

## Sunday August 27, 2023 | John 3:1-12

Last week we spent our time on the last three verses of Chapter 2. In this small passage we saw the distinction between salvation and intimate growth. This group was saved yet was not going to reach a deep intimate walk with Christ. Jesus knew what was keeping them from pursuing this kind of walk. Chapter 3 is going to give us an example of how well Jesus knew what was in humanity. He had insight into the heart every person, and was able to cut past the superficial.

### John 3:1-12 ESV

- (1) Now there was a man of the **Pharisees** named Nicodemus, **a ruler of the Jews**.
- (2) This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."
- (3) Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."
- (4) Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"
- (5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
- (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
- (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'
- (8) The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, 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 the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?
- (11) Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.
- (12) If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

Nicodemus is held up as an example of how Jesus was able to get to the heart of each person. This conversation did not go at all how Nicodemus thought it would. He was a very important Jew of the time. Not only was he a Pharisee but He was also **a ruler of the Jews**, in context this most likely means he was apart of the **Sanhedrin**. This was the highest Jewish court; it was made up of 70 members and the High Priest. Nicodemus was accustomed to being the most important person in most rooms. Conversations usually radiated around him, he outranked most everyone. Then comes this conversation with Jesus.

### John 3:2 ESV

- (2) This man came to Jesus **by night** and said to Him, "Rabbi, **we know** that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do **unless God is with Him**."

Nicodemus is intrigued by Jesus and wants to talk, but He wants to come by night. This is not just a casual detail to set the scene. It is so important that Nicodemus will be remembered as the one that came by night (John 19:39). Nicodemus did not want to be seen with Jesus. He had a fear of the other members of the Sanhedrin, and had to protect his reputation.

He is respectful towards Jesus and calls Him Rabbi, which means teacher. He doesn't ask Jesus a question, but makes an observation. Nicodemus admits that **"We"** (probably other pharisees) know that God is with Jesus because of what He is doing. Think about this admission. He knows that God is with Jesus, but still was only willing to come at night. **God might be with Jesus but the Sanhedrin was not** and Nicodemus is showing through his actions whom he fears most.

### Galatians 1:10 ESV

(10) For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? **If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.**

Paul learned that He could either please man or please God. The two were opposites of each other. Nicodemus is still trying to do both. He wants to be a respected member of the Sanhedrin but He also is drawn to Jesus. You can try to please both but eventually a choice must be made. Who are you fearing? Many of our decisions are motivated by the fear of Man. We tend to worry more about what others will think about a decision instead of considering what God thinks about the decision. When we have a fear of man, we are thinking on an earthly level. Fearing God encourages us to value the eternal. Jesus is going to expose these issues in Nicodemus's heart.

### John 3:3 ESV

(3) Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Notice that Jesus does not spend any time with flatteries or superficial things. He does not thank Nicodemus for recognizing Him as a Rabbi or comment on the miracles that impressed Nicodemus. He doesn't compliment Nicodemus on being a Pharisee or in the Sanhedrin. He gets right to the heart. **"unless one is born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God."

This statement was shocking to Nicodemus. He was well acquainted with the coming kingdom and thought that He was doing everything needed to be able to see it. What Jesus said is an entirely new thought for him. Nicodemus a pharisee, member of the Sanhedrin, who followed the law to each exacting detail needed to be born again in order to see the kingdom of God. He couldn't follow enough laws, or do enough righteous things to see it, He needed a rebirth.

### Ephesians 2:1-3 ESV

- (1) And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins
- (2) in which you once walked, **following the course of this world**, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—
- (3) among whom we all once **lived in the passions of our flesh**, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind.

These verses describe everyone who has ever been born, except Jesus. We are born physically alive and yet we are spiritually dead.

A spiritually dead person follows the passions of their flesh. They are a child of wrath and their actions show it. If the world approves of something, they do it. If their body desires something, they follow it. They are dead to spiritual things. The spiritually dead person cannot be **reformed**. It is not that they are just **ignorant** and need proper **instruction**. It is not that they are **weak** and need to be **built up**. They are not just **sick** and in need of a **doctor** or the right medicine. **The spiritually dead person needs one thing, a new birth, regeneration.**

#### **Ephesians 2:4-5 ESV**

- (4) **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us,  
 (5) **even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved—

The gospel is not about how to become a better person by doing the right thing. **The gospel is about how to become a new person.** To be given new life. We were dead and have been made alive because of Jesus. This truth should be reflected in how we share the gospel. We should not list out the sins a person needs to stop to be accepted by God. If a spiritually dead person stops a sin, what good is that, they are still dead. They need to believe in Jesus. New life is found in Him, then they can grow in that new life.

This entire conversation will be filled with words and phrases that have double meanings. The word for **again can also mean from above**. Jesus is talking about a spiritual birth from above, an entirely new nature. By Nicodemus's response we know how he understood it.

#### **John 3:4 ESV**

- (4) Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? **Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?**"

What Jesus just said was ridiculous to Nicodemus. How can a man who has been born be born again? Nicodemus's question is very honest, you cannot reenter the womb and be born physically again. This reveals the plane that Nicodemus is thinking on. He is thinking earthly. A spiritually dead person has no capacity to understand spiritual truth yet.

#### **1 Corinthians 2:12-14 ESV**

- (12) Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **that we might understand the things freely given us by God.**  
 (13) And we impart this in words **not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit**, interpreting **spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.**  
 (14) **The natural person** does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, **for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**

The Holy Spirit teaches us spiritual truth. Only spiritual people who have been reborn are able to understand spiritual things. If someone has not be reborn, they are not yet able to understand spiritual truth. The only message they need to hear is who Jesus is and what He did for them. They need the rebirth that Jesus offers.

