

John 3:1-12

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[0 : 00] I want to ask you a question this morning, and the question is this, why are you a Christian?

! What is the ultimate reason that you are a Christian? That there is faith in your heart? That you desire to follow the Lord Jesus Christ? Why are you a Christian?

You know, that's easy. Some would say, well, that's easy. That's an easy question to answer. I heard the message of the gospel. I turned from my sins. I repented. I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I trusted in what he did on the cross, and that is why I am a Christian. You know, that is true, that these are things that someone who is a Christian has done.

But when a Christian becomes a Christian, there's something else going on. Something more than what we merely do. Something on the inside.

[1 : 05] Not something we do, but something that God does to us and in us. Something that is unseen. Something that is mysterious. Something that is wonderful.

Something that God does first. Then we repent. And then we believe. This chapter, Jesus has a name for this mysterious, secret thing that God does.

That causes us to become Christians. Jesus calls it being born again. And as we read this chapter, we'll see that this is very important.

Being born again is indeed a life and death issue. Jesus teaches here that if a person is born again, he is in God's kingdom.

He's on his way to heaven. But it also teaches here, if a person is not born again, he is not in God's kingdom. And is eternally lost.

[2 : 18] So follow along as I read our passage of scripture. This is John chapter 3, verses 1 through 12. Hear God's word. 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.

[3 : 24] Do not marvel that I say to you. You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes. And you hear it sounds. But you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

So is everyone who is born of the spirit. Nicodemus said to him. How can these things be? Jesus answered him. Are you a 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 of heavenly things? Before we look at this passage.

Let's bow for another word of prayer. Father, we thank you for these solemn words from the mouth of our Lord Jesus to Nicodemus. Father, we pray this morning for what you would say to us.

[4 : 34] Father, we thank you so much for your Holy Spirit that dwells in our hearts. We thank you that he authored these words on the hearts of your prophets and apostles.

They've recorded them for us. Father, we pray for the ministry of the Spirit as we consider your word this morning. We pray that truth would penetrate our hearts.

Father, this morning I want to pray for every person that is present here. That you, by the power of your Spirit, would speak to them.

And that truth would penetrate and go deep into all of our hearts. Do everything in us today that you desire to do. By your word and by your Spirit.

We thank you for what you will do. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Now, who is this man who has come to Jesus?

[5 : 39] He came at night. He came solo, alone. He came for a private interview. What do we know about this man?

Well, we know several things about him. From verse 1, we know that he was a ruler of the Jews. In other words, he was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Jewish ruling body.

He was an important man. He was a powerful man in Israel. 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 a professor at a theological college or a theological seminary.

We know from John chapter 19, he was probably a wealthy man. After Jesus' death on the cross, Nicodemus bought very expensive spices to anoint the body of Jesus.

[6 : 43] We can see here that he is a respectful man in verse 2. Jesus had not been to the theological schools, the correct theological schools.

And yet, Nicodemus still gives him a title of respect. He calls him rabbi, teacher, professor. And lastly, we learn here that Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

And this is very important to understand his mindset as a Pharisee. I think this is the key to understanding why Jesus spoke to him in this way, using this metaphor for becoming a Christian.

Being born again. You remember that a Pharisee was a member of a religious party in Israel. And the goal of the Pharisees, the thing they gave themselves to, was the keeping of God's law.

That was paramount for a Pharisee to keep the law of God. Sounds like a good thing. Right? But they took a good thing and they did it in a wrong way.

[7 : 54] They reduced law keeping to outward external compliance. To rules. They just wanted to tick the boxes.

I've done this. I've done this. And then I'm right with God. But they did something else. They kept God's law. They kept these external things.

Reading the scripture. Going to the synagogue. Praying. They did those external things. They did them out of a wrong motivation. They did them to earn and merit.

If I'm this good. If I do all these things. Then God, you'll have to forgive me. You'll have to bless me. You'll have to take me to heaven. So they took a good thing. Keeping God's law. And they did it in a wrong way.

They reduced the relationship with God. Down to just keeping the rules. Keeping the rules. Hoping that that would merit them heaven. Now let's ask this question.

[8 : 55] Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus? Are we told here? No, we're not. But it's not hard to figure out.

And I think there are two things here that point to why Nicodemus came to Jesus. And the first one is this. Nicodemus realized that Jesus was not a man who could be ignored.

Listen to verse 2. 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. Why could Nicodemus not ignore Jesus?

The signs. That's John's word for miracles. The signs. Nicodemus had come to an inescapable conclusion. If this man performed miracles.

Therefore, he was from God. And if he was from God. Therefore, what he said was true. Nicodemus realized.

[9 : 59] This is not a man that I can ignore. Nicodemus realized. I cannot ignore what this man has to say. Because what he has to say is from God.

It is God's message. And I want to tell us today. Jesus is not someone that you and I can ignore.

