

Apostolic Distinctives  
Lesson 1  
How to Get Ready for Heaven

*John 3:1-9*

*1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:*

*2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

*3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

*4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*

*5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

*6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

*7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

*8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

*9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?*

I. Introduction

A. Questions

1. When Jesus spoke about seeing or entering into the kingdom of God, Nicodemus, like most of us, had questions.

2. "How can these things be?" he asked Jesus. Other ways to frame that question are:

3. "How can all this be possible?" NLT,

4. "What do you mean by this? How does this happen?" MSG

5. A similar question was asked by bystanders on the street after the Holy Ghost had been poured out on new believers:

*Acts 2:12-13*

*12 And they were all **amazed**, and were **in doubt**, saying one to another, **What meaneth this?***

*13 Others mocking said, These men are **full of new wine**.*

6. To those on the outside, like Nicodemus who couldn't figure it out, and the man on the street who wondered what they were high on, we are seeking to figure out what this kingdom of God thing is all about.

7. What is it about? How do we obtain it? How shall we live once we have it?

B. Four distinctives

1. **[slide]** So here in lesson one, we will consider "How can these things be?" as it pertains to how to be saved.

2. And next week in lesson two, we will speak on, "There is Just One!"
  3. And in week three, "How to Worship Him."
  4. And finally in week four, "How to Live Godly for Him."
  5. Concisely packed into four lessons, we want to examine what makes the Apostolic church distinct, not only from the world, but even among other religious groups and churches.
  6. You have found a church that has the very ambitious goal of copying the teachings of Jesus and His apostles in the church at its foundation.
  7. When you read the book of Acts, you will see that as the early church spread from the Middle East to Asia and Europe in the first century, they always looked back to how it began in Acts 2 as their pattern, and they duplicated that experience everywhere they went.
  8. So our goal is to succeed in duplicating the teachings of the Apostolic church of the first century into the Apostolic church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and follow the pattern laid out there.
  9. That is what it means to be an Apostolic church, is that we seek to preach and teach what the apostles preached and taught.
  10. Some of you are like me in that we were raised in a religious tradition very different from the church founded by Jesus and His apostles, so I had some tradition-unlearning to do, and some scripture learning to do.
  11. And truly, that is our goal of this study. Cut our ties to nonbiblical traditions and discover God's plan.
  12. What is the church? How and why can these things be as they are?
- C. Big picture application
1. In summary, first, the church is a called-out group who has been born of the water and Spirit, meaning baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Ghost.
  2. And second, the church is a called-out group who identifies Jesus Christ as the God of the Bible and the only God worthy of worship.
  3. The New Testament church did not place Jesus among and alongside other gods of their culture, thinking that Jesus was just one among multiple gods where they divided their devotion to many.
  4. No, Jesus is the Lord God Almighty, Creator of all that is and Redeemer and Savior of all souls.
  5. And third, the church is a called-out group, who, because Jesus is God, and because He changed them and gave them life and purpose, they worship Him with passion.
  6. And by the way, worship is not a noun, or a thing that we can watch and talk about.

7. Worship is an action that requires passionate participation that involves our heart, hands, legs, voice, feet, and face.
  8. And fourth, the church is a called-out group that takes seriously the fact that “church” literally means called-out, called out from the world of sin to a lifestyle of godliness.
  9. While the world lives for worldliness, the church pursues godliness. Not a holier-than-thou godliness, but a godliness that seeks to honor the Bible as instructive for how to live, how to think, how to talk, how to present our bodies, how to treat others, and even how to treat ourselves.
  10. The Bible set the standards for each of these things and when we as a church choose to follow them, it makes us distinct from the world.
  11. God so loved the world, as we should, and reach the world with love, compassion, and ministry, but we also are called to come out from the world and be separate.
  12. There is a tension point here. While there is an open door for anyone of all kinds, and all kinds of lifestyles to come to God’s saving grace, the very act of salvation is a call out from sin. So God wants to change us to conform to His image.
  13. And thankfully, He empowers us in that change. And also thankfully, He is patient with us as we should be with others who are on that journey, because we are also on that same journey.
  14. Church means called out ones.
  15. So it is that separation that makes us distinct. That is why we are teaching this series on Apostolic Distinctives. What makes us distinct as a church?
- II. How to be saved
- A. Jesus paid it all
1. First of all, we need to understand how we must be saved.
  2. The old hymn said it like this:  
*Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe.  
Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.*
  3. If Jesus had not paid it all, the crimson stain of my sin would keep me out of heaven.
- B. Banned from the Kingdom
1. New Jerusalem, that heavenly city, is the subject of this scripture:  
*Rev 21:27 And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*
  2. We must have our sin stains removed and have our name written in the Lamb’s book to assure our place in the New Jerusalem.

