

# John 3:1-10

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 April 2018

Preacher: Chuck Phillips

[ 0 : 00 ] Yeah, if you have a Bible, if you would like to turn to John chapter 3, or maybe your Bible is on your phone. You can look at it if it's on your phone.

By whatever means, you look at the Bible, if you'd like to follow along in John chapter 3. Yeah, this afternoon I want us to consider a question, and the question is this.

If you are a Christian, why are you a Christian? You say, well, that's an easy question to answer. I heard the message about Jesus.

I turned from my sins. I believed in Jesus. I trusted in what he did on the cross, and now I'm a Christian. You know, that's true. That is the way that we become Christians.

But when a person becomes a Christian, there's something else going on. There's something else going on inside. Not something that we do, but something that God does in us and to us.

[ 1 : 10 ] Something that's unseen. Something that is mysterious. Something wonderful. Something that God does first. And then we repent and believe.

In this chapter, in John chapter 3, Jesus has a name for this mysterious, unseen thing that he does in a person's heart when they become a Christian. It's called being born again.

Now, that phrase, to be born again, sometimes that can have a negative connotation. When we think about born-again people, sometimes we think of people who are Bible beaters, people who are intolerant people, who are trying to force their religion down someone else's throat.

But this afternoon, we're going to let the Bible define what it means to be born again.

So, if you want to follow along, I'm going to be reading from John chapter 3, beginning in verse 1 through verse 12. You'll recognize this as a very familiar passage of Scripture. Jesus' encounter with the Pharisee named Nicodemus.

[ 2 : 20 ] So, let's hear God's Word. This is John chapter 3, beginning in 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.

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 womb and be born? 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 flesh is flesh, and that which is born of 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.

[ 3 : 28 ] 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?

Truly, 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 of earthly things, and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?

Now, who is this man that Jesus is having an encounter with here? Here is someone who came to Jesus and wanted a private audience with Jesus, so he's meeting with Jesus one-on-one.

His name is Nicodemus. It's a Greek name, but he's not a Greek. He's a Jew. In fact, he is very Jewish. So what do we know about him from the text here?

First of all, in verse 1, he is a ruler of the Jews. In other words, he's a member of the Jewish ruling body. He's a member of the Sanhedrin. So this man is an important man.

[ 4 : 41 ] And this man is a powerful man. In verse 10, Jesus calls him the teacher of Israel. He was a professional student of the Old Testament.

He was a professional teacher of the Old Testament. He was an expert in the Old Testament. He would be the equivalent today of what we call a professor at a theological college or seminary. We know also from John chapter 19 that he was probably a wealthy man after Jesus' death on the cross. It was Nicodemus who bought the very expensive spices with which to anoint the body of Jesus.

We know that he was a respectful man. And he was very respectful of Jesus. Jesus, after all, had not been to the correct theological schools. And yet, Nicodemus still called him rabbi. He gave him a title of respect. Teacher. Professor. But the last thing I want to point out to you about Nicodemus is that Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

[ 5 : 50 ] The Pharisees were, of course, a religious party in Jerusalem of that day. And they gave themselves over to one thing. And that was to keeping God's law.

Is that a good thing? To want to keep God's law? It's a very good thing. But they took a good thing and they did it in the wrong way.

And here's the problem. Here's the problem with their law keeping. The Pharisees reduced law keeping to keeping the rules externally. They made law keeping just ticking the boxes.

Just externally doing the right things disconnected from a person's heart. In other words, they reduced a relationship to God down to just external law keeping.

Second problem that the Pharisees had with keeping the law was they did it out of a wrong motive. They didn't do it out of a heart of love for God. They did it out of a heart that wanted to earn and merit.

[ 6 : 51 ] If I do the right things, then God will surely bless me. He will surely forgive me. He will surely take me to heaven. So this was his orientation. He was a Pharisee given to keeping the law.

Now, why did Nicodemus come to Jesus? We're not really told right here. You know something? It's not hard to figure out why he came. And I think there are two things here that point to why Nicodemus came.

And the first is this. Nicodemus realized that Jesus was not a man who could be ignored. Listen to verse 2 again. Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who comes from God.

For no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. Why could Nicodemus not ignore Jesus? One word.

Signs. That's the word for miracles in the Gospel of John. You see, Nicodemus had come to something for him, which was an inescapable conclusion.

[ 7 : 56 ] That was, if this man performed miracles, therefore this man must be from God. And if this man is from God, therefore what he says must be true.

And therefore, I must listen to what he has to say. Nicodemus realized, here is not a man that I can ignore. You know something?

Jesus is not a man that you and I can ignore either. You know, here's the point. If Jesus healed the sick. If Jesus gave sight to the blind.

If Jesus caused the deaf to hear. If he cleansed the leper. If he calmed the storm. If Jesus raised the dead. If he did these things. And he did. But, you and I cannot ignore Jesus either.

If Jesus had to say. We must listen to what Jesus has to say. And we must listen to what Jesus had to say to this man. So why did he come to Jesus?

[ 8 : 58 ] Because Jesus, number one, was a man that could not be ignored. But I believe he came to Jesus because he had a question. What was the question that Nicodemus had for Jesus? Do you read it here in the chapter?

No, it's not here. Jesus does a very interesting thing here. He begins to answer what I believe was a question on Nicodemus' heart before Nicodemus asked it.

Jesus knew why he'd come. He knew what was on his heart. He knew what he wanted to inquire about. So if we look at Jesus' answer to Nicodemus, we can figure out what was his question, why he came to Jesus.

What did Jesus start talking about when Nicodemus came to him? He started talking about, in verse 3, how a person sees God's kingdom.

In verse 5, he started talking about how a person enters God's kingdom. So what was Nicodemus' question about? What was on his heart? The kingdom of God. And how you get into the kingdom of

God.

[10:02] We're saying it in a different way. How does a person become a Christian? And how did Jesus answer that question? Look in verse 3 again.

Jesus answered it. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Verse 7. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

Jesus said, you need to be born again. You know, this is something I think that was very surprising to Nicodemus.

This is something that was puzzling to him. This was not what Nicodemus was expecting. What would Nicodemus expect Jesus to say? How do you get into God's kingdom?

Well, you keep the rules. How do you get into God's kingdom? You just be a good person. You do the right things. You keep the law. And this will get you into God's kingdom.

[11:00] But that's not what Jesus said. What Jesus said here destroyed Nicodemus' false concept. What Jesus said here, you can get into God's kingdom by something.

You get into God's kingdom by something that is done to you. A birth. You get into God's kingdom by something that is done to you.

A radical new beginning called the new birth. Now, why did Jesus talk about salvation in these terms to this man?

It was to destroy Nicodemus' false thinking about how you get into God's kingdom. It's not about what you do. Nicodemus being Jewish is not enough.

Nicodemus being religious is not enough. Nicodemus being good is not enough. Nicodemus keeping the rules is not enough.

[12:07] Nicodemus knowing things about the Bible is not enough. Nicodemus, all that you are and all that you've done is not enough to get you into God's kingdom.

And I believe that's why Jesus called it this way. He said, Nicodemus, you need something else. You need another birth. You need a second birth. You need to be born again.

So it's important for us. What does it mean to be born again? This is an important question. If this is the only way to get into God's kingdom, you and I need to know what it means.

What Jesus is saying here, if you're born again, you are in God's kingdom. But if you're not born again, you're not in God's kingdom.

And you are not on the way to heaven. So what does it mean to be born again? Let me point out three things about what it means to be born again. First of all, this birth is, and it's obvious here, this birth is again.

[13:18] It is a second birth. It could be translated a new birth. If you're going to enter into God's kingdom, you need a beginning that is as radical as your first birth.

Secondly, this birth is a heavenly birth. To be born again could be translated, the Greek could be translated, to be born from above.

In other words, Jesus could be saying here, you need to be born from above. You need a heavenly birth. Your first birth gave you earthly life, but you need a birth that is going to give you heavenly life, that is going to put the life of heaven in you.

You know, it's interesting in the Bible, the only way that you get into a kingdom is to be born into it. How do you become part of the kingdom of this world?

You have to be born the first time. But if you're going to get into another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, that kingdom also must be entered by a birth, the new birth.

