all, what was the matter with Nicodemus? Anything the matter with him? What was the matter with him? Supposing Nicodemus came and made application for membership in your church, would you take him in? And if not, why not? Why not? Why not? He was a powerful man in the denomination. He was the teacher in Israel. He knew more about the Old Testament scriptures than we will ever know. He had educational background. His moral character was such that there isn't one of us in this room that could come anywhere near him, not one of us. So far as a moral man is concerned, he was head and shoulders above the rest of us.

Nobody ever whispered about Nicodemus, nobody. There was never an occasion when the gossipers got together and said, "Did you see where Nicodemus was last night? Did you hear what he did? Did you hear what he didn't do?" Nobody ever said that about him. So these great old pharisees, you know, were just marvelous - marvelous in their wonderful legal righteousness, like the Apostle Paul and the rich young ruler and Nicodemus. All of them could say, "All these things have I kept from my youth up."² We couldn't say that.

So far as the outward things are concerned, Nicodemus was miles ahead of us. The teacher in Israel. Not just a teacher in Israel. In the original, the definite article is there. He was the teacher in Israel. Anybody wanted to know any of the intricacies of the old Mosaic Law or how it affected human life, anybody wanted to know any of the deep secrets of Judaism, they knew exactly where to go. They could find the answer with Nicodemus. Spread your problem out before him and he had the answer for it. He was the teacher in Israel.

And yet this was the man, this fine, splendid, magnificent man, fine in the community, beyond reproach in his church, standing so high in every single respect, a man who was looked up to so far as his educational standard is concerned - everything about him commended him, everything. But one thing. But one thing. Now the people didn't know about that one thing. You could have asked anybody else, even the disciples and not one of them would have known the one thing that Nicodemus lacked. But there was somebody who knew. This somebody put his finger right on the spot where the lack was.

You remember, He did that before too, or at least He did it on one another occasion. He spoke to a rich young ruler, who was as magnificent in his way as Nicodemus was in his. And He said to him, "One thing thou lackest."³ One thing. And He said to this man, "One thing thou lackest. And unless that thing is supplied for you, to you, then there is no possibility that you will ever see the Kingdom of God. You cannot enter into it, you can't even see it unless that one thing is corrected."

1 John 3:3

2 Luke 18:21

3 Luke 18:22

Now, in the average Christian life, there may be a thousand things that are right, and folks all the way around us may think this person is absolutely right, but if there is one point of lack, regardless of the fact that other people may not be able to see it, somebody sees it. Somebody knows, there. There are any number of folks that look as if they've got everything, but that one thing. That one thing.

What was the one thing he lacked? Our Lord said to him this, "Unless a man is born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."⁴ Let's leave that for a moment. Take a good look at Nicodemus. We'll come back to him again. You get again the echo of our Lord's word, "Unless a man is born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." There is no life there. There is the one thing he lacks. It can only come to him from one source, in one way.

Let's take a look at him and then we'll turn back and look at a woman, a woman who came to Jesus in the middle of the day. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. This woman came to Him in the middle of the day. But I want you to notice that while there are obvious contrasts on the outside, essentially their condition and position is just the same. For while the sun was shining overhead when this woman came to Jacob's well, within her heart there was as deep a night as surrounded Nicodemus when he came to our Lord. They both came in the nighttime - one in the physical night, the other in the depths of a spiritual darkness.

A woman came. You know why she came in the middle of the day, don't you? Women didn't come to draw water in the middle of day; they either came in the morning or at night. But this woman came in the middle of the day, obviously because she knew there wouldn't be anybody else there. And there wasn't. There were no other women around drawing water in the middle of the day; she was the only one. She knew that if she'd gone there in the morning or in the evening, these self-righteous folks there who worshiped God in yonder mountain, who were so proud of themselves that they had a little Samaritan variation of Judaism and they were quite sure that they were on the right track. They had their holy place but, if she'd gone there in the midst of them they would have pulled their skirts on one side, they would have wrapped the veils around their faces and if they had looked at her or talked about her they would have looked at her out of the corner of their eye and talked about her out of the corner of their mouths. She knew that, and so she didn't go.

But when she came to that well, she thought she had one need, water from this well. But our Lord took the thing she knew and led her out to the thing she did not know, which is the art of teaching. From the known to the unknown is still the great foundation fact of all teaching. You start with something that folks know and you lead them out to something that they do not know. That's the art of teaching. And here was a woman who knew something about a well and knew something about water and knew something about Jacob, but there was something she didn't know.