3. Not having our name written in that book brings the worst possible result ever:  
*Rev 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*
  4. Since having your name written in that book entitles us to enter heaven, let's go back to John 3 Jesus talks about seeing and entering the kingdom.
  5. Jesus began a conversation with a religious elder, Nicodemus, by stating:  
*John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*
  6. It is as though Jesus was answering the question, "What must I do to go to heaven?"
  7. Jesus said, you will not see heaven unless you are born again.
  8. And hearing of that concept for the first time, Nicodemus asked for clarification, so Jesus clarified further:  
*John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be **born of water and of the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*
  9. **Being born again means we must be born of water and born of Spirit.**
  10. And since missing heaven is the result of not being born of water and Spirit, being born of water and Spirit must be the priority of anyone wanting to enter heaven.
  11. The way to secure entrance into the kingdom is to be born of water and Spirit.
- C. Born of water
1. Since that is the only verse in the Bible that speaks of the need for being "born of water," and then many times it refers to the need for water baptism, it is likely that those are the same things.
  2. In fact, Jesus commanded His disciples to teach and baptize all nations, and even showed how believing and baptism were necessary to avoid being doomed to hell:  
*Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*
  3. And the reason baptism is part of salvation is because what baptism does for us—it connects Jesus' death and burial to us in a personal way:  
*Rom 6:3-4*  
*3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were **baptized into his death?***  
*4 Therefore we are **buried with him by baptism into death**: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*
  4. Jesus died and was buried for the sins of the whole world, but His sacrifice becomes personalized for us as an individual when we believe that and are buried with Him in baptism.
  5. It is our faith in Jesus' sacrifice for sins that makes baptism a means for us to receive forgiveness or remission of our sins:

*Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and **be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins**, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

6. When a person goes down in the waters of baptism, they are putting their faith in Jesus' blood that washes away sins as Jesus said.

*Matt 26:28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

7. We are going to read Romans 3:24-25 that talks about faith in His blood.

*Rom 3:24-25*

*24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:*

*25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [an offering that sets us right] through **faith in his blood**, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God [God held back our punishment];*

8. **If I believe Jesus' blood takes away my sins, I am made righteous by that blood when I am baptized.** That is important. Remember that Rev 21:27 said our defiling sins will keep us out of New Jerusalem.

9. So being born of the water is one of the things Jesus requires for us to enter the kingdom of heaven, because **baptism in Jesus' name**, is **faith in Jesus' blood** to take our sins away, and we can't enter heaven with sin.

#### D. Born of the Spirit

1. But Jesus also said we must be born of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of heaven. Let's read it again:

*John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water **and of the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

2. We just read the parallel verse, Acts 2:38, that said repentance and baptism provides forgiveness of sins, but it also brings the promise of receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost.

3. And receiving the Holy Ghost is what Jesus was speaking of when He spoke of being born of the Spirit.

4. Receiving the Holy Ghost then, is the second thing Jesus said we must experience before we can enter the kingdom of heaven.

5. And interestingly, receiving the Spirit is also how we get added into Jesus' church, or as this passages says, how we get baptized into His body:

*1 Cor 12:13 For **by one Spirit** are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

6. How can anyone get into the church? Not by signing up, completing a class, by receiving a membership certificate, by giving an offering, or by any other act we could do, but by God filling us with the Holy Ghost.

7. Jesus adds you to His church when He fills you with the Spirit, and that Spirit filling, being born of the Spirit, also will allow you to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

8. And from many examples in scripture, when a person receives the Holy Ghost, the evidence that heavenly miracle has taken place is the person will speak in tongues.
  9. Do you want to go to heaven? Make sure you are filled with the Spirit! Baptism in the name of Jesus and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost are still for us today.
  10. So when we are born of the water and Spirit, from what we can understand from scripture, that is likely when our name gets recorded in the Lamb's book of life.
- III. When will we go to heaven?
1. One final thing to discuss since we are talking about going to heaven, is **WHEN** we will go there.
  2. When a person who is saved dies, their spirit goes to be with the Lord. But there is a future event that applies to everyone who is saved, both the dead and the living, when our bodies will transformed and raised to meet the Lord in the air.
  3. God promised to raise His people up off this earth by His Spirit that lives in us:  
*Rom 8:11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*
  4. There will be a day of resurrection, called the coming of the Lord, also called the rapture, when Jesus will descend to the clouds and will call His church off this earth to meet Him:  
*1 Thess 4:16-17*  
*16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:*  
*17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*
  5. Those who died in Christ and those who are alive in Christ, will in an instant, be changed.
  6. Our human, mortal bodies, will be changed into new bodies that will never die:  
*1 Cor 15:52-53*  
*52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*  
*53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*