

**Brand Names** are supposed to convey to consumers the mark of **authenticity**....

If you see a little **Apple** with a bite out of it.... you automatically believe you are holding the real McCoy.....(so to speak)....

Same thing with watches or cars.....

When something bears **the Name** of a product..... but turns out to be an **imitation**....we call it a counterfeit.... a **FAKE**.....

What about in the realm of Christianity? Ever since NT times.... people have attached the label.... or the NAME of Christ to themselves.....

Yet not everyone who SAYS they **believe** ..... ends up displaying the GLORY of God in their lives through a change of character....

Some are in fact..... **superficial**.... believers in Jesus.....

They are believers in NAME only..... other wise known as NOMINAL Christians...

Today... as we see Jesus expand his ministry in Jerusalem... we are going to hear Him tell us the difference between a **Legit** Christian... (if you will) and a superficial one...

## **Legitimate Faith**

### **John 2:23-3:8**

" Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many **believed** in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus **on his part** did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself **knew** what was **in man**.

Now 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 him, "Truly, truly, 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, "Truly, truly, 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 its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.""

Remember the context in which this event occurred. Jesus had come up to Jerusalem for the Passover..... after He cleansed the temple..... He obviously stayed for the weeklong observance of the feast of unleavened bread....

While he was there he apparently performed many miracles to manifest the GLORY of Who He is....

**John 2:23**

" Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing."

Signs... were Authenticating **MIRACLES**....pointing to the reality that Jesus is the Word of God made flesh....

They were **visible GLIMPSES** of His true identity..... and of His Authority over both man and nature.

John only records one SIGN...while Jesus was at Jerusalem this time....(the cleansing of the temple)....

And that sign was only miraculous in that no one (the Jews or the Romans dared to stop Jesus from literally destroying the best **commerce** of the year..)

Would it not be a miracle if you went to your local Wal-Mart on **Black Friday** turning over things.... driving out the employees with a whip.....and telling everyone they are WRONG... and everyone just stood by and watched (including the police) ?

John tells us plainly that Jesus was manifesting His glory through this sign ...as well as many OTHERs during that week.....

Undoubtedly signs such as healing the sick and casting out demons ... giving prophetic words of His **omniscience** like He had with Nathaniel....

The same type which are recorded in the other gospels during Jesus' ministry.

John himself makes it plain that only a sampling are recorded in this account:

**John 20:30**

" Now Jesus did **many other signs** in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;"

John was only led to record those events in Jesus' life which are sufficient for people coming to **BELIEVE** in Jesus as the Christ...

2:23 tells us (at that moment) that many **WERE** believing in His Name.....

...as they **SAW** the signs... great **crowds** were beginning to follow him around... "we want SEE more.....

These folks SAW His miracles.... and they said.... This guy is FOR **REAL!** woohoo!

He must be the KING sent to deliver us from the Romans!

There was an excitement in the air.... but John tells us that there was a **PROBLEM** which they were unaware of....

- While **they** were believing in Jesus..... **Jesus** was not believing in them.....

#### **John 2:24**

"But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people"

John is telling us the two sides of this **faith transaction** with a play on the same Greek word ...pisteuo = "to trust / believe."

v. 23 "they **believed** in His Name....

v. 24 But Jesus (Himself) did not **trust them**.

- **How** can that be?

Hasn't John already said this about Jesus back in:

#### **John 1:11-12**

"He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who **believed** in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,"

Now, here it says in 2:23 that MANY believed in His Name....

But Jesus did not TRUST **them**..... in fact he withheld himself from them.

- Did they not **DO** enough? Was there a **hoop** they neglected to jump through?

Look more closely.....It says many believed... **BECAUSE** they saw the signs... He was doing...

They were **SPELLBOUND** by His visible displays of power.

To them..... He was something of a **Harry Potter** with Royal Potential!

Their BELIEF was a mental decision that we **LIKE** what this guy can DO for us!

In the same way that many of you LIKE some celebrity on your FB page.....

But Jesus **knew their hearts**..... He knew that natural man does not want a **cross** bearing, suffering servant to come and rule over every affair of their lives.....

They wanted **Santa Claus** with a Crown on his head.

Legitimate Faith

## 1. Is Not Superficial

John is spelling out for us here a **truth**.... that each of you have witnessed in the lives of people around you.....or perhaps even in your own life at one time....

Some BELIEF in Christ... is only **skin** deep.....

Some people who hang around church.... and who readily name the Name of Jesus....

Some who even carry a Bible....

Actually only have a **superficial** faith..... NOT the faith which **saves**.....

But Jesus KNOWS those who are His.....

Jesus **KNEW**.....these Jews were still walking by SIGHT..... not by faith...

### John 2:25

"and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself **knew what was in man.**"

Jesus doesn't need anyone to TELL him about **you**.....

He doesn't need to check your **references**.... or get any special intel reports on you.....

