

## Being Born Again John 3:1-21

### I. Stereo-Types • Vs. 1-2

**<sup>1</sup> There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> 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.”**

1. Anyone familiar with the Gospels knows there was one group Jesus seemed to always be in trouble with; the Pharisees
2. It seems nearly every time He turned around there they were, ready to tear into Him.
3. They numbered only about 6,000, but their influence went far beyond their numbers because many of the rabbis, wealthy, & rulers were Pharisees.
  - a. What made them unique was their fierce devotion to religious traditions.
  - b. The Babylonian Exile taught the Jewish people the importance of obeying God.
  - c. They returned from exile with a renewed commitment to keep the Law & set about building a fence around it that would ensure they never violated the commands of God again.
  - d. The problem is, in making up *new rules* about *how* to obey the Law, they came up with things that had little or nothing to do with *real obedience*.
  - e. The more rules they made up, the farther away from the spirit & reason behind the Word of God they got.
4. The Pharisees had *self-appointed task* of *enforcing* the scribes & rabbis *interpretations* of the Law.
  - a. Not only were they ultra-fastidious in their *personal* observance of the rules & traditions, they went around making sure everybody else observed them too.
  - b. When the common people didn't show as great a devotion to these things as they did, they shamed them publicly & accused them of being traitors to God & Israel.
5. Being devoted to man-made rules & regulations instead of true holiness, the Pharisees were forever looking for *loop-holes*.
  - a. They didn't really care about the genuine righteousness that was the foundation for the Law of God.
  - b. They were more interested in just *looking* pious.
6. The 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment said they were to do no work on the Sabbath.
  - a. The scribes filled several books with all the things that constituted work.
  - b. One of the things they were prohibited from doing was tying a knot.
  - c. Since several profession like sailors & tailors tied knots in their work, knot-tying was forbidden.
  - d. The one exception was that a woman could tie her girdle because that wasn't work; it was getting dressed, a necessary daily function.
  - e. So, if it was the Sabbath & a Pharisee needed to draw water from the well & the bucket wasn't tied to the rope --
  - f. In order to get *around* the prohibition against tying a knot, they would take

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- a woman's girdle, tie one end to the rope & the other to the bucket.
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7. Because some used travel in the performance of their career, on the Sabbath you were only allowed to go so far beyond your home.
    - a. So the Pharisees said one's "house" included any man-made structure attached to it.
    - b. Travel didn't **begin** until you passed beyond whatever was attached to your house.
    - c. So they would stretch a rope from the corner of their house to the neighbor's, & from the other side of the neighbor's to the house beyond that, and so on.
    - d. This way, a person could walk far from their home & **technically** never leave it.
  8. These loopholes prove their desire wasn't to honor or obey God.
  9. They just wanted to **look righteous** and gain a reputation among their peers and the common people for being **religious**.
  10. And here's where they ran into trouble with Jesus – **His** whole aim was to obey the heart & Spirit of the Law.
    - a. Jesus knew the man-made rules of the scribes and traditions of the rabbis were clouding the issue and providing a smoke-screen for a **false self-righteousness** He would have nothing to deal with.
    - b. He had interest in such fakery & refused to follow their silly regulations.
    - c. This **infuriated** them because Jesus showed a **higher regard for & obedience to** God than they did with their precious rules.
  11. So they constantly tried to find something with which to **condemn** Him.
    - a. They were always around, just waiting for Jesus to break the Law.
    - b. When they challenged Him for violating one of their rules, He showed how their rule was **itself a violation** of the Law.
    - c. This only made them **more furious** and determined to do Him in.
  12. As we come to our text, Jesus has gone to Jerusalem for the first time since His public ministry began.
    - a. He's collected some disciples & been at work in Galilee teaching & healing.
    - b. News of His power had reached Jerusalem & the Jewish leaders were concerned that **another would-be Messiah** was in the making.
    - c. When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He cleared the Temple of the religious market-place the priests had allowed there.
    - d. This infuriated them – just who did Jesus think He was that He had the right to shut down what they, as custodians of the Temple, permitted?!
  13. Ch. 2 ends by showing a **rift** between the leaders & the common people over the reaction to this new rabbi from Galilee.
    - a. While the leaders were angry at Jesus,
    - b. The common people enthusiastically received Him as a hero who was cleaning up the corruption that had infected their nation & religion.
  14. But John tells us **not all** the leaders opposed Jesus.
    - a. One guy **at least** saw in Him something real, something true.
    - b. His name was **Nicodemus**, a member of the Jewish Supreme Court, & of the party of the Pharisees.
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15. He's one of their premier members & he comes, not to hassle Jesus, but to ask a sincere question about *how to get closer to God*.
16. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, not because he wanted to just **LOOK** religious; He really wanted to follow the Lord & the Pharisees looked like the best thing going at that time.
- But his years *as* a Pharisee had left him empty and longing for more.
  - The reports he'd heard of Jesus' power, coupled with the brief encounters he'd had with Him during His time in Jerusalem, moved Nicodemus to realize Jesus enjoyed an intimacy with God he longed for.
  - So he sought Him out, saying, "**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.**"
  - Nicodemus & his Pharisee buddies had been talking about Jesus.
  - Their conclusion was that Jesus wasn't just one more of a long line of false Messiah's. He was *different*; the *real deal* . . .
    - A *rabbi* who'd proven His authority to rightly interpret & apply the Word of God.
    - A *worker of miracles* whose power was obviously divine.
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17. Here's what Nicodemus' coming to Jesus teaches us:

We must be careful about *stereo-typing* people based on the group they're a part of.

- Nick was a *Pharisee*, of that group who were Jesus' fiercest opponents.
    - But Nicodemus became one of His *best friends*.
    - At the crucifixion, when the disciples fled & left Jesus all alone,
    - It was Nicodemus who went to the Romans & secured permission to bury Him.
    - He spent a considerable sum on the expensive embalming spices they buried Jesus with.
    - When it was the *most dangerous* to be identified with Jesus; when the disciples were in hiding, *that's* when Nicodemus stepped up.
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- 6) We must be careful about stereo-typing people & lumping them all in a convenient mental category because of their race, color, language, class, sect, or group.
- That Mormon Missionary who comes to your door isn't just someone to dismiss as a hopeless cultist.
  - That Jehovah's Witness who rings the doorbell on Saturday morning isn't just another one of those poor people to get rid of.
  - They're at your door because they've been told the lie that that's how they get to heaven.
  - Salvation must be important to them or they wouldn't be at your door.
  - So look past the label, the group they're a part of—see the person Jesus loves & died for.
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- 7) About 50 years ago a country pastor of a small church read an article in the paper about the street gangs of New York.
- There'd been a murder & some gang members were convicted & sentenced to prison.

- b) They were just teenagers & as David Wilkerson looked at their picture, his heart broke.
  - c) Up till that moment they were all just nameless, faceless thugs. But that photo with their names in the caption turned them into real people, sons of heart-broken mothers.
  - d) So he packed his suitcase, climbed into his car, & drove to NY.
  - e) He had little money & no plan. He just knew that he had to share Jesus with any gang members he found.
  - f) One of the kids he ended up talking to was Nicky, the consummate gangster, who threatened the naïve “preacher-man.”
  - g) Wilkerson’s message, coupled with a consistent demonstration of love & concern for those kids, won Nicky over & he gave his heart to Christ.
  - h) Out of such humble beginnings *Teen Challenge* was born, a ministry that has seen the lives of tens of thousands of at-risk teens & adults saved.
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- 8) Right now in our nation the debate is heating up over *illegal immigration*.
- a) Whatever side of this debate you come down on *politically*, make sure you don’t fall into the trap of seeing immigrants as a faceless group.
  - b) Whatever their *legal* status, realize they’re individuals Christ died for & that while they’re here we have an opportunity to share God’s love & truth with them.
  - c) A belief they ought to return to homeland ought never hinder our commitment to the imperative that we’d *all* share the *same home* one day in Heaven.
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## II. You Must Be Born Again • Vs. 3-7

1. There’re some commentators who make a big deal about Nicodemus coming *at night*.
  - a. They say he came under the cover of darkness because he didn’t want any of his fellow Pharisees to see him talking to Jesus.
  - b. I don’t buy it. The *reason* he came at night was because as a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, Nick was a busy guy! This was the first opportunity he’d had to come.
  - c. When everyone else’s day was over & they’d gone home, Nicodemus was so hungry for the things of God he searched out where Jesus was staying & went to see Him.
2. So here he is – Nick at Nite!
3. He begins with a review of the conclusion of his Pharisee buddies that Jesus is the real deal.
4. But Jesus knows what’s *really* on Nick’s heart – He wants to know who to get closer to God.
5. In characteristic fashion, Jesus cuts to the chase . . .