She didn't know the answer to the deep and unsatisfied need of her heart. She didn't know that. She didn't know that this water was merely a symbol of something that had eternal value, that this water that would last and give satisfaction for just a moment was but a symbol of something that could be abiding within, that would bring eternal satisfaction. For our Lord said to her, "If you drink of the water that I shall give you, you shall never thirst, but it shall be in you, a well of water springing up into

4 John 3:5

everlasting...,” what?...”life.”⁵ Exactly, life, life, life.

What was the thing this woman lacked? Life. What was the thing Nicodemus lacked? Life. Their need is exactly the same. And our Lord points her to a well of living water and He gives to Nicodemus the secret of life imparted when He speaks to him about a man being born of water and of the spirit. And the need is exactly the same. You can look at this man, so magnificent. You can look at this woman, so cloudy and spotted in that life of hers. And they look so strangely different, but you can link them together with a four word phrase that the Apostle Paul used, “There is no difference.” They are both exactly alike. And just as this woman was told the secret of a well of water springing up into everlasting life, so Nicodemus was told the secret of imparted life that would not only be physical life but it would be spiritual life, not just for the moment, but forever.

What was the secret? The figure is different. The truth is the same. Let's look at it for a minute. “Except a man be born of water and of the spirit.”⁶ “Except a woman drink of the water that I shall give.”⁷ What does He mean by that? What was He talking about when He spoke about water and of the spirit? What? Well, obviously He wasn't anywhere near baptism in spite of the fact that many folks who spell baptism with a capital B and can't see much else will immediately fasten on to that as meaning water baptism. It has nothing to do with water baptism, nothing whatever to do with water baptism.

Then, what did ‘water’ mean? What did it symbolize? What did it mean? Water, and of the spirit? Well, now obviously, the word and the figure ‘water’ can't mean one thing in one place and one thing in another. It's got to mean the same thing all the way through. It's a figure of something that leads to life. What did it mean when he spoke to Nicodemus? Turn to the next chapter. What did it mean when he spoke to the Woman of Samaria? He was suggesting to her and telling her of something that would lead to life. That's the first thing that we know about it. It's something that leads to life. In the hands of the Spirit this is something that brings life.

What brings life? Let's turn to the fifth chapter and get another step further along the line. What does it mean there? John 5:24. Now, watch it. “He that heareth My word (watch it) and believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life.” What is it that leads to life there in John 5:24? It is the Word of God. Now watch again where our Lord says to his disciples, “Now are ye clean through the Word that I have spoken unto you.”⁸ All the way through, you will find the symbol of water points to one thing, it is the Word of God. Now, you see in the Word of God that which produces life; that which brings forth life.

Let me give you Peter's definition of it. “Being born again, not of corruptible things but of incorruptible, by the word, by the word, the seed of the word.”⁹ Now watch it again. Here is this man who needs new life, spiritual life. It's quite obvious he wasn't talking about natural life. Nicodemus already had that; so did this Woman of Samaria. They didn't need natural life. They had that. They needed spiritual life. How could spiritual life ever come? Well, He's using this, the figure of the Word

5 John 4:14

6 John 3:5

7 John 4:14

8 John 15:3

9 I Peter 1:23

of God and the Spirit of God. And in the Word of God, spoken of as the seed, there is life there.

Now, the way in which a person is born again, whether it be Nicodemus on the one side or the Woman of Samaria on the other, for there is no difference, the way in which a person is born again is by the implanting of a seed that has life in it. And the Holy Spirit's business is to take the seed, the life-giving thing of the Word of God and plant it in a heart. Now, he's using natural symbols to illustrate a spiritual truth.

And we can stop, we're not children in this room tonight. We can stop and ask ourselves the question, how does any life appear? What is the secret behind any life? And you come right back to the thing that Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about: life is produced wherever you find it, by the implanting of the seed of the Word. The implanting of a seed, a period of brooding, and a new life appears. And in exactly the same way, and under the guidance and supervision of the Spirit of God, a life-giving seed is planted in somebody's heart. And the Spirit of God harbors over it as He did over creation in the first place, and watches it and cares for it until a new life appears.

Now that's the process, whether it be Nicodemus on the one side, or whether it be the Woman of Samaria on the other. That's the way in which a new life is brought about. And Nicodemus and the Woman of Samaria must come into the family of God in exactly the same way. There is no difference in their fundamental need. They come into the family of God in exactly the same way, by the implanting of a seed, by the brooding and oversight of the Spirit of God. And if you have been born again tonight, beloved, it is because, at some time somewhere, God the Holy Spirit guided the incorruptible seed of the Word to your heart, and then watched over it until, in God's good time, a new life appeared. That's God's process.

