

PM John 2:23-3:15

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: 01 November 2020

Preacher: Rev Douglas Cranston

[0 : 00] That's great. Thank you. Evening Jane. Hi.

Hi Robert. Good evening. Good evening.

Well, good evening friends. I don't know whether to welcome you. I congratulate you for making it out tonight. Thank you for coming. I'm sure we all benefit from each other's company and as the old African missionary should say, the journey's part of the gift. So thank you for being here this evening. I felt pretty stupid if I hadn't been standing here on my own.

And just to remind you, and most of you were here, but let me just go over that prayer meeting Bible study led by David Kenyon is a missionary night and that's on Wednesday at seven o'clock next Lord's Day, God willing.

And Tom McKenzie from Downvale Free Church will conduct worship at the usual time of 11 and six in the evening. Again, a reminder and I commend this to you. The Christian Institute start their autumn online lectures tomorrow evening.

[2 : 33] Also on Monday the 9th and the 16th of November at 7.30 in the evening PM. And the subject is Christian leadership in times of crisis.

Minutes of the annual congregational meeting are held in August and are available on the table there. Please help yourself. And as you know, the work began by the contractor to eradicate the dry rot.

And that, as is often the case, has revealed that it is much more extensive than first thought, involving the beams outside the vestry, inside the vestry door and upstairs, both in the porch and through the swing doors.

And we're waiting a revised estimate for that. Additionally, we're going to need a roofer. And because roofers are locally overcommitted, it's unlikely that the roof work will be undertaken until the new year.

And that work needs to be completed before the interior work starts upstairs. It means that we will be using this lower hall for a much longer period than first envisaged.

[3 : 43] But we're very grateful to God for the provision over these years of this second place that affords us an opportunity to worship together.

There's no update from this morning on Jack. We continue to remember him in our prayers and we commit him to the Lord in these difficult days as we do his wife, praying that they might both know the Lord's presence and the Lord's company.

Let me again read from the Heidelberg Catechism as we are called to worship. What do you believe when you say, I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?

And the answer is that the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who of nothing made heaven and earth with all that is in them, who likewise upholds and governs the same by his eternal counsel and providence, is for the sake of Christ his Son, my God and my Father, in whom I so trust, as to have no doubt that he will provide me all things necessary for body and soul, and further that whatever evil he sends upon me in the veil of tears, he will turn to my good, for he is able to do it, being Almighty God and willing also being a faithful Father.

Let us worship God, we sing to his praise and his glory from the Psalm 24, from the Metrical Psalm book. We sing verses 7 to 10, Ye gates lift up your heads on high.

[5 : 35] You ancient gates lift up your heads, You doors be open wide, So make the name of glory come For ever to apply, But who is this is the soul's of the King, For glorious King is he, It is the Lord of strength and might, The Lord of victory, It is the Lord of strength and might,

The Lord of victory. You ancient gates lift up your heads, You doors be open wide, So make the name of glory come For ever to apply, The Lord of prayer for ever to subs purge for your souls, The

Lord of glory come But who artists join the soul, The Lord of glory come The Lord of glory come
From the pirates who harness■,
God bless you.

Alleluia. Amen. Amen. Amen.

It feels so strange to sit when that's been sung. Anyway, our brother Robert's going to lead us in prayer this evening.

[8 : 48] Thank you, brother. Our Heavenly Father, we bow before your majesty now.

We praise you as the everlasting King, the everlasting God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Creator, our Redeemer and our Judge.

And we thank you for your Son, the Lord Jesus, who indeed has entered in through those everlasting gates. We think of that grand scene after his suffering, that he was raised from the dead and ascended to high and entered into the presence of his Father.

Father, we thank you that he has done so for us, representing us, interceding for us at the throne of the Most High.

We thank you that he does so, offering up a sacrifice, as our Great High Priest, having offered up himself, offered up his own blood for our sins.

[10 : 02] We confess our sins before you. We ask you by your Spirit to make us ever more aware of our sins, that we might be ever more appreciative of your Great Grace.

We thank you for the forgiveness that is ours through faith in Christ. And we ask you tonight that each of us may rest in that forgiveness.

We thank you for the great gift of the Holy Spirit, for all that he does in teaching us, in leading us in the ways of righteousness, in showing us the glory of Christ.

We thank you for the new birth of which we began to hear this morning. And we pray that you would grant to our brother here, as he opens up the Word of God, the power of your Spirit, anointing from on high, to open up to us further these wonderful truths.