**3** Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you,

6. This was something Jesus said when what He was about to share was especially important. Today, we'd say, "Okay folks, listen up – this is KEY!" **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."**
7. The Kingdom of God was the rule of God over the Earth every good Jew was looking for.
  - a. It was thought that the Messiah would come,
  - b. Would sweep away the kingdoms of man & set up a global kingdom in which God's reign would take over.
8. But Jesus dropped a bomb on Nicodemus by saying the Kingdom of God doesn't arrive with the Messiah coming to Earth in Heavenly glory as was the expectation of the day.
9. The Kingdom isn't something that descends out of the skies onto Earth, it's something we can enter into *right now* by being born again.
10. This confused Nick -

**4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"**

11. Nick isn't being sarcastic. He's asking a sincere question in his attempt to understand the words of a rabbi sent from God.
  - a. A person is shaped by the years & experiences of their life.
  - b. We're the sum of our past decisions; so how can we start over again with a truly blank slate? That's what Nicodemus is asking.
  - c. He understands Jesus is saying *regeneration*; a new start, is what needed. But he thinks that's *impossible*.

**5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."**

12. Jesus repeats & expands on what He said in v. 3
13. There's been a lot of debate over v. 5.
  - a. The solution is right here in the text. Jesus says – **"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."**
  - b. Some say that "born of the water" refers to water baptism while "born of the Spirit" refers to regeneration when the Holy Spirit saves us through faith in Christ.
  - c. Those who interpret the phrase "born of water" as baptism conclude you have to be baptized in order to be saved. But "born of water" *doesn't* refer to baptism.
  - d. As always, we ask, "What did the phrase 'born of water' mean to John?"
  - e. It was a common idiom referring to physical birth.
  - f. Just prior to the birth of a child the amniotic sac breaks & water flows.
  - g. This is the evidence that the birth is *imminent*. So the ancients referred to one's entrance into the world as being "born by water."
14. The context proves this is what Jesus means, *not baptism*.
  - a. Remember—Jesus told Nick he had to be *born again* if he wanted to see the Kingdom of God.

- b. Nick asked *how*, casting it as a question about *physical birth*.
  - c. Jesus then contrasted 2 *kinds of birth*, one physical & one spiritual.
  - d. Just as physical birth brings entrance into the kingdoms of this world, spiritual birth brings entrance into the Kingdom of God.
  - e. God knew there would be controversy over this so Jesus *makes it even clearer* in v. 6 – “**That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**”
15. The rules of grammar draw a parallel between vs. 5 & 6 so that “born of water” equals “that which is born of the flesh.”
16. After making it clear that a new birth, a *second* birth is needed—Jesus said . . .
- 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’**
17. Jesus says, “Don’t trip Nick! Don’t marvel, don’t be dense & act as if you don’t get it when I say ‘Being born again is a prerequisite to what it is you’re looking for.’”

### III. Illustrations • Vs. 8-12

1. Jesus then uses some illustrations from nature to convey the work of the Holy Spirit in making us new . . .

**8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”**

- 2. You can’t see the wind, but you see its influence & effect on what it touches.
  - a. The leaves & branches of the trees move. You can hear it as it passes by.
  - b. You can see it blowing your friend’s hair, well, in most cases anyway.
- 3. The new birth Jesus is speaking about is the same way; it’s a work of the Spirit.
- 4. You can’t see the Spirit Himself, but you can see & hear His influence in the lives of those He causes to be born again.

**9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”**

5. Read it like this – “HOW?!?! Jesus, I want to understand. I trust what You’re saying is true but I’m *not getting it*. Please help me understand!”

**10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”**

6. Jesus gives Nicodemus a mild but well-deserved rebuke.
- a. Nicodemus was esteemed as one of the *premier teachers* of that time.
  - b. Jesus didn’t say he was “a” teacher; he was “the” teacher of Israel.
  - c. Nick’s error was that as a rule-keeping Pharisee he’d lost sight of the *spiritual realm* altogether.
  - d. Religion had become so much a thing of rituals & regulation there was nothing of faith left.
  - e. His pursuit of a *relationship* with God had been *hijacked* by dead *religion*.
  - f. So much so that when Jesus tried to speak to him about *spiritual things*, Nicodemus was clueless.
  - g. And all of this only served to prove that Nicodemus, for all his piety & religion, was lost – the Spirit was totally absent from his life.