Once in a while, when I give an invitation, when we're preaching what we speak of as a salvation message, an evangelistic message, once in a while when we give an invitation we see somebody come forward and kneel, perhaps, in an altar of prayer like this. You don't see it very often. Just once in a while, you see the real thing. And you can tell by the look on a face, as that face comes forward, this is the real thing. Now look, let me ask you something. Do you think that I'm foolish enough when a thing like that happens, before our eyes, that I say to this blundering preacher who's talking to you tonight, that I say to this man, "This is the result of your preaching. This is what God did because of your message." Oh, no, no, no. I don't say that at all. The thing I think about and wonder about, and I'll know someday, I wonder who was it who planted that seed?

Was it a mother somewhere, perhaps years before? Was it a Sunday School teacher, who planted the seed of the Word in somebody's heart. And perhaps as days went by, and as weeks went by, this Sunday School teacher said to herself over and over again, "I haven't been able to do very much with those boys or those girls. I haven't done much in my class." Was it a friend who just dropped a seed of a word, a seed somewhere, the seed of the Word in somebody's heart? You didn't see any outward result. You didn't see that seed suddenly spring up and bring forth fruit, no, not at all. But you planted the Word, you planted the seed, and somebody bigger than you and me watched over it. Sometime, somewhere, that seed would seed again in a new life.

I found out something about some of you folks this morning. I felt I knew it before. Some of you in

this very room have felt within your heart a sense of discouragement because you haven't seen more outward evidences of what we speak of as success in your personal work. I found out something about you this morning. Some of you feel just exactly that way. "I've tried and I've tried and I've tried and I've given a word here and I've given my witness there, and I've done my part here. But I haven't been able to see outward, visible results." Wait a minute, wait a minute. It isn't what you see, my dear, when you give your witness and drop that seed into the ground. What you see is not the important thing, it's what He sees that is the important thing.

Do you know that there has been many and many a person who has slipped out and gone to meet the Lord with a sense of failure in their hearts. And they have said, "I haven't been a success as a soul-winner. I've dropped a seed here and there, and here and there, and maybe there's been a little flash of light once in a while along the line. But generally speaking, I haven't seen much result from my witness bearing." And some have gone out to meet their Lord with that strained sense of emptiness and perhaps futility in their hearts. But wait a minute, wait a minute. Do you know that when the books are opened and the morning breaks, and we know as we are known, there will be lots of folks who will discover that that seed that they dropped that didn't look as if it meant anything was the very thing the Holy Spirit used to bring a new life into being.

There will be folks in heaven who will meet somebody who didn't know anything about it except the fact that at some time they gave their witness. And they'll meet you on the golden street. And they'll be there because you were faithful in dropping that seed of the Word into something that looked like mighty stony ground. The seed of the Word – that's the thing that has life in it. And whether it's the man high up or the woman low down, or whether it's the woman high up and the man low down, or anywhere in between, the need is exactly the same.

"Unless we have been born of water and of the spirit, we cannot see the Kingdom of God." There is only one entrance into the family of God and that is by the new birth. We have no right to claim ourselves as children of God unless we have received life from God. And I want to say something to you now, and I'm going to say it slowly and thoughtfully and with some hesitation. God cannot claim you as His child unless He has imparted to you his own life. That's the thing that makes you a child of God.

I talked to a young woman in a hospital room one day. I went to visit her mother, but I knew this daughter was unsaved. So while I went to visit the mother, the unsaved young woman with a little new baby in her arms happened to be in the room at the same time. And so I said a word to her and at last I said this, I was trying to find some way of approaching her. I said to her, "Whose baby is that?" She looked at me in astonishment, and she said, "Why, it's mine." And then I said another blundering thing, of course. I said, "Are you sure he's yours? He doesn't look any different to any other baby to me," which was dead wrong, of course. And she said, "Oh, but he is mine, and he is different to any other baby." And she was quite right on both counts. The baby was hers and there was never another baby like that. He was different to any other baby, sure.

And then I said to her, "My dear, what is it, what has that baby received from you that gives you the right to say of that child above all others, 'He's mine'? What gives you the right to hold that baby to your heart and say, 'He's mine'? What?" And she thought for a moment and then she said, "Life."

That's it. Life, life, life.

And God looks down and sees in somebody His own life and His heart leaps with joy. Whether the person be Nicodemus on the one side, or whether the person be the Woman of Samaria on the other. Life, life, life, life. "He that hath the Son, hath life." And there is no difference between the need of one and the need of another. No difference whatever. There is no difference in your life and mine. If you have received life from God, then you are a child of God. If you have not received life from God, then you are not a child of God, regardless of what the outside may be. There is only one way into...

(audio ends)