

A Rabbi and Jesus Have a Talk

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. Please take out your Bibles. We're going to be in John chapter 3 today. John chapter 3. Can you guys hear me all right?

I'm mic'd up okay? All right. I got a question for you guys. Has anybody here ever given someone wrong directions?

All right. That's good. I know anytime I ask Sab for directions, he always says big, just past the big tree. You know, as we're getting to know Squamish, we're thankful that it's not too big, so we haven't been lost yet.

But I remember this time, I'm living in downtown Toronto, and I'm working for the government, so of course if I'm working for the government, I think I know everything, right? So this car comes by and the guy rolls down the window and says, hey, can you help me with something?

Sure. Love to. He says, can you tell me how to get to so and so? And in my very government authoritative voice, I tell him where it is, right? So he goes and I just keep walking.

[1 : 12] About 20 minutes later, he comes by again, rolls down the window. And he didn't ask me, why couldn't you be more clear?

He just simply says, why did you give me the wrong directions? And this was before the time of smartphones and Google and all that kind of thing, right?

So I obviously explained to him that I did not do so intentionally, but I really, really wanted to help him, right? He had a very legitimate problem. He wanted to go somewhere, and I wanted to help him get there.

And I very remember him very vividly saying to me, I didn't ask you where you thought so and so was, I asked you if you knew where so and so was.

I think this is the same issue that we have with evangelism sometimes, right? We really, really want people to come to know Jesus.

[2 : 18] We want people to get to Jesus. But sometimes we can be pretty mixed up on the way we tell them how they're going to and how they're going to get to Jesus. And how they're going to get to Jesus. As a pastor, probably my most painful conversations with people involve parents speaking about their adult children who do not know the Lord.

I'm with you. It's painful. We've raised our kids. We've done all that we could. We brought them to church. Brought them to Sunday school. But sometimes they just chose not to follow.

We knew that when we were kids, when our children were younger, we had this ability over them. And it was called power, right? You do what I say or I don't feed you for the week, right?

But now that the kids are at a house, they can kind of do what they want to do. And that's hard. It's frustrating as a parent. We seem to feel that we've lost our influence.

We know what they have learned. But sometimes we question God, what did we do wrong? What didn't we do that make that?

[3 : 39] Why do they not love Jesus like I do? Why didn't the gospel take hold in their lives as it did with me? Some parents will soothe themselves by saying, well, they are Christians.

Although they never go to church, they do not study God's word and have no outward affinity for Jesus or fruit. They're sometimes scared to admit the truth that perhaps their children do not know Jesus.

I think the best strategy is to actually understand what it means to be a Christian. And by a Christian, I mean to use the term born again.

It's the term that is most used to separate, quote unquote, cultural Christians from actually followers of Jesus Christ. Do you guys ever get that question from anybody? Does anybody ever ask you anymore?

Are you born again? Are you like one of those born again Christians? Anybody have that, right? If you're over 40, you've had it, right? But usually now it's not a big term that's kind of thrown around.

[4 : 47] I remember when I was in the government, people would ask me at first, are you a Christian? Yes. And then the second question would come, are you born again?

Even in a non-Christian world, there was an understanding. There was a distinction. And I remember I had this French colleague. He was a partner of mine and he was French. So sometimes he wasn't really familiar with all the terms.

So he comes to me and he says, well, I asked the guy upstairs. I asked him what it meant to be born again. People keep telling you what it's born again. And I said, well, what did they tell you?

He goes, zealot. You know, coming from a place in the government, I work counterterrorism. Whenever you hear the word zealot, it's like a big red flag, right?

But for them, that was, yeah, he's a true believer. He's not just a cultural Christian. So who defines what is born again?

[5 : 43] And it's more important, I must ask, is how does someone become born again? For the next several weeks, I want to take a look at some conversations that Jesus has with two distinct individuals.

They are two different in that they both grew up in a position of privilege. I would call it Jewish privilege. But they chose very different paths.

The first person we are going to meet is a man named Nicodemus. And in a couple of weeks, we're going to look at the man named Matthew. So take a look at John chapter 3.

