



JOHN 2:22-3:21

INTRODUCTION

Think about the number of “transformation” stories there are in our popular culture. Particularly think about the TV shows in which personal transformation is highlighted, whether that’s weight loss, career moves, relationship matters.

Why do we like personal transformation stories so much? Have a think about the components of these stories, the narrative arc that they create. How do these stories start, what are the problems they are trying to resolve, and what does the resolution look like?

Personal transformation in our culture is a major industry. List some examples you know, or even have found yourself taking part in.

BIBLE

Read through John 2:22-3:21

John begins this section by saying that although people trusted Jesus because of the signs that they saw him do, he did not “trust” himself to them, because “he knew what was in man”. (2:25)

The next thing that happens is that a “man” approaches Jesus to question him, and he is a religious man with impeccable credentials. The conversation he proceeds to have with Jesus

startles him because he realises that the very thing that he desires – life in God’s kingdom – is beyond him because he needs a level of transformation that he cannot achieve himself.

How might you think Nicodemus might feel when he hears what Jesus has to say to him about the impossibility of self-transformation.

- 1. Nicodemus says “we know that you are a teacher come from God”. Why do you think the religious leaders had come to that conclusion. What do you think it was about the signs Jesus was doing that might lead them to believe that to be the case?*
- 2. Jesus makes two statements to Nicodemus that say the same thing two different ways: (v3, v5). How would you explain these two terms to someone today if they asked you what was required to belong to God’s kingdom?*
- 3. When Jesus uses the term “enter the kingdom of God”, he does not mean that you will go to heaven when you die. The Jewish hope was that one day God would right all of the wrongs, and usher in an age of justice and “shalom” or peace, with God ruling the world in righteousness and saving his people. Why do you think that Nicodemus would be surprised to hear that he – an observant Jew who kept the law – was in danger of missing out on this kingdom.*
- 4. Have a read of Ezekiel 36:22-32. God’s people are down and out in exile, but here there is a promise that God will restore their fortunes. What internal restoration work is God promising to do? What external restoration work is God promising to do? How do you think it relates to what Jesus says in John 3:5*
- 5. Jesus makes a clear distinction between flesh and spirit. However “flesh” does not mean our physical personhood, but rather our fallen state before God that we live in. A “spirit” birth does not mean a disembodied existence, but an embodied spiritual existence. However we cannot achieve this ourselves, only God can do this for us. Why do you think it’s important to realise that we cannot transform ourselves to be eligible for the kingdom of God? What mistake might we make if we think it is up to us?*
- 6. Have a read of Numbers 21:4-9. It’s a strange story. Can you see how Jesus’ death on the cross is the fulfilment and greater expression of this story? What are the similarities between the Moses story and Jesus’ explanation of it in terms of himself?*
- 7. John 3:16 is rightly famous, but it’s important to realise that John’s main point is that God sent Jesus for ALL, and that his love is for ALL, not just the people of Israel, who assumed God loved them but not others. What do you think “perish” means? Think about it in relation to what it is juxtaposed with, that is, “eternal life”*
- 8. This is good gospel news, but it’s clear that to not believe in Jesus puts us under condemnation already. And for those reading it meant Jew and non-Jew. No one had an inside running with God. All needed to transformed by a water and spirit “born*

again” transformation by God. How is this a challenge to our world today? Think in particular of those who think they are “good people”.

- 9. Have a close look at vv19-21. Once again the themes of light and dark come up, that were there at the start of John. Note too, how evil deeds are done in darkness, and that the primary reason people reject Jesus is NOT because his salvation light is implausible to believe, but because it is unpalatable to obey: it exposes sin. And note too how the opposite of evil deeds is “works done in God”. Those who do good in God want their deeds to be known so that God gets glory, not so they do. How does this change our attitude to doing good works? Why might we be tempted to boast about these good works? What might keep us from doing so?*

PRAISE

Think about the transformation that God has wrought in your life through the spiritual reality of new birth. What has changed about you, or about someone you know, that you wish to thank God for?

PRAY

Praise God for his salvation of you, and the transformation he has done in your life. Pray for those who still do not know Jesus, and his salvation new birth, either because they believe they are too good to need it, or because they do not wish their evil deeds to be exposed.