

# HOW GOOD IS GOOD ENOUGH?

John 3:1-15

## How Good IS Good Enough? (John 3:1-21)

Have you ever thought you were good at something, only to later realize, compared to others, you just aren't good enough. Today we watch an elite spiritual leader come to that same reality...and realize it's a good thing for him...and for us.

### Nick at Night

**John 3:1-2** (CSB) <sup>1</sup> There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> This man came to him at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him."

**Nicodemus** was a **Pharisee** (from the Hebrew verb meaning "to separate"<sup>1</sup>). These men were known for their extreme commitment to the authority of Scripture, obeying the law of Moses, and teaching others to do the same. Since most Pharisees were from the middle class, living among & working common folk, so this conservative minority party was more popular with the everyday Jew. In contrast, their religious rivals - the **Sadducees** - were more liberal in their views as well as being very wealthy & socially removed from the common people.

While many Pharisees who stood against Jesus, some were genuinely intrigued by Jesus and wanted to determine His true identity (some Pharisees believed on Jesus according to Acts 15:5).

Nicodemus was one of the 6000 Pharisees who lived throughout Israel, but he was also a **ruler of the Jews**, 1 of 70 Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court (John 7:45-52).

We don't know why Nicodemus showed up **at night**. Maybe he was afraid of what others thought OR maybe he just wanted time to talk without interruptions. Either way, Nicodemus treats Jesus with respect that many other Pharisees did not, calling him "**Rabbi**" (term for a respected teacher). With his words Nicodemus acknowledged Jesus as his equal, **a teacher who has come from God**.

Nicodemus didn't know WHO he was dealing with, but DID know something was different about Jesus. Although John has only mentioned one specific **sign** (water to wine Jn. 2:11) so far, Nicodemus was familiar with other miraculous **signs** that Jesus had performed (Jn. 2:23). John's use of **signs** (17 times in his writing), were pointers to prove who the Messiah is.

### Born Again?!?

**John 3:3-4** (CSB) <sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, **unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" <sup>4</sup> "How can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked him. "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"

Nicodemus, *didn't seem to understand what Jesus meant by "born again."* In Jesus' day it was typically thought and taught that all Jews would be admitted to the kingdom with the exception of those guilty of continual wickedness and leading others away from God's clear standards (e.g. Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1).<sup>2</sup> Yet here was Jesus telling **NICODEMUS**, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, that HE TOO must be **born again**.

🌟 **John MacArthur:** "Jesus was telling him that entrance to God's salvation was not a matter of adding something to all his efforts, not topping off his religious devotion, but rather canceling everything and starting all over again."<sup>3</sup>

**If Nicodemus couldn't meet the standard to enter the kingdom, there's little chance for any of us!**

**Your good enough...isn't. (good enough)**

### YOUR NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., John 1-11, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), 100.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 189.

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, 104.

You must be **born again**. But the question remains...HOW IS ONE BORN AGAIN? Nicodemus doesn't know just yet, so now Jesus says the same thing in a different way, a way Nicodemus *has heard* before.

### Same Truth, Different Tactic

**John 3:5** (CSB) <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, **unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**

The Old Testament prophets often described a time coming when the Spirit of God would be poured out generously on all people (Isa. 32:15–20; Joel 2:28). *Sometimes this is described as water being poured out.*

**Isaiah 44:3** (CSB) <sup>3</sup> For I will **pour water** on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will **pour out my Spirit** on your descendants and my blessing on your offspring.

**Ezekiel 36:25–27** (CSB) <sup>25</sup> I will also **sprinkle clean water** on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. <sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and **put a new spirit within you**; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> **I will place my Spirit within you** and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.

### Teacher of Israel Gets Schooled

**John 3:6–11** (CSB) <sup>6</sup> Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not be amazed that I told you that **you must be born again**. <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." <sup>9</sup> "How can these things be?" asked Nicodemus. <sup>10</sup> "Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?" Jesus replied. <sup>11</sup> "Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony.

**The Spirit** of God, like **the wind** (spirit/wind = same Greek word), can be *appreciated* but not *anticipated* or *manipulated*. As the wind blows and transforms the land of Israel and beyond, so the Spirit of God is blowing in to transform the people of Israel, and beyond.

But Nicodemus still doesn't get it. This doesn't fit into his little BOX. Nicodemus and his colleagues did **not accept** the **testimony** of Jesus, nor of John the Baptist, nor of the prophets before him.

### Crazy Claim?

**John 3:12–13** (CSB) <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except **the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man**.

Jesus is calling HIMSELF **the Son of Man, who descended from heaven**. Jesus is pointing to *Himself* as the one in Daniel's vision.

**Daniel 7:13–14** (CSB) <sup>13</sup> I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly **one like a son of man** was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. <sup>14</sup> He was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom; **so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him**. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and **his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed**.

### YOUR NOTES

## An Old Testament Parallel

**John 3:14-15** (CSB) <sup>14</sup> “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,  
<sup>15</sup> so that **everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.**

God judged the Jewish people by sending snakes to bite them (Numbers 21:4-9). But *God showed grace when the people looked at the bronze snake statue - a reminder of their rebellion against God.* Those who looked were healed from the poison, but those who refused to look, died. So too, Jesus draws the comparison: the people on this planet are dying from poison too - sin. But, a time is soon coming when people who look upon **the Son of Man, lifted up**, and understand that *your good isn't good enough*.

John's audience knows that Jesus is speaking about His coming crucifixion, an eternal reminder about the cost of sin. And those **believe in Jesus** (believe = trust) **have eternal life** and are “born again”.

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\* **Want to talk further?** Please contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Justin** (704-618-6144), **Christy** (673-9764), or another follower of Jesus soon! Or call our **deacons & wives:** Fain & Linda Poppell, Tom & Martha Waddail, Steve & Debbie Bass, Freddy & Joyce Howard, Jere & Darlene Burnette, Alan & Christy Androski, Willy & Melissa Gamalero.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think so many people seem to believe they CAN be good enough to go to heaven?
2. What Scriptures and reasons would you share to demonstrate that a person *ISN'T* good enough, but God's grace *IS*? (e.g. Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 5:1-11)
3. How would you answer this question: “*What does it mean to be born again?*”
4. **Read John 3:14-15.** Explain what it takes to have **eternal life**. What is the difference between biblical belief (i.e. trust) and our culture's belief (i.e. hope so)?
5. **Read 2 Timothy 2:24-26, Titus 3:1-3, & 1 Peter 3:15-16** and be ready to answer this question: What might you say to the person who says they believe in Jesus, but don't seem to follow Him in their actions? How might you confront this misunderstanding in a sincere and gentle way?
6. What else challenged or encouraged you from today's teaching? (Look back over your notes and share!)
7. Share how you can pray for one another this week and make a phone call to check on each other this week.