

Born Again from Above

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[0 : 00] Well, you can see that we're going to continue in our study of John today. And I hope you've all got a copy of the devotional book. And if not, we've still got at least half a dozen copies.

And all you've got to do is say you will read it. And pick one up. It's yours. And if you've kind of gotten blessed at least a time or two reading it, raise your hand.

Yeah, good. Me too. It's a great book, really. So it's been good to be reading through a daily devotional about John, even though we don't read them daily because we're kind of going with the sermons.

But we will continue then with the Gospel of John today as we come into chapter 3. And let's begin with prayer. Lord, we've missed being together.

But you've been with us. And now we need you to be with us this morning. Because we're going to look at such an incredible part of the Scriptures.

[1 : 03] So true. So much truth here. God, open our hearts, our minds. Let your Spirit help us to really see the truth in these words. And believe it.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, your next slide, Mark. So today in John 3, we begin with verse 1.

Now a certain man, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and he said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him.

Well, let's talk about this guy, Nicodemus, a little bit, figure out who he is. The Scriptures tell us pretty clearly. First of all, it tells us he was a Pharisee. Well, I did a little research on that.

And at the time of Jesus, they estimate there were probably 6,000 Pharisees. Did you know it was such a big crowd of them? However, there were 4 or 5 million people in Israel, so it's kind of a very small percentage overall.

[2 : 17] Most of them lived in the area of Jerusalem. They were the most religious of all the Jews. You know, we always think of them as really terrible guys. They were really trying hard to be the most religious.

So they wore special clothing, you know, like some folks that, I'm not in any way criticizing this, but the folks that always wear the big T-shirt, you know, God loves you and ask me about Jesus.

That's basically what the Pharisee's uniform was saying. It was saying, I'm trying to follow the Ten Commandments. Ask me, I'll explain it all to you. They were really, they took the Ten Commandments, of course, and really worked on them for hundreds of years and had gotten it down to where there were actually 613 rules that they had memorized.

I'm not making this up. They had 613 rules that they tried hard to follow. All kinds of stuff about what you could eat with what and who you could touch, what time you had to do this and how to wash your hands.

I mean, just lots of rules. And they were trying hard where they missed the boat. And don't we Christians do this sometimes? They got a little too proud.

[3 : 31] They got a little too, I am more righteous than anybody. I've got it all going on. I know everything about God. And you other folks, well, come to me and I'll try to break it down for you.

So Nicodemus was a part of that group. Now, he was actually more than a part of that group because the next phrase says he was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

Now, that group was called the Sanhedrin. And I think in the King James Version, it uses the word Sanhedrin. There were not 6,000 of them. There were 70. They were like a high religious court.

And it was difficult to get a seat on that group. And once you got a seat there, it was a lifetime thing, kind of like a Supreme Court appointment. And these were the ones who really discussed and decided what does the Old Testament say.

They were the experts. But they also handled civil cases. Like if, you know, you'd had a big argument with a neighbor or something and you wanted justice. If it wasn't a crime, the crimes were handled by government authorities.

[4 : 43] But if it was a civil case, like you were going to sue a neighbor, that's who you went to, the Sanhedrin. And they would listen and they would apply Old Testament law and discuss it and come up with answers.

Now, there's some debate about how high up he was in the Sanhedrin. There are those, later on, Jesus says, you are the teacher of Israel and you don't know this stuff?

Right here in the same chapter. And so some say, he must have been the head of the Sanhedrin. But some others say, well, probably not because Caiaphas oversaw the trial of Jesus three years later.

He was probably the head of the Sanhedrin. And Nicodemus kind of liked Jesus. If he had been the head of the Sanhedrin, couldn't he have convinced him not to crucify him? So who knows?

It doesn't matter. What matters is you understand that this guy knew the Bible he knew the Old Testament better than anybody in this room. By far.

[5 : 44] A Pharisee had probably memorized word for word all of the first five books of the Old Testament, all of the Psalms, all of the Proverbs, and many of the words of the prophets.

These guys, they were something else when it came to knowing the Old Testament. So here he was, quite a religious ruler. Now, the next thing interesting in that scripture, he came to Jesus at nighttime.

That's interesting. Why'd he come at night? Well, most of his buddies, the Pharisees, didn't believe in Jesus. They thought, this guy is a con artist.

He's a scammer. He's a, he's just trying to go viral. He's trying to get as many likes on his social media accounts as he can. He wants to be a social influencer.

He's going to try to cash this in and make some big bucks on it. Finally, he's not for real. And that's what most of the Pharisees thought. And so, that's probably part of why he came at night.

[6 : 49] He didn't want the other Pharisees to know that he went to see Jesus. So he kind of sneaks over there in the dark. But then, I think there's another symbolism that's maybe more important about why he came at night.

And that is, he's a lost sinner. Now, he's very religious, but he doesn't know, really know God. You know, you can know the Bible. The devil knows the Bible.

But you've got to know the one who wrote the Bible as your Lord and Savior. And he didn't really know that. And so, he comes, he's in the dark, if you will, like every sinner.

All of us sinners, before we know the Lord, we are in the dark. We don't care about spiritual things. We don't care about the Bible. Now, he cared about it because he was very religious, but people come to the Lord in the dark.

And that's how he meets with us. And, frankly, the typical lost person that I know, like I was when I was totally lost, and that was, the things I cared about were, what's going to be good for me?

[7 : 59] How am I going to have fun? How am I going to win? How am I going to make this work? How am I going to get that promotion? How am I going to get that car? How am I going to get that girlfriend? How am I going to, I mean, it was all about me and how I was going to enjoy life.

And, that is basically living in darkness. And so, he comes with that kind of darkness around him. Now, if you look at other times that Jesus talks to the Pharisees, he doesn't usually give them any real discussion.

He just says, you guys are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites, and I'm not even talking to you. I'm not going to waste my time. And, you know, they just always wanted to argue with him. But, it's interesting to me that in this case, Jesus really sits and has a long conversation.

And, it's because in the last chapter, we saw Jesus knew the hearts of men. That's how that last chapter ended. He knew that Nicodemus was sincere.

He knew that this guy is a leader. He's in the Sanhedrin. He wouldn't come to see me except he really wants to know about God. And so, that's why he granted him this very good and serious and long-term interview.

[9 : 15] Another thing strikes me about this, Jesus was a pretty hard worker. That's one of the, you know, for some of you who watch the Chosen series, some of you don't care about it.

I've watched some of it. And, one thing that I think it's helped me to see is how hard Jesus worked. Physically. I mean, you know, I thought, I never thought about that much.

He would, you know, get up early, go out and pray for a long time. And then as the sun's coming up, here come people wanting to be healed, wanting to talk, wanting prayer.

And all day long, he's teaching and talking with his disciples and doing stuff and walking places, walking, walking. And then, finally, at the end of the day, I remember one scene in the Chosen, he's been healing all day and he comes back to his tent and just falls on those pallet on the floor and goes down to sleep.

And so, here it is late at night and Jesus has typically probably had a hard day. But notice that he's got time, he's available to talk to a sincere person who wants to talk about God.

[10 : 27] If he just wanted to argue, you know, there's a lot of folks that want to get on Facebook and debate stuff and whatever, don't give them the time of day, they're not serious. Well, that's up to you.

If you want to do that, okay. If you've got time, go ahead. But, you know, Jesus didn't waste his time. But he knew this guy was serious. And I thought, whoa, how different that is from today's celebrity preachers.

If you were a member of a church with, say, 10,000 people, a big, you know, the big mega church, try to go talk to your pastor. See if he's available.

You know, the celebrity preacher, he's got his bodyguards and maybe he needs them. I mean, we've learned that people today, if they disagree with you, they will try to kill you. Some of them will.

Maybe he needs bodyguards. But if you try to make an appointment in your mega church to go visit with your pastor, you're probably going to be sent to one of his other under pastors who's responsible for a particular thing.

[11:33] You know, you're not going to get to see him. But here's Jesus, the son of God himself. He makes himself available. Remember, he even said, let the children come to me. He was never too big, too important to talk to anybody.

Thank God for that. So that's a little background on the setup for this conversation. Now, it's interesting. Nicodemus started off with, and how strange.

I didn't notice until right now that the scriptures are not showing up on that thing because it sure did at home. But anyway, we're going to finally get this thing, my computer, talking with this one right.

But I read the scripture to you. So now, he has said to Jesus a lot of good things. Rabbi, we know you're a teacher. You've come from God. You do miracles. Whoa, you're something else. And here we see Jesus' immediate reply, which is strange to me.

Let's look at the next slide. It cuts this one off too. So, here's what Jesus says. First thing out of his mouth, I think.

[12:37] I tell you the solemn truth. Unless a person is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. So then Nicodemus says to him, how can a man be born when he's old?

He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time. Can he? Well, I think this is interesting too.

This is the very first teaching of Jesus in this book of John. Until now, it's all been action. He's been turning over tables, getting baptized, changing water into wine.

I mean, all this, this is his first teaching. And what's the first thing out of his mouth? You've got to be born again. And then he says here, I tell you the solemn truth.

Now, if you look at that in the old King James version or a lot of other versions, it's a double word. It's a word repeated twice. In the King James, it's verily, verily.

[13:39] truly. In more modern English, it's truly, truly. And in the Bible, and especially the New Testament, if something is repeated twice like that, it means, pay attention.

This is really, really important. So Jesus is saying, really pay attention. I'm going to tell you something super important. Unless a person is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Whoa. Well, this word born again, it can really be translated two different ways as I begin my research on it. It can mean born again. It can mean born from above.

You can translate it both ways. Nicodemus clearly understood it to mean born a second time. Because he says, how can I be born a second time? It doesn't make any sense. But I think Jesus is really saying, you're going to be born that second time by being born from above.

That's more of the meaning that I think Jesus, the direction he's going with it. Well, what is this kingdom of God anyway? I think everybody in the whole world, every religion, every atheist, every lost person, every political party, whatever, we all actually want what Jesus is calling the kingdom of God.

[15:06] We want utopia. We want heaven. We want nirvana. We want the perfect society. We want a place where there's worldwide peace.

We want a place where there's no selfishness and no crime, no violence, no broken families, no sickness, no, just on and on and on.

That's what we all want. The whole world wants it. And in Jesus' way of thinking, he says, he calls that the kingdom of God. It's the Garden of Eden.

We want, again, the Garden of Eden. How can that be? How can it be that, really, if we went into some part of Asia and found somebody that's never, ever even read the Bible and said, what do you think the perfect world would be like?

It would be amazing how much it would sound like the Garden of Eden, really. I think the reason we all have that in our hearts is because that's where we came from. God put that in you.

[16:11] He put this desire in you for a perfect world where everything is in harmony. What the Jews often called shalom, the peace and order of a perfect God in a perfect world.

A world of peace and equality and justice and fairness. We have that in us. And Jesus is saying, you are never going to see that unless you are born again from above.

Politics aren't going to get you there. Your favorite books, they're not going to get you there. All of your hard efforts, they're not going to get you there.

What's going to get you there? You will have to be born again. But why is that important? And why can't we just get together like a good political party or something and say, here's the goal.

Let's work out a five-year plan and a ten-year plan and we're going to keep promoting this and teaching it and we'll get it in the universities and we'll work on this and the whole world will finally have peace.

[17:25] And we'll have... I mean, there are people that are planning and doing that. They've been doing it since forever. Trying to come up with, some call it the one world order.

The, you know, we're going to create through human effort a perfect world. But here's the problem. This is a problem we can take from just everyday observation.

I heard, I first heard this illustration when I was about ten years old and it has always stayed with me. And here's the, here's the illustration. Dogs have puppies.

Cats only have kittens. Sal's hogs only have little piggies. And sinners can only give birth to other sinners.

sinners. This is what's wrong with the world. This is what's keeping us from having this kingdom of God. It's our sin. We have a sin problem. It's keeping us from having this beautiful world, this utopia, because we all are trying to lie to each other, gossip about each other, push each other around, get what I want first, make sure you didn't get, hey, I remember when I was just a little boy, my brother and I shared a room.

[18:52] We, we used to put a line down the middle, we shared a bed. We would draw a line down the middle of the bed, don't get on my side of this bed. I mean, this is the sinful human nature.

My parents were sinners, they gave birth to a sinner. And so, I have always done this kind of stuff, and it's what's wrong with the world. It's the reason that Israel and Palestine can't get along with each other.

I'm glad we've got peace delegations there. I think it's the right thing to do. Maybe a two-state solution would be a good thing, but as long as there's sin in the world, there's going to be some Palestinians wanting to kill some Jews, and some Jews wanting to kill some Palestinians.

It's what's wrong right now between Russia and Ukraine. And there's two sides to all these arguments, but Russia is convinced we want that property and we will kill again.

And the Ukrainians are convinced, no, you won't. Those are both sinful attitudes. Sin is what's wrong with the world.