If Jesus healed the sick. If he gave sight to the blind. If he caused the deaf to hear. If he healed the lepers. If he calmed the storm. If he raised the dead.

And he did. Then Jesus is not someone that. You and I can ignore. And we're faced with that same inescapable conclusion.

If he did these things. We cannot ignore this man. And when this man speaks. This is God. Speaking. To us. So why did Nicodemus come to Jesus?

[10:59] First reason. Jesus was not a man that he could ignore. But I believe there's another reason that Nicodemus came to Jesus. And that is. I believe he had a question for Jesus. What was that question?

Do you read it here? Did you hear it here as we read the verse? No. You didn't. There's no record of a question here that he asked. But Jesus does a very interesting thing here.

And Jesus began to ask. Began to answer. Nicodemus's unasked question. Did Jesus know why Nicodemus had come?

Of course he knew why Nicodemus had come. Did he know the question on his heart? Did he know what Nicodemus wanted to know? Of course he knew. So what does Jesus do? He starts right in to answer the unasked question on Nicodemus's heart.

And what did Nicodemus want to know about? What does Jesus start talking about here? And verse 3. How a person sees God's kingdom. Verse 5.

[12:01] How a person enters God's kingdom. What was his question? The kingdom of God. How does a person get into it? Or saying it in a different way.

How does a person become a Christian? I believe that was his question. But what was Jesus' answer?

Look at verse 3. Jesus answered. 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 say to you.

You must be born again. If you want to get into God's kingdom, you need this experience. You need the experience of being born again.

Now, is that what Nicodemus expected? I don't think so. I think this was a huge surprise to him. I think this was very puzzling to him. I think he never expected Jesus to answer like this.

[13:02] What did Nicodemus expect Jesus to say? How do you get into God's kingdom? You do the right things. You keep the law. You be a God person.

You be a good person. You do the things you should do. If you're good, you're in. If you're bad, you're out. In other words, Nicodemus expected Jesus to say, You get into God's kingdom by something you do.

But what did Jesus say? He said it's not something that you do. It's something that God does to you.

You get into God's kingdom by something God does. He causes you to be born again. A radical new beginning done to you.

Now, why did Jesus talk about salvation in this way to this man? Is there any other place in the Gospels where Jesus talks about salvation in terms about you being born again?

[14:10] I don't know of it. But Jesus used this metaphor with this man to talk about how a person gets into God's kingdom. Why did Jesus do that with this man?

I believe it is to destroy his false thinking. To destroy his false concept. In a way, Jesus is saying to him here, It's not about what you do that's going to get you into God's kingdom.

It's not about you being Jewish. That's not good enough. It's not about you being religious. That's not enough. It's not about your law keeping. That's not enough. It's not about knowing the Bible and knowing theology.

That's not enough. Summing up, Nicodemus, all that you have done to this point, is not enough. It's not about what you do.

It's about something done to you. To get into God's kingdom, you need something else. You need another birth. You need a second birth. You need to be born again.

[15:15] What does that mean to be born again? I think there are three things here. Let me point out to you. First of all, this birth is again.

This is beyond a physical birth. This is another beginning. Another radical new beginning. This birth is again.

It is a second birth. The next thing I want us to see is this birth is a heavenly birth. It says here, Jesus says you must be born again.

Could be translated, born from above. In other words, Jesus could be saying right here, you need a heavenly birth. You need heaven to reach down and touch you and change your heart.

You need the life of heaven placed in your heart. This is a heavenly birth. So it is being, it is another birth. It's being born again. It is a heavenly birth.

[16:19] But there's a third thing. And I think this is really important to understanding what it means to be born again. This birth is a spiritual birth. What causes this birth?

What is the agent of this birth? Listen to verse five. Truly, truly, I say to 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 and flesh, and that which is born of spirit is spirit. Verse eight, so it is with everyone who is born of the spirit.

Three times, what causes this birth? What is the agent of this birth in the heart of a person? It is the Holy Spirit. Third person of the Trinity.

The one who is God and yet who is distinct from the Father and the Son. He is the agent of this birth. Now, let me show you something very interesting here.

[17:21] Look again at verse five and listen to it. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Is that what it says there? No. It says, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

So, the question is, what does water have to do with this experience of becoming a Christian? What does water have to do with this experience of being born again?

Is this a reference to baptism? I don't think so. I think that's unlikely. There was no such thing as Christian baptism at this time.

So, what in the world does Jesus mean by being born by water of water? I'll tell you what I think.

[18:17] I think the word Jesus using the word water with Nicodemus here connects this experience with something in the Old Testament.

Remember, remember, it wasn't Nicodemus' job. He's a theological professor. He's an expert in the Old Testament. And surely he would know that famous passage in the Old Testament.

All they read it to us this morning from Ezekiel 36. Where there's a prophecy about being born again by water.

