

John 2:23-3:8

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: 06 November 2018

Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Well great, we had a week's break didn't we last week from John's Gospel and we're back in John's Gospel and we're trying to work out what is genuine Christian belief that's if you've been here over the last few weeks what is it what isn't it are we doing it are we not doing it and in our passage today we come to another one of John's belief motifs it's there in verse 23 of chapter 2 there we're introduced to a new group John calls them the many doesn't he the many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing it's exciting isn't it we've been set up to look for this kind of thing as we read through John's Gospel and we're told the many believe in him as a result of seeing their miracles the signs that he does they believe in his name John picks up of the language that he uses in the prologue in in chapter 1 when he's describing what genuine belief is he uses that language doesn't he a belief in his name those who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God it looks like God's family is growing isn't it as the many believe in his name

John's clear isn't it as the many believe in his name John's clear isn't he that they believe they're not pretending to believe they're not saying one thing and doing another they're not being hypocritical so verse 24 comes as a great shock doesn't it it's a very disturbing verse but Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people Jesus is reluctant to count them as followers of whom he can be sure the impression made on them of his miracles was no guarantee in Jesus's mind of their perseverance and of their genuine faith the kind of belief that he was looking for and the couple of verses at the top of your sheets there are a kind of set up for the famous encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus in chapter 3 and Nicodemus in chapter 3 John is teasing us up for that and the key message that John wants us to understand as Jesus and Nicodemus meet is that if you want to know what faith is if you want to know what genuine belief is and whether you're doing it and whether you're not doing it humanly speaking to get it right you cannot get it right why doesn't Jesus sign up for that and why doesn't Jesus sign up for the church on that morning into church membership it is a problem verse 24 Jesus knows about all people they look legit don't they and John adds that little comment it's really interesting in verse 24

Jesus on his part did not interest himself to them as if to say isn't it everyone else thought they were legit we all thought I mean you know John the apostle thought you could have fooled me we thought they were genuine believers but Jesus singular on his part with his unique knowledge of humanity sees right through them doesn't he and it's a problem of human nature of all people everyone thinks revival has come but God incarnate he's not being insulting to our species here but he thinks hang on a minute for a second here you are only human it is your fallen human nature verse 25 Jesus knew what was in man John uses the word anthropos that the human person no matter what you look like from the outside Jesus knows what is in on the inside of a fundamental human person and it's an inability to believe properly and we've got to realize to get belief right we cannot get it right in ourselves I've got two main points really this afternoon our problem we see is two things first of all our natural human attitude towards Jesus our natural human attitude towards Jesus your only human

Nicodemus he comes to Jesus doesn't he and I want to focus in on a few key bits here look at verse two in the second paragraph this man came to Jesus by night and said to him rabbi we know that you're a teacher come from God for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him now you might think okay that is good isn't it Nicodemus's attitude towards Jesus seems well here he says good things about him he calls him rabbi what a sign of respect that is God is with you so that you can do these miracles Nicodemus actually puts his finger on some of the things that Jesus will later stress that we must believe about him that he has come from God Nicodemus gets that right doesn't he his knowledge of Jesus seems right and good but the problem is his deep seated

attitude towards Jesus his problem is clear the moment he opens his mouth what are his first words rabbi we know rabbi we know that you are a teacher come from God notice Nicodemus he comes to the rabbi doesn't he this great teacher but he doesn't come with a question he comes with a statement he doesn't really ask him a question even to start off with does he he does later but he comes with a statement

Nicodemus's posture in the conversation is one of initial certainty certainty concerning the things that he thinks he knows already about Jesus so he comes to him doesn't he Jesus your signs are so very convincing and I've come to tell you that that we now know who you are we know who you are we know who you are we know what you're doing here you're you're a teacher aren't you you're you're you're a good man so good you're here others thought that he was going to bring about a revolution didn't they others thought that he was just a prophet either way we've got you sussed Jesus and that carries on today doesn't it people think that maybe he was a social revolutionary and others think he was a good moral example others a wise sagely teacher others a spiritual mascot others a philosopher others think he was just a con man or a magician others think he was a trickster but either way whatever you think of him either good or bad the bottom line is we know who you are Jesus we've got you nailed we've worked you all out all by ourselves and we just want to let you know that Jesus the point here is not what Nicodemus thinks of him whether he thinks good things or bad things about Jesus that is kind of irrelevant the point actually is that he thinks he knows Jesus in the first place that by himself he's got the know-how that he's got the insight and we can be like that can't we we've got all the data we've got all the interpretative skills we've got the intellects and to nail Jesus down to nail the person of Jesus Christ down to make our informed decisions about him to take him or to leave him to believe him or not we know who he is and people say don't they your Jesus is clearly not the same as my Jesus we come to Jesus with a statement of who we know he is

[8 : 46] Jesus you are this to me we don't come to him with a question and Nicodemus is the spokesperson for the human race here isn't he he represents human certainty based on human deduction of what human beings see in Jesus Christ he's got a superiority complex hasn't he but that arrogance actually makes Nicodemus stupid it makes him ignorant of the things that he should know about Jesus Jesus says doesn't he later on in this chapter how can you be the teacher of Israel and not know these things John shows us here that it's not for lack of information that people don't see Jesus for who he is or understand what he's come to do it is fundamentally an attitude problem it is a posture of certainty in our own inventions of Jesus Christ that make people stupid as to who he really is and we all do it don't we there's a great episode of a TV show called Undercover Bosses where an overzealous factory manager features in the show and he is so sure that he knows who the new guy in the forklift truck department is he's just another lackey who signed into the company a couple of weeks ago we as the audience know that he's actually the CEO of the whole company and he signed on to work undercover and at one point the manager gets so annoyed with him without realising it he fires his own boss the reveal at the end is TV gold you should watch it your attitude is that natural pride of having Jesus nailed isn't it thinking we know who you are but Nicodemus you're only human you're only human and I know what's in humans

