

# John Ch3v1-21 - Who Will Enter The Kingdom?

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 22 September 2024

Preacher: Sam Ross

[ 0 : 00 ] We continue in our studies of John's Gospel, and Sam is going to be preaching this morning, but before he does, we're going to read the section of Scripture that we're going to be looking at, which is John chapter 3, starting at verse 1 through to verse 21.

John's Gospel, chapter 3, and we'll start at verse 1.

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 are doing if God were not with him.

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

[ 1 : 45 ] Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit. You shouldn't 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.

How can this be? Nicodemus asked. You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus, and do you not understand these things?

Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know. We testify to what we have seen. 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.

[ 2 : 52 ] And 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.

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.

[ 3 : 53 ] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 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.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Johnny.

Good morning, everybody. Good morning. Let's begin by praying and asking God for his help. Our Father, we thank you for giving us your word this day.

We thank you for the life that is in us. Holy Spirit, help us to see wonderful things in your word this day. Amen.

Who will enter God's eternal life? That's the question that Jesus answers in today's text.

[ 5 : 14 ] And this is the most important question that we could ever ask. There is more writing on this question than on any other.

Who will enter God's eternal life? For some of us, this is a question that we find really hard to think about.

The gravity of this subject is just too much to face, so we just push it away. In essence, we're scared to hear what Jesus has to say about this.

Then for others of us, we think we know the right answer, and we're pretty smug about it. But in reality, we're dead wrong, and Jesus knows it.

That description matches Nicodemus, the man that Jesus meets in today's text.

[ 6 : 25 ] Everything that Nicodemus believed about who would enter God's eternal kingdom got thrown upside down by Jesus.

Now, if you look in verse 1, John, the writer of this gospel, tells us that Nicodemus is a member of the Jewish ruling council.

So this is a man with power and influence in his community. But we also learn that he's a Pharisee. These were very religious Jews who strove to keep God's laws, although unfortunately, they believed that they had earned entrance into God's eternal kingdom because they kept the rules much better than the others around them.

And Jesus warns people throughout Israel at this time. He's warning them not to listen to this teaching of the Pharisees, which in turn led the Pharisees to hate him and see to his death in the end.

So this probably explains why, in verse 1, when does Nicodemus come to Jesus? At night. Nicodemus, he risks his reputation by seeking out this conversation with Jesus.

[ 7 : 49 ] So why does he come? What has brought him here? Well, look what he says in verse 2. Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the signs that you are doing if God were not with him.

Now, while he's making a statement there, it's also like he's trying to draw Jesus out a bit, isn't it? It's kind of like, I know you're important, Jesus, but why are you so important?

Why are you doing what you are doing? But Jesus knows what's really going on in Nicodemus' heart.

In fact, the last verse of chapter 2, it says that Jesus did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

Jesus knows what Nicodemus is really thinking. He diverts the conversation completely, and this is his shocking reply to Nicodemus in verse 3.

[ 9 : 06 ] Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. Jesus dives straight into the heart problem that he sees in Nicodemus, and this is a problem that we all share.

The problem is that we inherently think that we can earn our way into God's kingdom by something that we do for him. God's kingdom is where God is ruling and reigning over the hearts of those who want him to be their king.

It's another way to describe heaven or eternal life with God. And Nicodemus, he thinks he's in. He thinks he's got God's eternal life in the bag because he's a good person.

He tries to keep God's rules. He's a Bible expert. He prays multiple times a day. He gives money to church. I mean, what more could God possibly ask?

But in the course of this conversation, Jesus shatters all of our assumptions about who will enter God's eternal life.

[ 10 : 32 ] Jesus confronts this toughest question and gives us his answer, the truth. And are we ready to hear it?

Because it's not those who do enough good for God who will enter into his eternal life. No, in this text, we find that it's whoever is born again of his spirit.

It's whoever simply believes in Jesus. And it's whoever daily walks in his light. Firstly, whoever is born again of the spirit.

Now, you notice in verse 4, Nicodemus is shocked whenever Jesus tells him he must be born again. And we're also confused because we don't have any categories to understand how one could be physically reborn when they are old.

But Jesus isn't talking about anything physical here, is he? And in verse 5, he clarifies, he develops his thoughts.

[ 11 : 50 ] Read with me in verse 5. 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. Jesus is saying that you don't get to share in his eternal kingdom by the good things that you do.

Not by living an outwardly religious lifestyle. Not by trying to be a really good person to those in your community. No. You need a totally new spiritual life.

You need to be born again of water and spirit. Now, what does that mean? What does it mean when he says born of water and spirit? Well, we need to understand a prophecy from the book of Ezekiel 600 years before Jesus came.

And in this prophecy, God speaks of a time to come when he would intervene in the lives of sinful, stubborn-hearted people, like you and me, to enable us to follow him.

[ 13 : 11 ] So, as we read this, I want you to listen out for references to water and spirit. You can follow on the screen. First part. God says, I will sprinkle clean water on you.

And you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. So, that's what it means to be born again of water.

It's God cleansing us from our sin and all the other things that we look to for life instead of God. And here's the second part. God says, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.

I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

That's what it means to be born again of the spirit. It's God giving us a new heart, a transformed heart, and a new spirit that actually wants to love him and obey him.

[ 14 : 35 ] This is a completely new spiritual life with new desires and affections for God that we never had before. And Jesus is saying to us all today, you must be born again or you will not enter my eternal kingdom.

If you don't get this new spiritual life, you'll never see me as what you most desperately need. You'll never want to trust me as God.

But here's the question. How do you get this new spiritual life? How do you get born again? We all want this, but how do we get it?

Is there a special prayer that you can pray? Is there a book that you can read? Jesus tells us to our shock that we have nothing to do with it whatsoever.

And that grates on us. Because in our pride, we want to have something to do with it. Look at what it says in verse 6.

[ 15 : 57 ]   Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit. Now think about this. You didn't ask your parents to give you physical life.

You did not initiate that process and the physical life that you and I have here today. That's a gift that we received from them. We had nothing to do with getting that gift.

And so it is with our spiritual life. We cannot initiate our own spiritual rebirth. We cannot give ourselves a new heart that wants God.

We simply receive this new life as a gift from the spirit. Look at what it says in verse 8. 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. Jesus is telling us something really clear.

[ 17 : 07 ]   God gives the gift of spiritual life to whomever he chooses. And just like we cannot control or predict the direction of the wind, so also we don't control or predict who God is going to give the gift of spiritual life to.

If we have been born again, it's only because we have been born again of the spirit. And two effects I think that that has on us day to day.

Number one, it should humble us in amazed gratitude when we realize that if it were left up to us, we never would have chosen God.

Unless the spirit had intervened. That's the first thing. Gratitude. Here's the second thing. What greater motivation do we need in our lives to pray?

Think of the friends, the family that you have who don't yet understand or see that they need Jesus. What are we to do?

[ 18 : 24 ]   we are to pray that God by his spirit would give them the gift of spiritual life because guess what?

They cannot give it to themselves. This is our call to pray. so Jesus' first part in answering the question of who can enter God's eternal life is to say whoever is born again of the spirit.

But some of you might be wondering at this point, how do I know if I have been born again? And it's right that you should ask that question given everything that's writing on this.

But Jesus doesn't want us to spend our lives in anxious wondering. He tells us plainly in the next few verses how you can know if you have been born again and this is it.

Those who are born again will believe in Jesus. That's how you know. If you've been given new spiritual life, you will believe that Jesus is God.

[ 19 : 42 ]   You will believe that he died and rose again for you. You will believe that he is your king and he has rights to your complete devotion.

That kind of belief, Jesus says, is only possible if you are born again into new spiritual life, if you are granted to believe it. And Jesus is clear that whoever believes in him will enter his eternal life.

Let's now unpack what it means to believe in Jesus. I mean, anyone can say, oh yeah, I believe in Jesus. I believe he died.

I believe he rose again. I believe he's God. The apostle James makes a good point in his letter later in the Bible. He says, even the demons believe.

But they are obviously not in God's kingdom, are they? So what type of belief is Jesus getting at here? It couldn't be mere intellectual assent to some truth about God.

[ 20 : 48 ] Jesus says, believing means looking to Jesus in faith for forgiveness. That's the belief he's getting at here.

And he explains this in verse 14 by referring to the Israelites. This happened when they were on their journey from slavery in Egypt to their home in the New Promised Land.

And along the way, they grew bitter and disobedient towards God, even though he just rescued them from slavery. And in judgment, God sent snakes upon them. And the snakes bit the people.

And what it did was it caused the people to realize their sin and to repent. And God, in his mercy, even though the people don't deserve it, in his mercy, he told Moses to put this bronze snake up on a pole and to raise it up in the middle of the camp.

And anyone who looked at that snake was healed of their poisonous bites. And Jesus, he draws the analogy to himself.

[ 22 : 11 ] Read it in verse 14. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man, that is Jesus, must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

The people in the desert looked up to the snake and were healed of the poisonous bites. We look up in faith to Jesus on the cross and we find forgiveness for our sin.

We believe that he, the sinless Son of God, was the only one who ever qualified to take the just punishment we deserved for our rebellion.

We believe that he took every sin, past, present, future, on himself. And John tells us the astonishing consequence of that belief.

we are no longer condemned by God. We deserve to be condemned. Sin is our rebellion against God's loving rule over our lives.

[ 23 : 35 ] And God's just punishment for sin is to be separated from him forever. Rather than eternal life with God, we deserve condemnation to eternal death in hell.

But listen to how John says it in verse 16. Some feel this is the key sentence in his whole gospel account, what he is trying to get across.

Verse 16, 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.

If we believe in Jesus, we will not perish in hell for eternity. Instead, we will share in God's eternal life.

That is not a maybe. It's not a hopefully. It's a certainty. And John continues in verse 17. Read it with me. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.

[ 24 : 57 ] 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.

Jesus couldn't be any clearer. Before believing in Jesus, our record of sin was laid open before God and it condemned us.

But Jesus took our sentence. He bore our hell and he rose from the grave so that you and I could share in his eternal life instead.

Through believing in Jesus, all our sin, past, present, future, is paid for and can no longer be held against us.

We are no longer condemned. But what if you believe in Jesus and you struggle with doubt?

[ 26 : 14 ] do you ever wonder in your times of doubt if you really still believe? Because let's face it, we all go through times of doubt in our lives.

And maybe you're sitting here saying, yeah, I remember the time in my life when I first saw my need of Jesus. I remember that I believed in him.

I looked to what he did in the cross and believed he did that for me. And I repented of my sin. And I knew his spirit's work in my life.

But now I'm just plagued with doubt. I struggle to believe. It's the sin that I've struggled with. It's the suffering that I've been through in my life.

And sometimes I just wonder, do I believe anymore? I doubt that Christ really has forgiven me.

[ 27 : 30 ] And if you have doubts just like that, you're not on your own. sin. But what would Jesus say about that? Well, listen to verse 16.

Whoever believes will not perish, but will have eternal life. And verse 18, whoever believes is not condemned.

These are statements of fact. they are not changed by our fluctuating feelings as we go through life. The moment that you placed your faith in Jesus, you were no longer condemned by God, and you will never be condemned by God again.

The work is finished. finished. Your faith could be as tiny as a mustard seed. What matters is not the size of your faith, but who you have believed in.

Jesus is great. Jesus is strong. And he promises to save the sinful, the doubting, and the weak.

[ 28 : 51 ] praise God. It is not about how strong my faith is. It's about how strong my Savior is.

So when you doubt if you're still in God's kingdom, ask yourself this question. am I believing my own feelings? Or am I believing what Jesus has said to be true about me?

Rest in what he has declared about you. But here's the other implication of this verse.

And this is the negative one. these verses are clear that if you have not believed in Jesus, then your sin condemns you this day before God.

And you have no excuse. You will not see eternal life, but you will be condemned to eternal death.

[ 30 : 03 ] This is no joke. Do not miss the gravity of these words and their consequence for eternity.