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7. Did you know that you can be *very religious* & still lost?

- a. There are tens of thousands of Hindus who follow exacting lives of devotion to their gods who are utterly without hope.
  - b. There are countless Buddhists who've racked up thousands of hours chanting a mantra before a gohonzon, who are lost.
  - c. There are oodles of JW's & Mormons who've spent countless hours going door to door who are no closer to heaven than the worst pagan.
  - d. And there are **hundreds of thousands** of church-goers who follow a religious lifestyle but have no real abiding faith in Christ.
8. For all of these, religion equals morality, no less, & certainly no more.
- a. They view God as little more than an umpire who oversees an obstacle course called "life."
  - b. As long as they compete by the rules, they believe they're okay & Heaven is the prize.
9. To all these, the Nicodemuses of the world, Jesus says – **"You must be born again!"**
- a. It's not about following the rules.
  - b. It's about a **new life** where faith in God brings you into a whole new reality, a whole new realm where the main thing is a living, vital, daily relationship with God.
10. We could easily sum up what Jesus says here this way:
- Born once – Die twice  
Born twice – Die once
- a. If the only birth you've had is your entrance into this world, then not only will you one day die physically but you will perish in eternal, spiritual death.
  - b. If you've been born again, then the only death you may experience is when the body wears out. Eternal life in heaven awaits.
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**11 Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.**

11. By "we" Jesus means all those faithful witnesses over the generations who've faithfully spoken the Word & counsel of God.

**12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?**

12. Jesus said this to awaken Nick to just how serious things were for him & those he led.
13. Jesus used earthly illustrations to explain spiritual truths but Nicodemus **still** wasn't getting it.
14. If the guy who was supposed to be "the teacher of Israel" was struggling, it wasn't looking good!
15. Jesus knew Nick's **real problem** wasn't an **inability** to understand; it was an **unwillingness** to.
- a. All his life Nicodemus had trusted in his **own goodness**, his **own performance** of the rules to earn Him a place with God.
  - b. Jesus turned that whole idea on its head & told him he needed to **start over**.

**IV. Salvation • Vs. 13-17**

1. Though in most Bibles what follows v. 12 is presented as the words of Jesus, it's pretty sure this is John's commentary.
2. The Greek didn't have punctuation marks so this isn't marked off in quotes.
3. John often added his own commentary after quoting Jesus.

**13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven. <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.**

4. In Numbers 21 we read how the camp of Israel was invaded by poisonous snakes.
  - a. Whoever was bitten died, *unless* they looked up at the image of a bronze snake Moses erected in the center of the camp.
  - b. This foreshadowed Christ Who was *made sin* for us on the cross.
  - c. We've all been bitten by the Fall & are dying of the spiritually fatal poison of sin.
  - d. Salvation comes, not for any work we do but the Work Jesus has already done.
  - e. All we need to do is look to Him & we're saved!

**16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

5. Being born again comes through *believing* in Jesus.
6. Though we are *all* wretched rebels who deserve hell, God doesn't see us as a *group*; He sees *individuals*; men & women & children He loves passionately!
7. So He sent His Son to pay for the guilt of every one of our sins; those of the past, the present, & even the future.
8. And He says, "Just look to My Son, look to Him & be saved!"

**17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**

9. Oh that we who've been born again might remember this, this week; that God did not send His Son into the world to *condemn*, but to save.
10. It seems the Evangelical Church today has earned a reputation for condemnation rather than compassion.
  - a. Since the Election of 2004 we seem to be known more for the things we condemn than for who & what we love.
11. If you're one whose view of Christianity is a wagging finger telling you all the things you can't do, and if you do do, then you're scum – I hope what we seen today has changed that.
12. In vs. 18-21, John goes on to say that Jesus didn't *come to* condemn the world because the world is *already condemned*.
  - a. Most people admit they're not living as they ought.
  - b. The Bible says the Holy Spirit *convicts* the lost, showing them their need of forgiveness.
13. Jesus came because God loves you & wants you to experience *relief* from guilt.



- a. The relief you need is not in a **bottle** or shot glass. It's not in a **joint**.
  - b. It's not between the **sheets**. It's not in **more stuff**.
  - c. And it's certainly not in **religion!**
14. The answer, the hope, the life you're looking for is in Jesus.
15. You must be born again!