

Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church

John 2:23-3:3 | Born Again

Sunday October 25, 2026

WELCOME:

- Announcements
 - Congregational Meeting: November 8

CALL TO WORSHIP:

- **Prayer:** Psalm 100
- **Music**

REVIEW:

Last Sunday, we examined a famous passage—Jesus cleansing the temple.

We learned several things about Sunday worship.

Last week's Keypoint 1:

Noise and activity are not conducive to worship.

Today, many churches, even conservative ones, try to recreate Pentecost to some degree every Sunday.

By doing so, they miss out on the reverence of *being still and knowing that God is God.*

Last week's Keypoint 2:

We don't come to God's house on our own terms; we come on His terms.

We don't approach God any way we want—He tells us how to approach and have a relationship with Him.

Last week's Keypoint 3:

You can learn more about a person by what he hates than by what he loves.

Jesus hates fake, false, and worldly worship.

Last week's Keypoint 4:

How we approach God during corporate worship is paramount.

Our mindset and attitude are critical to us coming with the right heart to worship.

I closed by asking three questions that come directly from that passage:

1. Does zeal for God's house consume you?

- If it doesn't, then what does?

2. What have you personally let into this sanctuary that shouldn't be here?

- We are all part of the Body, and what we do and what we bring affects everyone else.

3. What table is the Lord turning over in your life today?

- Is there something that you know God will not tolerate in your life, but you do?
- Name it, repent of it, and walk away from it.
- Please know you will be tempted to turn that table right side up.

INTRODUCTION:

Today, we continue in our verse-by-verse exposition of John's Gospel.

Last week, Jesus exposed what was wrong in the temple.

Today, He exposes what is wrong in the human heart.

We come to yet another very famous passage—the conversation that Jesus has with a famous Pharisee named Nicodemus.

In this conversation, we hear the term “born-again.”

What exactly does that mean?

Are you born again? How do you know? Let’s find out!

Please stand as we read and honor God’s Word.

SCRIPTURE:

John 2:23—While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing.

John 2:24—Jesus, however, would not entrust himself to them, since he knew them all

John 2:25—and because he did not need anyone to testify about man; for he himself knew what was in man.

John 3:1—There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

John 3:2—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.”

John 3:3—Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

May the Lord bless the reading of His Holy Word.

PRAY:

God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not banish me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. (Psalm 51:10-12).

EXEGESIS:

John 2:13—*The Jewish Passover was near, and so Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

John 2:14—*In the temple he found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and he also found the money changers sitting there.*

John 2:15—*After making a whip out of cords, he drove everyone out of the temple with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers' coins and overturned the tables.*

John 2:16—*He told those who were selling doves, "Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!"*

John 2:17—*And his disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for your house will consume me.,*

John 2:18—*So the Jews replied to him, "What sign will you show us for doing these things?"*

John 2:19—*Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple,, and I will raise it up in three days."*

John 2:20—*Therefore the Jews said, "This temple took forty-six years to build, and will you raise it up in three days?"*

John 2:21—*But he was speaking about the temple of his body.*

John 2:22—*So when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made.*

John 2:23—*While he was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing.*

First things first—the Jewish leaders didn't arrest or run Jesus out of Jerusalem after He cleansed the temple.

He stayed to teach the Gospel and perform miracles throughout the rest of the Passover week.

He most likely stayed for the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, closing out the Passover celebration by eating unleavened bread for seven days.

This feast reminded them how their ancestors left Egypt in such haste during the Exodus.

John 2:23— *many believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing.*

After the wedding at Cana, the disciples believed.

After cleansing the temple, the disciples believed the Scripture.

Here we see common people believing.

John 2:23— *many believed in his name...*

In biblical times, a person's name summed up their character or referred to God's purpose in their life.

Most likely, these people believed Jesus might be a prophet or even the Messiah they've been waiting for.

John 2:24—*Jesus, however, would not entrust himself to them,*

What's interesting is that the phrase "entrust himself" uses the same Greek verb as "believed" in verse 23.

John uses creative wordplay in Greek—*pisteuō*.

KEYPOINT 1:

Jesus had no faith in their faith—He didn't believe in their belief.

Why not?

All four Gospels repeatedly reveal that people who saw Jesus' miracles firsthand didn't truly believe.

It's quite ironic, isn't it?

Miracles do two primary things:

1. Help the person in need.

The Lord gives sight to the blind, allows the lame to walk, and heals people with leprosy.

2. Reveal that Jesus is indeed God.

So Jesus doesn't trust these folks because He knows their faith is superficial.

Faith based only on miracles, without roots in the Gospel, isn't true faith.

The problem with miracles is that they're never enough.

We see people throughout Scripture, especially religious people, always demanding something more.

If you base your faith upon signs, you'll always be upset by the one that didn't happen—the prayer that wasn't answered or the healing that didn't come.

That is why our faith must be built not only on what Jesus does, but on who He is.

We must learn to trust in the Lord regardless of our emotions or external circumstances.

Today, many people will say they believe in God—but more so, they're spiritual.

My thought is, “Wow, that's great, even the demons are spiritual.”

James 2:19—*You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder.*

Jesus knew that people's opinions of spiritual matters prove nothing.

One thing is for sure: if we demand a miracle before we believe, that miracle will never come.

Jesus has proved this time and time again in the Gospels.

Why didn't Jesus trust these people?

After all, the passage does say that they believed.

John 2:24/25—*since he knew them all and because he did not need anyone to testify about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*

John repeats himself to make a point.

It's as if John anticipates this question.

In this verse, John reveals the Lord's divine omniscience.

Omniscience is God's infinite knowledge and understanding of all things past, present, and future—all at once.

The Lord Jesus knows the true state of every heart.

So, for example, Jesus knew of Nathaniel's heart and called him a true Israelite—a man of no deceit.

The Lord knows the heart:

- Of the most legalistic Pharisee like Nicodemus
- Of the Samaritan woman who only wants a man to truly love her for who she is.
- Of Simon Peter, who is always trying too hard.
- The Sons of Thunder, who have an agenda.
- Of the woman caught in adultery, who made the biggest mistake of her life.

And yes, the Lord also knows your heart—your fears, your anxieties, along with your pride, ungratefulness, and unrepentant sin.

Jesus knows all—no one has to tell Jesus anything.

He knows everything at every moment.

When it comes to faith, nothing is more dangerous for us than hypocrisy.

Think about how hypocritical it is for us to say we believe only when things are going well.

But the moment things don't go our way—what do we do?

We may be experts at deceiving ourselves, but the Lord isn't like us—He isn't blind to what we see, nor is He deaf to the lies we tell ourselves.

John 3:1—There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

This is the third time John uses that term “man.”

...he did not need anyone to testify about man; for he himself knew what was in man.

Now we meet a specific man. What kind of man do we meet?

Notice his achievements.

First, Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

Their name probably derives from a Hebrew verb meaning “to separate.”

They were the “separated ones,” meaning they lived separated from worldly matters and were zealous for the Mosaic law and their own traditions.

Today, Pharisees have a bad rap, mainly because Jesus was so harsh on them.

When we hear the word “Pharisee,” we associate it with “hypocrite.”

And the reason why is because of their legalistic religion based on human works.

The Pharisees lived their entire lives believing that they could climb the stairway to Heaven.

However, in Jesus’ day, the Pharisees were the most respected group of men in all of Israel.

They were known for living a godly, ethical life.

So the everyday common people honored, admired, and greatly respected them.

John 3:1— *named Nicodemus,*

Names say a lot about people, and here we have a Jewish Pharisee that goes by a Greek name.

Oh, the irony!

The name “Nicodemus” means, “one who conquers the people.”

Why did a Jew AND a Pharisee (of all people) have a Greek name?

Members of the elite upper class of society in the first century typically had two names: a Hebrew name and a Greek name.

In Nicodemus’s case, his Hebrew name was likely Buni—short for Benaiah—a famous military commander and hero under King David.

However, he didn’t go by his Jewish name, Buni—he went by the Greek name Nicodemus. Why?

His choice of names indicates a love for Greek culture.

It also let him live in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds and lead in both.

And we see his leadership next...

John 3:1—a ruler of the Jews.

I’m sure he is a ruler—Nicodemus is “one who conquers the Jews.”

Nicodemus was not only a Pharisee but also a politician.

He was part of the elite political group called the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin included not only the elite group of the Pharisees but also other power groups, such as the Sadducees, priests, and scribes.

Think of the Sanhedrin as an elevated version of our Supreme Court, minus Judaism.

They held the power that generally divides Congress, the Executive, and the Judicial branches of our government.

All that power is wrapped up in the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin conducted trials, investigated heresies, wrote laws, and handled official communication between Israel and Rome.

Nicodemus served on Judaism's highest legislative body.

It gets no higher—make no doubt Nicodemus is one of the most powerful men in Israel!

Think religious scholar, national leader, and member of the highest council—all wrapped into one impressive résumé.

He's more important than the president, secretary of state, and the Pope.

In a very real sense, he was all these things in one person!

He was a highly educated man, an aristocrat, a politician, and a very religious, highly moral and ethical man.

Nicodemus was not merely a man, but the man of mankind.

No one today is like Nicodemus—combining political power with moral excellence and elite scholarship.

These qualities make Nicodemus a perfect case study for learning the basics of salvation and eternal life.

John 3:2—*This man came to him...*

KEYPOINT 2:

We must see Nicodemus as a human representative standing before God.

Because that's exactly who he is— the best of the best.

John 3:2—*This man came to him at night...*

Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night; why?

Three reasons:

First, it's Passover, and Nicodemus is a powerful, busy man during the day.

Nicodemus was the keynote speaker on the speaking circuit, with sold-out tickets.

Second, from a practical perspective, Israel had no AC, and the most comfortable and enjoyable part of the day was at night.

As a result, each home had a flat roof.

Rooftop conversations were common at night.

Third, in John's Gospel, darkness often represents spiritual darkness.

In other words, Nicodemus lives in spiritual darkness but now encounters the light (8:12; cf. 9:4; 11:10; 13:30).

John 3:2—*This man came to him at night and said, "Rabbi.*

By using the term Rabbi, Nicodemus addressed Jesus as an equal.

At this point, that's all Nicodemus knows about Jesus—that He's a teacher.

Here we have mankind's "man of the year" trying to be polite, but it goes south fast.

John 3:2—"Rabbi, we know..."

Pause: Who's the "we?"

It's the rest of the Sanhedrin—the other powerful people in Israel.

In other words— *You deserve the title 'Rabbi,' and we are prepared to welcome you into our club. But things are very different in Jerusalem than they are out in Galilee. You are going to need good advice, support, and resources. We can help.*

Do you feel the tone?

John 3:2—"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God,

Nicodemus is partially correct.

And please know that partially correct men who think they are spiritual are very dangerous.

Yes, Jesus has come from God the Father— but that's not the whole story.

Jesus is not only a Teacher sent by God—

Jesus is Almighty God—the second person of the Holy Trinity!

Yet, Nicodemus has just reduced God to a "rabbi"—just like himself.

Coincidence? Isn't that what we do? We lower God and raise ourselves up?

John 3:2— *for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him.*”

Maybe Nicodemus heard about the miracle at Cana—maybe not.

He certainly heard or even saw Jesus cleanse the temple.

Regardless, Nicodemus understands that God empowers His prophets through miracles.

But you don’t have to be a man with his pedigree to know that—everybody knows that!

Unfortunately for Nicodemus, the point of the story so far is that, despite his knowledge, Nicodemus’s whole conception of the Lord Jesus is wrong.

His intellect had deceived him. His pride has misled him.

This is why Jesus rebuked him.

God had sent dozens of prophets and teachers up to this point in Jewish history.

But only four primary prophets performed miracles—Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha.

But Jesus was not one of these prophets.

They were men. The Lord Jesus Christ is God.

Prophets had come to teach men about God.

Jesus was God who came to teach men about Himself—that’s a divine difference!

How did Jesus respond to Nicodemus offer to join the Pharisees?

Did He say, “I really appreciate that. Let me pray on it?!”

Remember, Jesus knew that Nicodemus was a man, and He knew what was in man.

So, Jesus interrupts him.

Nicodemus begins with what he knows about Jesus—now Jesus answers with what He knows about Nicodemus.

John 3:3—*Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you,*

These words set the stage for what came next.

Jesus could have said, “Oh, you’re aware of My miracles! Pretty powerful, huh? Quite incredible, eh?”

Instead, Jesus cut through the flattery, the small talk, the games people play, and the veneer of religiosity.

The Lord Jesus refuses to talk about miracles or superficial faith.

Nicodemus may have been ready for a philosophical exchange, but he wasn't prepared for what Jesus says next.

“Truly/verily/amen”—in other words, this is the most important thing you will ever hear.

And Jesus uses this term three times with Nicodemus.

The sense here is that Jesus was stressing the absolute certainty of what He was about to say.

Jesus said, in effect, “Listen carefully, Nicodemus—what I’m about to tell you is the simple divine truth and it will change your life for eternity.”

The Lord goes to the heart of the matter because it's the heart that matters.

So, Nicodemus wants to discuss the physical signs that Jesus performs—but Jesus focuses on the spiritual life that Nicodemus lacks.

John 3:3— *unless someone is born again,*

The word "unless" is a universal, necessary precondition.

What's the necessary precondition? *Born again.*

There are no ifs, ands, or buts. Being born again is a must—it is a spiritual necessity.

What's it mean?

“Born” is the Greek verb *gennáō* (guh-now), meaning “to become the parent of.”

Matthew uses it with the genealogy in Matthew 1:1–17.

What's interesting is that it's like the Lord takes us back to Adam and Eve.

Genesis 2:7—*Then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.*

Notice two things:

First, the preincarnate Lord Jesus Christ physically created Adam.

Second, the Lord also breathed life into him.

Adam was a passive participant in both actions.

However, when Adam actively sinned, he lost both.

He first died spiritually and then physically.

It was a double death.

“Again” is the Greek adverb *anōthen* (an-oh-then), meaning “from above.”

In other words, *Nicodemus, you have to become a child of the One Who is from above.*

And if you don’t...

John 3:3— *he cannot see the kingdom of God.*”

God’s kingdom is not only a heavenly realm or a future event.

It’s also the here and now.

This is why both the Baptizer and the Lord Jesus preached the same message—
“Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

What’s interesting is that Jesus is the first person in Scripture who has the audacity to proclaim a necessary precondition for entrance into the kingdom of God.

John 3:3— *he cannot see the Kingdom...*

To “see” is not intellectual understanding—it’s a supernatural gift of grace.

Theologically, Jesus is referring to *regeneration*.

It’s really important as Christians that we understand this theological term.

KEYPOINT #3:

Regeneration is when the Holy Spirit transforms someone from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Regeneration is divine rebirth— a godly genesis, a beatific beginning.

Scripture teaches that this divine act of being born again is monergistic.

Mono meaning “one/single.”

Monergistic means God alone does it.

Think about it: we didn’t choose to be physically born.

We also didn’t choose our parents or choose the era of history in which to be born.

And if it’s impossible to choose those physical things, how much more impossible that we choose spiritual things.

We do see regeneration in the OT:

Ezekiel 36:26—*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.*

Notice who is doing all the work!

Ezekiel 36:27—*I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.*

God does all the work because He provides all the gifts.

So while Ezekiel introduces the concept, John’s Gospel explains its reality.

John 1:12—But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name,

John 6:44—No one can come to me unless the Father...draws him,

Notice again the necessary condition.

John 6:65—He said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by the Father.”

The Apostle Paul further explains regeneration in the Epistles.

Ephesians 2:1—And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

What can a dead man do? What choices does a man make?

Ephesians 2:4—But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us,

Ephesians 2:5—made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved (not by your own choice) but by grace!

This is why we sing the song AMAZING grace!

We call it AMAZING for a reason! His grace is not from us but from Him!

If we could choose God, we would change the title to “Mediocre grace.”

Ephesians 2:8—For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift.

What's the *this*?

Even our faith doesn't come from us—it comes from God too!

Romans 9:16— *it (regeneration) does not depend on human will or effort but on God, who shows mercy.*

KEYPOINT 4:

We are physically born spiritually dead.

Since we are *physically born spiritually dead*, we are passive in the act of regeneration.

- Just as Adam and Eve didn't create themselves.
- Just as we didn't choose our parents
- Just as Lazarus couldn't raise himself— nor can we.

ILLUSTRATION:

Maybe you've heard or been taught that being born again is like a drowning man going under the water for the third time, and by God's grace he has one last bit of strength to grab the life preserver.

That's not what Jesus teaches at all.

Mankind having any say whatsoever in regeneration is not what Paul teaches either.

God doesn't give a drowning man swimming lessons—he lets him drown.

Why? So that God gets all the credit and glory.

No one in Heaven will ever be able to boast in themselves—only in the Lord.

Therefore, those who are born again are new creations.

2 Corinthians 5:17—*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!*

Think about your own testimony—especially if you were born again later in life. Before regeneration, you had no disposition, inclination, or desire for anything of God.

All of your desires were for this world.

But now, by God's amazing grace, God slowly and painfully purges the things of this world from your lives.

Those old sins may still entice you, but now there is a battle.

John 3:3—*Jesus replied, "Truly I (God) tell you (man), unless someone is born again, he cannot (will not/it's impossible) see the kingdom of God."*

In other words, Jesus just blew up Nicodemus' world.

Jesus' words have staggering implications for Nicodemus.

All of his life, Nicodemus had diligently/strictly/passionately/obsessively observed the law and the rituals of Judaism.

He had joined the ultrareligious Pharisees, and even become a member of the Sanhedrin—talk about an overachiever!

Now Jesus commanded him to give it all up and start over.

He must abandon his religious credentials and so-called "good works"—and believe the Gospel like everyone else.

Nothing is more humiliating for a person to discover that we don't choose God—that it's God who chooses to save us.

Nothing makes people more angry than to discover that all of their good works are nothing more than filthy rags.

How is this fair?

Romans 9:20—*who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?*

In other words, *Do you not remember that you are made of dirt?*

Spiritual birth is something we undergo, not something we produce, contribute to, or participate in.

But once we're saved, we do participate/cooperate with the Lord—sanctification.

It's absolutely necessary for Nicodemus to get over his astonishment at being so wrong.

KEYPOINT 5:

Your religious résumé and good works cannot give you spiritual life.

In one sentence, the Lord sweeps away everything Nicodemus stood for.

You must be born again—this is one of the great statements of the Bible.

Yet, it's so misunderstood because of our human pride.

It is so simple a child can understand, and so profound that mankind's "man of the year" is flabbergasted.

KEYPOINT 6:

According to Jesus, the starting point in the Christian life is to be born again.

Fast-forward about three years in John's Gospel, and we know Nicodemus had indeed been born again.

He and Joseph of Arimathea played a major role in burying the Lord's body.

Application:

Here's my question as I close: ***How do you know you've been born again?***

Let me give you five things to consider this week:

First, you'll start to notice a struggle/tension in your life that you've never had before.

A holy hostility—an awareness of what is truly good and what is truly evil.

You feel the tension because you're in the middle of it.

Second, there will be an ongoing sorrow for sin.

Over time, you'll notice that certain things that you've said or done begin to bother you like never before.

That sorrow is meant to lead you to repentance—so that someday very soon you'll stop doing what you've always done.

Third, the way you spend your time and money slowly changes.

The things and hobbies that you used to enjoy are no longer enjoyable.

Music, TV Shows, all forms of entertainment.

The spiritual things you had no interest in before—attending church, Bible Studies, personal devotion, and prayer—become more enjoyable.

It's like you have a new spiritual hunger.

Fourth, your relationships with people begin to change.

You begin to care about God's people—His church.

But you also care about unsaved people.

Fifth, since God has changed your heart *from death to life*, your character now follows.

Galatians 5:22/23—*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

Disclaimer:

If you have any of these things going on in your life—you are (most likely) born again.

Let me caution you about the sin of perfection.

You will never do any of these things perfectly, but you can—slowly and over long periods of time—do them increasingly...by God's grace.

It's one thing to look ahead and see how far away from this self-inflicted goal of comparison.

But it's another to see how far the Lord has brought you since the day He saved you.

Dear friends, that realization should bring us to our knees in worship.

The realization that you're not the same person.

Lastly, for those of you who know you are not born again—let me encourage you too.

There is a reason you're here.

Unless you were forced or shamed into coming today, God is doing something in your heart.

My encouragement to you is this—*let Him work.*

Ask for eyes to see and ears to hear—and when you hear His voice—don't harden your heart—repent and believe.

PRAYER:

SONG:

BENEDICTION:

May the LORD bless you and protect you;

*may the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;*

*may the LORD look with favor on you
and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24)*

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