

PM John 3:1-21

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[0 : 00] Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.

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

Nicodemus said to him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?

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

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

[1 : 15] The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

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

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.

[2 : 37] 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 loved the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and 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.

Amen. May God bless this reading of his word to us all. Let's again say... Well, turn with me in your Bibles to John chapter 3, to this passage that we've read together.

[3 : 57] And I want to draw your attention to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in this most important and vital passage from John's Gospel.

In this chapter, we are told on the authority of the Son of God himself, about the divine necessity, the absolute and vital need that we all have to be born again of the new birth.

Listen again to his exact words. John chapter 3, verse 3. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And then look at verse 5. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

And then look at verse 7. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

[5 : 17] Unless you cannot see the kingdom of God. Unless you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

You must be born again. Someone has said, A person may be ignorant of many things in religion, and yet still be saved.

But to be ignorant of the matters handled in this chapter is to be in the broad way that leads to destruction.

This chapter contains vital knowledge. It's essential that we understand it.

That we understand it. That we believe it. That we apply it to our own hearts individually. Because if we do not, we are lost.

[6 : 23] We are in our sins. We are condemned already. And we will perish everlastingly. And so it's vital, my friends, that we are not ignorant of the vital and important truths taught in John chapter 3.

But it's even more important that we apply these truths to our souls in a saving way. It's not sufficient just to know them.

Or to understand them. To be in a position to be able to answer a quiz question about them. We need to experience the power of the doctrine and teaching taught in this chapter.

Jesus says, You must be born again. And this is a truth that came as a shock to Nicodemus, this religious, devout, church-going person.

He was morally upright. He was a devoutly religious man. And what Jesus said to him came as something of a thunderbolt.

[7 : 44] A bolt from the blue, as it were. But Jesus tells him, you notice, not to marvel, not to be astonished, not to be surprised, or shocked, or taken aback at such a truth and its application to him.

Because even upright, moral, and devoutly religious people need to be born again if they are to see and if they are to enter the kingdom of God.

And this is the main point that I want us to really grasp from this passage of the divinely inspired scriptures this evening. A mighty, you could almost say, an almighty change is absolutely essential and necessary if you and I are to be saved.

A mighty change is absolutely necessary if we are to be saved. Although we have grown used to the expression the new birth, we have got to remember what a remarkable expression Jesus used when describing the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

He spoke of a new birth. So let's pretend we're hearing this for the very first time in our lives this evening.

[9 : 18] Let's put ourselves in the shoes of Nicodemus. And we're hearing Jesus speak to us and he uses this remarkable analogy, description, parallel.

You need a new birth. He says to Nicodemus, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And he declares the same truth using slightly different words in order to make it even more clear to this hearer's mind. He says, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Now what does Jesus mean by this expression? Born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God in verse 5. Well by this expression, Jesus meant Nicodemus to understand that no one, no one could become his disciple unless his inner person was as thoroughly cleansed and renewed by the Spirit as the outer person is cleansed by water.

The Apostle Paul in one of his letters speaks about the washing of regeneration. generation. We need our souls to be cleansed by the Spirit just as our outer bodies need to be washed with water.

[10 : 58] In other words, to possess the privileges of the Jewish religion, a person only needed to be born into Abraham's extended family according to the laws of natural generation.

but to possess the privileges of Christ's kingdom, a man or a woman or a boy or a girl needs to be born again of the Holy Spirit.

That's the only way to enter into the kingdom of God, to be born again of the Holy Spirit. And I want to emphasize this evening that the change connected to this new birth of which Jesus spoke far from being a slight or superficial change is absolutely the most dramatic, the most powerful, the most almighty change imaginable.

So Jesus here is not talking about something small and insignificant. He's not just saying, look, you need to turn over a new leaf in your life. You need to reform yourself.

you need to make some kind of amendment to the way you live or to how you think or how you speak. You need a moral transformation in your outlook.

[12 : 24] You need to alter your outer way of life. Now he's not saying any of that. He's speaking about something far more radical.

He's speaking about a new birth, a new birth. And that surely communicates to us a most thorough change of heart and character.

I want you to think of some of the terms that the Bible speaks about the new birth in this regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Think of the language the Bible uses.

It describes it as a resurrection from the dead. another picture it paints is of a new creation. If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation.

In John's Gospel it's spoken about as a passing from death into life. It's also described in terms of the implanting in our dead hearts of a new principle of life that comes from above.

[13 : 34] It is the calling into existence of a new creature. A new creature who has a new nature. Who has new habits of life. Who has new tastes, new desires, new appetites, new judgments, new opinions, new hopes, new fears.

And all of this and nothing less than this is implied when our Lord declares that Nicodemus and each and every one of us needs a new birth.

You must be born again. man. Why is this change needed? Well the answer to that question is this. This change of heart is absolutely necessary for salvation because of the corrupt condition in which we all without exception have been born.

Jesus says in John chapter 3 verse 6 that which is born of the flesh is flesh.