Lord, we do commit to you at the outset of this service, our brother Jack. Lord, we are devastated by this news of his sudden hospitalisation.

[11 : 30] We know that Avril must be even more so. Thank you that she has been able to go in and visit briefly. But Lord, we ask you that both Jack and Avril may be able to rest under your sovereign care in this situation.

And we ourselves also. Lord, if he is taken from us, we give you thanks for him. Thank you for his wonderful knowledge of the Scriptures.

Thank you for his love for Christ. Thank you for his holiness. Thank you for his ministry amongst us and for his fellowship.

But if you would restore him to us, Lord, for us now, how much better. Lord God, pour out your gracious Spirit now upon us and throughout this service, guide all our thoughts.

Grant to us that we may, as a church, grow. Grant wisdom to those in authority over us and protection. Grant, Lord, that your will may be done in the coming days with the United States election and around the world so many problems and yet one glorious answer.

[12 : 58] Grant us tonight to hear and to understand more and more of him who is indeed the supreme answer to every conceivable problem, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Thank you, brother. So I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles back to where we were this morning to the end of the second chapter of John.

As I was explaining, this is one of the very rare instances where the chapter division is not at all helpful because as I was explaining this morning, what we have in the first part of chapter 3 is actually the opening out of what is going on in these last three verses of chapter 2.

And I hope you found that helpful and a useful insight into understanding something of what is going on here.

So let's read carefully for this is the Word of God. Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

[14 : 25] But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about him for he himself knew what was in man.

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

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 say to you, you must be born again.

[15 : 55] The wind blows where it wishes and you hear it sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit.

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

Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we 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 Moses lifted up the servant in the wilderness, so must the son of man be lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

[17 : 02] And so on, and thanks be to God for this, his holy word and to his name be all praise and glory given. Let's return to the psalm that we sang this morning, psalm number 95.

We sang the first six verses this morning and we'll return there and sing the remaining verses of psalm number 95 from verse 7 for he's our God, the people we of his pasture are.

Psalm 95 verse 7 to the end to God's praise. I'm sorry, we just have the, there's the one to six again. Oh yeah, we're doing one to six again. Okay, that'll do perfectly well.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. O come, let us sing to the Lord, come let us everyone, adore you Lord, make true the Lord, of the earth salvation.

Let us be born, his presence come, with rich and thankful voice.

[18 : 32] Let us sing sad to him with grace and make the joyful noise.

For God, our great, our great day, above all God's he is, as all the earth are in his hand, the strength of his disease.

His honor, the faith of the Lord. His face and most of us has the feeling of for he rules and safety, Thank you.

Amen. Let's pray.

Almighty God, open your word to us this night, O Lord. Show us ourself. Show us the Saviour. And open your word to us, Heavenly Father, to your praise and to your glory.

[20 : 52] And to the advancement of your kingdom according to your sovereign purpose. Through Jesus Christ, O Lord, we ask this. Amen. Amen.

Well, we had a fairly extensive introduction this morning and I don't intend to go over that in any great detail.

I will make passing reference to it, but let's just really get into what we are thinking about this morning. I don't know if any of you are country western fans.

Perhaps some of you are and you're just not prepared to admit it in such respectable company. I am quite proudly so. One of the great country western singers is a man called Hank Williams.

And even if you are not a country western fan, you will know that he was one of the greats. In 1948, Hank Williams wrote what is probably his best known song, I Saw the Light.

[22 : 06] I wandered so aimlessly. Life filled with sin. I wouldn't let my dear Saviour in. Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night.

Praise the Lord. I saw the light. If I wasn't now a free church minister, I would have brought my guitar and I could have given you a couple of the other verses.

The first line in the opening verse seems to be a perfect description of Hank Williams' life. A life troubled, tormented by disease, by drugs, by drink.

He died at the age of 29. In the back of his Cadillac somewhere in West Virginia. A few months before that, he was doing a concert in San Diego.

And he was so intoxicated as he went on stage for the first performance that he stumbled off the stage after only having sung two songs.

[23 : 17] The show promoter at that time started to fill him with coffee, started to drive him around with the windows down in the car.

And trying to get him up for the second performance, decided that they would sing his song to get him sober. I wandered so aimlessly, life filled with sin.

I wouldn't let my dear saviour in. Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night. Praise the Lord. I saw the light. And after singing that first verse, Williams said to the promoter, Minnie Perl.

Minnie, I don't see the light. There ain't no light. Now, as we pick up this wonderful account of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus.

