

You Must Be Born Again

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we're going to be reading or focusing our attention on John's gospel. But very often, as you know, in the New Testament, the New Testament authors or the New Testament preachers reference the Old Testament narratives.

So we're going to read from Numbers chapter 21, Numbers 21, because this is one of the passages that was referenced by Jesus when he met with Nicodemus in John chapter 3.

Now you heard the old quip, nostalgia isn't what it used to be. And we have a tendency to look back. And we have a tendency to look back with rose-colored or rose-tinted spectacles.

Things in the past were great. Things in the present are bad. Things in the future are likely to get worse. Now the people of God had been rescued, you remember. It was in all the papers.

They were rescued from Egypt. They were slaves in the land of Egypt. And with a mighty hand, God parted the Red Sea. God rescued his people. And God vanquished his enemies.

[1 : 06] But now they're on a journey. They're going through the wilderness. Egypt looks much better than it was. The food was wonderful. The living conditions were superb.

Those were the days. Numbers chapter 21. They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way.

They spoke against God and against Moses and said, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread. There is no water.

And we detest this miserable food. Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them. They bit the people. And many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you.

Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us. So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, Make a snake and put it up on a pole.

[2 : 09] Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. And when anyone was bitten by a snake, they looked at the bronze snake.

And they lived. Amen. We're now going to sing the hymn, How Deep the Father's Love for Us.

And we will stand together to sing. Amen. How deep the Father's love for us.

How vast beyond all measure That he should give his only Son To make a wretch his treasure How great the pain of searing loss The Father turns his face away As wounds which mar the chosen one Bring many sons to glory Behold the man upon the cross My guilt upon his shoulders

Ashamed I hear my mocking voice Call out among the scoffers It was my sin that held him there

Until it was accomplished His dying breath has brought me alive I know that it is finished I know that it is finished I will not boast in anything No gifts, no power, no wisdom But I will boast in Jesus Christ

[5 : 03] His death and resurrection Why should I gain from his reward?

I cannot give an answer But this I know with all my heart His wounds have paid my ransom I cannot give an answer To the Lord And I know with all my heart He has made me alive So we're now going to watch a short video From WFM It's on a charitable work Called Release International So let's see.

Hello, my name's Paul Robinson, and I'm CEO of a Christian ministry called Release International, which for more than 50 years has been called by God to love and serve persecuted Christians.

Statistics vary, but it's reckoned that more than 300 million Christians around the world are being persecuted for their faith in Christ alone. Today, we love and serve persecuted Christians by raising their voice, and with your help, we give them the tools they need to live for Jesus Christ.

We're active in many countries, always working through trusted Christian partners on the ground as they provide prayerful, pastoral, and practical support to Christians suffering persecution.

[6 : 56] At the beginning of the final chapter of the book of Hebrews, the writer urges Christians to continue to remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

With a population of 219 million, Nigeria is the largest country in Africa.

54% of Nigerians are Christian and are located mainly in the southern states. However, there are also many Christian communities in the predominantly Muslim north.

In these areas, Christians have faced sustained persecution for many decades. In recent years, with the rise of the terrorist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa, and with the increased arming of Fulani tribal militants, the violence has intensified.

Thousands of Christians have been killed, and tens of thousands have been forced to flee. Villages are attacked, churches and homes are burned, pastors are kidnapped, and the Nigerian government seems powerless to control the violence.

[8 : 23] Those who have been displaced have had to leave their homes and possessions behind. They have been deprived of the means of supporting themselves, and many now live in camps or other temporary facilities where they are in need of emergency food and sanitary provision.

In response to the many needs of those who have been displaced, Release International's partner, the Stephanos Foundation, runs the Love in Action project.

Over the course of a year, Love in Action provides essential food and hygiene relief items to around 1,000 families affected by the violence. Items are purchased from local markets and packed in durable containers before being distributed in camps, villages and resettlement areas across northern Nigeria.

The packs are designed to sustain a family of six for two to four weeks and contain items such as rice, beans, salt, sugar, milk, soap and laundry detergent.

As a result of this support, vulnerable families are having their immediate practical needs met. This reduces the impact of the hardship and trauma they face, and they are encouraged to persevere in faith and know that they are not abandoned by their Christian brothers and sisters in the UK.

[9 : 48] Thank you so much to Women for Mission for partnering with Release International and the Love in Action project. We truly value your prayers and financial support.