He read all your text messages while they were still in your mind....

He has been with you to all your websites... ..

He knows things about you which even **you** don't know.....

He knows things you have chosen to forget..... He knows about evil thoughts which you are nurturing in your heart....right now...

He already KNOWS what is ... in the heart of **ALL mankind**....

He did not entrust Himself to these superficial believers because He KNEW their hearts were still in the same condition into which all men are born: ..... **dead** in trespasses and sins....

John is about to give the **ANSWER** as to why SOME people's faith is only skin deep.....

Why they lack power to change.....

Why their faith... is in fact IL-LGITIMATE....

Hard Topic....

But the good news is that Jesus Himself is getting ready to tell us (as He teaches Nichodemus) what **Legitimate Faith** actually IS....

Because this little incident (with the crowd) is actually **an introduction** to the most famous Chapter in the New Testament....

(Remember - no Chapter Divisions in the original document...) those were added **later** to help us navigate Scripture...

The end of 2:25 informs us that there is some universal problem with **MAN**.....

On the heels of that ...3:1 tells us of **one man**... ( representing the many) who comes to visit Jesus.... with the **same KIND** of superficial faith as the MANY

### **John 3:1**

" Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews."

The Pharisees were the controlling religious party within the Sanhedrin (the ruling council of the Jews)....

In the Gospels, the Pharisees are almost always saying Jesus' works are of the **devil**..... that He is a **blasphemer**.....

Whenever they spoke to Jesus it was always to try and **trick** him so they could be **RID** of Him.....

John tells us... that Nichodemus did not come representing His party.....He came **SEEKING instruction** ....

We know that because he addresses this unlearned Galilean Carpenter with the Hebrew term for **MASTER Teacher** (in our context Doctor)...

### **John 3:2**

"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."

Nichodemus has FAITH..... but we are going to see that Jesus says His Faith is not yet **SAVING** faith..... it is still superficial....

As may be the case with some people in your life right now.....

Or maybe even with some of YOU.

God APPEARS to be **DRAWING** Nichodemus to Jesus..... He is showing **interest** in Who Jesus really is....

- That is the way we **ALL** start out you know.....

**Children** aren't BORN with saving faith.....

They first develop a **FRAMEWORK** of **Who** God is .... and Why He sent us Jesus..... through people (ideally their parents) reading them the Bible.....

Corey confessed to me this week.... that He has gotten some of His best understanding of Scripture through the children's Bibles he reads his kids...

Faith is nurtured through people (like teachers are doing with some of your kids right now) ..showing them GOD in all the stories of the Bible.....

Teaching them about God's **Law** so they can know what SIN is.....

And that because **THEY sin**... they need a Savior... - Who is Christ the Lord!

By the grace of God....(as He draws them to Himself) they begin to see that Jesus is God's **ANSWER** for our sin!

They begin to recognize that He is Alive today and that He is for **Real** as they SEE the POWER of Christ at work in the church....

As they watch people from all different backgrounds..... learn to love and **forgive** and build up one another.... instead of living for themselves.....

They see parents **REPENT** when they fail.... and ask for forgiveness....

By the grace of God..... they **begin** to sense their OWN need to **TRUST** in and follow Jesus themselves...

We don't **scorn** people.....for having superficial faith.....

Jesus did not say to Nichodemus..... Why didn't you come see me in the daytime you **coward!**

We don't say to people who have doubts about Jesus....."You stupid little unregenerate worm..... you don't get it do you"??

**No!** We **fan** what faith they are demonstrating..... into a **FLAME!**

Like a dimly burning candle wick..... we keep waving the Word of God over their minds.....PRAYING for them..... loving them..... in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sowing the good seed of the gospel!

We bring them.... (like Jesus does here) to an understanding **that** Legitimate, SAVING faith is a **GIFT from God**.

### John 3:3

"Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.""

Jesus ANSWERED Nichodemus..... He was responding to Nichodemus' statement that Jesus had been sent by God.....

His ANSWER... is that you (Nich) will not be able to SEE / understand God's **reign** over His people....**until** you are born again....

John Piper - "What happens in the new birth is not merely affirming the supernatural in Jesus but **experiencing the supernatural in yourself**

You **Must** be Born Again.

Scholars tell us that this word we translate "again" here is purposefully ambiguous..... "again" can mean BOTH **again** and **from above**.....

(it is translated "**above**" 5 other times in the NT)...

So it denotes both **the time** and the **origin** of this New Birth...

This is not the first time we have seen this word picture of the new birth in John....

A few minutes ago we saw in **1:12** that all who receive Jesus... who believe on His name shall be given the right to become children of God.... in the very next verse he tells us that those who demonstrate LEGITIMATE faith.....are those who **have been** born of God....

### John 1:13

"who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but **of God**."

**None** of the babies in our nursery.... DECIDED they were going to be conceived... None of them DECIDED what day they would be born.....