Jesus says I know what's in man and this is what you do isn't it with me you can't believe because you are blocked by this natural fallen human attitude to me your natural assumptions and your sense of certainty about me that's the first thing secondly you can't believe not only because of your natural attitude but because of your natural human birth you can't believe because of your natural human birth look at verse 3 Jesus answers him truly truly I say to you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God Jesus is saying there isn't he that true belief and entry into God's kingdom is more than natural human deduction it's more than simply being impressed by Jesus it's more than the belief that you are competent to judge who Jesus is true belief actually is not at all natural it is entirely supernatural

Jesus describes it as being born doesn't he being born again or above what's he saying there let me say that if you hear that and you haven't understood it then you're halfway to understanding it because what we're talking about here are deeply mysterious things in the work of God we are walking here right at the bounds of human language so much so that John in the original Greek he has to use a word that has two meanings it can mean to be born from above or to be born again but if we can simplify it Jesus shows Nicodemus that true belief is about something far deeper than what you claim to know and what you judge about Jesus from your own experience it is about

something far more fundamental to your identity in the first place it's not about how you conceive of him but how you are conceived what matters in believing in the right way is having the right birth Jesus describes two kinds of birth doesn't he in verse 6 if you look there born of the flesh or born of the spirit imagine your birth certificate Jesus looks at your birth certificate doesn't he and with all the details on it and next to your name he sees only one of two possibilities flesh birth or spirit birth they're Bible words flesh it just means natural human birth and spirit is to do with God isn't it it's being born by God conceived by God in about an hour if I go down to Buckingham Palace after this talk and I speak to the Queen's guards at the gate imagine it and I could tell him couldn't I I want to come in can you let me in just me I really want to sit in the royal suite I want to be a royal for the rest of my life can you let me in

I really want a Range Rover he'd say get lost wouldn't he don't waste my time and I could say well actually don't you know who I am I am a member of the royal family Lord Robert this is preposterous let me in to the palace well what would he say he would say well show me your birth certificate then if you're conceived by royal people if it says royal birth on your birth certificate then come in to the kingdom but if not forget it birth is everything isn't it when it comes to royal things and when it comes to kingdoms and when it comes to the kingdom of God it's true you can do all you like to try and be royal but without the right birth you're not coming in and the same goes for belief that is why this passage is here after the many believe it is explaining to us what is going on here it's the same with belief true belief is like birth in one sense it is something that you just cannot do by yourself your first birth you had no part in it did you you did nothing really you were a shriveled mess of flailing limbs you were so vulnerable you were so weak and it's the same with belief it's like being born born again and it must be done by God and God alone you've got to be born of the spirit of God really the meeting of Nicodemus is an exposition of John chapter 1 verse 12 to 13 do you remember that

[16:47] John says to all who did receive him who believed in his name there's that language again he gave the right to become children of God and we're thinking aren't we well John clarify what that means believing in his name what is that and he does that he said people who believe in his name are people who are born not of blood nor of the will of flesh nor of the will of man but they are born of God he says true belief in his name is of God it comes from him to get it right we've got to realise we can't get it right just as to be born right we don't get it right do we that's the point but here's the rub with it because it's the very impossibility of it for you to do it that will actually lead you to the possibility of it once you grasp that you cannot do it you will begin to do it as soon as you start saying

I can't do this Lord I need your help to get into the kingdom even to believe when you think you can't achieve perfect belief actually you're well on your way the kind of believing Jesus is looking for is the kind of believing that is only from God I've spoken on Nicodemus on this passage quite a few times before and because he's religious that's always why I've gone to him he's an easy target isn't he to kind of attack religious people John tells us he's the ruler of the Jews but what I've missed actually until this week is that Nicodemus is put here not because of what is unique to him as a religious person but actually what is common to him as a man as a human being you see at the end of chapter 2 verse 25 there

John ends with the word man doesn't he Jesus knew what was in man and then in the next verse of chapter 3 he uses the same word again there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus and John flows them together if you've got a title in your Bibles at home it might say something like you must be born again that's not part of the original text get a black permanent marker and scrub it out because the flow between chapter 2 and 3 is so important here John flows them together he says in chapter 2 doesn't he Jesus knows what was in man so let me give you an example of a man here is Nicodemus and so by scrubbing out the little title in our Bibles we see don't we that Nicodemus is just like all of us maybe his religion makes the point even more strongly doesn't it that after all all of that religion he's still only human underneath the robes and all the religiosity he's just one of the many he's one like us and Jesus knows what is naturally in us it's wonderful as you follow the gospel how Nicodemus later he stands up for Jesus doesn't he in the Sanhedrin in the court he arranges an honourable burial for

Jesus I think Nicodemus did believe in the end and perhaps this was the moment wasn't it in this conversation with Jesus where he stopped bringing statements to Jesus and he started asking questions we like him with this superiority complex we make ourselves stupid before Jesus and we

kid ourselves that we can believe by pure human deduction without God's help at all but we get it right don't we when we know we can't get it right we're only human and we need to be born of God born again let's pray