May God bless you. So if you want to support the work of Women for Mission, come along on Saturday for breakfast.

You can give. I'm sure there's, on the Free Church website, there's a way to give with WFM, but you can give through Buclew, and if you earmark your donation to WFM, we'll make sure that it gets there.

300 million is a lot of people in the world who suffer for their faith, and organizations like Release International makes life a bit better for a significant number of Christian brothers and sisters across this world.

So as we have seen, let us pray. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for organizations like Relief International and for others who are seeking to reach brothers and sisters who are persecuted.

[11 : 02] We recognize that throughout this world there are many situations and circumstances where persecution accompanies the people of God in their daily existence.

We think of that border area between North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, where there are large Christian populations intersecting with large Muslim populations.

We recognize that there is violence, that there is uncertainty, that there is terrorism, and yet we come to you as the one who has all power and all authority. We pray that you would sustain your people in the midst of these situations.

We pray that you might still the hand of those who are seeking to do evil. But even more than that, you are the God who is able to take your enemies and make them your friends.

You are able to take those who are violently opposed to your cause and to your people, and you are able to transform them into those who now become advocates and spokesmen on your behalf.

[12 : 03] So what you have done in the life of Saul of Tarsus, we pray that you might do that again, and that those today who are bent on destruction and violence, that they might become those who become preachers of good news gospel.

We pray that you would remember WFM, and we pray for their work. We pray for the way in which they support work overseas and at home. We thank you for the way in which they have raised

thousands upon thousands, hundreds of thousands of pounds over these years.

We thank you for the Disaster Relief Fund, which exists to respond to immediate disasters across the world. And we pray that though we are a small church, though we might appear to be few in number, Lord, you are able to take small gifts and to do great things.

So Lord, help us to pray for our brothers and sisters who are under pressure and under threat, and help us to consider ways in which we might practically, as well as prayerfully support them.

So Lord, we thank you for privileges like this to learn a little bit about what life is like in a very different part of the world, and to learn a little bit about organizations which, in the name of Jesus, seek to provide help and hope and comfort.

[13:19] So for Release International, we commit them to you for love in action for their program in Nigeria. We ask, Lord, that the love of Jesus would be seen in action and heard in word, and that you might accompany all that is done in your name with your blessing and with your presence, because your blessing and presence are powerful and transformative.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Well, we're going to read again from God's word, and it is tempting as a preacher to say that the text that we are looking at is the most important text in the Bible.

I don't know if I could say that about John chapter 3, but I can certainly say that there is no more important text in the Bible than John 3, 1 to 21, and hopefully we'll see something of its significance as we continue today.

John chapter 3, page 1065 in your pew Bibles, if you have one, or on your devices. Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

He came to Jesus at night and said, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the signs you were doing if God were not with him.

[14:40] Jesus replied, Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. How can someone be born when they are old?

Surely, Nicodemus asked, surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born. Jesus answered, Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases.

You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. But how can this be, Nicodemus asked.

You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus. Do you not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen.

[15:41] But still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe. How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?

No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have life, eternal life in him.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but people love darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light, for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

[16:57] But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Amen. And may God add his own blessing to this reading of his word. We're going to sing, and we're going to sing a psalm, Psalm 124, which is a well-known psalm of the 150.

And this is a psalm that reminds us, that's maybe particularly relevant to the video that we just saw, that if God had not been on our side, we would have been lost.

We would have been washed away. We would have been overwhelmed. But this is a psalm that reminds the people of God now, and in the past, that our God is with us.

Our God is for us. And our God protects us, and preserves us. So let's sing, let's stand to sing Psalm 124, If the Lord Had Not Been On Our Side.

[17 : 57] If God the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel say, had not the Lord been near, when foes attacked us, filling us with fear, and when their wrath against us reached its height, a life we had been swallowed in their spite, we would have been enveloped by the flood, over our heads the torrent would have gone, the waters would have carried us along,

But praise the Lord, for he has set us free, and has not left us to their cruelty.

We have escaped, just as a captured bird, out of the fowler's net has been set free, the snare is cut, we are at liberty.

Our help is in the name of God the Lord, who made the earth and heavens by his word.

If you were to go out of this church, and turn left, and turn left again, walk along to the Royal Mile, turn right, just before John Knox's house, on the left, there's a very large church, called Corubber's Christian Center, and that church was built with money, that was raised from an evangelistic mission.

