

AM John 3:1-21

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[0 : 00] Okay, our reading this morning is taken from John's Gospel, the Gospel according to John chapter 3, page 1070 in your pew Bibles, if you're using one, page 1070.

! John chapter 3, I'll be reading the first 21 verses. Hear the Word of God. John 3, 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.

[1 : 25] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I say to you, you must be born again.

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 the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

Truly, 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.

[2 : 31] 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 hate 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.

[3 : 44] Amen. And may the Lord have his blessing to the public reading of his holy and inspired word. Amen. Amen. Please turn me once again to that passage that we've read.

John chapter 3. It's a great topic we'll be considering this morning. To be born again. The necessity of being born again.

Now perhaps you may ask the question, why this topic? You can see in verse 3 and verse 5, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Say, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And in verse 5, truly, truly, I say to you, if he repeats himself, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Now why this topic?

It's not directed at anyone in particular. This is not a sermon. Well, if you feel it's for you, wonderful. But it's not designed or written with any particular one in mind.

[4 : 53] Or any particular congregation in mind. But it's a very important subject. It's a subject that I've been thinking about for quite a while. In my own reflections on this matter.

And of course, as one who only preaches on a kind of irregular basis. I'm not able to preach throughout consecutive sermons on a particular entire books and so on.

And so, various topics spring up into my mind more than others. And this is one of those subjects, one of those topics that is currently very close to my heart.

Notice this, first of all, that this is a lesson that the Lord Jesus Christ directed to the religious leader of the Israelites.

Nicodemus was his name. He was a Pharisee. He was a religious leader of the Israelites. He wasn't some atheist or atheistic kind of pagan.

[5 : 55] He wasn't somebody who was not a Jew. Somebody from the outside. He was one of them. One of the, not just a Jewish person, but he was a religious leader amongst the Jewish people.

And yet, we notice that Nicodemus evidently did not realize that there was such an important need to be born again. He didn't realize that being born again was absolutely necessary for entry into the kingdom of God.

And I do mean this. He didn't realize it was absolutely necessary for, to be born again in order to enter into the kingdom of God. And this is a man who was very much well taught, experienced in the scriptures.

At least in the Old Testament scriptures. He would have known it back to front, left and right, inside out. He was very much well versed in the scriptures.

And yet, for some reason, the idea of being born again just completely wasn't there. He was evidently not, didn't realize the absolute need to be born again.

[7 : 14] So this suggests to us that this particular doctrine, this teaching, is one that is easily neglected. One that is easily neglected.

One that is easily forgotten. Perhaps blurred. Perhaps covered over by tradition. In the case of Nicodemus, that is very likely to be the case.

Perhaps covered over by politics, education. And let's be clear, this is not just for Nicodemus.

This could very well be for us too. It could very well be for us too. This particular issue addresses some of the most fundamental problems of the world today.

I don't mean just British society, and I don't mean just Scottish society. I'm talking about the fundamental problems of the world today. You know, we live in a day and age where we have all kinds of labels.

[8 : 14] Labels galore. You know, if you don't like somebody, just throw in a few labels at the person. The person is far right, just because you don't like what he's saying or what she's saying.

You can throw somebody, throw the label of this person is far left. It's so easy to throw labels here and there. You may have seen in various interviews, somebody said something about some issue and the labels that comes out.

You know, you kind of think, how in the world do you come up with those words? How in the world do you come up with those words? Far left, far right.

I've even heard things like Nazis being used as a label. You know, you almost think, it's almost as if you think that in this society, there's only two types of people, left and right.

I wish it would be the same for male and female, but you know, we live in such a strange society. But you know what?

[9 : 26] There's nothing new under the sun. Nothing new under the sun. In the days of Christ, there was Jews and there's Gentiles. There's Jews and there's Gentiles.

And then along comes Jesus. And he confronts Nicodemus with these words. Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

You must be born again. That is the very words of Christ himself. That is the very words of Christ himself. This world, we see in this day and age, is divided into all kinds of different cultures, different countries, different race.

I've already mentioned all the labels that's thrown around here, there and everywhere. But you know what? In the sight of Almighty God, the Lord only divides mankind, all of us, into two categories.

Either we are born again, or we are not. Either we are born again, or we are dead, spiritually. Now that is a radical idea.

[10 : 53] When Jesus said, truly, truly, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And in verse 7, do not marvel that I say to you, you must be born again.

He's addressing, yes, the religious leader of his time, but he's pointing out to all of us, that this is a radical idea. So radical that even Nicodemus completely didn't realize it.