This is the most serious thing we could ever speak of. Because there is no other way to be forgiven and welcomed into God's eternal kingdom than through Jesus.

Jesus. So if there is anyone in this room who has not yet put your trust in Jesus, maybe you've heard about him many times before.

And you've never really put your faith in him. You've been on the fence. Maybe you believe that it's something you can do that will make you right before God, that will make you part of his kingdom.

Maybe today for the first time, you can see Jesus as the only God and Savior. Today is the day to put your faith and trust in Jesus alone.

[ 31 : 20 ] Don't wait. You don't even know if you have tomorrow. Say sorry for your sin. trust in what Jesus did on the cross to forgive you.

Thank him for giving you new life. And this day you will no longer be condemned. You will enter into God's eternal life.

And this leads us very briefly to the last part of the answer to the question of who will enter God's eternal life. And it's whoever walks in the light.

And what does it mean to walk in the light? Well, walking in the light is one of the fruits of being a born again believer in Jesus. It shows that you are sharing in God's eternal life.

So let's think about what that actually means. Read from verse 19. This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

[ 32 : 38 ] Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 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.

When we walk in darkness, we don't want our sin to be exposed. We don't want God or others to see it because we fear being condemned.

That's our spiritual condition before being born again. Jesus, he is the light who has come into this world.

That's what he called himself. Walking in the light means that you walk each day in him. It's not that we don't sin anymore.

No. On the contrary, we willingly bring our sin into the light of Jesus. We don't have to hide it anymore.

[ 33 : 49 ] it can no longer condemn us. We can freely bring our sin before God in daily repentance knowing that every sin is paid for and God will forgive us.

And here's another benefit of walking in the light. Rather than hiding our sin and not dealing with it, when we bring it into the light, we access the Spirit's help to fight against it.

Those who walk in the light become more and more like Jesus because they are daily bringing their sin to him, asking for his forgiveness and his help. So to those of you who are born again believers, practice walking in the light.

You don't have to hide anymore. Bring your sin before him without fear. And if you are here and you don't yet believe in Jesus, hear his words to you today.

You don't have to walk in the darkness of guilt, shame, and condemnation anymore. Jesus has won your freedom.

[ 35 : 08 ] if you would only believe in him, come out of the darkness and walk in his light.

To finish, remember at the start we said that there's no more important question to ask than who will enter God's eternal life. And Jesus has answered that for us today.

But what about Nicodemus? It's almost like John drops him off halfway through the passage. We don't get to hear the rest of the conversation.

John chose not to include that. We don't know how it ended. Do we know if Nicodemus was born again of the Spirit?

Do we know if he did go on to believe in Jesus and walk in the light? Well, John actually records two more instances in the gospel where Nicodemus was present.

[ 36 : 15 ] In chapter seven, we read that Nicodemus stood up for Jesus in the middle of the Jewish court, the Sanhedrin, and defended him before his fellow Pharisees.

And in chapter 19, get this, once Jesus has been crucified, two men come to take his body down from the cross and carry it to the tomb and prepare it for burial.

The first man, Joseph of Arimathea, the second man, Nicodemus, the Pharisee. I think there's enough evidence to suggest that he did believe.

He came to Jesus thinking that Jesus was just another teacher. He left with a new heart to believe in Jesus as God and Savior.

He came thinking he could earn his way into God's kingdom. him. He left having found eternal life through simple faith in Jesus. He came under the blanket of spiritual darkness and left walking in the light.

[ 37 : 38 ] what's your response to this Jesus? Are you thankful for the gift of new spiritual life when you were born again?

Are you thankful that you're no longer condemned and that you don't need to walk in the darkness anymore? Or maybe your response is to trust in Jesus for the first time today.

whatever your response is, let's respond to him now in the quietness for just a few moments.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, we thank you for your love and sending your one and only son.

Jesus, we thank you for taking our sin and bearing the wrath of God for us on the cross.

[ 39 : 17 ] Holy Spirit, thank you for giving us the gift of spiritual life to see our need of Jesus.

We plead with you to give that gift to those who desperately need it this day. For your glory and their good, we pray.

Amen. We're going to sing a song