[21 : 08] The American preacher and soloist, D.L. Moody and Ira Sankey, they came to Scotland in 1874, and for months they had rallies in the city, and one of the outworkings was funds were raised to build a permanent structure structure that continues to be a source of gospel outreach right in the center of the Royal Mile.

This reminds me of a story told of Moody, because Moody not only was known for his evangelistic addresses, Moody would often accompany the evangelistic evening meetings with daytime meetings.

Sometimes he would have meetings for parents, and they would be praying for their children.

Sometimes he would have meetings for workers, to pray for the work of the gospel.

Well, one time there was a gathering of church workers, and after the meeting, an angry woman came up to Moody and said, Mr. Moody, do you mean to tell me that I, an educated woman taught from childhood in good ways, and all my life interested in the church and doing good, must enter heaven the same way as the worst criminal in our day?

No, madam. I don't. God does. He says everyone who would enter heaven, no matter how good they think they are, how well educated or zealous in good works, must be born again.

[22 : 39] This is not my message. This is not my material. But Jesus gives to us our clear text. John chapter 3, verse 7, you must be born again.

This is not an optional extra. This is not a piece of advice. You see, there are a lot of books, and there's some really good books out there. You know, there are books that will give you 12 lessons to live a happy life, or 10 tips for, you know, being fulfilled and happy.

The Bible is not one of those books. The Bible does not give you tips. The Bible does not offer you advice. The Bible doesn't make suggestions. The Bible actually tells you that things are absolutely necessary, absolutely required, and if we needed any underscore, the Lord Jesus himself is the speaker, and he says to Nicodemus, you should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again.

And as we look at this text, and as we look at this truth, what we see is that time and time again, the Bible commands the impossible. You must be born again.

I was speaking of about an hour or so ago, I was in Edinburgh prison, and I said, you know, the command, Jesus was once asked, what is the greatest command? And he answered, he said, love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

[24 : 09] And he said, the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. Now again, that's a command. It's an authoritative command. Love God above all else, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Now, I can't do that. I'm not able to do that. And what's more, neither are you. Because when I hear that command, I affirm that it's true, and I affirm that it's right, but deep down, the love that I express is a love not for God above all else, not a love for a neighbor before myself, but it's a love for me. I'm good at that. I'm good at loving me. I'm good at doing what I want, when I want, how I want. But the Bible confronts me with the command, you must love God, and you must love your neighbor, and you must be born again.

And as we look at this text, Nicodemus, it's quite a remarkable encounter, isn't it? It's very atmospheric. It's as if you were there. You feel like you're there in John chapter 3, just like in John chapter 4, you feel like you're at the well in the middle of the day.

In John chapter 3, you're there with Jesus. It's nighttime, and this one-on-one encounter. Now, the setting is quite significant because Jesus at this stage is a public figure.

[25 : 25] He's out and about. He's preaching. He's teaching. He's performing miracles. He's telling parables. His reputation is on the rise. So why do you go to Nicodemus at night?

Why the secrecy? Well, I think the answer is obvious, isn't it? If you're doing something under the cloak of darkness, if you're doing something and, you know, you don't want people to know, Nicodemus was a Pharisee and he was a member of the Jewish ruling council, so he was religious and political.

He had a standing in his society and coming to Jesus at night was something that he did not want people to know about. And he comes with a word of flattery.

And, you know, we do this all the time. We say nice things to people. We want, you know, we want to keep people on their side. You know, again, one of the most, one of the best-selling books in the 20th century in the United States and further afield was Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People.

Well, I don't, Nicodemus didn't read that book, but he, you know, he had the similar principles here. Rabbi, we know, we know you're a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the signs you were doing if God were not with him.

[26 : 41] So word of praise, word of flattery, word of compliment, but then Jesus shifts things quite significantly, doesn't it? Because, well, this is the NIV, but if you have the ESV, I think it will say something like, Jesus answered.

Jesus answers Nicodemus, but Nicodemus doesn't ask a question. Jesus answers an unasked question. And that's the difference between Jesus and us.

That's one of many differences, but that's a significant difference. If you ask me a question, I can answer it or not, as the case may be. But I'm not really good at answering your unasked questions because you haven't asked them.

