

John 3:1-16

The “Religious” Person

Image Church // One More Week 5

Introduction

New Building- Construction started this week- pics coming next week.

Alright, if you have your Bibles this morning, go ahead and turn to John 3...

We’re in a series called **One More...**

I want to share with you something that’s interesting...Listen to this:

- **67% of Americans say they have a relationship with Jesus, and 50% of them say they have prayed a prayer asking Jesus into their heart.**
- **But here’s the thing: 1/2 of them have no regular presence in any kind of church and 2/3 have lifestyles and worldviews that really do not differ significantly from those outsiders of the Christian faith.¹**

Interesting statistic, right?? Why is it that the vast majority of *professing Christians* seem to have little-to-no life change?

Well, there’s obviously a disconnect, and it’s that disconnect that I want us to look at today...

And the reason why this is so important for us to understand is that according to the statistic that I read there are a lot of people that are experiencing this disconnect...

I’m sure you’ve encountered someone like this, and just maybe you’re here this morning and this is you!

Well Jesus encountered someone like this and we’re going to look at it today and learn how to navigate this from Jesus’ encounter... **A Tool**

Before we jump into John 3, look up just a little bit to John 2:24 so that we can have a little context with what’s going on here.

Jesus was in Jerusalem, and there were people that were “believing” in his name because of the miracles that He was performing... But then look at **verse 24 and 25: Jesus, however, would not entrust himself to them, since he knew them all 25 and because he did not need anyone to testify about man; for he himself knew what was in man.**

What does that mean? It means that people were claiming to believe in Jesus, but because Jesus could see their heart, He knew that their belief was superficial- it wasn’t real... Jesus didn’t entrust himself to them because they really didn’t trust in Him!

There’s a disconnect- they liked the things of Jesus, the things that he did, but they didn’t trust in person of Jesus and who He was!

We’re about to see this play out even more in what happens next with a guy named **Nicodemus...**

John 3:1-15

There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus is *big time*. He’s a member of a group of religious leaders called the Sanhedrin, and he’s become really interested in Jesus because of all that he has seen and heard about Him. **verse 2** [Nicodemus] came to [Jesus] 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.”

¹ JD Greear via Barna 2011.

Notice the evidence of the disconnect... *we know you are a teacher from God...* Affirmed the things of Jesus- missed the person of Jesus...

I want you to notice something else... **When** did Nicodemus come to Jesus... **At night**... Here's something that interesting, though out the Gospel of John, **night** is used as a picture or indicator of **spiritual darkness**.²

See Nicodemus, like many people in our culture today, was **religious**... He believed in God, but for him it was all about following the rules... He thought the way to God was through his works...

But on the inside, he was empty, he was **spiritually dark**, which is why I believe he came to Jesus... There was a deep curiosity inside of him, a dissatisfaction maybe even doubts when it came to his religious worldview...

I think the same is true for the people in our culture today that **consider themselves religious**... That may even be the case with some of you that are here today...

See, here's the problem with just being religious, **and this is true for any religion- you never really know where you stand with God**... How good is good enough? How much do you have to do, and how do you know when you've done enough?? How can you be certain that you will be with God when you die? There's a longing for more clarity...

Look at how Jesus responds to him, **verse 3**:

3 Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 "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, is dumbfounded... *He's looking at Jesus the same way you'd look at me if I took my shirt off in the middle of my sermon and kept on rolling...*

He's like *that doesn't make any sense... There's no way I can get back into mamma's stomach- I'm a grown man, that's awkward and it would jack me up psychologically for the rest of my life!*

But here's what I want you to see... Look at the way that Nicodemus responds... Look at the natural tendency for his train of thought...

He says: *How can anyone be born when he's old, and how can he enter into his mother's womb...* He's saying how can anyone DO this?? It's impossible for anyone to **physically DO this**... EXACTLY!!

That's the point that Jesus is making, **that there's nothing that anyone can physically do to be saved**... There is no amount of religiosity that will save someone, there is no amount of good works that can justify you before God... There's no scale of good works vs. bad works...

There's nothing that you can do to bring about new life in you spiritually... **In the same way that there is nothing that you can do to bring about new life physically**...

Think about this, **no one contributes to their own birth**, you don't get to pick your birthday, you don't help with the birth, you don't give input to the Dr.'s as you're about to come out, you're just born...

Jesus is making the same point... There is nothing that you can **do** to bring about new life in you... **It's actually the opposite**, there's something that needs to be **done to you**, so that you can have new life...

Look at **verse 5**, Jesus hits it again: "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." What does he mean by this, born of the **water** and the **Spirit**?? Well, **water** is a picture of cleansing and purification, and the **Spirit** is what brings spiritual life...

Jesus is saying that we need to be made clean, and we need to be spiritually brought to life...

² Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 186).

We're dirty because of our sin, and there's nothing that we can do to clean ourselves up, we have a disease called *sin* that's *infected* every one of us...

And no matter how good we try to make myself on the outside, on the inside we all have a disease, and it affects everything...

And because of that **not only** do we need to be made clean, but we need **NEW LIFE** so that we can experience a relationship with God!

Why?? Because look at **verse 6**:

6 Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.

IOW: Your natural human birth makes you part of an earthly family, but not part of God's family. Only *the Spirit can give new life making it possible for you to be a child of God and part of His family.*³

The Spirit gives you a new heart and a new life and a new nature...

OK, there's 3 things I want to highlight in this encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus that we need to recognize...

The 1st is the...

1. The disconnect

Here's what you need to understand... ***It is possible to believe in Jesus, but not be a Christian***, or to use the words of Jesus: not be "**Born again**" ... Let me show you what I mean by looking at the 2 of the most common disconnects.

A. Claiming to be a religious affiliate

At the end of **Chapter 2** we see a bunch of people saying that they believe in Jesus, but Jesus knows their heart and doesn't entrust himself to them because their faith wasn't real.

There are countless people who claim Christianity as their religious affiliation, and yet for many of these people their life looks exactly like people that don't claim Christianity at all.

I cannot tell you the amount of conversations that I have had with people where they have assured me that they are Christians because they prayed a prayer one time when they were younger.

Example: I had a friend of mine in college who I would carry home on the weekends because he was so drunk, he basically lived with his girlfriend and openly talked about how they had sex, and he would never go to any bible studies and he was never involved in any local churches. He would go occasionally but never more than that.

- One day I was with him and I asked him where he was spiritually and he quickly said: "I am a Christian." I said, "Tell me about it." He said "When I was in middle school I was at a Christian camp one summer and I prayed a prayer one night, it was real special and I cried."

See, for him Christianity was nothing more than a religious affiliation. But the scary thing is that he actually thought that was enough, that he and God were good...

He based the weight of his eternity on a one-time prayer, that he thought got him some kind of special access card that allowed him to live however he wanted, and that one day when he stands before Jesus he can whip out and be like: "look what I have!"

And he's somehow expecting that Jesus will say, "Whew, so glad you have that, you did whatever you wanted but you prayed a prayer one time, you're good, come on in!"

Listen, **that's not how it works!!**

³ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 196). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

Simply saying that you believe, or praying a prayer, or walking an aisle, or having an emotional experience that you claim affiliates you to Christianity isn't enough!!

Another thing people do is claim denominations or religious sects...

- Has no impact other than 1-2 times a year...
- I often ask is this a *culture* thing for you or is it a *practice*?

The second common disconnect:

B. Being religious

Nicodemus was **VERY** religious, he was varsity level, he was a religious **LEADER** he devoted his life to religion and working for God...

His mentality was that his standing before God was based on his ability to follow the law. He had a check list that he maintained that made him feel like he was doing a good job.

Nicodemus stood on the pride of his ability to keep the law.

Some people are just like him, they're standing on the pride of their ability to keep the law... ***Maybe this is some of you***...

If you're they're honest, they look at yourself in the mirror and you think, I'm not a bad person, I don't steal, I don't get drunk, I am nice to people, I don't cuss, I haven't cheated on my wife, and I go to church... I do everything I am supposed to do...

You think your goodness contributes to your standing before God...

Others are just under a false assumption that they have to work **for** God. That you they have to please Him by doing good things for Him. They live under the oppression of never really knowing what God thinks about you. They are tired and worn down because when they do something bad you feel like you need to do good to make up for it.

- You struggle with constant guilt and frustration, it's this continual cycle in your life of longing for God's acceptance.

Most of the time these people see Christianity as rule-based religion... So, they just try to live right, go to church when they can, pray before meals and have a Bible in the house, and hope for the best...

Another way this plays out is with ***people who've grown up in church and just by default assume that that's what saved them***...

- And you hear things like, I've always been a Christian...
 - Which, by the way, is biblically impossible...
 - Just like Nicodemus, you can grow up knowing that there's a God, and even learning about God, but never have surrendered to God...
- ***Assimilation by proximity***- Just because you grew up in God's church doesn't mean that you're God's child...
- Scripture is clear, there's a time where you go from death to life...

*Meet them where they are... Ask questions to bring these things out... Press in on certain places just like Jesus did...

- Don't just listen to this sermon- allow it to help sharpen you

At the end of the day, you can summarize both of these disconnects like this: ***Peoples view of God is often clouded by their view of themselves.***

Let's look at the second thing that we have to see from this passage:

2. The demand

Jesus said to Nicodemus, **you have to be born again**... This is a word picture of what salvation is...