We can see that Nicodemus was in a very different way. Exactly the same predicament as Hank Williams was in.

[24 : 32] And that's the most extraordinary of statements. Because what we know about this man is that he was one of the elite, as we saw this morning.

He was a Pharisee. He knew all about the law. He knew about every means of keeping the law. I don't know if many of you have many Jewish friends.

I have one or two really friends of friends, family of friends who are Jews. They're really Jews by ethnic identity.

When you actually speak to them about their Jewish faith, they really don't believe very much. They're what I would call modern Jews.

Liberal Jews. And while they keep all the ceremonies and all the routines of being Jewish, and while they circumcise their male children and do all that, they do so by means of keeping that Jewish identity going.

[25 : 43] Rather than by any understanding at all of what any of the significance of any of these events are.

But when we come to Nicodemus, we're only going to understand how amazing this story is, this encounter with Jesus is. If we understand that, that's not Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was religious. Nicodemus believed the Old Testament from beginning to end.

You know the difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees believed the whole of the Bible. The Sadducees, who were the other part of the ruling party, they only believed the first five books of the Old Testament.

But the Pharisees, they believed in life after death. They believed in righteous judgment. They believed in resurrection. They believed in heaven.

[26 : 53] The Sadducees, because, for example, there was no mention of resurrection in the first five books of the Bible, they didn't believe in the resurrection.

That's why they were sad, you see. Poor Joe. They didn't believe in any of that. But the Pharisees did.

These were the devout. These were the religious. These were the Sabbath keepers. To the nth degree. In ways that I could bore you with, but we can't possibly imagine.

And here he was. Right at the height of his power. And of his religious sect. One of the elite ruling council.

One of the people. And he now comes to Jesus. Representative, as we saw this morning, of that group of people that Jesus had not entrusted to himself.

[28 : 06] Jesus knew that these were not converted people, even though they had believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. And we saw this morning, and we began to tease this out, as we saw, this man came to Jesus by night.

Now, just stop there. You would not believe the amount of pen that has been used in trying to explain why Jesus came, that this man came to Jesus by night.

Pages and pages and chapters. Giving insight into why he came by night. Let me tell you why he came by night.

Because he didn't come during the day. That's it. That's all there is to it. Some people have said, oh, this is indicative of his spiritual condition.

Well, it was indicative of his spiritual condition. But I don't believe that for a minute that that's what John was doing when he was saying that Jesus came by night. Why did he come by night? I have no idea why he came by night.

[29 : 14] Probably because he was busy during the day. Don't get bogged down in trying to work out details that are not clear and not plain.

As Alistair Berg says, the main things are the plain things. And if it's not plain, if it's not obvious, the chances are it's not meant to be that significant.

He came to Jesus by night. It was dark when he came. Now, we could speculate endlessly to why that was the case.

I think it was probably because, as I said, he was the only Pharisee that we read about in the New Testament who actually came to Jesus in this way and in this manner. And maybe it was the only way he could engage with Jesus without being exposed as being interested or as being somebody who wanted to engage with Jesus.

But I have no evidence for that. And so, you take that with a pinch of salt, friends, unless the Bible tells us let's just move on. And as we move on, we see what it does tell us.

[30 : 26] That you are a teacher come from God. We know that you are a teacher come from God. As I said, that relates to the end of chapter 2. And he was believed in at their level of belief because he had done many signs.

So let's look at what happens next. Verse 3. Jesus answered him. Now, hang on a minute. Nicodemus hasn't asked any question here.

He answers a question later on. If you'll notice, in verse 9, Nicodemus said to him, how can these things be? Question mark. And Jesus answered him. But in verse 3 of chapter 3, Jesus answered him.

He's not asked a question here. Now, remember what we said this morning. Part of John's purpose here is to show that Jesus is God.

And so, what John is doing here is, he's actually showing us that in this encounter, and again, this is a wee bit of speculation.

[31 : 43] I don't believe this encounter lasted 15 verses. I think this was, there was much more to this conversation than it's here.

But you see, John has edited this out. But what he leaves us is, Jesus answered him, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Jesus, as we've already heard in the end of that previous chapter, he knew men. And Jesus, you see, supernaturally in his omniscience, he knew everything.

can see right through this guy. He knows why he's here. He can see beyond the rabbi's robes.

He can see beyond the self-righteousness. He can see beyond the status. He can see beyond the old school tie, to put it in modern parlance.

[32 : 52] He can see beyond our Christian heritage. He can see beyond the positions that we hold within the church. And he can get right into the heart.

And when he gets right into the heart of Nicodemus, Nicodemus is instantly in bother. because Jesus can see that this man needs to hear something of absolute importance and significance.

The implications here are astonishing. And this is why this is a powerful, powerful encounter. And indeed, this is why the term being born again is so despised in liberal churches.

Because it comes in an encounter with the Lord, with a man who has worldly righteousness coming out of his ears. He's full of it.

and Nicodemus is instantly challenged and rebuked and brought to nothing by what Jesus says to him.

[34 : 26] Why? Because he's exposed as being a hypocrite. Jesus goes on to say to this man, why do you ask me all these things?

Are you not a teacher of Israel? And yet you do not understand these things? You've got so caught up, son, in all your fancy religious trammings, trappings, all your religious laws, and your obsession with keeping those laws, you've missed the whole point of everything that that Old Testament speaks about.

We read this morning from Ezekiel, and how this Pharisee would have known that, he would have known it inside out and back to front, he would have believed it, about the Spirit moving, about the Spirit transforming, about the Spirit bringing new life.

This man had reached the very pinnacle of that, and it was useless to him.

And I've described that as the sinner's worry, worry, the sinner's worry. And you see, you receive more hostility for preaching the gospel to liberal congregations who are full of all that religious stuff than the hostility you ever encounter when you're dealing with someone who has no religious background whatsoever.

[36 : 26] because the hostility that is drawn from them, it's because when you say to them, are you born again?

Are you born from above? Have you experienced a true and living and saving encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ? You are touching the bruise in a very, very sore spot in their inner being, and they do not like it.

And can you imagine this sinner's worry? He knows he's not headed for heaven. when you have reached the pinnacle of your religion, and it fails to deliver a confidence that you will go to heaven, you're in trouble.

You've invested everything that you are as a human being in the wrong places. my grandfather, who came from Lanarkshire, would have said, you've backed a pup.

You've put your all on something that's never going to win the race. He had done everything he knows to do, and yet he was afraid, because he knew it was not enough.

[38 : 15] And friends, that's our neighbours, that's our friends, sadly, that's some of our family.

Perhaps even more challenging, it could be some of our church members. others. And please, this is not about this fellowship. It could be our elders, it could be our ministers.

They're moral, they're religious, they're even interested to engage in moral discussion, theological inquiry, they hold office, they're respectable, they have some reputation, some might even deem them spiritual.

How do you engage with someone like that, and how do you tell them that this great truth about how vital regeneration is in saving faith to being a Christian? Well, if you do so, you must be ready for the hostility, the hostility that you're going to face.

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

[39 : 37] All the world's keys that this Pharisee possessed, where he lived, he could have walked wherever he wanted to walk. Because of his authority and position, every door in Israel would have been opened to him.

He had such power and authority, he could walk through any door, except the one door that mattered, the door to the heaven that he believed in, to the heaven and the glory that he knew that the Old Testament spoke of.

He was worried, and he was afraid. And he came to Jesus at night. I remember reading Chuck Coulson's book and I had the privilege of actually sitting at a dinner table up in Creef Hydro with Chuck Coulson when he came to speak to us in the Creef Fellowship.

And I remember, I can't remember whether it was in the course of his paper or just round the table with a number of others. And I remember him telling me that before he was converted, you know he was involved with Nixon, he was very high up in the Nixon government.

And he said to us, he said, I used to get up every morning, get dressed and went into the house and walked straight in to the Oval Office.

[41 : 19] And he says, first thing in the morning there would be the President Nixon, there would be Henry Kissinger and there would be myself in a meeting that we would have every day of the year.

And without fail he said, Kissinger would begin, every day by saying, what are we going to do today that will change the world?

And it took a prison sentence and the loneliness of a prison cell for Chuck Coulson to come to the realisation that all the power, all the authority that he had in the world amounted to not a jot in relation to the power of God and the power of saving faith.

And interestingly enough, his book, if you've read it, and if you haven't, you should read it, it's an old book, it's called Born Again. You must be born again.

You of all people, Nicodemus, should understand what born again is about, being born from above. What I talk to you about is not new, it's old, yet ever new.

[42 : 53] new. This is the power of God, Nicodemus, that Ezekiel talked about, being unleashed in cleansing water. Nothing else will work here, Nicodemus.

You see, friends, here is the issue. The great divide has never come at the realisation of the predicament that we are in.

You go to religious people, you go to conservative evangelicals, you go to people of other religions. And we'll all agree about the predicament that this world is in a mess.

There's a problem. And dear God, are we being made very aware of just how deep that problem is. That in a moment, all of a sudden, not just our country, not just our nation, but our whole world is laid down by some virus.

Oh, we know that there is a problem. But what distinguishes us is the solution, the diagnosis, and the cure.

[44 : 15] world world diagnosis over the years, if you're a student of history, you will know and understand this, the world diagnosis is that the problem is poverty, or powerlessness, or ignorance as a result of lack of education.

So, World War I was fought as the reaction against power and was to be the war that would end all wars. And the great promise to the men who gave their lives in the trenches of World War I is that they would come back and they would be empowered as heroes of the nation.

And then years later, during a time of great depression, these men are huddled round fires on the streets with no work.

In Victorian ages, the problem was poverty, and so it roused the great philanthropists of the Victorian era who built halls and places of recreation and built places like Quarrier's Village, great places, many of these men Christian men.

And then post-Second World War, the problem was educational advancement. We just need to educate the world, and once we educate the world, then everybody will be able to talk and communicate and think, and we will sit round the table, and we will all work it out.

[45 : 55] That was the basis on which the United Nations was established. That was one of the key goals of the United Nations, was to bring education to the world.

And here we are. The diagnosis of the world has failed. the Bible.

And the wonderful thing is that the diagnosis is accompanied by the cure.

And it's only if we get the diagnosis correct that we can understand what the cure is and where it comes from.

And the diagnosis of the Bible and of Jesus is you are dead in your trespasses and sins. You see, many people laugh at Nicodemus.

[47 : 05] Can a man go into his mother's womb and be born again a second time? And folks say, that shows you how confused the man is.

But that's precisely what the issue is. That's the question that we should be asking. Jesus talks about new birth. How can we do this?

That would be Nicodemus' first reaction. How can I do this? Because he had spent a life trying to do things to solve the problem.

And here he is returning to the normal way of dealing with things. He's been challenged by Jesus to be born again. How can I do this, Jesus? What can I do?

Can I go a second time into my mother's womb? No. That's the whole point of new birth. It is part of what we saw this morning.

[48 : 06] It is part of that glorious doctrine of regeneration. that doctrine of salvation that is all of God and all of grace and all in Christ.

You are dead in your trespasses and sins. You're dead. You're as dead as Lazarus was dead. You have no more chance of walking out that tomb or walking out of your predicament than Lazarus had of walking out of his tomb.

because you're done for. You're dead. But I alone, says Jesus, have not only the correct diagnosis of your condition, but I have the medicine and the cure.

Believe in me. Trust in me. accept the saving death of me on the cross and through miracle and wonder of the gospel, you who were dead will be made alive.

You who are far off will be brought near. And that, you see, deals with the sinner's worry by offering the Saviour's way.

[49 : 44] I am the solution, Jesus said. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Nicodemus came to Jesus one night long ago. His own night, as I said earlier, I don't believe there was any real significance in that, but it did represent his spiritual condition.

In a way that had nothing to do with the fact that he came to Jesus at night, but in a day that he had tried everything that this religious world could offer. and he had been found desperately wanting.

The night in which he came was daylight compared to the darkness in his life that was exposed by Jesus.

Blacker than he could ever have imagined and ever have known. the sinner's worry, the saviour's way, and of course the spirit's work.

So let's just conclude our service this evening by the marvellous hymn, How Sweet Podcast Ch instructionpard Mars Bill Point closed 32 verse Hold for As Seeds can I Get Vo GREG The mountain of believers live.

It smoothes his sorrows, tears his wounds, and drives away his fear. It makes the wounded slave wait home, and comes the troubled rest.

'Tis my words through the hungry soul, and through the weary voice.

Dilling the rock of which I built my shield and hiding place. My never-fading treasuring till rebounded stores my praise.

[60 : 22] Jesus, my shepherd, brother, friend, my brother, face of king. My will, my life, my way, my end.

Thou take care, wrestling, oscar huns and I see thee as thou art, I'll praise thee as thy Lord.

Till then I will find on your way, with every waiting breath. And with the music of heaven, refresh my storm and day.

The day is long spent, the darkness has come. But as we go with Christ, we go as children of the light.

With the light of the gospel shining brightly in our lives. And so as we go this night into that darkness, may we go as God's precious children.

[61 : 55] And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, go with each and every one of us this night and forevermore. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.