I don't know what you're thinking. I don't know what's in your heart. He does. So he answers Nicodemus' unasked question. What's the unasked question? Nicodemus is looking for the truth. Nicodemus is not content with what he has.

Nicodemus is searching for something. Well, how do you know that? It doesn't say that. Well, why on earth is he visiting Jesus at night? Why on earth is he having a one-to-one with a rabbi?

[27 : 47] He himself is a religious authority. Something is missing in Nicodemus' life. And something's missing in each of our lives. You know, we naturally have questions.

Sometimes we articulate, sometimes we say it. But we have questions about life. What's the meaning of life? Why am I here? Where have I come from? Where am I going? Now, Jesus answers the unasked questions.

And he says, Nicodemus, let's cut to the chase here. I tell you, verily, verily, amen, amen. Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.

That's it. You really, we're not going to talk about, you know, my reputation. We're not going to talk about your flattery. But if you're interested in seeing the kingdom, if you're interested in being in the kingdom, you must, Nicodemus, be born again.

Now, I said this is the NIV. If it was the NJV, NJ meaning New Jersey, if it was the New Jersey version, which I'm familiar with, the answer would be, I don't get it.

[28 : 58] I don't get it. And that's what Nicodemus says. Jesus, I don't get it. He says, how can someone be born when they are old? He doesn't get it. You see, because Jesus is talking, again, there's a footnote.

The footnote will tell you that again can sometimes mean from above, and that's true. But the again also means, the again here means the one who did the thing must do the thing again, the exact person.

So, you know, you come to Becclew and you enjoy the preaching, right? And you say, I want to hear that again. Okay, so what you're saying is, I want to hear a good sermon.

It doesn't matter who preaches it. I want to hear a good sermon. But if, you know, if tonight you come and you hear the Reverend James Ross, you say, I want to hear that again. And you use the

word that Jesus used, that means you want to hear the same person deliver the same message. And that gives us an insight because Nicodemus now thinks about his mother, right? Nicodemus is thinking about it. So Nicodemus understands what Jesus is saying. And he thinks to himself, the person who gave me birth was my mother.

[30 : 06] And now you're telling me that the same person who gave me birth must give birth to me again. I don't get it. Jesus, or Nicodemus is on to something.

He just doesn't go back far enough. So this word again has two meanings. It means above and it means before or you go back. So actually it's not Nicodemus.

We're not talking about your mother here. We're talking about the first person who gave birth to the first human being. Who gave life? Well, the answer to that is God. Who did God give life to?

Adam. Adam, God breathed into Adam. Adam became a living soul. So Jesus is saying you need to look back and you need to look up. You see, this new birth does not come from you.

So it's not surprising that Nicodemus says, I don't get it. What he's saying is, I just can't understand what you're saying. Then verse 5, Jesus goes on to explain, very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit.

[31 : 11] Flesh gives birth to flesh and the spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases.

You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with every one born of the spirit. So Nicodemus begins with, I don't get it.

But then he progresses. How can this be? I can't do it. Now, I was in London for a few days. And when I'm wandering around, believe it or not, I talk to random people.

That's just the way I do things. I talk to random people. I meet somebody on the door. It's a nightclub. Somebody's standing at the door. And I say, good evening. He says, good evening. I said, it's quite warm.

He said, yes, it is. Where are you from? I'm from America. I live in Scotland. What do you do? I teach theology. What's theology? Well, theology tells us about God.

[32 : 09] And theology tells us about us. And theology tells us about Jesus. He said, that's really interesting. I'm lost. I said, well, actually, that's really good. Because if you realize that you're lost, you might ask for directions.

If you don't think you're lost, you won't. So Nicodemus is actually moving forward here. You think he's not getting it. He doesn't understand it. He can't do it. Well, that's bad. No, no.

Actually, that's quite good. He realizes that Jesus is asking him to do something that he can't do. That's the first step. Because if you think the Bible is asking you to do something that you can do, you really don't get it.

Because you can't. If you think the Bible is explaining something to you that you can get with your mind, you can't. I was reading Winnie the Pooh the other day.

You know, highly educated person. Reading Winnie the Pooh and I came across this phrase where Winnie the Pooh described himself as a bear with a very small brain. And very often we think of ourselves as people with small brains.

[33 : 13] It's hard to keep things in our head. I'm going to tell you about a man who had a big brain. He was active in the 1600s. He was living in Oxford.