[14:24] The third thing I want to tell you about the new birth is it is a spiritual birth. What is the agent of this birth? What causes this birth?

Notice three times in this passage, there's a reference to the agent, the one who causes this birth in the heart of a person. Verse five. Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Verse six. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of spirit is spirit. Verse eight. So is everyone who is born of the spirit.

This birth is caused by the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity. The one who is God and the one yet who is distinct from the father and the son.

Let me show you something else interesting here in verse five. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

[ 15 : 36 ] What does he mean by being born of water? What does water have to do with the experience of being born again?

Is this a reference to baptism? I think that's unlikely. At this time, there was no such thing as Christian baptism. Some people have said, well, this is a reference to natural birth, because part of natural birth is water.

And so Jesus would then be saying to get into God's kingdom, you need to be born first physically, then spiritually. But I don't think that's really what this is aiming at here.

What does he mean to be born by water and the spirit? You know, it's very interesting. In the Old Testament, there's a symbol for the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. And it is water.

And I think what Jesus is doing here, he's saying born of water, because Nicodemus is a student of the Old Testament. And he knows the Old Testament.

[ 16 : 39 ] And I think he knows that this would take his mind back to a very, very famous passage in the Old Testament. This is Ezekiel chapter 36, verses 25 and 27.

And it's interesting what we find in the Old Testament is a description of being born again. What Jesus is saying to Nicodemus is this is not something new.

This is something that was prophesied in the Old Testament. And notice how being born again is described in the Old Testament. Let me read to you Ezekiel 36, 25 and 27.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and a new spirit. I will put within you.

I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes. You see, it's interesting. We have the same three things in both passages, both in John chapter 3 and Ezekiel chapter 36.

[ 17 : 45 ] We have water. I will sprinkle clean water. We have the spirit. I will put my spirit within you. We have a new birth and I will give you a new heart. Two passages.

Same thing. This experience of being born again. It's by the Holy Spirit. You know, water is the Old Testament image of the Holy Spirit.

Did you know there's another image of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament? And it's wind. And what is so interesting is it right here in John chapter 3, Jesus talks about wind too.

Look at verse 8. 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.

When Jesus says that this spiritual birth is by the wind, the Holy Spirit is like the wind, what is he saying about being born again? He's saying it's something mysterious.

[ 18 : 45 ] It's something unpredictable. It's something uncontrollable. Let me ask you a question. Can you make someone a Christian? Can you control the Holy Spirit?

No, you cannot. Can you control the wind? Of course not. Can you make yourself a Christian? Can a person do that?

Well, you say all I have to do is repent and believe. But can you really do that on your own, by yourself? And the answer is no.

These are familiar words. This is Ephesians chapter 2. How does Paul talk to the Ephesian Christians? He talks to them about what they were like pre-conversion. This is Ephesians chapter 2, verse 5.

You were dead, but now you've been made alive. Verse 6, you have been raised up. What Paul is saying is that becoming a Christian is like a resurrection from the dead.

[ 19 : 55 ] The point is this, that new birth is not something that you do. It is something that God does. It is something that God does to you. In the new birth, we are passive.

You say, no, I did do something. I repented, I believed, I trusted in Jesus. You know, that's all true. But the question is this, why did you do it? You did those things because God did something first. He caused the wind of the Holy Spirit to blow upon your heart. And He caused the water of the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon your heart.

And now you have a new heart. And now you can repent and believe. Notice in verse 3, the order of these events is very important.

Listen to verse 3 again. Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. You see the order here? What comes first? Being born again.

[ 21 : 05 ] And then seeing and understanding God's kingdom. Until you're born again, until the Holy Spirit does this to you, you don't see God's kingdom. You don't understand that you're a sinner.

And you don't understand that you need Christ. You don't understand His work. It's only after He gives you a new heart and gives you understanding, you see your need for Christ.

And you repent and you believe. To sum it all up, in salvation, God does it all. So why is this important?

I mean, is this important for the way we live as Christians? I believe this is very important for how we live. Some people would say, well, this is just theology. It doesn't really have any application in our lives.

Wrong, wrong. Let me give you a few reasons why this is so important that we see in salvation that God does it all. Number one, to believe that God does it all gives God all the glory in salvation.

[ 22 : 10 ] You know what we want to say? We want to say, well, God, you did most of it. You sent Jesus. He died for my sin. God, you did most of it. But, you know, I did some of it. I repented.

I believe. You know, it was a joint effort. You did most of it. I did a little of it. You get most of the glory, but I get a little of the glory. Wrong. If God has done it all, God gets all the glory.

You know, if you're a Christian, the only thing you can do is look up into the face of God and say, God, you have done it all.

You get all the glory. Second thing. Second reason I believe this is important. This makes us humble before God. I want to tell you what my sinful heart is like.

It is proud. I love to think to find things that I think that I've done that I can boast in. But you see what this does? If God has done it all, this destroys my pride.

[ 23 : 17 ] My pride and achievement. Oh, I want to boast in what I've done. You know, I want to feel like I have made myself worthy for God to love me and forgive me and take me to heaven.

But no. God has done it all. It destroys my pride. Third thing I want us to see. This makes us humble toward other people. You know, we like to look at other people, particularly non-Christians.

And we like to feel superior to them. You know, I want to feel I'm better than people who are not Christians. You know, I want to feel, well, if they were as smart as me, they'd be a Christian.

If they were as good as me, they would be a Christian. As if it was something in me that made me a Christian. You know, once we realize we are Christians only because of what Jesus has done.

Once we realize it's because God has done it all. We cannot feel superior to anyone on the face of the earth. If there's any difference in us morally and anybody else out there, even non-Christians.

[ 24 : 26 ] The only reason for that is the grace of God. Because if you're a Christian, God has done it all. Here's another reason why it's important that we believe God has done it all in salvation.

This gives us hope for everyone. You know, I used to play this little mental game. I used to look at my friends who were not Christians and I would divide them into two categories.

One category is people that I thought were likely to become Christians. And there was another category. People that I thought would never, ever become Christians.

Their heart's too hard. They're not interested. Their heart is so hard. But in the new birth, what happens?

Ezekiel 36, and this is God's speciality. It is to take a hard heart and to make it a heart of stone. If you're a Christian and your heart is not hard to God, why is that?

[ 25 : 31 ] It's because God, by His Holy Spirit, made a hard heart, a heart of stone, into a heart of flesh. So the point is, if God does it all in salvation, this gives us hope for everyone.

And what else does this do? This gives us encouragement to pray for everyone. No matter how unlikely it might seem to us from our human perspective that they would become Christians.

This gives us hope in evangelism. Confidence in evangelism. When we present the gospel to someone, it's not up to us to make them a Christian. And it's not up to us to ultimately convince them to be a Christian.

Our hope and prayer is that we, as we share the gospel with people, God will work this miracle. He'll pour in His Holy Spirit and work this miracle of the new birth.

Now let me say just one last thing here. If you're not a Christian, you may be saying, If God does it all in salvation, then there's nothing I can do.

[ 26 : 36 ] I just have to sit back. There's nothing I can possibly do. Because I cannot make myself a Christian. Is that the way to view things? Not at all.

What does the Bible say? The appeal of the Bible, the invitation of the Bible, the command of the Bible to all people, to people who do not know the Lord, is come.

What did Jesus say? Matthew 11, 28. Come unto me, all you that are heavy laden. I will give you rest. The command of the Bible, the invitation of the Bible, the appeal of the Bible, to all people is to seek the Lord.

This is Isaiah 55, 6. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is here, near. Also, the appeal of the Bible, the invitation of the Bible, the command of the Bible, is to call on the Lord.

Both Joel and Paul said, Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. It's true, we cannot make ourselves a Christian.

[ 27 : 37 ] But if you're not a Christian, the Bible commands you, seek the Lord. Call upon the Lord. Come to the Lord. And you know what?

Come to him with this attitude. Come to him and acknowledge the fact, I cannot make myself a Christian. You must do it. Come to him with this attitude.

I need you to do for me what I cannot do for myself. You give me a new heart. You pour out your Holy Spirit upon me. You soften my hard heart.

You give me the gift of faith. You give me the gift of repentance. And if someone who is not a Christian comes to God this way, God will do that.

Let's bow in prayer. Let's bow in prayer.