[14 : 51] In other words our nature the nature that we are born with is flesh. It is human nature fallen in Adam.

the apostle Paul explains this further in Romans chapter 8 verse 7 he says the mind that is set on the flesh that is controlled by the flesh by the fallen human nature he describes as hostile to God. The old King James version puts it in this term it is enmity with God. And the Bible says it's not is at enmity with God which is what we would want to say in English but it is actually enmity itself with God.

It's very nature is enmity with God. And since the fall of Adam we all come into the world without faith without love without the fear of God.

and what is worse we have no natural inclination to serve God or obey God and no natural pleasure in doing his will.

[16 : 11] And if left to ourselves we would never in a million years turn to God. So therefore the most accurate description of the change which we all need to make in order for us to become true Christians is the expression Jesus used here in his conversation with Nicodemus.

We need to be born again. We need a new birth. We need to be born from above. And one other thing I want to mention at this point and this is also very important for us to grasp but never to forget is that this mighty change is something that is beyond our power to make or to effect upon ourselves.

And the very name that Jesus gives to this change is an evidence of that truth. He calls it a birth. A birth.

Now think about that for a moment. No one is the author of his own existence and no one can give life to his own soul.

It is an impossibility. We might as well expect a dead man to give himself spiritual life as for a natural man to make himself into a Christian man or a Christian woman.

[17 : 41] What we need is a power from above and in fact the word that is used in the original Greek for again born again is a double entendre.

It is two meanings which are completely legitimate and in John's gospel you often find this he chooses words that have double meanings and both meanings equally apply.

To be born again that is a good and accurate translation but a good and accurate translation would also be to be born from above because the Greek word for again also means from above and the two are connected we are only born again as the spirit of God from above comes down and gives new life to our dead souls so by calling it a birth and a second birth or a birth from above by two logical arguments we are convinced that this change is beyond our power to effect upon ourselves but it is in the power of God to accomplish a power from above must be at work and according to

scripture this has to be the same power which created the world if you look over at 2nd Corinthians chapter 4 verse 6 there is a great statement by the apostle Paul where he says for God who said let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus

Christ how did you become a Christian well you can go through the various steps in your testimony and those things are all true but there is something that lies behind those steps the God who said let light shine out of darkness at the beginning has shone his light into your heart to give you the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ that's the ultimate reason that is the effective reason behind all the steps that you so clearly recall that brought you to faith in Jesus Christ but if God had not commanded that light to shine into your heart you would still be in darkness you would not be born from above you would still be dead in your transgressions and your sins you know human beings can do many things and it's a marvel what the ingenuity and power of man can achieve but human beings cannot give life either to themselves or to someone else that is the peculiar work of almighty

God that is why our Lord puts it in this way to Nicodemus you must be born again you need a new birth which is beyond your control and that birth comes from above and one last point I want to drive home to your hearts under this heading is this without this mighty change we cannot go to heaven but even if we could go to heaven without this mighty change we would not enjoy heaven if we were there our Lord's words on this point are ever so clear and emphatic he says unless one is born again he can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God heaven may be entered without money without being part of a certain social standing you don't need a university degree to get into heaven but it is as clear as day if words mean anything that no one can enter heaven without being born again and our nature you see needs to be radically transformed and changed if we are to enjoy heaven and if we are to feel at home in heaven we need to love what heaven represents we need to be in harmony with the laws of heaven with the values of heaven with the ethics of heaven this is why heaven needs to be in us before we are in heaven let me tell you a story

[22 : 48] I read years ago in the biography the life story of C.H. Spurgeon the great preacher of the 19th century Spurgeon began preaching when he was just about 16 years of age and it wasn't long before a little country church in Cambridge I think it was called him to be the pastor he was known as the boy preacher of the fens and on one occasion he was preaching on this very point of the need of the new birth and he said if a thief was to go to heaven without being born again he would be a thief still and he would pick the pockets of the angels well after the sermon one person in the congregation took issue with his words you silly boy do you not know that angels don't have pockets well the following

Sunday sermon Spurgeon stood up in the pulpit and apologized for using the crass illustration and he said since I was reliably informed that the angels of heaven do not have pockets what I should have said was that if a thief went to heaven without the new birth he would pinch the feathers out of the angels wings in other words we need a change of heart we need a change of nature so that our nature is no longer sinful and fallen but regenerated and holy and godlike and Jesus like a nature that is now appropriate and fitting for the holy and godly environment of heaven heaven would be hell to us if we were not born again and put into heaven and one further point we must see in these verses and that is the comparison which our