And listen to it. This is Ezekiel chapter 36, verses 25 to 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.

[19:16] I will put my spirit within you. And cause you to walk in my statutes. What do we see in Ezekiel 36? We see the same three things that we saw in John chapter 3.

We saw water. I will sprinkle clean water on you. We saw the spirit. I will put my spirit in you. We saw a new birth. I will give you a new heart.

I believe these two passages, Ezekiel chapter 36 and John chapter 3, they're talking about the same thing. The Holy Spirit, the water of the Spirit, being sprinkled upon a heart.

And being born again by water of the Spirit. It's the same thing. What's Jesus saying to Nicodemus? He's saying, No, when I tell you you need to be born again, I'm not coming up with something new. I'm telling you what was prophesied in the Old Testament. For God's people in the Old Testament, in the time of Ezekiel, it was yet future. But what is Jesus saying to Nicodemus?

[20:17] He's saying what was prophesied in Ezekiel, what we get future then, now, is here. With my coming, my death, my burial, my resurrection, my ascension, now, God's people can be born again.

And now, Nicodemus, this is what you need. It's interesting, water is the Old Testament image for the Holy Spirit.

But you know, there's another image in the Old Testament for the Holy Spirit. Wind or breath. It's very interesting, we just read from Ezekiel 36, but in the very next chapter, Ezekiel 37, there's another famous passage about a valley of dry bones.

And God tells Ezekiel to prophesy and to speak to these bones that are dead and dry. and says, blow, wind, blow, blow, breath, the breath of God, the breath of God's Spirit.

And he speaks to these bones and they become alive. Another Old Testament image of the same thing. Another Old Testament image of the Spirit giving life.

[21:37] Now, what is really interesting here, that same second Old Testament image is in John chapter 3. This birth, this being born again, is by the wind of God's Spirit.

Listen to verse 8. Back in John chapter 3, the wind blows where it wishes, you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from, where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. When Jesus says that this birth is by wind, the wind of the Holy Spirit, what is he emphasizing? About being born again. He's emphasizing it's something mysterious. It's something unpredictable. It's something uncontrollable. Can you control the wind? No. Can you control the Holy Spirit?

No. Can you make a person, another person a Christian? Can you argue them into the kingdom? You cannot make another person a Christian because you cannot control the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 39] Can you make yourself a Christian? Well, you say, that's easy. Yes, I can do that. All I have to do is repent and believe. But the question is, can you really do that on your own, unassisted by the Holy Spirit?

Listen to Paul in Ephesians chapter 2. This is what he said to the Ephesians, verse 5. This is pre-conversion. Pre-Christian, he said, you were dead.

But now, you've been made alive. Verse 6, Ephesians chapter 2, he says, you have been raised. Paul is saying here in Ephesians chapter 2 that becoming a Christian is a resurrection from the dead.

Paul's implication here in Ephesians chapter 2 is you cannot make yourself a Christian because pre-conversion, pre-Christian, you were dead spiritually.

And the point is this, the new birth is not something that you do because you were dead. It is something that God does to you.

[23 : 52] You know, this new birth, this spiritual birth, is like physical birth in this respect. What part did you have in your physical birth?

Do you remember back then? Do you remember it? Do you remember, well, I'm on the inside here and I think it's time to come out? Did you do that?

Did you think that? No. What part did you have in your physical birth? You didn't have any. You were passive. And so it is with this birth that Jesus is describing here.

It's not something that you do. It's something that is done to you. You say, well, in my spiritual birth, I repented, I believed, I trusted in Jesus.

That's true. But why did you do it? It's because God did something first. He sprinkled the water of the Holy Spirit on you. He caused the wind and breath of the Holy Spirit to blow upon your heart and gave you new life.

[24 : 58] Then, you repented and you believed. You know, I believe the order here is important. Look at the order here in verse 3. Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Do you see the order here? What comes first? The new birth. Then a person sees spiritually.

Then he understands. Then he believes. Summing it all up, I believe that we're taught here, John chapter 3, that in salvation, God does it all.

Did you realize our salvation is trinitarian? God does it. The Father sends the Son. The Son dies on the cross for God's people and in the Spirit.

He blows upon our hearts. He's poured out on our hearts. He gives us new hearts. Then we repent and we believe. Now, why preach about this?

[26 : 17] Why teach about it? Does this make any difference in the way we live? Or is this just some obscure theological point that Presbyterians are hung up on?

I want to tell you, I believe this is very practical to believe that we are Christians not because of what we've done, but because of what God has done.

Very quickly, let me give you six reasons why I believe this is important. If you believe that God does it all, number one, this gives God the glory in our salvation.

You know, what do we want to say? I'll tell you what my fallen nature wants to say. I want to say, God, you did most of it. You sent your Son. Jesus, you died for me, but hey, I did a little of it.

