

Born Again?

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[0 : 00] Well, so good to be with you all this morning. Recognize a lot of faces this morning. So Carla and I and our family, we lived in Squamish for 11 years.

And we're part of a few different churches. And got to know, you know, churches in Squamish would often, at least back then, did some like ecumenical things.

We get together. We do like different services. We do different events together. So I got to know a number of people here at this church. And Church on 99 and The Rock.

I was a part of both of those churches at different times. So I see Clay and Bridie. I see June and Adela at the back. So it's just been a real blessing to already come here this morning and just see people that are so familiar.

And it's been a long time. I've been away. I received a call kind of into ministry when I was living here in Squamish. Moved away in 2012 to go to seminary.

[1 : 05] I went down to Florida, actually, to Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando and enjoyed our three years there. And then was called to my first pastoral role at a church in Abbotsford called Northview Community Church, where I was an associate for five years.

And then in 2020 was called to be the lead pastor at King Road, right in the middle of or right at the beginning kind of of this thing called COVID that you've probably all forgotten about already, which is good.

We're glad to forget about those days, right? Anyway, it's so good to be here with you this morning.

And, yeah, we're going to be spending our time in John chapter 3.

John chapter 3. So by way of introduction, just something somebody told me a little while ago, that there's a documentary on Netflix.

It's a documentary on Netflix that's called Don't Die, The Man Who Wants to Live Forever. It's about this tech billionaire who believes that he can basically manipulate the things in the world that he takes in and what he does, how he treats his body, that he will be able to live for well over 100 years, maybe even 200, maybe even more.

[2 : 31] And so this documentary is all about this guy. And at one point in the documentary, or in the trailer at least, he says, I really want to live multiple lifetimes with my son.

100 years isn't going to be enough. When we look at the Bible, though, we can see that no matter how long this man prolongs his life, even if he can extend it to 150, 200, what, 600, what, maybe he'll outlive Methuselah, whatever, he will die.

He will not be able to escape his mortality. Hebrews 9, verse 27, we read, It is appointed unto man once to die, and then comes the judgment.

It's inevitable. Each of us will die. And even though that's true, though, some will live forever.

Just as in Adam all die, in Christ all can be made alive, we read in 1 Corinthians 15. And it's this incredible truth that we get to dive into today as we look at John chapter 3, verse 21 verses.

[3 : 56] So there's one big idea for the sermon, and then there's three points. So if you like to take notes, note takers, I've got you covered. Well broken down. All right? So the big idea is only by faith in Jesus Christ can a person have eternal life.

And we're going to go through this in three sections. The first one, what it means to be born again, chapter 3, verse 1 through 8. Second, whom we need to believe in, verses 9 through 15.

Third, why it matters, verses 16 to 21. Let me pray, and then we'll dive into the message. Father, I thank you for your grace on us this morning.

I already thank you for this great worship and the team who's led us. Lord, I thank you for the volunteers who are greeting and welcoming and all the behind-the-scenes thing. Lord, I just praise you for Squamish Baptist and all your faithful servants here.

Lord, as we dive into your word, yeah, would you speak to us? Would you renew our hearts? Lord, would you show us the depth of our sins, lead us to repentance, and to greater faith in you, Lord Jesus?

[5 : 14] Holy Spirit, use me as your instrument this morning. Only by your grace. In your name, Jesus, amen. All right, point number one, what it means to be born again.

John, chapter 3, starting verse 1. 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. We'll pause there. So as a Pharisee, Nicodemus would have been well known in the city, especially if he was known already as a ruler of the Jews.

He was a prominent figure in Jewish life. And two interesting things with how John writes this. First, Nicodemus is quoted as saying to Jesus, we know that you are a teacher from God.

He doesn't just say, I know, he says, we know. So either he came there with some of his own disciples with him, or maybe he came on behalf of a larger group of Pharisees.

[6 : 31] Second, he came under the cover of darkness. But it's not clear why. Maybe he only knew where Jesus was going to be in the evening.

Maybe he wanted to avoid being seen because he's a Pharisee. And he was actually inquiring who Jesus would be for his own personal discipleship.

We don't know. But whomever he was with, and whatever his reason, right here in this passage, he is emerging from darkness and about to experience not just a light, but the light of the world.

Continuing verse 3, So when Jesus first answers Nicodemus by saying, you must be born again, when you read that, do you ever imagine kind of Nicodemus' posture, his demeanor as he responds?

It's kind of like, good one, Jesus. Enter it. Yeah, enter into your mother's womb. Good one. Maybe. Because it kind of sounds crazy to us.

[8 : 01] Maybe if you grew up in the church, it doesn't sound crazy. But to those who grew up kind of outside the church, it does kind of sound crazy. Being born again. I used to work for TELUS.

A lot of the years that I actually lived in Squamish, I worked for TELUS. And at one point, I was on a job with another worker. And this guy was, he was a little eccentric.

A little nutty, you might say. Even for TELUS guys. And as I'm working with him, I'm telling him about my life and church and Jesus. And he's like, whoa, whoa, whoa.

You aren't like, like you're a Christian. But I mean, you aren't one of those like, born again, are you? Like, I didn't even know that was a category. That, like, born again.

I'm like, what? I'm a Christian. What? Of course I'm born again. But to him, this idea of being born again, again, was crazy, right? So for those who grew up inside the church, it's not a strange concept.

[9 : 00] For those outside, it can be quite strange. But let's see how Jesus answers him. Verse 5. 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. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said 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. And Nicodemus said to him, how can these things be?

And Jesus answered him, are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? So you see how Jesus roots his understanding of what it means to be born again to Jewish teachings.

He expects Nicodemus to understand the concept of being born again. Ancient Judaism taught that if a Gentile converted to Judaism, that he was now born from above.

[10 : 11] Or born again, or born of God. So this idea would not have been new to Nicodemus, especially someone as learned as he was.

But what Nicodemus couldn't wrap his mind around was that he, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, who knew God's laws like the back of his hand would ever need to be born again.

I know this. Being born from above or being born of God, being born again.

No, that's for the Gentiles. That's for those outside. So Jesus does something very wise here. He points Nicodemus back to the Old Testament to back up his claim.

So when Jesus says, you must be born of water and the spirit, Jesus isn't comparing physical birth with spiritual birth, which I think is something that's kind of natural for us as we read it.

[11 : 16] To think that. Likely, Jesus is pointing Nicodemus actually back to Ezekiel chapter 36, and then actually 37 as well. A prophecy about how God is going to raise up a people for himself.

So as we look at Ezekiel 36, remember what Jesus says. He says, unless one is born of water and the spirit.

So let's look at Ezekiel 36, starting in verse 25. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you, and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

So did you hear the words water and spirit there? The water and the spirit that Jesus is referring to both have to do with God's regenerating and sanctifying work within us.

But Jesus also says to Nicodemus, the wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, which again, likely a reference to Ezekiel, chapter 37 now. God shows Ezekiel a valley of dry bones, no skin, no muscles, no blood, no life.

[12 : 55] And God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. 37 verse 7. So I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I prophesied there was a sound, and behold, a rattling.

Right? You can imagine these dry bones, and they're like sun-scorched dry. They've been there. There's nothing good in them. Like your dog might not even be interested in them. And they start rattling and coming together.

Right? And the bones come together, bone to its bone, and I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them.

And then he said to me, prophesy to the breath. Prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, thus says the Lord God, come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived. There was nothing good about these bones.

[14 : 01] No possibility of life in them, apart from a miracle of God. And this is the prophecy that Jesus points Nicodemus to. Essentially saying that Jesus himself has ushered in the fulfillment of this prophecy.

The spiritually dead will be made alive by a miracle of God. And spiritually dead, we're not just Gentiles, dear Nicodemus. No, this includes you.

And for us here today, I think it's important for us to realize that it's not just those outside the church who need the gospel. It's not just those outside the church who need to be born again.

It's for us inside as well. We can easily be like Nicodemus and think, yeah, that's for those outside the church. No, I grew up in it. I know it.

I went to Sunday school. I went to Awana. I went to, you name it. I went to, you know, Young Life, and I heard from the great leaders there.

[15 : 08] I know this. But are you born again? It is only by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ that we can be saved.

This is what the Holy Spirit does through the preaching of the gospel. The Holy Spirit will use the vehicle of proclamation of the gospel, the wind from our lungs, to bring new birth to those who are dead inside.

The Spirit gives us the gifts of faith in Christ and repentance of our sins. He softens our hard and rebellious hearts, and He gives us the desire to love God and obey Him.

That any of us believe in Christ is a miracle of God. I was talking with someone recently who just started attending church. This young man who spent the first decade of his life in church, but then for the past 15 years has done whatever he wanted with all the sins and addictions that you can imagine.

But recently, he was working out at a gym, and he goes at the same time every day early in the morning, and there's this other group of guys there, and they start talking to him, befriending him,

talking to him about Jesus.

[16:31] And it didn't take very long for him to realize, yes, this is exactly the truth. It's like something just awoke in him from hearing the testimonies of these guys.

So he started reading his Bible and praying, but he was scared to tell his girlfriend, whom he had started living with at the age of 15. And she had zero experience in the church.

And she had not much good to think about it. Very against religion of any kind. But when she found out what he was doing, she started to read the Bible with him.

And then she started praying, and eventually she came to faith in Christ. And the Spirit started immediately sanctifying them as they would read the Word.

They just, certain addictions, gone. Premarital sex, done. Without anybody even telling them.

[17:44] This is just them reading the Bible and the Holy Spirit working through his Word in their lives. Now they're getting baptized in a couple of weeks, and they'll be getting married a couple of weeks after that.

This is a miracle of God. This is the power of the Holy Spirit through the good news of Jesus Christ. He makes dead bones live. He takes rock-hard, rebellious heart that just wants its own way and makes its own demands and lives selfishly and believes that it can do life without him and turns that heart into a soft heart that trusts in Jesus for his own righteousness, for salvation.

A heart that now wants to follow God, repents of sin, and walks by faith. And this is what it means to be born again, folks. Now as we keep going in this passage, Jesus' language goes from talking about being born again to talking about believing.

So point number two, whom we need to believe in. Verse 11, Jesus keeps speaking to Nicodemus. 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 it, our testimony.

If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? So the earthly thing that he's talking about is actually being born again.

[19:17] Because on earth, this is what we do. We can be born again on earth by the power of the Holy Spirit. The heavenly thing here is actually Jesus himself. And then he continues, verse 13, So Jesus is essentially asking Nicodemus, like, when you say you believe I'm sent from God, do you realize what you're saying?

Because as a teacher of the law, you have shown that you don't even understand what it means to be born again. When you guys use that language. Then Jesus gets to his big point.

If you say you believe I'm from God, then this is where that belief will lead you. Verse 14 to 15, 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.

Seems like a strange thing to compare to, right? Like a serpent being lifted up on a pole. Well, to first century Jews, though, it's not odd at all.

It was an important part of their history of how God provided for them in the past. So Numbers chapter 21, verses 4 and 5, says, From Mount Hor, they set out by the way of the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom.

[20:52] And the people became impatient on the way, and the people spoke against God and against Moses, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.

Send us back to slavery, Lord. Right? Listen, they're grumbling. Worthless food. God had been miraculously providing for them every day, as much as they could eat.

But their grumbling was not ignored. Verses 6 through 9, Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

And the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord that he may take away the serpents from us.

So Moses prayed for the people, and the Lord said to Moses, Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, whether he sees it or when he sees it, shall live.

[22:01] So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole, and if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. So the same way that the serpent was lifted up on the pole, Jesus is saying that he, the Son of Man, would be lifted up in the same way.

And whoever looks on him, whoever believes in him, will have eternal life. The fiery sting of sin that bites each and every one of us can be healed, and we can be forgiven of by looking up to that

cross.

This is what Nicodemus needed to believe, and what everyone needs to believe to receive eternal life. And our Western post-Christian culture has tried now for decades to tell us that all there is in the universe is that which is material, that which we can touch, that which we can see, that which we can feel.

And then when we die, that's it. You're pushing up daisies, you're worm food. That's what you have to look forward to. But very few people are actually satisfied with this worldview.

As they go through their life, maybe they'll believe it for a short time, but eventually, they start wondering and looking and searching because, can they, really? Like, this is all there is?

[23 : 44] You look at the depression that has overtaken our society in so many ways in so many places.

You look at the suicides that are committed by some of the wealthiest people in the world. They have everything, right? Right? And they realize it's not enough.

So people look and they search. And why do you think that is? The Bible gives us the answer.

The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us that God has put eternity in our hearts. So even though we are saturated and stained and soaked in sin and live in a sin-soaked world, God has placed a longing within us to yearn for him.

When we look at creation and Squamish, right? Like, we worship creation in Squamish, right? We go for hikes. We go for mountain bikes. We love nature. We love it. And man, when I go out there, that's when I see God.

[24 : 56] And it's true. When we look at creation, man, it's gorgeous. It's amazing. You look at the power and the might of these mighty mountains around us. We live in Abbotsford and we can look and we can see Mount Baker, which is a dormant volcano.

Man, imagine that thing going off. Power! But that is nothing compared to the power of our God. God has put something in us that yearns for him.

So we look to creation for that answer, right? Like the psalmist in Psalm 121, he says, I look to the hills. Where does my help come from? Yeah, it's not from the hills. It's from above the hills.

From the Lord himself. So people look to fill this longing, though, that's within us, this eternity that's in their hearts and they look to fill this longing with all the things around them, with money, with sex, with power, substances, new jobs, new pets, new wives, new husbands.

Whatever's new is going to be better. But all those things are temporary and the temporary will never satisfy the eternal.

[26 : 05] only the eternal Son of God who took on flesh and perfectly obeyed God's law could give his life as a ransom for us, earning for us the forgiveness of our sins in eternal life.

And to receive it, you just need to look upon that cross in faith. just as there was only one way for the Israelites in the wilderness to be saved, there is only one way for us to be saved by looking at Jesus.

on to our last point, why it matters, the verse you've all been waiting for. John 3.16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

we're so used to this verse by itself that it's easy for us to look at it outside of its context.

But we need to remember that it isn't a stand-alone verse. it exists as a part of this whole conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

[27 : 23] Nicodemus came to Jesus and Jesus told him what it means to be born again and that the Son of Man himself was going to be lifted up and in order for people to be saved they must look to him.

And now Jesus says why God did this. John 3.16-21 is the why of it all. Why did God send his Son this way? Because he loved the world.

Now where this verse says so loved is important to look at. In our language we have a way of talking that includes the word so to make something seem bigger or more important.

Like that steak was so good. Right? Or oh man that hike up the chief was so awesome. awesome. Or those Canucks man they're so bad.

But that's not how Jesus uses that word here. In Greek the word for so is the word hutos which means in this way. In this way.

[28 : 33] therefore John 3.16 could read for God loved the world in this way. He gave his only Son.

The focus is on God's gift of his Son and what that gift saves us from. Because if people don't believe in Jesus things don't look good.

Look at verse 17 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.

So this is a mission of salvation that Jesus was on from the beginning to save people from something. From what? Verse 18 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 that's the bad news. Without Christ we stand in a place of condemnation deserving eternal wrath and destruction at the hands of God because of sin.

[29 : 57] the bad news of John 3 18 is what makes the good news of John 3 16 so good.

Right? Continuing verse 19 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. Remember back at the beginning when Nicodemus came to Jesus at night.

John often uses the theme of darkness and light to show an opening of the eyes to faith in Christ. He was coming out of the darkness of his own life into the light of Christ and each and every one of us need to do the same.

[31 : 15] Whether you grew up in the church or you grew up outside the church you need to emerge from the darkness of your sin and come to Jesus. Being a Pharisee didn't save Nicodemus.

Being a lifelong member of Squamish Baptist Church doesn't save you. If you say you believe the heavenly thing that Jesus is Lord then by repentance and faith in him you need to give him all earthly things.

Every inch of your life. All of us have things that either are or have been hidden in darkness. We all have things that we look at in our past and that we're ashamed of or maybe they're habits right now that you're stuck in that you don't like but you keep them in the darkness.

You haven't opened up to anybody about them because you're too ashamed. we need to bring things into the light. When we bring them into the light they're into the light of Christ and they can be dealt with, they can be forgiven, they can be redeemed, you can be redeemed.

You can be surrounded by your pastors, by your brothers and sisters in Christ who can speak God's truth over you, who can wash you with the word. We all need to emerge from our darkness in every part of our lives and hand it over to Christ.

[32 : 57] When he is Lord, he is Lord over every square inch of creation. Coming to Jesus isn't just acknowledging him as being God.

in the scriptures we see even the demons do that. Coming to Jesus means having his light exposed whatever is hiding in our darkness.

And if you're fearful of that, there's nothing to fear. Do you know what Romans 5, 8 reads? For while we were still sinning, Christ died for us.

He didn't wait until you were good. He didn't wait until you were righteous. That day would never come. While you were still sinners, Christ died for you.

While I was still a sinner, Christ died for me. God would have been in the world. And amazing grace we have in the gospel.

[34 : 13] In Christ there is no longer any condemnation. You can leave the darkness, come to the light of Christ, and be showered with the mercy and the love of God all the rest of your days.

In Christ, you will find eternal life. We pray with you. Father, we praise you for your goodness and your might.

Lord, we do love your creation around us. I had friends who just visited Squamish for the first time recently, and they texted me just blown away by the beauty of this area.

And so Lord, we do praise you for your creation and the fact that you have made it and that we can enjoy it, that we can get out there and enjoy the trails and enjoy the mountains and the water and the beautiful warm weather of summer.

What a gift, Lord, you've given us in that. But Lord, we do not praise creation. Creation praises you. Creation points to you.

[35 : 24] When we look at that sharp point of Atwell Peak, Lord, that is pointing up to you. Don't look to the mountain for glory. Look to you. And Lord Jesus, we thank you and we praise you that you did not grasp onto your throne in heaven, but instead left that throne to live as a human being in a sinful world, among sinful people, on a mission of salvation, to bring salvation to us.

Lord, it was only by your grace that we can hear your gospel, that we can understand you, that we can understand your word. So Holy Spirit, I pray that for all of us here in every area of our lives, would you convict us of sin?

Would you lead us to bring those things into the light, Lord, to bring them to trusted brothers and sisters in Christ, to bring them to our pastors, and to allow our brothers and sisters to walk with us, to bless us, to help us in our walk.

So, Lord, we thank you for your word. we thank you for this exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus and that there's so much that we can learn from it.

So, Lord, we praise you for your word, we praise you for all that you've done in us. Continue to bless us, Lord, continue to bless Squamish Baptist. In your name, Jesus, amen.

[37 : 04] Amen. Amen. Amen.