Lord Jesus Christ makes in explaining the new birth what is that comparison well you remember how he saw Nicodemus the writing was all over his face this confused and astonished man and the Lord knew that he was confused and perplexed and astonished at the things he had just heard from the Lord's lips and so the Lord graciously helped him by giving him an illustration about the wind he says the wind blows where it wishes and you hear it sound but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes so it is with everyone who is born of the spirit John chapter 3 verse 8 now what does he mean by using this illustration about the wind well there's much about the wind that we simply cannot explain it's mysterious we don't understand it you do not know says our Lord where it comes from or where it goes in other words we cannot handle the wind with our hands we cannot see the wind with our eyes when it blows we cannot point out the exact spot where its breath was first felt or the exact distance to which its influence will ultimately reach but just because there is much that is mysterious and unknown about the wind we don't for that reason deny the existence or the presence of the wind and so it is with the operations of the Holy Spirit there is much about it that we do not understand as far as the new birth of men and women and boys and girls is

concerned and the working of God's Spirit may be mysterious and sovereign and incomprehensible to us in so many different ways but it would be absolutely crazy for us to stumble over those operations because there is so much about them that we cannot explain but whatever mystery there is about the wind its presence may always be known by its sound and its effects Jesus says you hear its sound and when our ears hear the wind whistling in the rafters of our houses in the winter or when our eyes see the clouds being driven across the sky we say look there is the wind there is the wind and it's just the same with the operations of the Holy Spirit in the new birth of men and women it's marvellous yes it's incomprehensible yes but nevertheless the Holy Spirit's work can always be seen and known in other words the new birth is something that can't be hidden there will always be visible fruit what the Apostle Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit so in everyone who is born again of the Spirit of God there will be visible signs of his powerful presence and working in that person's life do you want to know what the marks of the new birth are the [29 : 08] Bible provides us with a list not an exhaustive list but nevertheless a very important list of the marks of the working of the Spirit through the new birth and you find them in John's first letter let me point out some you can read the letter and you could mark them out yourself very easily here's a taster for you 1st John chapter 5 and verse 1 what do we read there everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ then you have been born of God look at 1st John chapter 3 and verse 9 no one born of

God makes a practice of sinning for God's seed abides in him and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God he does not make a practice of sinning his attitude you see to sin has changed he once had a heart that was full of sin and lust and passion but now his heart has been changed and he has a desire for the opposite for the things that please God rather than the things that please the devil or look at 1st John chapter 2 and verse 29 if you know that he is righteous you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness righteousness has been born of him he does or practices righteousness the will of

God as revealed in the ten commandments he makes conscience of obeying the law of God and then look at 1st John chapter 3 and verse 14 the same chapter verse 14 what do we read there we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers speaking about the church of the Lord Jesus Christ made up of brothers and sisters in Christ the person who is born again loves the church wants to be in the church wants to do and serve in the church because he has been born of God and then look at 1st John chapter 5 and verse 4 for everyone who has been born of

God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world our faith the person born of the Holy Spirit overcomes the world the rest of the world the dead fish are all floating downstream but the lively fish the one born of the Spirit of God he resists the flow and current of the world he goes in the opposite direction he overcomes the world and then 1st John chapter 5 and verse 18 we know that we are from God and the whole world lies oh wrong verse do you find that your verse numbers in the Bible are getting smaller and smaller as you get older yeah do you need a magnifying glass I usually keep one in work I should take one with me into the pulpit verse 18 we know that everyone who has been born of

God does not keep on sinning but he who is born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him he keeps himself from the evil one and his temptations he protects himself by the power of the Holy Spirit against the devil's temptations so this is what a person is like who is born of the Spirit we cannot see the Spirit just as we cannot see the wind but we can hear its sound and we can see its effects and these are the effects of the new birth in the life of a sinner who turns to Christ for salvation and where these aspects of the fruit of the Spirit are to be seen we can be sure that there is the new birth of which our Lord speaks in John chapter 3 but friends the other side of that truth is equally important to see and to grasp you see the person who has these marks can be sure that the Spirit of God has given him new life but the person who does not have these marks can be sure that they have not yet been born of the

[35 : 13] Spirit of God that they are yet still dead in transgressions and sins and so in closing our service this evening we need to apply seriously this passage to our own hearts by asking the following straightforward and honest questions do you know anything of this mighty change spoken of by the Lord Jesus Christ in this passage of scripture have you been born again can the marks of the new birth be seen in your life can the sound of the Holy Spirit be heard in your daily conversation can the image of Jesus who is produced by the Spirit in the believer's heart and mind

and life be discerned in your life these are serious questions that really search us and helps us to get to know the truth about us happy we've been thinking about that this morning blessed divinely happy is the man or the woman or the boy or the girl who can give satisfactory answers to these questions but oh my friends a day will surely come when everyone who is not born again by the Spirit of God will one day wish that they had never been born at all you must be born again and to the astonished devoutly religious church going teacher of Israel Nicodemus Jesus said marvel not that I said to you you must be born again may God write these words upon our hearts and may we seek him with all our hearts knowing that he has promised if you seek me with all your heart you will find me he is to be found in the person of Jesus Christ come to him and receive the power to live a totally transformed life let us pray our God and heavenly father we thank you for your word which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path help us to walk in the light that you have given to us this evening from your word come we pray give us the new birth if we don't already possess it we've heard that we cannot produce it in our own lives it must come from above we are helpless poor in spirit yet we cry out Lord have mercy upon me and grant to me the life that I need and that only you can give through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen