

A Changed Life

Main Text: John 3:1-15 (NIV)

Key Truth: Jesus did not come simply to make us a little better. He came to make us new. Through His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus shows us that entering the kingdom of God requires a spiritual transformation that only God can accomplish. We must be born again.

Getting Started

Nicodemus seemed to have everything going for him. He was a Pharisee, a respected teacher, and a member of the Jewish ruling council. He knew Scripture and was committed to religious obedience. Yet something was missing.

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, apparently willing to risk his reputation because he wanted answers. He knew there was something different about Jesus, and he wanted to know the truth for himself.

Jesus quickly took the conversation beyond religion, knowledge, or good behavior. Nicodemus needed something he could never accomplish for himself.

He needed a **changed life**.

Icebreaker

Have you ever learned something new from a Bible passage or story you had heard many times before? What stood out to you?

1. We Must Be Born Again

Read

- John 3:1-8
- Ephesians 2:1
- Romans 6:23
- Colossians 1:21

Discuss

Jesus told Nicodemus:

"No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

The phrase can also mean "**born from above.**" Both ideas help us understand what Jesus was saying. We need a new birth, but it is a birth that comes from God. God must do something within us that we cannot do for ourselves.

This would have challenged Nicodemus. He was religious, knowledgeable, respected, and part of God's covenant people. Yet Jesus told him that his family background, religious position, and obedience could not give him entrance into God's kingdom. He needed a spiritual birth brought about by the Spirit of God.

Why is this necessary?

Because of sin.

Scripture says we are spiritually dead in our sins. Sin separates us from God, and we cannot overcome that separation by simply becoming more religious or trying harder to be good. We need God to give us new spiritual life.

Discussion Questions

1. What stands out to you about Nicodemus coming to Jesus despite his position and reputation?
2. Why do you think Jesus' words about being born again would have been difficult for Nicodemus to understand?
3. What are some things people rely on today instead of personally trusting Christ?
4. What's the difference between becoming a "better person" and being born again?
5. How would you explain the phrase "born again" to someone who had never heard it before?

2. We Cannot Change Ourselves

Read

- John 3:5-10
- Ephesians 2:1-5
- Romans 6:23

Discuss

Nicodemus kept asking, "**How can this be?**"

Jesus explained that physical birth produces physical life, but only the Spirit can produce spiritual life. Being born again isn't something we manufacture through effort, morality, religious activity, or knowledge.

It is something God does.

Jesus compared the work of the Spirit to the wind. We cannot control the wind or determine where it will blow, but we can see its effects. In the same way, the Holy Spirit produces genuine spiritual life and transformation within us.

Nicodemus knew a great deal about God, but knowing religious truth wasn't the same as experiencing new life from God. The same danger exists for us. We can attend church, know Scripture, consider ourselves religious, and still need the personal transforming work of the Gospel.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it sometimes easier to focus on changing our behavior than allowing God to change our hearts?
2. How can someone be very familiar with Christianity without personally knowing Christ?
3. What are some outward signs that the Holy Spirit has changed someone's life?
4. Why is recognizing our inability to save ourselves essential to understanding the gospel?
5. Where are you tempted to depend on your own effort instead of the work of God's Spirit?

3. We Must Look to Jesus

Read

- John 3:11-15
- Numbers 21:4-9
- John 3:16
- Romans 10:13

Discuss

Nicodemus wanted to know how this spiritual transformation could happen. Jesus answered by pointing him to a story he would have known well.

In Numbers 21, the Israelites sinned against God and were bitten by poisonous snakes. God instructed Moses to make a bronze snake, lift it on a pole, and tell the people to look at it. Those who looked in faith were healed.

Jesus told Nicodemus that the Son of Man would also be **lifted up**. This was a picture of what Jesus would accomplish on the cross.

The Israelites couldn't save themselves from the consequences of the snake bites, and we cannot save ourselves from the consequences of sin. God had to provide the way.

Jesus took the curse and punishment of our sin upon Himself. He was lifted up on the cross, died on our behalf, and made forgiveness and new life possible. Jesus told Nicodemus that **everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life**.

A changed life begins when we stop looking to ourselves and **look to Jesus in faith**.

Discussion Questions

1. What similarities do you see between the bronze snake in Numbers 21 and Jesus on the cross?
2. Why is admitting that we cannot save ourselves such an important part of responding to the gospel?
3. What does it actually mean to "believe" in Jesus?
4. How is trusting Christ different from simply knowing facts about Him?
5. If someone asked you how they could be born again, how would you answer them?

A Changed Life Keeps Changing

The story of Nicodemus doesn't end in John 3.

Later, when Jesus had been crucified and His body was being prepared for burial, Nicodemus appeared again alongside Joseph of Arimathea. The man who originally came to Jesus privately at night was now publicly identified with Him. The sermon points to this as evidence that Nicodemus ultimately received the truth about Jesus and experienced the new life Jesus had described.

That gives us two important questions to consider.

Have I been born again?

Jesus' words aren't simply an invitation to become more religious. Have you personally recognized your sin, looked to Christ and His work on the cross, and placed your faith and trust in Him?

But there is another question for those who have already trusted Christ:

Am I walking in the Spirit?

Salvation isn't the finish line of the Christian life. It is the starting line. The Spirit who gives us new life continues working in us as we grow in obedience, holiness, and devotion to Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What evidence of change should we expect to see when someone has been born again?
2. Why is salvation better understood as a starting line rather than a finish line?
3. Where have you seen God change your life since trusting Christ?
4. Is there an area where you have drifted and need to recommit to walking in the Spirit?
5. What is one practical way you can yield more of your life to God this week?

Living It Out

Nicodemus had knowledge, position, influence, and religion, but Jesus told him he still needed something more. He needed new life.

The same is true for us.

This week, ask yourself:

Have I been born again?

Have I personally trusted what Jesus did on the cross for me?

Am I walking in the Spirit?

Is the new life Christ has given me producing continued change in the way I think, live, and obey?

Jesus isn't interested in simply improving a few areas of our lives. **He wants to make us new.**

Memory Verse

John 3:3 (NIV)

"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for loving us enough to make a way for us to have new life. Help us recognize that our religion, knowledge, good works, or background cannot save us. We need Jesus. Thank You that He took the punishment for our sin and that through faith in Him we can be forgiven and born again. For those who have trusted Christ, help us continue to walk in the Spirit who gave us new life. Change us from the inside out so that our lives bring honor and glory to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.