Jesus also says that it happens through the ***water and the Spirit***... Again, another beautiful word picture of the cleansing and Spiritual life that we need...

And it was so confusing to Nicodemus, and it's so confusing to many today- they may not know this phrase, but the concept is confusing because it goes against our cultural norm...

We desperately want to or feel like we have to contribute in some way... It doesn't make sense in our logic... We work for everything in this life, why not for salvation as well...

*I mean doesn't God require something of me??
Yea but you can't supply it... So, He came down and did it for you!*

I actually love this language Jesus uses because it's such a clarifying reminder of the reality of the gospel...

It is a good term to use when you're talking to the religious person... **Jesus used it very strategically and so should you** because of what it denotes...

- Let it serve as a jump off point...
- *Flesh out... What do you think about the Christian concept of being born again? Use your story... talk about the gaps in religiosity...*

Example: The Alcoholic I was walking with- deacon in His church...

Ezekiel 36:25-27, a great reference to drive home what Jesus is talking about... The beauty is that it was written some 600+ years before Jesus came... God's speaking through the prophet Ezekiel about what **He** is going to do...

25 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. **26** 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. **27** I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.

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- **I will** cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols.
- **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.
- **I will** place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.

What Jesus wants to make clear is that we need to be made clean, by default we're dirty, and we have to be washed, and our hearts need to be replaced...

- **Jeremiah 17:9** says: **The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.**
- **Genesis 8:21** says: **the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth onward.**

Our hearts are like that because we have a disease called **sin** that's **infected** every one of us... And no matter how good we try to make myself on the outside, on the inside we all have a disease, and it affects everything... We need to be cleaned up and we need new life... We need to be **born again**...

This is what we need to understand and it's what we need to help other people see...

And then watch how all of this happens... This is so good, Jesus doesn't stop at saying we have to be born again by the water and the Spirit, He's going to show how this happens...

*Jump down to verse 14 Jesus Says: **14** "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15** so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. **16** For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

Jesus looks back at the OT and uses it as a powerful picture...

When the people of Israel yet again turned their back on God and chased after other idols... So, God sent poisonous vipers into their camp, and they began to bite them...

- People were dying and in great pain and they called out to God...
- God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on the pole... Anyone who looked at it in faith would be healed...
- Look and live...

***But why put a snake on a pole?** Why would he hold up the very thing that was killing them as a symbol of life?

*Because that was a picture of what Jesus would come and do...
Jesus would take on that which was killing us, in order to bring us life.

2 Cor. 5:21 He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Practical:

This example Jesus uses is one of the best examples in the bible that you can use... *Jesus strategically used this so should you!!*

I would actually say that this entire story is one of the greatest tools to use with someone who claims to be religious...

- I've used this before...
- Show how to use it...

Let's look at the last thing...

3. The decision

Notice that we don't know what Nicodemus does with what Jesus said... We don't know if he surrendered to Jesus...⁴

The decision is not ours to make- our job is to present and press in on the gospel...

Here's what we want people to see and understand more than anything else...

To be **born again** is to recognize that there was a problem with your first birth... you were born incredibly sinful... and you are separated from a perfect and holy God, and there is nothing that you can do to change that in your own efforts... But there is hope...

God put His love on display by sending Jesus to do that which we could never do for ourselves... Living the life that we should have lived, He meets God's standards... And dying the death that was meant for us, He took on the punishment we owed because of our sin...

*And raising to life He offers us **new life** in and through His finished work... **A second birth** where through **faith** in Jesus, we receive His righteousness meaning, we're no longer separated from God because of our sin, through Christ we become sons or daughters of God...

This is the heart of who we are... This is what we want to be about... It is not *an option*, it is *our mission!*

Can you present the gospel? Can you bring people to the point where they are left with a decision? We see this all in the bible!

This cannot go in one ear and out the other...

Conclusion [VAMP]

Ok as we close, some of you this morning need to combat the lie that God evaluates you based on how you perform and you need to rest in the finished work of Jesus... you need to be refreshed by that...

I love what **Paul David Tripp** says: *If you obey for a thousand years, you're no more accepted than when you first believed; your acceptance is based on Christ's righteousness and not yours.*

⁴ John 19:39 Nicodemus brings Myrrh and Aloe.

Some of you need to pray about your *One More* and ask the question *how can you use Jesus' interaction to help shape yours?*

- How can you help them see the *disconnect* and the *demand* and leave them with the *decision*???

Others of you need to respond by **being baptized**... Some of you trusted to day and you need to respond others of you responded years ago and you need to respond!

You need to publicly declare your new life!

- Call for baptism... explain and tie it to sermon...

**Lastly, some of you need to be born again some of you are Nicodemus...

***Call for Pastors and prayer team

- If you made a decision today, if you want to be baptized we want to walk with you...

Let me pray for us!