This is a story that Jesus has this conversation with this man. I'll read through the first 10 verses. 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 things that you do unless God is with him.

[6 : 59] 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 wombs and be born? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. 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. The reason why I'm teaching on what this means to be born again, is I'm praying that it will help you in your approach to your children, whether it be young or old, or even your friends, your parents, your family members.

[8 : 12] And I think once we truly understand what it means to be born again, and how it happens, that will help us both teach more effectively, and it will also help us pray more effectively, and encourage one another more effectively.

So let's get back to the text here. We need to get to know this man named Nicodemus, and we need to know his problem. Verse 1, Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

There's three things that we need to understand about Nicodemus, in order to understand the weight of Jesus' words in this passage.

Three things. The first thing that we understand about Nicodemus, is that he is a Pharisee. He's a Pharisee. Now many of you understand from our Sunday school lessons, what a Pharisee is, but I'm going to give you a brief synopsis.

He was one of 6,000 men in Israel, who were part of this religious group. Largely these men, operated out of the synagogues that were throughout Israel.

[9 : 20] We believe that the Pharisee order evolved out of the captivity of the Jews when they were in Babylon. They no longer had a temple in which to serve God at, so these men studied God's word, and they would form these synagogues.

Whenever there'd be 10 people that would come together, 10 men, they could form a synagogue, and there'd be primary religious teaching. They would be considered the religious arch conservatives.

They were men who knew God's word. They taught it, believed it, and lived in it as best as they could. They believed in the sovereignty of God. They believed in the kingdom of God. They believed in miracles and angels.

One who was set apart, they believed from the foul pollution of the day. They believed that the Roman occupation was entirely wrong, and they wanted to live a life that was ultimately so pure that God would not bring judgment upon Israel again like they did in the time of the kings.

Remember? The time of the kings, we see that Israel continued to lapse into sin, continued to worship other gods. They did not want this to happen anymore.

[10 : 32] If God comes, they want to be ready. So that's the first thing. They're Pharisees. The second thing to know about Nicodemus, he's a member of the Sanhedrin.

Now, what this means is he was one of 70 rulers over all of Israel, primarily Rome ruled, but it's interesting, out of all the countries that Rome ruled, the most stubborn time they had was with the Jews in Israel.

So they kind of allowed them to have this governing body called the Sanhedrin. And it was made up of the 70 rulers, which was made of one, was a high priest, half were Pharisees, and half were Sadducees, which was another religious order.

And these men were in charge of the governing and religious decisions in the country. These men were highly respectable men. They were men who climbed the ladder of influence and became very powerful.

One person or commentator simply writes, it's kind of like the Supreme Court. These guys have risen to the height of their order. And the third thing we need to learn about Nicodemus is found in verse 10.

[11 : 44] Just take a quick look at it. Notice Jesus says something here. Are you not the teacher of Israel?

He does not say you are a teacher of Israel. He calls him the teacher of Israel.

This guy was it. This guy was the head of the class. He's the guy who graduated number one. He would be summed up as a living, walking Bible.

He knew the Old Testament inside and out. This is the guy who teaches other rabbis how to teach God's word.

And because of this, he's both a Pharisee, he's a part of the Sanhedrin, and who he is, you could say that there's no one that Jesus encountered who has more going for him than this man Nicodemus.

[12 : 52] He would be considered a morally pure man, a man free from corruption. He'd have great influence, great respect. He'd be greatly revered.

Not only did he know the Bible, he served God, and he'd teach the Bible. Chances are he came from a very privileged class of family. He's that one guy that stands out in your city as being a very admirable man that you want to be like.

Nicodemus, by all sense, has everything going for him. But something is troubling him. He's met and encountered and heard the teaching of Jesus Christ.

And there's something gnawing at him. There's something in his soul that's wanting more. This is a guy who's dedicated his whole entire life to God.

I'm sure he would have felt proud. It's kind of like that person who thinks he's got the nicest car on the block until the neighbor rolls in with the Ferrari, right? I was pretty excited about my Chrysler 300 there for about a day.

[14 : 05] Right? It's just someone who's got something better. He's got some way more than I do. He heard Jesus preach. He watched Jesus do the things that we read about in Mark chapter 1.

And he knows without a doubt that Jesus is of God. And he's asking himself, maybe I'm not of God.

Maybe I missed out on God's kingdom. Let me ask you a question. Have you at any point considered yourself to be someone, something like Nicodemus?

You felt that spiritually, if there were spiritual qualifications, you've got them, right? I come to church, got Christian parents, I've taught in Sunday school, was a member of the youth group, perhaps even served as a deacon or an elder.

Not only are your children here, but your grandchildren are here. You know the Bible inside and out. But there might be this fear that maybe you might miss out on the kingdom of God.

[15 : 32] The sad reality is, hell is going to be filled with plenty of people who all like to consider themselves good people.

People who came to church. People who served as elders. Who served as deacons. Who served as Sunday school teachers. People who never missed a Sunday.

People who were influential. People who were respectable. But never were born again. Today I want us to have a clear understanding of what this is.

For two reasons. So that one, you will come to appreciate what God did in your life, whether it be days, months, or years ago. For some of you, decades ago.

And give you an assurance of your faith. For others, perhaps you may not have been born again. My prayer is that God will have mercy on you and adopt you as one of his eternal children.

[16 : 41] And that you will ultimately pray that God would indeed save you. Let's get back to text in Nicodemus here. Verse 2.

It says, This man came to Jesus by night. I think we know the reason why. He's come to Jesus by night. Jesus doesn't really count many Pharisees as fans of his, right?

It's a quiet time. He's able to get into a secluded location with Jesus Christ. And he can ask them some very pointed questions. Notice the first thing that he says here.

Rabbi. Right here, we have the teacher of the law of Israel recognizing Jesus as a teacher.

Now, this is what I find really interesting. I actually thought about this this morning. If Jesus were here instead of me, right? Probably would have healed all of you guys that had some physical ailment or suffering.

[17 : 54] He would have done all these great things. He would have preached this sermon. That would have been incredible. How many of you would come and approach him after? A few of you might.

But think about it. You know the guy is perfect, without sin, all powerful. We know in the scriptures, when Jesus Christ did miracles, even in front of the disciples, what did they do?

They were fearful. Because no man had ever done these things. So before you say, hey, I'd be up there talking to him, would you really? What's interesting, and I just thought about this, and I'm going to have to maybe do a little survey, is go through all the Gospels and seeing how many people approach Jesus with a question.

Now, the pages of the Gospels are filled with crowds around Jesus. And what's amazing is that we see desperate people come to Jesus all over the Gospels.

Amen, right? People who are hungry. We have the story in Mark 4 about the woman who was bleeding. You had the story of the righteous man who worked in the synagogues, whose daughter had died, and he came to Jesus.

[19 : 15] We see plenty of stories of people desperate. They have got nothing else to lose. They come to Jesus. I think this is Nicodemus doing the same.

He's got nothing else to lose. He doesn't come because he's bold or he's smart, because from an earthly perspective, if anybody can go up, just think about it, right? The guy's ahead of the state of the queen.

You must think you're pretty special to go and talk to the monarch, right? I don't think he's thinking that. I think he's thinking, hey, I've now got a desperate need.

And even though we think he's got all the right credentials, he's now beginning to think if he has the right credentials. We would think if there was anybody who had him who could go and talk with Jesus, this is the guy.

So here he comes and he addresses him as rabbi. He knows there's something special, really special about Jesus. He's seen the works.

[20 : 20] He's heard the teaching. So notice when he approaches Jesus, he makes a statement. He doesn't ask a question. He actually makes a statement.

Simply says, you are a teacher from God. Boom, it's settled. We may have been talking about this as Pharisees, but I'm the teacher. I'm making this statement.

And I can say unreservedly, you are a teacher from God. Nobody can do these things unless God is with you.

What does Jesus say in response? Gee, thanks. I appreciate that. He doesn't ask why Nicodemus thinks these things.

What's interesting, if you notice in the text, Jesus doesn't even address this man's statement. Jesus goes for the jugular, the heart of the matter, because Jesus Christ knows what's plaguing this man.

[21 : 24] Verse 3 just says, Jesus knows that this man's religion is causing him great angst at the moment.

Jesus knows that Nicodemus is uncertain about his eternal destiny. Jesus knows that Nicodemus is questioning the validity of his qualifications.

These are the qualifications that he has been proud of his whole entire life. Jesus knows that Nicodemus has heard him preach, and he knows what Nicodemus believes.

Notice Jesus Christ says, truly, truly. When we see truly, truly, it's biblical code for you really need to hear this. Right? Whenever you see that Jesus says, truly, truly, they say, listen up right now.

You know, it's like when your parents pronounce your middle name, right? It's time to listen up. Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

[22 : 35] Here we go. We're going to see this term, born again, five times in this passage. Now, if you did any study on the kingdom of God, there's many definitions, and some of them have very different theological nuances, but I'm just going to use a very easy definition.

It's the place where God rules and God works. All right? That's what we're going to call the kingdom of God, where God is present. So now Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a rabbi, a teacher, actually responds to Jesus in a very unique way in verse 4.

Now, if we read this, Nicodemus says, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's wombs and be born? You might think he might be quite daft, right?

Is he really thinking that's what you mean, Jesus? No, no. What he's saying here is that he understands it perfectly, what Jesus is communicating.

He understands that this can't happen. If you know anything about the Pharisees, they're great at using analogies to preach truth. What he's simply saying is it can't be done.

[23 : 46] It can't be done. Now, Jesus had told him, and notice it says, he says, how can a man? He says, not how may I, but how can a man?

He's not asking for mission, but he's asking, how does this happen? And Jesus gives him this answer. How can I be born again? He says, you can't. You can't.

Pop quiz. How many of you had anything to do with your physical birth? Raise your hand. Come on. How many of you had anything to do with your physical birth, right?

None of you. See, what's interesting is that birth, physical birth happens to us, not by us. What Jesus is communicating very clearly here is that nobody can give physical birth to themselves.

And guess what? Nobody can give spiritual birth to themselves either. As your birth has everything to do with your parents, so your salvation has everything to do with God.

[25 : 03] You see, this truth guides us in how to evangelize. It teaches us how to disciple. And it teaches us how to pray.

There is an attitude that comes from this. And think about this. This teaching humbles us, right? It absolutely humbles us.

The only response that we have to be born again is, guess what? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

There's nothing else. It's the most lowliness that we can actually feel. We can't do anything.

Now, how serious of this would have been a statement to Nicodemus? I believe, if it was possible, to get struck with a bolt of lightning and survive, that happened right there.

- [26 : 09] Boom! What Jesus was telling him is that salvation is not for those who become more religious.
- Salvation is not for those who try harder. Salvation is not for those who are more moral. We tend to think in terms to do more good and stay away from the bad.
- And I believe this has been reinforced. And it's been interesting. I've been studying this whole idea of holiness. And we equate it with being of moral character.
- That's unholy bad. That's holy good. If I can just do more of this holy, I'm in a better condition with God, right? So we tend to equate that with our moral laws.
- I really believe to be holy is to be called what God wants us to be. And what does he want us to be? Yes, there's that morality, that purity there.
- [27 : 19] But that purity is only found in him, Jesus Christ. Amen? It's not through my works. It's through his works on the cross. But he's called us for something. And what has he called us? Matthew 28, 19, someone help me out.
- Make disciples of men. I really believe that. That to be holy, to be called to be holiness, is to do the work that Jesus Christ commanded his disciples.
- To teach what Jesus taught. To baptize. But that's a whole other subject. But that's the way we think. Get rid of the bad, augment the good. God will see us better.
- But what's really interesting is the kingdom of God only opens from the inside, right? You come to that door. There's no handle. You can't push on it. There's no intercom.
- There's no bell that you ring. You simply say, I can't open that. I cannot come to you, Jesus Christ. The only thing that I can say is this door only opens for those who abandon all hope in themselves.
- [28 : 27] Remember those Chinese finger puzzles that we had as kids, right? The only way to get out was to push in when our instincts always told us to push, pull, right? I had one trapped on my fingers for like six months, right?
- But that's how we're to come to God. It's to say that I am not worthy and there's nothing here that I bring. It's to in fact abandon all self-effort.
- It's to give up the idea that I can improve myself before God. What's interesting about Nicodemus is he didn't live his life trying to measure up.
- Nicodemus was the measure that everyone else tried to measure up to. He wasn't looking for others to see to measure up. He was the measure.
- You see, Jesus Christ is not just destroying his way of life. He's destroying his whole view of life. He's destroying his whole view of himself. His whole status as a person and faith is shattered on this moment with this conversation with Jesus Christ.
- [29 : 43] You see, what is interesting, and sadly so, Matthew 23, Jesus actually talks about their whole Pharisaical symbol. In case you don't understand what they did is they took the law of Moses, and they augmented all these rules.
- So one of the things, one of the rules that they had is they had a mirror, which they would take a piece of metal and shine it out. But you are actually forbidden to look on the mirror on Sundays. Imagine that, you ladies, on the Sabbath, coming to church, you can't look in the mirror, right?
- I lie, it's me too. And why? Because you might see a gray hair and pull it out. And guess what pulling the hair out is? Work, right?
- You've worked. You've now broken the Sabbath. So we're going to stop you from working. You're not, we're going to make the rule, don't look in the mirror. So what they did is they augmented it.

But Jesus destroys their whole system of religion in Matthew 23, 15. He simply says, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

[30 : 50] For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselytite. And when he becomes a proselytite, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

Whoa. What he is saying is not only are you hell bound, but everything you are teaching is leading other people to hell.

This is Nicodemus. This is the guy who thinks he's the measure. So Jesus, tell him, not only are you, but now everyone you've taught, you imagine having that on your conscience? It would almost destroy a man.

What you have to say when you teach Nicodemus is not good news. Now what he's talking about here, this is the great hypocrisy.

He's not talking, notice in verse 2 he says there's that word we that's present. He's not talking about Nicodemus and his wife. He's not talking about Nicodemus and his sons.

[31 : 56] He's talking about all the Pharisees. And all the Pharisees recognize that Jesus is a teacher from God. Do you get that?

That's the greatest scandal of the cross. Crazy, isn't it?

Before Jesus showed up, he was the measure. Now Jesus shows up. People marvel at his teachings. And Nicodemus realizes that his teachings actually lead people farther from God and not closer.

This man's whole rule of law was built around an intense code for fear of offending God.

And now Jesus, the Son of God, states that everything that you have said is an offense to my Father. The Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 3 that all his works and our works are absolutely worth what?

[33 : 19] Nothing. Even our good works are worth nothing. I'm not talking about our very best works are worth nothing. In fact, our good works, our best ceremonies, our best rituals, our best man-made plans are actually considered garbage in God's eyes.

The fact of the matter, if you didn't do anything, you'd be considered neutral. And that's actually closer to God than actually you doing the good things.

Because it's almost impossible for a man to repent of their good behavior. But before God, that is what has to happen. When you try to do good to please God, you sink further away from him.

The fact of the matter is, Nicodemus didn't need more laws. Nicodemus didn't need more rules. There was no more service that he had to do. There was no more money he had to give away.

There was no more sacrifices he had to offer. There were no more prayers or candles that he had to light or sensors filled with smelling.

[34 : 30] What Nicodemus needed to be was born. Again. So Jesus answered verse 5. He just simply says, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

What does that look like? How does this happen? Now we understand that this is covered in the next couple of verses, which we will cover next week.

But my question that I have before you is, Are you settled before God? Are you settled before him?

Can you speak with 100% certainty that you will see the kingdom of God? Is there anything unsettling in your soul?

Is there anything that you think, Before I die, there's more I need to do? Well, I want to tell you the good news. There's nothing more for you to do.

[35 : 52] There's no more laws that you need to obey. There's no more rules that you need to follow. There's no more things you need to serve or people you need to serve. There's nothing you need to do more for sacrifice.

You do not need to give more or pray more. What you simply need is to be born again.
Dear Heavenly Father,