[20:06] Sin separates us. Sin is why there's an American armada right now pointing our guns, our missiles at Iran and saying, if you don't do what we want you to do, we're going to blow you out of the planet or whatever.

And they're saying, no, you won't. I mean, you know, sin, if you traced it back, all of these are sinful attitudes. Sin is what made, did you know that 30, 40 years ago, the richest country in South America, America, if you wanted to pick the one to go live in, you would pick Venezuela.

Because they got all that oil, they were so filthy rich. They had free medicine, free schools, free gasoline, there was about five cents a gallon. And what happened?

Well, there were people with a plan. We can make things better. We're going to take from the rich and share it with the poor. And this is going to be wonderful.

We're going to create utopia. It was communism. And so, Chavez, Maduro, and now Venezuela is the most broken, poorest country in all of South America.

[21:18] And who knows how many people they have killed who got in their way. And if you're sure you're right, you don't mind, and you're a sinner, you don't mind killing ignorant people who don't see the light, the truth, the wisdom, because your group knows it all.

And if they don't agree with you, then it's okay if they get eliminated. That is the attitude of a sinner. Sin divides us. Separates us.

The love of God brings us back together. Here's another evidence of what's wrong with the world. Racial hatred. Sin is the root of it.

Do you know that right now, 300 feet through that wall, there's a church right there that believes the same stuff we do. And they're having a sermon very, I don't know their topic, but they preach the same stuff we do.

And they sing a lot of the same songs we do. Sometimes with a little more enthusiasm. How did that church get over there with all black folks?

[22:25] And we got a church over here with all these white folks. It's a sin problem that went back 170 years ago. That whites and blacks couldn't worship together. And sin separates and divides.

But let me tell you, Troy said, we had a great breakfast yesterday. Of those 32 men, half of them were black men. They came from two or three different churches and they gathered with us.

And the white men and the black men, we ate together and we drank coffee together and we prayed together and we hugged each other. And as I was leaving, I saw Glenn with a black brother in the corner and they had their heads bowed and they were praying together.

You will not see the kingdom of God, this peace, this utopia, unless you are born again from above.

God, faith in Christ can bring us back together. Sin will always separate us. Here's a sinful move in the world today.

[23:35] Destroy the family. Break down the family. It's the basic building block of society. So if you want to control the minds, try to break down the family.

And so, do that in different ways. Because of sin, we all know husbands and wives who have cheated on each other and that has led to divorce and brokenhearted children and chaos.

And there are folks who, I heard about this this week on a news program. I forgot the title of the book and they said it's very widespread in social media. I don't even do Facebook, so I don't know about that.

But they were talking about people who are intentionally saying, if you don't like your family, then cut yourself off from them. You don't need that family.

Just cut it off. I mean, if they've been brainwashing you and they are so emotionally immature that they don't have all of your wisdom and you're 19, 20, 28, whatever you are, you know everything.

[24:39] They're old fashioned. Cut them off, don't have anything to do with them. You see how sin always wants to divide and separate? Whereas, the Christian worldview would be if you have something against your brother, your mother, your father, go to them and say, let's work this out.

Let's work this out. There's some division in my family. I've told you about it before. I've got a brother that won't speak to me. I am constantly sending him something, a note, something, whatever, to say, yeah, I just love you.

I appreciate you. If you ever want to talk, let's get together. We're getting too old to let this go on, brother. Come on, let's work it out. That is the Christian worldview of when you're born again.

Sin is our problem. And Jesus said there's only one cure. And here's the cure. It's the most famous verse in the whole Bible. Mark, hopefully good, it shows the whole verse.

John 3, 16, most famous verse in the whole Bible. For this is how God loved the world. He gave his one and only son that everyone who believes in him will not perish, but will have eternal life.

[25:56] They will have the kingdom of God. They will have that perfect life forever. The garden of Eden will be restored. We often call it heaven. What does it take to believe that to get there?

You must believe in Jesus Christ, the one and only son of God. And what does believe mean? It's more than our English word. It means to really trust him, depend on him, commit your life to him, decide to follow him.

that is what it is to believe, and that's what it takes to become a Christian. Now, this morning I got here, and I looked in our church kitchen, and saw the clock on the wall, and I said, gee, we're here about five minutes earlier than I thought we were.

That's what it said. That clock hasn't changed time in probably months. You know, it's right twice a day, isn't it?

