

Heart to Heart With Jesus

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon all. I'm sure you answered there but I've got this in the wrong setting. Okay.

God is good all the time. We're in John chapter 3 this afternoon. It's probably the most famous chapter in the Bible. But it always bears looking at how Jesus encountered Nicodemus and that's what we're going to do today.

It's John chapter 3. But we're actually starting at verse 23 of the previous chapter. So if you look at John chapter 2, go right to the end of the chapter.

We'll start in verse 23. Jesus has turned water into wine.

He has routed the people who were turning the temple into a marketplace.

[1 : 07] And so it's obvious he's operating on a completely different level from anybody they've ever known. And of course the crowd, you know, the crowd is fickle.

One minute they're shouting his praises and the next minute they're crying crucify him. The crowd is fickle but this people have been watching what he's doing and they're impressed and they start to believe in him.

And this is what's happening here at chapter 2 verse 23. Now when Jesus 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.

[2 : 42] 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 you hear it 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.

Nicodemus said to him how can these things be? Jesus answered him are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?

[3 : 50] Truly truly I say to you we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen but you do not receive our testimony if I have told you earthly things and you do not believe how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven the son of man and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the son of man be lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life for God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God and this is the judgment the light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil for everyone who does wicked things hates the light does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed but whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God well may God bless us and help us to get to grips with his word this afternoon this is probably one of the most important passages in the New Testament right at the heart of our Christian faith is this idea of being born again it's amazing the number of people they did a survey in America the sort of thing

Americans love their surveys and they did a survey in America just recently and discovered that six out of the ten people that they interviewed who claimed to be born again didn't know who had said it first and where to find it in the Bible and then they did more surveys and unearthed all sorts of unbelievable things there was there was one couple who said that being born again meant it had greatly enriched their sex life and they had been so blessed by God that they decided to share their sexual discoveries with the pastor and his wife I wish I was kidding but you know so born again is a phrase that gets bandied around these days and very often people don't really know what it means and many people think it was invented by an American evangelist with a big broad tie and a floppy Bible but the person who first used the phrase was the son of God it was Jesus it was Jesus who said you must be born again hang on to that word must you know if the son of God says must you really need to pay attention would you agree if the son of God says must you need to pay attention so let's let's look at this thing here let's see what was actually going on in this this fascinating chapter

I'm just give me a second I'm just losing my notes here right I've called this talk this afternoon heart to heart with Jesus because it's astonishing the part that is played here by Jesus knowledge of the human heart we've just read that we've just read in the two verses at the end of chapter two that Jesus could not be fooled God is not mocked said Paul to the Galatian churches Jesus can't be fooled we might go around saying we're born again Jesus knows whether we are or not he knows every single heart here today everything in us is wide open to him we're just open books to Jesus he could walk in here right now and he could tell you everything about yourself so we're talking about someone absolutely awesome a man who was perfectly human as fully human as you or me and when he bled he bled eight pints of blood and his body died as human as you or me and yet at the same time he was also fully God he didn't sacrifice his divinity to become a human being so we're talking about someone absolutely awesome it says that he upholds the universe by the word of his power he upholds the universe this is this is not someone who deals in in fantasy this is someone who is really really powerful there's a there's a funny old story about a wee Arab boy he was going along and he saw this wee sparrow lying on its back with its feet in the air and he said to the sparrow he said what are you doing lying there like that with your feet in the air and the sparrow said well

I heard that the sky was falling and so I'm just trying to hold it up and the wee boy says well that's ridiculous with your scrawny little legs you can't hold anything up and the sparrow says one does what one can you know this is not Jesus when Jesus is holding up the universe he's spinning the planets on their way 24-7 this planet this ball that we live on is in his hands and so here he is he sees this crowd and they're beginning to be fascinated by him and they're beginning to believe in him and they're beginning to trust him that's the word the bible uses they're beginning to trust him and Jesus is not beginning to trust them because he knows what's in their hearts he knows the human heart and that is so important for us to grasp at this point it's why we started with those two verses today rather than going straight into the whole story of

[11 : 03] Nicodemus because it actually sets the scene for us to understand what's happening with Nicodemus better because Jesus does something very strange he answers a question that Nicodemus never asked so let's look at that there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews this is an impressive man even to Jesus he's an impressive man if it's possible to impress Jesus Jesus acknowledged he says you are you are the teacher of Israel now it doesn't come clear in all the translations of the Bible but in the original Greek text and certainly in the one I read just now the little word the is there and it is important that little word you are the teacher of Israel in other words he was a teacher of some prominence and some importance Israel had lots of teachers but Nicodemus was the teacher of Israel he was the go-to man for a sort of final assessment of what our behavior should be in the light of

God's law and the Jewish council the ruling council the Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees and he was a Pharisee now let's not get this guy wrong because you tend to look at Nicodemus here and he looks as though he's just a bit thick and just doesn't get it this is not a man who was thick and I think we'll see that as we go on this man is not silly he's not some kind of theological dummy here that just doesn't understand Jesus there's something deeper going on he says about Jesus he says he comes to him at night why does he come to him at night I think it's quite simply because in his position it could even be dangerous to be seen in broad daylight associating with a rabbi who was already very very controversial most of the

Pharisees saw him as a troublemaker and an upstart and many people had it in for him already but here's Nicodemus he comes to Jesus at night and he says after he says rabbi he uses a very important word he uses the word we he doesn't say rabbi I can see that you've come from God he says rabbi we know we know that you've come from God it's like he's representing other people and he's not just there in his own right so we'll press on and see how that pans out rabbi we know that you're a teacher come from God for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with them and Jesus answered him and I think to myself but Jesus didn't answer a because he didn't ask a question he just made a statement and b because there is no question there to be answered so what's

Jesus doing let's bear in mind what we learned right at the very start Jesus can read the human heart remember you remember that Samuel the prophet in the early days of his of his work as the judge of Israel it was commissioned by God to go and anoint the second king of Israel who was going to be David and he had to go to Jesse of Bethlehem who had seven sons he had 88 sons actually and Jesse presented these seven sons in front of Samuel and they were impressive looking guys big strong blokes and Samuel thought surely this one here it must be this one and God said to Samuel don't look on the outward appearance because God sees the heart you see so with a direct connection here this is the same

God who is now in human form standing among the people standing with Nicodemus Nicodemus is standing here talking to God and he doesn't realize it how amazing is that standing talking to God and he's saying he's saying Lord Rabbi we know you must have come from God we look at the things you're doing you must have come from God we're clear about that let's just put that into modern English Rabbi we don't need any convincing about your credentials we don't need to see your CV we don't need any letters of recommendation about you our eyes are telling us enough about you we're completely convinced that you're from God that's a big statement isn't it right at the outset of a conversation we know you've come from God but then

[16 : 38] Jesus looking into this man's heart gives him the answer to a question that he doesn't ask Jesus answers him and says I tell you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God what's Jesus doing he's reading this man's heart and he's saying I'm going to tell this man about the thing that he's really longing for I know what this man really really wants and I'm going to set out for him what needs to happen in his life and so here's Jesus unpacking joyful news about the kingdom of God and Nicodemus didn't even realize when he met with Jesus because it's like Jesus is saying Nicodemus I know you don't have any questions about me you're not troubled about me you're troubled about yourself you're troubled about your own relationship with God you're troubled about how it's possible to be a different person from the one that you are and so

Jesus is reading the man's heart just like he did with the crowd before he knows what's in this man and he's answering the question the man hasn't even been able to articulate for himself isn't that so beautiful isn't that so rich and merciful of God to do that isn't it wonderful to think that God hears the longings of your heart right now is there any one of us here who doesn't want a closer walk with God is there anyone here who wants a walk with God who's never ever known what it was to walk with God some of us here are blessed and we're able to say that by God's grace we've walked in his company and enjoyed his friendship for decades and decades of our lives but there might be one or two folks here today who have just never known what it was to walk with God well Jesus is setting it all out here for

Nicodemus he's saying Nicodemus it's possible to be born again he's saying actually Nicodemus the problem is with your parentage think about it because that's what's at stake here it's nothing short of a change of parentage that's required if you're going to be born again and Nicodemus wasn't daft he said look this is a physical impossibility clearly you're not talking about a physical thing here but Jesus is saying a rebirth is going to involve a change of parentage what does that mean who is our earthly parent ultimately it's Adam isn't it and because of Adam we're all born with a twist in our nature aren't we okay

I'm just going to ask Ruth straight out how's she getting on with training Cameron to be naughty to be misbehaved to be rude and do all the naughty things I mean are you managing Ruth or is he just too perfect right you see what I'm saying there isn't one of us here who needed any training to be bad to be to misbehave to be selfish we don't need any training for that that comes naturally to us you see a tiny child crawling across the carpet towards the fireplace and you say no no and this wee thing turns and looks up at you with a with a look you wouldn't believe a child of that size and age could actually give you they know exactly what they're doing they know it's wrong and they're just testing the boundaries there's a twist in all of us folks because of our parentage the Bible speaks of

Jesus as the last Adam another parent the first born of many brothers do you see where we're going here folks when you talk about being born again you're getting a change of parentage and what became what was impossible becomes possible because the parental line has changed it's exciting it's wonderful it's only God could do it why did Nicodemus come to Jesus because Jesus bypasses any discussion that might have taken place with this senior religious figure I want to ask us a different question not so much why did he come but how did he come how did he come

[22:17] Jesus says if you read on into chapter six you'll read Jesus saying to people no one can come to me unless the father draws him no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by my father so in other words how did Nicodemus come to have this encounter with Jesus well there were several factors going on at the same time probably Nicodemus thought I have to speak to this man I have to speak to this man he's clearly from God and he's operating in a level that I know nothing about so I have to speak to this man so that was going on but something else was going on God was granting Nicodemus access to his son God was drawing Nicodemus to Jesus this was a divine appointment this was not just a chance encounter

God is at work here in this and Jesus is answering a longing that Nicodemus has in his heart but there's more to it than that as well because you see when Jesus answers Nicodemus here and says you must be born again in the Greek the you is plural so Jesus has taken it very seriously when Nicodemus said we know that you have come from God Jesus is not just answering Nicodemus he's answering all the people who are of a like mind with Nicodemus and the likelihood is there were quite a few of them but you know the way it is with politics and peer groups and all the rest of it it's very very difficult for a person to take a stand and come out and declare that they're on one side or another and they try to play one side off the other and please everybody but Nicodemus clearly represented other people as well and Jesus says all of you you must be born again not just you

Janice but you must be born again this is Jesus and he's saying to the entire Jewish ruling council the people who presided over the spiritual and material welfare of the entire realm of the Jews throughout the known world in those days he's saying to all of them you must be born again and so Nicodemus says how can a man be born when he is old when you read quite a lot of the commentaries Nicodemus does come across as though he's just a bit slow in the uptake but I don't think that's what's going on here at all I think it's quite clear Nicodemus is too smart to just be a bit theologically dense at this point he knows the scriptures this is the teacher of

Israel he knows the scriptures so he knows that Ezekiel promised that there would be a rebirth he knows that Ezekiel said I will put my spirit in you and I will give you a new heart what's that if it's not rebirth he doesn't he's not saying you know when he says how can a man be born when he is old he's not saying that can't happen he's saying I know it can happen I need to know how it's the same sort of reverent question that Mary asked of the angel when she said how am I going to be pregnant when I don't have a husband and I have you know how is this going to happen she wasn't denying it was going to happen she was accepting it was going to happen but she was saying

I don't understand and Nicodemus is saying I don't understand you see Jesus says you're going to have to be born by water and the spirit when he said water Nicodemus his mind would be probably clicking in the direction of John the Baptist who even at that point was baptizing people around the area and it was a baptism of repentance John dressed exactly like Elijah used to dress was calling the people of God to repentance and repentance is a complete thing repentance is a complete change of mind that leads to a complete change of behavior it's not some small modification of a person's personality or lifestyle it's a complete turning away from something you know is wrong in the eyes of God and embracing the path that you know is right and that's what John was calling to he says he was he was saying to people saying to the soldiers don't take more money than you should be taking change your ways show that you're different show that you you you you're serious about obeying

[28 : 16] God so there's this this this being born again involves a water baptism involves a repentance and folks you know we can't mess around with this God is not mocked Jesus is not fooled we need to be very very clear in our minds that we're talking about a complete transformation of our lives Paul put it this way round he said 2nd Corinthians 5 17 if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature well by the way Paul uses that phrase in Christ all over the place in his letters and you know what in Christ really means it means being born again because you see before we're born again we're in Adam which is why we've got this twist in our nature why we don't need training to be bad we're in

Adam but when God takes a hold of our lives we are in Christ so being born again and being in Christ are one and the same thing the battery in my hearing aid is just gone so I hope you can still hear me already okay so it's not only born again by water it's born again by the spirit and Nicodemus wouldn't be surprised by that because again he knew the scriptures and Ezekiel had said I will put my spirit in them I will put my spirit in them and he also knew the prophecy of Zechariah that the things that need to be moved can only be moved by God it's not by might it's not by power it's by my spirit says the

Lord Nicodemus knew all of that so Jesus isn't covering new ground for this man he's just helping him understand old ground he must be born again and that word again by the way again in the original language it's ambiguous it can mean again or it can mean from above so Jesus is saying you must be born again you must be born from above he's spelling it out for Nicodemus he's saying look the help's gonna have to come from outside of yourself you can't rebirth yourself that's just not a possibility but it is possible this is exciting Jesus is saying there's going to be complete transformation rebirth is a transformation it's not a modification it's a transformation you remember the old funny story about the

Welsh revival and the pit ponies I love that wee story where the pit ponies wouldn't obey the miners when they went back after they came to Jesus and the reason for it was the miners were so totally changed they were so transformed that they didn't swear anymore they used to curse and swear at the ponies and the ponies didn't understand them anymore because they weren't cursing and swearing at them you see it was a genuine transformation it was a change of life it was a new person you know there's J.B.

Phillips where he takes 2 Corinthians 5:17 he puts it around this way when a person becomes a Christian he is not the same anymore a new life has begun and this is what Jesus is talking about here we need to go to God we need to seek that baptism in water we need to confess the twist in our lives we need to seek God's forgiveness we need a new mindset that results in new behaviour and we need to understand that we're going to have to be born again from above there is no entry to the kingdom of God without the help of the king we can't do it on our own that's one of the fundamental problems that religion has caused in this country you know people often say to me religion is the problem behind everything

[33 : 11] I say you're absolutely right you're absolutely right and what they actually mean is it's religion that causes all the wars and the fighting between different races and all the rest of it that's not what I mean religion is a problem because religion fools people into thinking that it's they're here on earth to impress God and that God should be impressed by what we do for him a lady fell out with me many many times over the years years ago because every now and again I would try and remind her because she kept forgetting that she wasn't buying her way into heaven by the amount of cakes that she had baked for the church you know it's important for us to understand that we don't buy our way into heaven we don't get there by our own efforts

Jesus is saying though God is going to come to you Nicodemus this is a work of the spirit of God the spirit of God will come to you he will bring about this rebirth in you and unless you're born again you will not see the kingdom of God your eyes will never behold it you'll never enter into it it's a work of God your work is just simply to come to that water of repentance and don't try and dodge it because you cannot dodge repentance there is no way around the cross there is only a way through the cross there is no way around the cross nobody gets to circumvent the cross because as Jesus said this is how God loved the world and that little word so you know so often we we read that verse for God so loved the world and there's a kind of ah about the whole thing you know God so loved the world isn't that lovely isn't that really nice he so loved the world it's not actually what it means it means

God loved the world in this way this is how God loved the world this is what it took to love the world God sent his son that's what it took we cannot experience the love of God without the sacrifice of the son of God we can't get to God except through his son God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life and you know what eternal life is oh I love what Jesus said about it this is eternal life he said that they should know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent eternal life is knowing God you see that's why some of us here today are thrilled we're delighted and our mouths are full of praise

King David knew God really well he said I will bless the Lord at all times his praise shall continually be in my mouth and Jeremiah Jeremiah had prophesied for 50 years and and he just didn't have an ear that was listening to him there was one good king out of five and he prophesied through all their reigns Josiah was a good king the other four they were a disaster and they led the country on a downward moral spiral until the Jews were indistinguishable from the Canaanites and God's judgment fell as predicted by Jeremiah through all those years and Jeremiah looked at the devastation young warriors that had fought for

Judah and Jerusalem were their corpses were strewn all over the streets women had been raped babies had been smashed on rocks the walls were burned with fire the gates were destroyed the temple was desecrated the priests were murdered and all the youth the cream of the youth they were being driven ahead of Nebuchadnezzar's army 900 miles over the desert to Babylon and they were not going to leave Babylon for 70 years that's what Jeremiah had predicted as God told him and he sat in the midst of this devastation and he said well let me read you exactly what he said because this is astonishing lamentations he said to the

[38 : 50] Lord now the lamentations of Jeremiah this is it's heart ringing to read the lamentations of Jeremiah but right in the middle of it he says remember remember my afflictions and my wanderings the wormwood and the gall my soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me this is a man who is sad because he was right he had been right all along for 50 years and nobody was listening but then he says but this I call to mind and therefore I have hope the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases his mercies never come to an end they are new every morning great is your faithfulness this is a crying man this is a weeping prophet his eyes are looking on horrors that no eye should ever see but he's able to testify like this with praise in his heart about the

God whose steadfast love never ceases whose mercies are new every morning there is always opportunity for a new start with this God of grace there is always opportunity for mercy to meet us when we least expect it we are talking here about a God who loved the world in such a way as to do the one thing the world needed to send his son Andrew Murray was a famous man of the 19th century who was a great leader in the Dutch Reformed Church funnily enough he was a Scotsman but he became a great leader in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and he's a great teacher and one of the things that Murray said was that one of the things that the great thing that a saviour was needed for the one thing that we need was one man who would give

God perfect obedience that's the one thing that was needed that's the twist in our nature because none of us gives God perfect obedience but Jesus did 33 years of sinless perfection that's Jesus never a sin to his name never a twist in his character never a flaw never a failing nothing to regret toward the end when he was facing the cross he said to his disciples the prince of this world meaning Satan is coming he has nothing in me there was nothing Satan could latch onto and say that part of him belongs to me there was nothing in Jesus that Satan could hold onto because this man had obeyed the father with perfection for 33 years that's why he was a spotless sacrifice a sinless sacrifice and that's why we can be born again it's in his name that we are born again my brothers and sisters and friends if you're not my brother or sister in

Christ then I want to encourage you to believe that you can be my brother or sister in Christ before you leave this place today and as for the rest of us if we're Christians you know something repentance isn't something you do at the beginning of your walk with God repentance is a day to day minute by minute walk with God there isn't a single day goes past I don't have to go to God in repentance about something and that doesn't mean I'm a flawed Christian it means I'm a growing Christian it means that God has taken me on as his own personal project he has begun a good work in you and he is carrying on this good work he is carrying it on this is not your work this is his

God has begun a good work in you and he is carrying it on to the day of Christ Jesus when he will finish it he will finish it if you're a Christian today you are so secure because your salvation is secured from God's side not from yours you're not as good as your last mistake it's not your track record that will guarantee your final destiny it's Jesus track record that has secured our destiny you must be born again the son of God used that word you must be born again it's not an option there was a famous writer I read some of his stuff when I was a young lad at university Somerset Maugham he was one of the most famous writers of the early 20th century he became fabulously rich and I mean you couldn't exaggerate his riches millions and millions of pounds to his name he had a fabulous bungalow a fabulous villa on the on the

[44 : 39] Riviera in the Spanish Riviera it was filled with collectibles from all over the world and every one of them was fabulously valuable and when he was getting toward the end of his life his nephew visited him and he slumped into a sofa as an old man and he said I'm a complete failure I'm a total failure my life amounts to nothing at all I've got all this here and I'm coming to the end of my life and I can't take any of it with me and Jesus said what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world like Somerset Maugham and loses his soul so let's be sure that none of us makes that mistake and leaves here today thinking oh I'll put it off until tomorrow there's always another day to make up your mind about these things no there isn't none of us knows if we've got another breath coming a friend of mine who's a minister was a minister preached his sermon in the morning and went home and went up to sleep before he got his lunch and he never had his lunch or at least if he had it he had it in glory but he didn't have it here we none of us know if we've got another breath please please don't put off this reckoning with God you must be born again and I'm not telling you that the son of

God is telling you that you must be born again don't trust in your religion religion will lead you up the garden path trust the son of God who says you must be born again and Nicodemus says but how can this be he wasn't saying of course it can't be he was saying I need to know how you do it and Jesus said well this is how it happens your part is repentance you're baptized in water and you go to God and you say Lord you're in the right and I'm in the wrong show me how to live an upright life before you and the other half of it the bigger part of it is the work of the living God who will come and meet you at the point of your need because he has read your heart because he knows the longing that's there to be able to walk with God and not be the person that you are but be the person he alone can make you amen let's just pray for a moment living God our Father we marvel at the provision that you have made that you would send another

Adam into the fight oh God thank you so much for your son for the last Adam for the one who is the firstborn from the dead the firstborn of many brothers thank you Lord that there are many of us here today who can rejoice in the day that you drew us to Jesus and right now Lord well I'm 100% sure father as I stand here right now that there's at least one other person in this place right now that you are drawing to your son just as you drew Nicodemus to meet him that night because you've been reading their heart because you know their longing and because only you can satisfy because only you can lift them up to see the kingdom of God it's not by might it's not by power it's by your spirit Lord we confess that before you today and we ask in the name of

Jesus help us to hear the must from the lips of Jesus you must be born again take that imperative into every heart here today and let us be sure that we are not trying to fool you as well as ourselves because you can't be fooled you know what's in our hearts and you know whether we're born again or not let us settle the matter father and may you be glorified in our lives because your desire is that each one of us should become like your son and what a glory that is what a hope that is we praise you for it in Jesus name amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen ■ amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen amen