God, you did your part, but you know, I have my part to do too. I turned from my sin. I saw the errors in my way. I turned from my sin and I believed and trusted in Jesus.

[27 : 19] But you know, to believe that God does it all, what does it do? It gives Him all the glory. If you are a Christian and you realize God has done it all, the only thing that you can do, what, is look up into God's face and say, you have done it all.

You get all the glory. What is the reason for our salvation anyway? What is it ultimately all about? It's about this great God glorifying Himself.

Second reason this is important. Second reason this is so practical. If you believe that God does it all in salvation, this is the basis of our assurance. This is why we can feel safe and secure as Christians.

How do we know that one day God will not say, well, you just sinned too much. I'm just not going to put up with you any longer. You just sinned too many bad things.

You're out of here. I'm forgetting you. You know, here's the point. If you did not become a Christian because of what you did, neither will you lose it because of what you do.

[28 : 32] By your failure to do good things or by doing too many bad things. You see, when we believe that it's a joint effort, God and us, there's always an element of uncertainty.

Is it safe? Is it secure? But if the reason for our salvation is in God alone, it's eternally safe and secure and we can have peace and assurance in our hearts.

Third reason why I believe this is so experienced is this makes us humble. If we believe that God does it all, it makes us humble before God.

It destroys our boasting. It destroys our pride of religious achievement. But you know something? It also makes us humble toward other people.

You know something? I think we've lost our testing, testing. The stamp, this mic right here.

[29 : 32] Okay. You know, to believe that God does it all, it makes us humble toward other people.

You know what I find in my own heart? It's so easy to feel superior to other people. Particularly to feel superior to non-Christians.

You know, I look at non-Christians, I look at their destructive ways in their lives and I think it's so easy to feel if you were as smart as me, you'd be a Christian. If you were as good as me, you'd be a Christian.

If you were as spiritual me, you would be a Christian. But if the only reason that you and I are Christians is because of what God has done, we cannot feel superior to anyone on the face of the earth.

So this destroys our pride before God. This destroys our pride in the face of other people. It keeps us from that feeling of superiority applied to our hearts.

[30 : 38] It makes us humble. poor thing, if we believe that God does it all, it enables us to love other people. Guess what?

You cannot love and help another person if you feel superior to them. It's a wall. They can sense it. We need to cut to help other people.

We need to come alongside them as fellow sinners who found the grace of God. This truth applied to our hearts that God does it all. It enables us to love other people.

Fifth thing, this gives us hope for everyone. You know, throughout my Christian life, I found myself playing this little game in my mind. You know, I look at non-Christians and I divide them into two groups.

The first group is those who are likely to convert and to become Christians. Christians. And the last group is those who would never become Christians. Their hearts are just too hard.

[31 : 40] They're just so confirmed in their unbelief. They just believe so many lies and errors. So I put people in these two groups and I give up on one group because I think they're unlikely to be saved.

This is wrong. This gives us hope for everyone. In the new birth, what does God do? He takes a hard heart, a heart of stone, and he makes it into a heart of flesh.

That is God's speciality in regeneration. So there's hope for everyone. And the last thing that this does for us, this gives us confidence in prayer and evangelism.

Confidence to pray for everyone. Even that person that you don't think is likely to become a Christian. That person you think their heart is too hard. This gives us confidence to pray for them and to share the gospel with them.

The Bible teaches in salvation, Jesus told Nicodemus, you must be born again. This is something that God does.

[32 : 54] God does it all in salvation. It's a wonderful truth. It brings us peace. It brings us assurance. It makes us humble.

One last question I want to address. You may be saying, well, I'm not a Christian. Yeah. Or you may be saying, I'm not sure that I'm a Christian. If God does it all in salvation, what can I do? There is nothing I can do. I just have to sit around and wait. Maybe he'll do it. Maybe he won't. Is that the view of the Bible? No. Let me tell you, the appeal of the Bible, the invitation of the Bible, the command of the Bible is threefold.

If you're not a Christian, it is come. Jesus said in Matthew 11, come unto me, all you that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. The command of the Bible is seek, Isaiah 55, seek the Lord while he may be found.

The command of the Bible is call. Again, in Isaiah 55, call upon him while he is near. And then Paul, in Romans 10, he's quoting the Old Testament prophet Joel, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

[34 : 13] Yes, God does it all in salvation, but if you're not a Christian, what does he command you to do? What does he invite you to do? What does he appeal to you to do? To come, to seek, to call upon him.

Not to be passive. And when you seek him, and when you call upon him, and when you come to him, what do you say?

The very same things we talked about this morning. I cannot do it. I cannot save myself. I cannot make myself a Christian. I cannot die for my sins.

I cannot be good enough. I cannot even repent and believe. You must do for me what I cannot do for myself. And when a person does that, what happens?

God causes him to be born again. Let's pray.