Well, he ought to know it, but he didn't realize its significance, its importance. You know, we live in a day and age of radical ideas.

You know, you have the media, social media, the news outlets, peddling all kinds of new ideas. Radical ideas, so they say. You know, from environmental issues, to social issues, to even biological issues.

Some of them are serious, some of them are just downright wacky. And they tell us that we need radical ideas. And I've heard this phrase, I never heard it before when I was growing up in Singapore, but I get a lot of it in this country.

[12 : 09] You know, we need radical ideas to solve all the problems in society, to promote equality, fairness, happiness. Well, how is it going for everyone?

Have, have they solved all the issues of society? The environmental, the social, the biological. Are we truly happy? Is this truly a fair society?

I would say, no. Society is, is worse off, in this day and age, when, when we, discard the Bible, and this country, I don't just mean Scotland, I mean, in Great Britain, has discarded the Bible, for, at least two generations.

Maybe even more, some may say. They've discarded the Bible, they say that the Bible is full of, fiction, and it's full of fairy tales, and it's not to be, believed in. Well, what have we got?

The idea of sin, is now swept under the carpet. The idea of God's law, that is broken, which is sin. All that is kind of, swept under the carpet.

[13 : 31] And that is where we are, today. And if you want a radical idea, this is the radical idea, from the Lord himself.

Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Do not marvel that I say to you, you must, be born again. That is what we need.

So we need to unpack, what this means. We need to understand, really very clearly, what it means to be born again. Before we think about, what it means to be born again, let's work out, what it does not mean.

Okay, let's work out, what it does not mean. Being born again, it doesn't mean, it's not the same as, being a cultural Christian. I may have mentioned this before, is a phrase that has been, in recent years, had been in the media, due to some folk like Richard Dawkins, the well-known atheist, who described himself as a cultural Christian, you know, one who, who likes the idea of Christianity in society, but just not, everything, you know, enough of Christianity, to keep the hymns, to keep the, the nice cathedrals, to keep the, the Christmas and the Easter, holidays, just enough of Christianity, to, to, to, to, to, to, to keep that religion going.

There are those who are cultural Christians, who just like, though, that, that form of Christianity, that doesn't demand anything from them, that there's no commitment from them, required from the Lord.

[15 : 24] Just enough to be born, perhaps, christened, married in the church, and buried in the graveyard of the church.

Cradle to the grave. Hatch, match, and dispatch. As those of you who come through Anglican circles, who have heard of that.

Hatch, match, and dispatch. Is that it? Is that all there is to it, to the Christian faith? Some perhaps may think that, well, to be a, to be a Christian is, you just need to be educated.

And we've certainly seen this in, in, not in this century, but in the previous centuries, where Christianity is, just being about, being educated. Educated in the Christian things.

Enough of, of Bible knowledge, but just not the commitment to Christ. Just enough Bible knowledge, to squeeze into heaven sideways, as one puts it.

[16 : 41] And some perhaps may think of the Christian faith, as just following our traditions. Our, our traditions, whether it be the church tradition, or whether it be parents' tradition. And we have to be quite careful with that.

We don't want our children, just to, take on our religion, what we call, second-hand religion, if you know what I mean. Second-hand Christianity. Second-hand Christianity. Those of us, who are, who are parents, with children, we have to be quite careful with that.

I, I, I have five children, as some of you know. Uh, they're all, all teenagers. The oldest is, 20 now. Um, and we, I, we have to be quite, as parents, we have to be quite careful.

They parrot some of our words. Some of the words that we use, they parrot it. But then when you ask them, when they were younger, you know, do you know what it means? Completely clueless. Uh, so we have to be quite careful.

That, that's not what it means to be born again. All that I just said so far, that is not what it means to be born again. You notice this, that this is a conversation between, between Jesus and a good, loyal Pharisee.

[17 : 56] He was highly educated, no doubt about that. He was well versed in the law of God, the Old Testament law, and he was also well versed in the traditions of the elders.

Fellow, fellow Pharisees. He was ethnically a Jew, Nicodemus. He was ethnically a Jew, and so culturally, he was one of God's people.

And he was very much one who does good works in his community. Uh, you know, he, he, he viewed Jesus as a rabbi. We see that in verse 2.

Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God. Wow, wonderful. You know, he's put, he, he put Jesus in the same level as himself. You know, okay. Okay, you're, you're good, you're good.

You know, you've done very well. You know, you, you, you've done some wonderful things. Okay, I, I'll lift you up to be on par with me. Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God. That is as far, as, as, as, as high as he could see Christ.