He wrote a lot of books. And John Owen said this. He said, we speak a lot about God. But the truth is we know very little of him. And we know very little of him because it is God thus to be known.

So you see, we're gathering here together. And I think Nicodemus is being honest. He doesn't get it and he can't do it. And if we share that response, we're on to something.

Because much of what Jesus is saying here, we don't get. This is beyond our capacity. Our brains are small and Jesus is telling us something big.

Our capacity is limited and Jesus is telling you must do something big. So Nicodemus is on to something because he doesn't get it and he can't do it.

[34 : 10] So the message of the Bible says you must. You must do. You must be. You must avoid. And the first step in your understanding of the message is I can't.

I can't do. I can't be. I am not able to. So the impossible is commanded and the honest response is no.

I can't. I don't get it. I'm not able. But then Jesus doesn't leave Nicodemus where he finds him. Now, Yassine, who was on the door down in London, I hope I didn't leave him where I found him.

I said, you know, if you're lost, the best thing to do is to find someone who knows the way. I said, if I was lost in London, I would come to you. You've lived here all your life.

And you'd tell me how to go places, wouldn't you? You'd direct me where to go and how to get to where I wanted because you know London. And I said, if you want to go to heaven, ask someone who knows the way.

[35 : 11] The one who knows the way is someone who's come from heaven. Jesus says that here. He's come from heaven. He's going back to heaven. So if you ask Jesus for the way, he'll show you the way because not only does he know it, he is it.

So Jesus doesn't leave people where he finds them. He gives the impossible command and then he illustrates the impossible. He said, this is just like the wind.

Now here we live in Scotland. We get a lot of gales. We get a lot of strong winds. And you hear the wind. And you see the effects of the wind. But you don't see the wind. So it is with the spirit.

Jesus says you cannot see the Holy Spirit. But you can see the spirit when he's working. You cannot see him physically. But you can see the effects of the spirit.

So Jesus is a great teacher, is he not? He's the great preacher. And he doesn't leave Nicodemus where he finds Nicodemus. Or Nicodemus finds him, I know. But this encounter, when you have a life-changing encounter with Jesus, you are never the same again.

[36 : 18] Nicodemus was never the same again. The first illustration was a nature illustration. We can get that. The second illustration was why I read from Numbers 21 was a Bible illustration.

Now we're on safe ground with Nicodemus. Nicodemus knows the Bible. Nicodemus knows the wilderness journey. Nicodemus knows Moses. Nicodemus knows the serpent in the wilderness. So Jesus is saying, look, the impossible command is you must be born again.

Nicodemus says, I can't. And I'm not able to. And then he says, the wind. You can see the effects of the wind even if you can't see the wind. You can see the effects of the spirit even though you can't see the spirit.

And just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness. Ah, now. Maybe, maybe the penny's beginning to drop. Because that Old Testament story is quite evocative.

It's quite memorable, isn't it? Again, it feels like you're there in the camp. You can hear the complaints. Now, we believe that the Bible is the word of God. That the Bible is authoritative.

[37 : 23] That the Bible is accurate. But isn't it the case that so often you read the Bible and you think, that's human nature. That's exactly. We know the Bible is the word of God. But we know it.

But we just see it so often that it captures real human beings. We constantly complain. Rains for a week. Boy, it's really wet. It's, you know, the sun is shining brightly for a week.

Boy, it's really hot. You know, you get a cold spell. It's freezing. You get a hot spell. You know, it's the Goldilocks effect. Goldilocks effects. It's just never the right. We constantly complain.

And the people of God constantly complain then. The people of God have a tendency to complain now. But here we have the serpent in the wilderness. They complain.

Judgment occurs. Punishment happens. And then they change their tune. They say, Moses, we're sorry. We didn't mean to say that about you. We didn't mean to say that about God. We need help. God says, I'll help you.

[38 : 22] God says, make a serpent. Make it out of bronze. Put it on a pole. Anybody that looks lives. Now, maybe it's hard to tell. But maybe Nicodemus is now beginning to, okay, right.

People were dying. They couldn't save themselves. They couldn't heal themselves. God provides a way where there is no way. God provides an answer to the problem that was caused by the people. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. So, Numbers 21 is the gospel.

The gospel is look and live. The gospel is not do and live. The gospel is not be and live. We cannot do and we cannot be, but we can look. We can look.

You know, you're bit by a serpent. You're in danger of dying. You can look at the serpent on the pole. We can't be born again ourselves. We can't love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, body, and strength.

[39 : 24] We cannot love our neighbors ourself. But when Jesus says the Son of Man will be lifted up, and we can look. We can look to him. And we can be saved. We can look to the one who has done.

We can look to the one who has achieved. We can look to the one who is able. So, the impossible is commanded, and then the impossible is illustrated. The wind and the serpent.

But thirdly, the impossible is made possible. Because it doesn't stop there. Not only does Jesus tell us about the wind and the spirit. Not only does he tell us about Old Testament history, Moses and the serpent.

He previews his coming, death. Because three times in the Bible, here in John 3, I think it's John 8 and John 12, this phrase lift up is used in John's Gospel.

And it's, again, one of these strange words that has two meanings. I was down in Windsor. I went to Windsor Palace. And you went into the throne room.

[40 : 26] And you saw the thrones on which the queen or the king sat. And they were elevated. So that when the king or the monarch sat, they were higher than everyone else.

So the idea is that the king would be lifted up. Meaning, given a place of honor. A place of recognition. But this word also had another meaning, which is quite different.

This word was the word of lifting something or someone up. For public, not praise, not honor. But for public ridicule and for public shame.

So Jesus on the cross was lifted up. And you remember the abuse. You remember the mocking. You remember, you know, all that was said and all that was done.

And here, even the sign, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. What kind of people would have this kind of king? So that word, those three times it's used in John's gospel.

[41 : 23] John 3, John 8, and John 12. It all has this double meaning. Because the cross is both a place of humiliation. And a place of shame. But it also is a place of honor.

Where the son is elevated and lifted up. As you read John's gospel. In John, uniquely, John sees the Friday event triumphantly.

Now we of course know the Sunday event, the resurrection, was the triumph of Jesus over the grave, over death and over evil. But even on the cross, even on the Friday, Jesus says, it is finished.

Tetelestai, the debt has been paid and paid in full. So the impossible is now made possible. Not because of us.

Not because of what we can do. Or have done or might be able to do. But because of who he is. And because of what he has done. I mentioned John Owen earlier.

[42 : 27] John Owen wrote a lot of books. And he wrote this two-volume set. The first book was about Jesus. The second book was about the Holy Spirit. He used fancier titles.

But basically the idea was saying that the thing of first magnitude. The truth of first magnitude is who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. And that of not second magnitude.

But that of equal importance is who the Holy Spirit is. And what the Holy Spirit has done. And he said, without him, the Spirit. All that the Son achieved.

All that the Son accomplished without the Spirit would be of no benefit. Would be of no benefit to us. So we not only need the Son who dies on the cross.

And is raised from the dead. But we need the Spirit of God who is poured out. Who now dwells in our hearts. What does that say? That's the depth of the problem.

[43 : 25] The depth of the problem requires God to send his Son on a rescue mission. To live a perfect life. To die a sacrificial death. And to rise triumphant from the dead.

And the Son, the Spirit of God, is poured out on the people of God. So that the Spirit of God now comes to live within me. A small man of great stature was a man called John Wesley.

The Queen, the late Queen, Her Majesty. She would often unveil statues. And she said, it's a very rare occasion where she unveiled a statue of someone who was shorter than herself.

John Wesley was barely five foot. The Queen was slightly higher than five foot. And the statue of John Wesley in the Methodist Central Hall in London is tiny. You know, it's a tiny man. Like here.

But here was a man who had a big impact. Small man, big impact. John Wesley preached, it's estimated, 40,000 times. 40,000 times in 50 years is 800 times a year for 50 years.

[44 : 33] So let's say he's an active preacher. It's estimated that 20% of his sermons, 8,000 sermons, was on the text John 3, 7, you must be born again.

That was his theme. George Whitefield, John Wesley, the great awakening. The great theme was the person and work of the Spirit. Because the people were dead. They were sleeping.

They needed to be awakened. They were spiritually dead. They needed to be revived and given life. But Wesley put it this way. He said, if any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity be properly termed fundamental, they are doubtless these two.

The doctrine of justification and that of the new birth. The former relating to that great work which God does for us in forgiving our sins. The latter to the great work which God does in us in renewing our fallen nature.

