



The Offer to Insiders - Starting Over

John 3:1-3 (larger context 1-15)

^{3:1} Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³ Jesus answered him, “Very truly,* I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”
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⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You (plural)*** must be born from above.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel****, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you (plural) about earthly things and you (plural) do not believe, how can you (plural) believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

* “very truly”, or “truly, truly” is a literary convention Jesus uses before making an important point. In the Greek it is “amen, amen”. This double amen is used 25 times in John’s gospel. You could do a half of a year’s sermons on the amen, amen passages in John!!!

** this word can be translated as above or again. Above is more common but Nicodemus seems to take it is “again” in verse 4.

*** you can be singular or plural so I identified the plurals. In the south this problem is resolved with the beautiful word, “y’all”. It would be super helpful if our translations offered a way to know the difference, but...

*** in the Greek it says, “Are you the teacher of Israel...?” Most translations include “the” in their translations. It is even more obvious because in verse 2 Nicodemus calls Jesus a teacher. NRSV follows the Greek in verse 2 but not in verse 10. I wonder if Jesus has an ironic or sarcastic tone when he says THE teacher.

The structure of the text is super easy to notice: 3 “questions” from Nicodemus, followed by 3 “very truly” or “truly truly” answers of Jesus.

The sermon only focused on verses 1-3, but that was only because of time constraints.

I bring up Matthew in this next question because he was our focus last week.

What is your most recent painfully awkward conversation? Imagine Matthew and Nicodemus stuck in a room together alone, what would their conversation be like? Why might the experience be uncomfortable?

What do you make of Jesus calling Matthew, but not Nicodemus?

What is your emotional, gut level reaction to the expression “born again”? What do you think Nicodemus’ reaction was (on an emotional level)?

This passage takes us deep into the waters of the doctrine of justification (how we are saved). In our secular culture it is uncomfortable to talk about this issue. We are not sure about heaven, or who gets there and how they get there, but give yourselves the freedom to opine. Expect that people might be all over the place on this topic. We have three rivers joining The Protestant view, the Roman Catholic view, and the secular view. This text, however, is not all over the place.

Salvation is defined as “entering the kingdom of God” Vs. 5 (3 also)

The way involves a radical change (born anew or born again)

We must be supernaturally healed/forgiven/redeemed. Vs. 15

This change can only be accomplished by God’s work.

How often at Church/Group do you feel like Nicodemus - “How can these things be?” Can you identify specific occasions. The gospel is outrageous.

*For this question it might be good to spend 10 minutes in smaller groups to formulate answers. Imagine someone comes to your group, who has just lost a loved one, and sincerely asks, “Y’all go to church... How can I know God? How can I go to heaven?” **How would you respond?***