[19 : 02] He could see Jesus Christ only as high as himself. On par with himself. Social standing wise, near as a carpenter's son.

But okay, he's done some wonderful things. So I, I, I, I, my estimation of him, he's taught well. He's a teacher. That's why he says, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God.

No one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him. So perhaps, he feels a little bit threatened. You know, Jesus could do some miracles. He could teach well.

Perhaps he feels a bit threatened. So, okay, I, I don't want to see him in just as a carpenter's son. I'll just raise him up, up to my level. And Jesus is saying, ah, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And then he's later going to rebuke Nicodemus in the nicest possible way. Are you the teacher of Israel? And yet, you do not understand these things? In verse 10. You see, the problem is, he has the wrong idea of his own religion.

[20 : 11] Nicodemus has the wrong idea of his own religion. He took too much pride in his own standing in society. Yeah, I'm a rabbi. Yeah, you know, people look up to me. People look up to me as the, the rabbi.

Or maybe one of a rabbis. But, you know, people look up to me. I'm, I'm in good social standing. You know, surely with my good life, with my rabbinic teachings, and, and, and, and my, and my standing in society.

Surely, surely, God will accept me. That's evidently what he was thinking. You know, he had all the training, all the teaching about the Old Testament, and yet, in his mind, he thought, wrongly, he thought that God would accept him, because he was a rabbi.

Well, perhaps, he didn't realize that, in the Old Testament, this whole idea of being born again, is already mentioned. There was already warnings there.

There were already, red flags being raised. The Old Testament, already says, about considering a new covenant. We read in Jeremiah 31, famous verse, For this is the covenant that I will make, with the house of Israel, after those days, declares the Lord.

[21 : 35] I will put my law within them, and I will write them in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. That is already a hint, of the new birth.

The law of God will be written in their hearts. And then again, in Ezekiel chapter 11, we read, God said, I will give them one heart, and a new, a new spirit, I will put within them, I will remove the heart of stone, from their flesh, and I will give them a heart of flesh.

See there? In the Old Testament, in the book of Ezekiel, there's already small hints there. The new birth. And again, in Deuteronomy, the Lord, your God, will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your offspring, that you love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, that you may live.

So being a cultural Christian, is not the same as, experiencing a new birth. So, being born again, we will come to what it means, to be born again.

To be born again, to put it in a nutshell, is to be a Christian. And that, to be a Christian, there must be a radical change, of the person.

[22 : 54] To be born again, means, when God works a work in our hearts, when we become a Christian, nobody is born as a Christian.

We are born in sin. We are born as fallen human beings. But when we become Christians, when God works that work of grace in our hearts, that change is so radical, is so radical, that Jesus described it as being born again.

It's a new birth. We all have our first birth. That's the reason why we are sitting here today. But now we need to be born again. That's the second birth. And this second birth is as radical, and as amazing, and as miraculous, as our first birth.

the use of that, of the concept, of being born again, it's not, something that Jesus has cooked up, or just imagined.

This is something that is, is real, is genuine. We read, some, some, one writer puts it this way. This is where genuine Christian experience really begins, with a radical work of God's grace, that is like a birth.

[24 : 21] The beginning of a new life. The transformation of someone into a new creature. Another writer puts it this way, to be born again, is a secret act of God, in which he imparts new spiritual life to us.

Or another writer puts it this way, to escape from sin, to be happy in the world to come, it is necessary, that man, or woman, should be changed in his principles, his feelings, and his manner of life.

This change, this radical change, or the beginning of a new life, is called, the new birth, to be born again. So that's what we need.

And I've said already, the reason why we need to be born again, is because, of our sin. And it's so, it's such a fundamental, need, that if we are not born again, we will not, we will not enter into the kingdom of God.

We read in verse 3, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. God, it's a, it's a fundamental need.

[25 : 49] It's a fundamental need. In order to, enter into the kingdom of God, and this is not just about heaven itself, but it's about the kingdom of God, even here, in this world, to become a Christian, to be, enter the kingdom of God.

Where, where before we are Christians, we are in the kingdom of this world. Where we become Christians, we are moved into, the kingdom of God. We will enter into the kingdom of God.

You know, with Nicodemus, what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus is, it's not just some new teaching that you need. Nicodemus could be under the illusion that, oh well, maybe all I need is just additional, you know, like, like how, how we, how we, we study in certain universities, you have to module, the modular system.

And you study, number of 60 credits in, in one semester, and so, you know, if you lack that last 10 credits, you just take a module, and just add it on, to make up that 60 credits in one semester.

That is not what Jesus is saying. That is not what Nicodemus needs. You don't just need a new module, to be added to your life. You don't just need another additional 10 credits, 20 credits, to fulfill that, that, that, that quota.

[27:18] No, what you need is a, a new birth. It's a new birth. Now, we can, we don't have to, kind of, think too much about this, but, you know, we, we, we, we trust that Nicodemus, later on, somewhere along the way, from John chapter 3, to John chapter 19, somewhere along the way, he became, a born again, believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, because we see later on, when Jesus is being buried, he came together with Joseph of Aramethia, in, in, John 19, um, he brought, a mixture of myrrh, and aloes, uh, and he, he and Joseph of Aramethia, took the body of Jesus, and, and bound it up, with linen cloth, and with spices, and buried, in, the tomb, um, so we trust that somewhere along the way, he, he became, born again, he became a believer, but at this precise moment, uh, he wasn't one, and I said already, the reason, of the need to be born again, is because of our sin, in the New Testament, we read, that, every single one of us, regardless of which, which, uh, country you're from, which city you're from, which county you're from, which part of the world we are from, it doesn't matter, we, we are all born, in sin, the scriptures tells us, in the Psalms, we are shapen, in iniquity, and in sin, did my mother conceive me, we're born in sin, in Ephesians, we read that we are, dead, dead in trespasses and sins, and that's what we are, that is, that is God's declaration, concerning us, as, as a human race,

Romans chapter 3, we read, that all have sinned, and come short, the glory of God, with our, with us being, born in sin, and dead in, in sin, we will commit, our own sins, you know, that very famous saying, we are, we are, we sin, because we are sinners, we are born in sin, and so that's why, we commit sin, it's not the other way around, it's not that, because we, we sin, and then we become sinners, no, we are already sinners, and then we commit, our own sins, and so, in the sight of almighty God, we will always be, we will always come short, of the glory of God, and of course, with that, there are consequences, when we break God's law, when we sin, and break God's law, there will be consequences, there will be day of judgment,

I also have Romans again, we read that the wages of sin is death, so, the question, that I raised earlier, why is it that society, will never experience, true happiness, true fairness, equality, why society will never experience that, is because we are all born in sin, sometimes you, when we think about, when we, when you hear the news, and we hear some of the, ideas that's put forward, in trying to resolve, some of the, issues in society, yes, it's nothing wrong, with trying to resolve, the issues of society, and I'm not, I'm not, I'm not disparaging that, but when we take, like Nicodemus, when we take, the point of view, that we are all, wonderful, and we're all good, fundamentally good, and fundamentally wonderful, and all we need, is just raise everybody up, to our levels, well, then we've missed, the whole point, that's, that's the problem, with society today, and we can't raise people, up to our own, imaginary levels, then what we sometimes see, we get the blame game, we blame everybody, we blame everybody,

I read recently, and this is not my area of expertise, but about the drug use in Scotland, and some of the reasons behind it, and this has been published as well, it's not, I'm not, I'm not cooking this up, for my imagination, some of the reasons, why, why there's, high drug use in Scotland, poverty, lack of opportunities, no jobs, bad weather, how that works, I have no idea, bad weather, no hope for advancement, boredom, so that's the reason, because of that, people have tried to resolve, the drug issues, by working around those reasons, the whole issue of sin is not there, the whole issue of, we need to be born again, is not there, we understand why, but that's the problem, it's not something that's fundamental, in our society, the issue of sin, and the need to be born again, so how does this work, we need to be born again, how does this work, we read born again, or sometimes in, we read in verse 5, about being born of water, and the spirit, and so on, or born from above, if you have it in your margins, born of the spirit, we wouldn't go into all the details, of that, but to be born again, is like, just like the natural birth, just like our very first birth, when we are conceived, in our mother's wombs, we, we don't know, when it happens, well nobody would know, when it happens, but it has happened, and nobody knows, what it's like,

I know, these days, you got the sonography, and you can kind of, do the scan, and you can see, the baby being formed, strictly speaking, you don't know, what's going on, and there are a lot of things, that we still don't know, what's going on, in a natural birth, in our first birth, but we know, that's life, we know, that's life, and likewise, the new birth, to be born again, is the same thing, it has to be worked, by the spirit of God, we can't see, what's going on, but we can see, the effects of it, we can see, the effects of it, in the case of, our first birth, if you have a scan, the lady, if the mom has a scan, you can see the baby, moving around, sometimes you can see, the baby is sucking, his own thumb, and so on, kicking, in the womb, you can see all of that, and of course, the effects of that, is the mother, will also get all the, side effects of it, the morning sickness, the swollen tummy, so that you can see, the effects, of the first birth, for the child, and also for the mom, and it's the same with, our second birth, by the spirit, by the Holy Spirit, we can't see the effect, which is why, we read in, in verse 8, the wind blows, where it wishes, you hear it sound, but you do not know, where it comes from, or where it's going, so it is, with everyone, who is born of the spirit, we don't know, exactly, exactly, what's going on, but we can see, the effects of it, so we are dead, in trespasses, and sins, we need, to be born again, whether we are rich, or poor, whether we are smart, or simple, whether we are winsome, in character, we are annoying, in our personality, regardless of all that, we need to be born again, what happens, all of a sudden, the Bible, that we read, perhaps in, before we are born again, is, it's a closed book, something that we don't understand, something we don't really care about, when we are born again,

[36 : 31] God gives us the ability, to hear, understand, believe, and obey, the scriptures, Jesus, we are given life, and this book, which is a living, written word, comes alive, to us, it's now alive, it's a living book, we read, and suddenly realize, wow, that's me, that's what I need, that's who I need, that's Jesus, the son of God, Jesus Christ, we see him, and we read about, about the Lord Jesus Christ, and we see, that he's lived, that perfect, sinless life, and then he went, to the cross of Calvary, died on the cross of Calvary, buried, and rose again, on the third day, and we don't just read it, but we suddenly realize, I need him, I need him, and while we look around us, and many, many people may still, mock, the Lord Jesus Christ, use his name in vain, curse his name in vain, we suddenly see him, and we say, this is who I need,

I need him, you know, I may have used this example before, it's like being, the difference between, a spectator, in a sporting event, or being a player, in a sporting event, you know what it's like, if you go to a football game, or baseball, or basketball, you know, you're a spectator, you sit in the stands, you know, you shout at the, at the referees, you know, you tell the referees, how they should do their jobs, you know, you shout at the manager, of your home team, how he should do his job, you shout at the opposing, managers, telling them, you know, don't be so rough, on our own home team, you know, you're a spectator, in a sport, and this is, you know, it's all in good fun, and well, you hope it's all in good fun, you know, we're spectators, in a sporting event, and perhaps maybe, when, before we are born again, we come to, to, to the passage, before us, or we come to a church, and we are spectators, you can sit, and we can, perhaps, you know, pass judgment, over the person, who's preaching, or we'll still, pass judgment, over what you're reading, you know, but when you're born again, it's quite a different thing, you're no more, a spectator, you're now, a player, you've got to put on, the jersey, you've got to go, into the field, you've got to, boot up, lace up, jersey up, get you to the field, start playing the game, you know, it's a big difference, isn't it, it's a big difference, when you're a spectator, and when you're a player, in a sporting event, and it's quite different, when you are, born again, it's quite a different thing, but that's the wonderful thing, is when you're born again, you know where you're going, unlike if you, if you're in a sporting event, you're thrown into a, into a position, of being a player, and you do not know, how to play the game well, you'll be in trouble, thankfully, in the Christian life, it's not quite like that, when you're born again, born of the spirit, born from above, you know where you're going, the Lord himself, will guide you, through his word, through the Bible, that we have, when you're born again, you've been declared, righteous, before almighty God, you've been freely forgiven, by the grace of God, through that salvation, that comes through, the Lord Jesus Christ, you have, you have that, as your solid ground, grounding, your solid foundation, and the path, that leads to heaven, is there for you, that's why, one writer, puts it this way,

Christ did not die, to make it more easy, to get to heaven, than it was before, he died, to make a certain, to make, to make certain, the way to heaven, that was impossible, before, see the difference, Christ did not die, to make it more easy, to get to heaven, than it was before, but he died, to make certain, a way to heaven, that was impossible, before, and the way for us, if you are believers, in Christ, if we are born again, that way to heaven, is now made clear to us, because of the, because of the Lord, Jesus Christ, there's a big difference, there is not, there's a big difference, something for us, if you are here, this morning, and you are not, a believer in Christ, well the encouragement, is seek the Lord, pray to him, ask him, to change you, ask him to, make you, a new person, ask him to give you, that new life, that you need, that you desperately need, if you see the sins, in your own life, you see that you're a sinner, and you need salvation, through the Lord,

[illegible]