We need both. My sin has separated me from God. I am not a friend of God. I am an enemy of God. I am naturally turning my back towards God.

[45 : 37] What is now required is that there is a sacrifice or a substitute. One who takes that sin, that guilt, that shame, that punishment in my place and allows me to go free.

But what's more, I'm dead. Not only am I an enemy, but I'm dead. I need to be made alive. And I can't make myself alive.

I need to be born again. And I can't make myself born again. So the Holy Spirit must take all that Christ has done. And he must apply that work to me personally and powerfully.

And not only that, he now comes to live in my heart by faith. So that's why the Apostle Paul puts it this way at the end of 1 Corinthians chapter 6.

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you? Who you have received from God. You are not your own. You are bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.

[46 : 39] Bought with a price. Temples of the Spirit. Christ for us. The Spirit in us. But I've just told you this is impossible. I've told you that you don't get it.

And can't get it. And I've told you you can't do it. So is this just a message of frustration? You know, a counsel of despair? No. Because what does Jesus say?

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. That whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. We can't love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul.

Body and strength. We cannot love our neighbor as ourself. We cannot be born again. But Jesus commands us to do something. He commands us in the words of the Old Testament to look and live.

Or he commands us in the New Testament to believe and live. All that has been done. All that is required has been done. And we are required to look.

[47 : 38] We look to the Son who is lifted up. We look in faith. We believe in him. We take him at his word. And we are promised that all who believe now will live.

How this is possible, I do not know. How God is able to do this, I cannot tell you. But the fact that he says it is crystal clear. And it's as if God is saying to anyone and everyone, you believe in Jesus and you go to heaven.

You believe in Jesus, your sins are forgiven. You believe in Jesus and you are welcomed into eternal life. You will see the kingdom and you will be part of the kingdom. He makes no qualifications.

He makes no limitations. He makes no small print for whosoever, whoever believes in him. It's an open invitation. I don't know how he can do it, but he does it.

I don't know how he can say it, but he says it. I don't know how he can achieve it, but he achieves it because he is who he is. All I can do is to tell you what he says.

[48 : 50] All I can do is to exhort you as he exhorts you. But his work is perfect. His word is reliable. If you take him at his word, you will never, ever be disappointed.

The sad reality is that people hear the invitation, not now. People hear the invitation, not me. People hear the invitation, and like the children in the wilderness, life is too good.

Egypt is too fun. The living conditions are too, you know, just too enjoyable. God is tough. The people of God are difficult. It's much easier just to stay in Egypt.

Jesus says if you love darkness, even though you're invited to life and life eternal, if ultimately your love is in darkness, you'll stay in darkness.

If ultimately your desire is here on this earth and for the things of this world, ultimately you will find yourself saying, no, not now, not me. But the great thing, and I don't know how he does this, the great thing is that when God's word goes forth, the same Holy Spirit who he spoke of a moment ago, the same Holy Spirit takes the word of God and applies the word of God powerfully.

[50 : 05] So I don't need to know. I don't need to know how he does it, but he does. I don't need to know how it works, but he does. And there's something about the gospel that goes forth with power, so that Paul, using the language of Romans 1 16, I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

It's an impossible command, but it's an impossible command that's made possible, because Jesus Christ has made the impossible possible, because the Holy Spirit has made the impossible possible.

Do you mean to tell me that I, an educated person, taught from childhood in good ways, and all my life interested in the church and doing good, must enter heaven the same way as the worst criminal of our day?

No, madam, I don't. God does. He says everyone who would enter heaven, no matter how good they think they are, or how well educated, or zealous in good works, you might add, or how bad they think they are, how inadequate they think they are, how incapable they think they are, must be born again.

The command of Jesus is you must be born again. The command is accompanied by the gospel, by which the impossible is now made possible. The Israelites who looked, they would have a lasting testimony.

[51 : 36] They could tell their children, their children's children, I was bit by a poisonous serpent. I was dying. All of a sudden, Moses put up a serpent of bronze, and he said to us to look. And I looked, and I lived.

And I can tell you as a Christian now of 31 years, on that day, on the 19th of January, 1993, I looked, I believed.

And God was true to his word. God came to dwell in my heart. God changed me from the inside out. It's a lingering testimony of the grace of God, of the power of God, that is found in the gospel of God, that is vouched safe by the spirit of God, on behalf of the son of God.

May God bless his word.