**God** did....

In the same way.... Legitimate Faith is a gift from God which He brings about by **BIRTHING** a new creation in your soul....

He **RE-GENERATES** your heart....by His Holy Spirit....

Most often He does this **PLANTING** the seed of the Word of God in your ears.....

As that GOOD seed falls on the **GOOD soil** of a **new** heart..... You **receive** the Word implanted....You **TRUST** in the REALITY...that while you were still a sinner..... JESUS came..... JESUS died.... and JESUS rose again....

So that (through believing) **you** can HAVE eternal life.....

You believe that BECAUSE God has caused you to be born a**NEW**.... so you can SEE the KOG...

### **2 Corinthians 5:17- 18a**

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.....ALL this is from GOD!"

A pre-natal baby..... can not **SEE** anything.....it is **DARK** in the womb....

But a NEW BORN baby **can** SEE!

He sees **dimly** at first..... nothing is in focus.... but he still can SEE the Light!

He can increasingly recognize things in his new world.....

Likewise.... someone who has been Born of God..... can SEE the Kingdom...

With eyes of faith.... they can **BELIEVE** the realities of God's **RULE** over them... and the church... and all things....

And they **WILL all** see... with physical eyes.... the coming eternal REIGN of Jesus in the New Heavens and the New Earth....at the resurrection of the dead.

But Jesus said...."**UNLESS** one is born again.... He CAN NOT see the KOG"...

Nichodemus said **What are you talking about?** Nichodemus brings up the kind of earth bound objection common to some one who is still in **DARKNESS**.... still blinded by the curse of their own sin...

### **John 3:4**

"How can a man be born when he **is old**? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Nichodemus (like all Pharisees) was **proud** of his being born a Jew (a son of Abraham)... He was comfortable trusting in his physical lineage.....

This new thing (be born **AGAIN**)...is ridiculous.....

Jesus gets more **pointed** using terms Nichodemus was readily familiar with:

### **John 3:5**

"Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless** one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Nich would readily recognize this language as coming from Ezekiel's prophesy regarding the Messiah.... Where God said;... I will sprinkle CLEAN water on you and put my Spirit within you.....

Jesus is saying **Listen** to Me... there are **NO EXCEPTIONS** to this truth....

Not 85% ...or 95% but 100% of the people who will go to heaven will have been Born of the Spirit of God...

**No one** enters the eternal reign of God over His people.....**no one** gets to participate in the Age to Come.... **UNLESS** he or she is birthed into the **washing** of regeneration of the Holy Spirit....

Legitimate Faith

## **2. Is the Result of Being Born of the Spirit**

I don't do a lot of laundry.... but occasionally I do.... and I actually enjoy it when a pair of pants or something is really **DIRTY**.... I actually like squirting STAIN remover on it.... and putting it in....watching the twisting... turning motion of the washing machine.... make it come out completely CLEAN.....

Jesus was painting a picture for Nichodemus here (and for us) of our deep need to be **CLEANSED** by the pure water of the New Birth....

As the Holy Spirit enters into our dirty souls....He APPLIES (like stain remover) the reality of the **BLOOD** of Jesus ....

We are BIRTHED into His perfect righteousness..... We are BORN of His water.... and **His Spirit**...

The Holy Spirit is the EFFECTOR of the New Birth.... He BINDS us... by faith... to the RISEN Christ!

Nichodemus was like some of you.....

He did not really think he was **all that** dirty.....he felt he was probably one of the most righteous men in all Jerusalem...

He was extremely proud of having been born as a son of Abraham....

So Jesus says:

**John 3:6**

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Human flesh is created in the image of God.... there is beauty in it..... there is **LIFE** in people..... People have personalities.... they create ideas... they can SING.....they LAUGH.... they LOVE.... ..

then....they **DIE**.

Because of sin....

**All** flesh is like GRASS.... it is here today and gone tomorrow....

Because of sin.....In the end.... the FLESH profits **nothing**..... it is....doomed to return to the dust from which it was formed.....

Good News! God has sent **His SPIRIT**... to re-create eternal life in you.....through believing the GOSPEL...

To make you part of the first FRUITS of the New world... the **re**-generation of creation.

**Titus 3:4-7**

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to **the hope** of eternal life."

- Do you BELIEVE that?

**Northern VA** is one of the most educated regions on the planet.... More degrees in this room than in many villages of the world....

Yet.... GOD brings little children into His Kingdom ahead of some of you.....

If you are thinking there are **MANY** ways to God.....

If you are believing that somehow your good works will outweigh your bad deeds.... Jesus says....

**John 3:7**

"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You **must** be born again.'"

When a baby is born.... first thing it does is gasp for breath and then let out a CRY....

God has breathed new life into some of you this morning as you have heard Him speak...

And you need to CRY OUT to your Father who has given you birth....

Say Abba Father.... you are My God and My King. Thank you for sending me JESUS!

PRAY