So when I got here this morning, it was a little after nine, it was almost right. Well, this clock has stopped working, and you know what I could do?

[27:08] I could really try to dress the outside of it up. I could wash it, polish it. I could gold plate it. Would that make it tell time right?

No. probably what's wrong is that battery right there is dead. And the only way to make this thing be right is to put a new battery in the heart of it.

We people are so much like that. We can work a lot to dress up the outside, but our problem is that sinners are born with our spiritual battery dead.

It needs to be replaced from above. A new battery needs to come into our hearts. As we believe in Christ, he puts that seed of faith in us.

We are born again. The new spiritual battery comes. Now, I think it's interesting that this thing is twice a day. Sinners are right about some things.

[28:13] And we Christians are not right all the time. You know, I'm trying to convince my wife I'm right all the time. She hadn't believed it yet.

You are. You are. So, as we agree with God and let Him grow in us, we have right attitudes more and more often.

And just fixing up the outside of a thing is not the cure. Well, Nicodemus was a very religious guy and yet his religion didn't save him.

He had to be born again from above. And I don't know if some philosopher said this. Lately, it's attributed a lot to this evangelist Ravi Zacharias but somebody said it long before him.

This next slide. Jesus did not come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people alive. He didn't come that if this is your life, He didn't come to dress up the outside and make you more polite, more educated, nicer.

[29 : 36] He came because you battered dead spiritually and you needed a new life put in you. And if you don't receive Christ, it doesn't matter how religious you are or how good you are, you will not see the kingdom of heaven.

And that's the point of the whole sermon. What happens when we do receive Christ? Well, I have two favorite verses on this and I'm going to ask Mark to put them up for us.

2 Corinthians 5, 17. If anyone's in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come. 2 Peter 1, 4. God has given us great and precious promises and these are the promises that will enable you to be a partaker of His divine nature and escape the corruption caused by sinful desires.

If you're a believer, those two things apply to you so much. Let me tell you, when I was about 20, and really during my teen years, every now and then somebody would say to me, have you thought about being a preacher?

And I'd say, cut your tongue out. What do you mean? They'd say, well, you know, you're a pretty good talker and you know, your daddy's a preacher, you you'd be good at it.

[31 : 00] And I've said this so many times. I said, I will never, ever be a preacher. And by the time I was in my early 20s, I was saying, look, I am an atheist.

My parents were old-fashioned. They didn't know what they were doing. They believed all that stuff. It's not for me. But what happened was, one day I was broken and I said, Lord, I need you so much.

Jesus, if you'll forgive me. And he, I was born again from above. I don't know how else to explain it. And everything became new.

And I became a partaker of his divine nature. A little bit of God came into me. I was a partaker of the divine nature. And boy, did my attitudes change. The stuff I loved to do before, I was still tempted to do it, but I hated it.

And when I would do it, I would feel guilty. And the things I didn't want to do before, now I liked it. I liked reading the Bible. I liked going to church. And as far as never being a preacher, it wasn't any time after I got born again.

[32 : 15] That I was wanting to start to talk to people about, hey, let me tell you what I saw in the Bible today. Have you ever seen this verse? Look at this. This is amazing. What do you think this means? And no time after I became a believer, the guy that was never going to be a preacher started a Bible study at my work.

I was working at a community college, and so once a week there was a group of students and teachers, and I put it together, and I would come in with the Bible and start teaching. What did I know? I haven't been a believer long, but I have been born again.

I had some of that divine nature in me. I was a new creature. I wasn't the old man they knew before. God is so good to work in our hearts.

a week ago. A week ago, it was 50 years. On January the 31st, 50 years ago. Well, I know this to be true because the Lord has done it for me.

And so I want to end with the most important thing here that Jesus said, unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God. Friends, do you want to be a part of that perfect world of fairness, of justice, of equality, of health, of joy, of peace, peace on earth?

[33 : 37] You want that? Unless you're born again, you're not going to see it. A lot of other people promise and it's out there, you're not going to see it. Well, we are now going to have the Lord's Supper together that reminds us of what Jesus did to pay for us to be born again.

After that, we're going to close with a song. And you can participate in this because of what Jesus has done. And let's pray together.

Lord, we thank you. We thank you that we are born again from above by faith in Jesus.

God, don't let us be fooling ourselves. We either are new creatures in Christ and partaking of your nature or we're not. God, help us to see the truth about ourselves and be born again today.

Let us make that decision today, God. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen.