

John on Jesus - You Must Be Born Again

Sign Title: You Must Be Born Again

June 24, 2012

Good morning Faith family. I also want to say a special “Hello” to those connecting through the Internet. It is great to have you studying the Word of God with us. This morning, we begin John chapter three. In this chapter, we are looking at some of the most famous verses in the Bible.

One of the things I like about the Gospel of John is John doesn’t just talk about events in Jesus’ life, he tells us about Jesus’ interaction with real people. I can relate to those one-on-one conversations. This morning, we have one of those stories where we learn about Jesus and Nicodemus.

Last week we saw how John used contrast as a teaching tool. In John chapter two we saw how Jesus had love and compassion toward a young couple in its time of need when the wine ran out at its wedding. We loved this compassionate side of Jesus. The second half of chapter two was very different. Jesus went UFC fight club in the temple and kicked out the scam artists who were ripping people off in the name of God during the Passover. In one story we saw Jesus’ compassion; in the other we saw Jesus’ authority to carry out judgment. It was quite a contrast, but it is the same Jesus.

This morning, we have more contrast. This time it is educational contrast. We meet Nicodemus. He is a brilliant man, but he can’t understand the basics of how God works in people’s lives. Let’s put our finger in the text and learn how God worked in peoples lives then, because it is the same way he works in lives today.

Meet Nicodemus

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." John 3:1–2 (ESV)

Who are the Pharisees? For those of you new to the Bible, let me introduce them to you. In the Bible, they come across as the villains, and Jesus comes across as the hero. What you need to know is in Jesus' day, they weren't considered the villains. These were the guys who were concerned about the moral and religious decay in society. These were the guys who were trying to draw people back to God. These guys studied the Bible with incredible seriousness. Many of them memorized all of the Old Testament, and they memorized it in Hebrew, a language that was not their mother tongue. They were the most dedicated of the dedicated. This was such an elite group that there was never more than 6,000 in existence at any time in history.

The problem was that in their zeal to follow God, they began adding to the Word of God to help keep the Word of God. I ran across a memorable example of the rules they added to God's law in my preparation for this message. Ladies, did you know the Pharisees made a rule saying a woman could not look in a mirror on the Sabbath? Their wives came to synagogue with bed-head. Do you know why? If a woman saw a gray hair, she would be tempted to pluck it. They considered the plucking of hair a form of harvesting. That was considered working on the Sabbath. To keep you from the temptation to pluck, they added a rule that said a woman could not look in the mirror on the Sabbath day. You can imagine how this became burdensome and out of line. In one sense, we need to

respect the Pharisees. They were incredibly dedicated when it came to following God and living their lives in line with God's Word. The problem was they added rules to God's rules. That is where they went wrong. Nicodemus was part of that super-dedicated group.

What does it mean Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews? This means Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a group of 70 men that ruled over the nation of Israel. It is similar to a big Supreme Court. This is another elite group of leaders.

If you take a peek at verse 10, you find Nicodemus was also called "the teacher of Israel." I want you to notice Nicodemus was not called "a teacher in Israel." He was called "the teacher of Israel." It is possible he was considered the head educator, the biggest brain, the smartest guy, in his day.

So Nicodemus was one of the elite 6,000 Pharisees. He was also one of the 70 in the Sanhedrin, and he was *the* teacher of Israel. This was one extremely smart dude. He had probably memorized the entire Old Testament. He went to the Harvard of his day and graduated first in his class. The wall of his office was papered with credentials, awards and degrees. This guy was as bright as they come. That is what makes this so funny. The walking brain couldn't understand spiritual basics.

He came to Jesus by night. Why did he come to Jesus by night? Many people bash Nicodemus for coming to Jesus after dark. I don't think that is fair. Jesus was very popular. Jesus had every waking hour occupied. The only down time he had was when he collapsed on the bed of his hotel room at night. I think

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night because he wanted extended time with Jesus, and night is the only time he could find it. I think it is that simple.

What were Nicodemus' motives? Nicodemus showed us his motives by the name he called Jesus. He called Jesus "Rabbi."

When you call someone a rabbi, what does it mean? At this time in history, rabbi was not an earned title. It was the title a student gave to someone they wanted to be their teacher. It was a way of asking to be a pupil. When you called someone rabbi, it was a way of honoring them and saying you wanted to learn from them about following God.

I think this is pretty funny. Do you see the contrast? Jesus, who is a blue collar carpenter is called Rabbi by a guy who is considered the sharpest tack in the theological box. Nicodemus, the man considered the ultimate rabbi, considered Jesus his rabbi!

What was it about Jesus that humbled Nicodemus to do this? It was the miracles Jesus performed in Jerusalem during that Passover. Jesus was doing things that only God could do. Jesus grabbed everyone's attention with those miracles. I love Nicodemus' attitude. He told Jesus that he knew Jesus didn't go through all the proper theological education. Jesus didn't have all the degrees and accolades papering his wall, but Nicodemus realized Jesus came from God, because the miracles Jesus did were things only God could do so he was willing to sit down and learn from Jesus. That is humility. Nicodemus, the brain on a stick, wanted to sit down and not teach Jesus but learn from him.

The conversation

As the rabbi, Jesus got to choose the topic of conversation. If you were going to learn from Jesus, what topic of conversation would you choose? Predestination? Song of Solomon questions? Who was the author of Hebrews? Jesus chose the topic of conversation and he chose the simplest but most important topic of all. How does God work in a person's life so he or she enters the kingdom of God?

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 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." John 3:5–8 (ESV)

Why does Jesus begin by saying, "Truly, truly?" This is called the Aramaic double amen. It is a way people underscored the truth of something they were about to say. It is as if Jesus knew Nicodemus would find what he was about to say hard to believe so Jesus prefaced it by telling him it was the truth.

What did Jesus tell him? Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. What does that mean?

First, what is the kingdom of heaven? John didn't talk much about the kingdom. The other Gospel writers did. The kingdom of God is about being in heaven and being part of the new heavens and earth. In heaven, and in the new creation, we will be ruled by a king. That is why it is called a kingdom. Who is the king? It is Jesus. Many of us are focused on electing the right president. It is a good thing to be involved in politics to help our nation bring glory to God. As you are involved in politics, I want you to adjust your expectations. Everything

will always be a mess until Jesus is king and we are living in his kingdom where he is in charge. Before that time, the only question is how many problems and injustices will there be? Some rulers bring more than others. Nicodemus wanted to be part of the kingdom of God. He worked hard to earn his place in it. He memorized his Old Testament. He tried to keep the rules and probably wouldn't let his wife look at her hair on the Sabbath. He made rules to help him keep the rules. He was good at rules and achieving. He was the top of the top of the top. Jesus told him to flush it all down the toilet. It counted for nothing. Nobody will be in the kingdom of heaven unless they are born again. It doesn't matter how well you perform on keeping the rules.

Who can picture Nicodemus' face after Jesus said this? What do you think it looked like? Let me see your rendition of it. I think Nicodemus was completely confused. This went sailing over his head.

Let me give you a little side note. Sometimes Jesus tried to make it confusing. Jesus sometimes said things in a riddle to make people think. When you have to think about things it produces that "Ah, ha" moment when the light bulb goes on and you finally understand it. When that happens, you really learn. This is what Jesus did with Nicodemus. He tried to make him think so he would learn.

The term "born again" in the Greek can have two meanings. It can mean "born from above" or it can mean "born a second time." The light bulb was not flashing for Nicodemus. He wanted to know if he had to go a second time into his mother's womb to be part of the kingdom. He was thinking his mother would

have massive stretch marks. Are there any mothers here that would be interested in giving birth a second time to their adult sons? I didn't think so.

Jesus was trying to teach this bright guy the basics about God. He began by saying "Truly, truly" again. Do you remember what that means? It means "Listen up, this is the honest truth even though it is hard to believe." Jesus tried to explain it to him again. Unless you are born of water and the spirit, you can not see the kingdom of God. What does that mean? The explanation is found in the next verse. That which is born of flesh is flesh and that which is born of spirit is spirit.

Jesus said everyone in the kingdom of God will only be there because they were born twice. Once was a physical birth. How many here were born physically? All hands should be up. It is only those who experience a second birth spiritually that will be part of God's kingdom.

All of you here are very much alive physically, but I know not everyone here is alive spiritually. You are not alive to the things of God unless you are born spiritually. If you are not born spiritually, you will not be part of the kingdom of God. I don't care how much you know spiritually. I don't care how many AWANA verses you memorized. I don't care how many times you attended church. I don't care how much you gave. You can even be a Pharisee who is the teacher of Israel and it doesn't matter. Unless someone is born spiritually, they will not see the kingdom of God. Those are the basics. If you are born once, you will die twice. If you are born twice, you will only die once.

What does it mean to marvel? At this point Nicodemus, the Bible answer man of his day, had that really screwy look on his face again.

Since Jesus' explanations were not connecting, he moved to telling Nicodemus what it looks like when someone is born again. It is like the wind. We see the effects of the wind, but we don't see the wind. When someone is born spiritually, we don't see how it happened but there is a change in his or her life. There is evidence the spirit of God is in his or her heart. He or she will go from hard to the things of God to soft to the things of God. The saved one will go from no interest in the Bible to loving the Bible. He or she will go from laughing at Christ to loving Christ. He or she will go from caught in a web of sin to breaking free from it. There is a change from no interest in God to loving God and his son.

Not only is there evidence of a change but just like the wind gives us evidence of its presence but we can not control that change, just like we can not control the wind. We cannot force a spiritual birth on anyone. How many of us have friends we wish would believe in Christ? How many of us get frustrated when we tell people about how great church is and how wonderful the Bible is and how great it is to have Jesus but our friends look at us like we stepped out of a flying saucer from another planet?

Then one day, something changes for our friend. The light bulb goes on. They get it. They are born again. Suddenly, they love Jesus. Just as we cannot control the wind, we cannot control someone's spiritual birth. Spiritual birth is begun by God. In the beginning of Ephesians two, Paul said we are dead in our

sins. How much can a dead person do? Nothing! Can a dead person blink?

No! Can a dead person lift their pinky finger? No! They are dead! They can do nothing for themselves. That is what we are to the things of God before the Holy Spirit raises our hearts from the dead and makes us spiritually alive.

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 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?” John 3:9–12 (ESV)

Nicodemus said, “This can’t be true. You mean all my education and memorization counts for nothing? I tried so hard. I disciplined myself more than others.” I love Jesus’ answer. I picture Jesus looking at the ceiling and rolling his eyes saying, “You are the top teacher in Israel and you are missing the basics? I thought the wind thing would help you. I made it as simple as I could. If you don’t get the simple stuff with earthly examples, you are never going to understand the heavenly stuff.”

Don’t you love the irony here? The big brain can’t understand the basics.

What does it mean to be born again?

Now Jesus gives an explanation of what it means to be born again.

No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 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. John 3:13–15 (ESV)

The first thing we need to notice is that Jesus is the only bridge to heaven. The reason we know he is the only bridge to heaven is because he is the only one who came from heaven. Find any other religious figure out there. They will

tell you what you must do to go to heaven. The problem is, they don't know what they are talking about. They never came from heaven. Jesus knows the answer. They don't.

How do we know Jesus came from heaven? Nicodemus was convinced about that truth because Jesus was doing things that only God could do. This is why Jesus did miracles, healing and all kinds of indisputable signs. They proved his claims to be God. Get this in your head. Jesus is the only one who has any kind of authority to speak about what it takes to get to heaven. The reason we say this is because only Jesus came from heaven, and he proved it with his miracles.

What does it look like to come alive to the things of God and be born again? It is trusting fully and completely in Christ. Jesus gave an example of what this looks like from Numbers 21. The people were complaining and bickering. Since they were such whiners and complainers, God decided to send poisonous snakes among them. This really got their mind off their problems. People are bitten. People are dying. Poisonous snakes under your bed sheets doesn't make for a restful sleep. What are they to do? God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who wanted to be healed simply needed to look at the snake and have faith that God would heal them. God healed them from death through their faith that God could, and would, miraculously heal them and give them life.

In the Garden of Eden, there was a snake. He bit Adam and Eve and infected them with the venom of sin. It killed them. We have inherited it, and sin

is killing us. Everyone knows they are bitten so they try to heal themselves. We can have snake burning parties. We can have campaigns against snakes. We can have snake protests. We form snake support groups. The problem is, we will still die. We can't heal ourselves. The only way to overcome the bite of the snake is to realize there is nothing we can do to cure ourselves. It is to simply look to Jesus and acknowledge his death in our only hope. It is just like the Israelites did in Numbers 21. The only hope they had for a cure was looking at the bronze snake on a pole.

Becoming alive spiritually means realizing we realize we can't cure ourselves. It means we look in total faith to Jesus who was put on the cross, who died in our place for our sins. If we trust in Christ, by faith we will be healed from the bite of the snake of sin.

It isn't your education. It isn't your perfect attendance score. In fact, for Nicodemus, all those things were barriers to his second birth. He thought it was something he did, not trusting God to do something Nicodemus couldn't achieve. He thought it was about what we do rather than what Christ has done. He thought it was about effort, not simply looking in faith to Jesus and admitting you can't be healed of the bite of the snake unless God does it for us.

Conclusion

What does it mean to be born again? It means to trust in Christ, by faith, that he will heal you from the snake bite of sin. It is giving up your own efforts to heal yourself and to be your own savior. It is acknowledging there is nothing I can do to stop my dying; I cast all of my hope on Jesus to do it for me.

Why isn't everyone born again? We may be physically alive but we are so spiritually dead that none of us will or can place our hope for healing from sin in God unless God does a supernatural work in our life to make our dead hearts come alive.

How do I know if God wants me to be born again? If I know my efforts to save myself from the bite of sin are useless and I know my only hope is Jesus, that is God making me alive right now! Respond in faith. The reason it is only those who place all of their hope in Jesus that can be part of the kingdom of God is because to be part of that kingdom, you have to worship Jesus as the king. In God's kingdom, those who try to worship themselves and be their own savior won't fit.

What is the evidence that someone is born again? The evidence that someone is born again is a changed life. It is just like the wind. You can see the difference Jesus makes in a life when someone is born again.

Applications

Born again doesn't just mean healing from the sins I committed, but healing from the sins committed against me. I want you to think about this from a different perspective today. We often think of saving faith as God forgiving us of the penalty of the sins we have done. New spiritual life is not just forgiveness by faith for the sins we committed. It is healing, by faith in Jesus, from the sins committed against us. Have you been sinned against? Some of you were hurt as children and you have a hard time forgiving your parents. One-third of all women are sexually abused. Are you a woman that was sinned against? The

Gospel isn't just being healed from the sins you committed, it is healing from the sins committed against us.

Where has the serpent bitten you? Where are you bleeding? Where are you dying because of the sin committed against you? God says, "Look to my son, and by faith in him, you will be made whole."

Born again means life with God begins now, not in eternity. I don't like when people tell you to put your faith in Christ so you will go to heaven when you die. That is true, but what are we to do to for the remaining 30 to 80 years until we kick the bucket? Jesus is much more than a life insurance policy. Eternal life begins now. When you come alive spiritually, your life changes now. Your joy changes now. The Holy Spirit begins working in you and through you and leading you and teaching you from the Bible. Eternal life begins now!

This morning, we saw how Jesus began changing the life of Nicodemus. Jesus is still changing lives. Check out this video of how Jesus changed the life of a man in our church. (<http://www.johnonjesus.com/stories/index.html>)



Prayer

Jesus, we come to you tonight just repenting. It is so easy to drift into a worship that is convenient for us, a worship that is about our comfort and preferences. We just repent of that because we know it makes you angry. We want to be worshippers that joyfully sacrifice for your glory. We want to be worshippers that have your heart for the lost. We ask this in your name. Amen.



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