The person who is spiritually dead only can understand and interact with things of this earth. When we are reborn and given new life, we have a new capacity for spiritual things. **This is why a spiritually dead person would hate being in heaven, they have no capacity to enjoy it.** When we are born physically, we inherited an earthly nature from our parents. It is a dead sin nature. When we are reborn, we are given an entirely new nature. Nicodemus did not understand this spiritual truth. Jesus is going to repeat the same phrase (v.3) but replace a few words to offer clarity.

### **John 3:5-6 ESV**

(5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born **of water and the Spirit**, he cannot **enter** the kingdom of God.

(6) That which is born of the **flesh is flesh**, and that which is **born of the Spirit is spirit**.

Instead of being born again, Jesus says we must be born of water and the Spirit. He also replaces seeing the kingdom to entering the kingdom. The changes are meant to expand on what He meant. To be born again means to be born of both water and Spirit. There are many interpretations as to what it means to be born of water. Each making connections to other parts of scripture. One interpretation though, is dangerous. Some say to be born of water means water baptism. They use this verse to say you must be water baptized to be saved. **This is not true!** If it was, then the thief on the cross that Jesus promised would be in paradise with Him is not saved because he was never water baptized. If Water Baptism is needed for salvation, then we are saved by a work, and not by the grace Ephesians 2:5 just told us.

Being born of both water and Spirit clarifies the two births. Our first birth was through water, it was our natural birth. The second birth is through the Spirit. Jesus is answering Nicodemus's question. You cannot reenter your mother's womb, you were already born through water. Nicodemus had need of being born in the Spirit.

This entire passage Jesus has been using words with double meanings, again/ above, and we will see down in verse 8 wind/Spirit. Water and Spirit are no exception. This phrase would have been a reference to the Old Testament that Nicodemus should have recognized.

### **Ezekiel 36:24-26 ESV**

(24) I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

(25) **I will sprinkle clean water on you**, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

(26) And **I will give you a new heart, and a new Spirit I will put within you**. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and **give you a heart of flesh**.

God is making a promise to Israel for the kingdom. He will cleanse them with water and give them a new heart. They will be reborn from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh. Jesus is showing Nicodemus that this should not have been a foreign thought. Once we became Spiritual dead we needed to be washed and given a new birth.

**Titus 3:4-7 ESV**

- (4) But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,  
 (5) **He saved us**, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy,  
**by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit**,  
 (6) whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,  
 (7) **so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**

This is what is truly amazing. God chose to give access to the new birth to the Church. We are not saved by our own works done in righteousness. There is not enough of anything you could do to earn this. This birth comes from the washing the Holy Spirit does to regenerate and renew our dead hearts. We have been born through the water and the Spirit. The new birth is a work of God in our lives. **There is a mystery in it.**

**John 3:7-8 ESV**

- (7) Do not marvel **that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'**  
 (8) The wind blows **where it wishes**, and you hear its sound, but **you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.**

Nicodemus should not have been surprised that Jesus said you must be born again. Jesus then compares how the Spirit works to how the wind works. The interesting thing is that the same word, **pneuma** is used in both places. Again, this passage has a lot of words that have double meanings. **Pneuma**, can mean wind, and it also means the Holy Spirit. Jesus' point is that the wind blows where it wants, it is in control. You can hear it but don't know where it is coming from or where it is headed. You can see the effects of the wind, but not the wind itself.

This is how the Holy Spirit works in our lives to accomplish the new birth. He moves and accomplishes His will. **There is a mystery in how God works**, but we see the results of Him working. This language of the wind blowing and representing the Spirit refers us back to Ezekiel. God showed Ezekiel a valley full of dry bones, who were dead.

**Ezekiel 37:5-6; 9 ESV**

- (5) Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, **I will cause breath to enter you**, and you shall live.  
 (6) And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and **put breath in you**, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD."  
 (9) Then He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: **Come from the four winds, O breath**, and breathe on these slain, that they may live."

This passage refers to God bringing the nation of Israel back together, and breathing life through His Spirit into them. They were a valley of dead bones and needed new birth, new breath in their lungs. The breath came from the wind. Jesus keeps referencing Ezekiel 36 and 37 in this dialogue with Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin. He should have known this truth; we need to be born again.

**John 3:9-12 ESV**

(9) Nicodemus said to him, “**How can these things be?**”

(10) Jesus answered him, “**Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?**”

(11) Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

(12) If I have told you **earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?**

Nicodemus does not understand what Jesus is saying. Nicodemus is supposed to be a teacher of Israel and **He did not understand the need to be reborn**. Now until Jesus is resurrected, Nicodemus would not have been able to fully understand this truth. But as we have seen **Ezekiel talked about the need and the promise of being born of the Spirit**. Jesus has been using earthly things to make His point and still Nicodemus did not understand. Jesus can't start to teach Him Spiritual truth.

As believers we have been born again, and now have the capacity to walk with Him in this new life. We should not take our new life in Christ for granted. God has done a tremendous work in us.

**2 Corinthians 5:16-17 ESV**

(16) From now on, therefore, we regard no one **according to the flesh**. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard Him thus no longer.

(17) Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**

You and I as believers are not just of the flesh anymore. We have not been born only one time but twice. We have been given a new life in Christ. We are not dead in our sins but have been made a new creation. **We have a new ability to live for Jesus that we didn't have before.**

**Colossians 3:1-5 ESV**

(1) If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

(2) Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

(3) **For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

(4) When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

(5) **Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:** sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

As a believer our true life is with Him. We are called to seek the things above, eternal things. To seek Him. We now have a very important choice to make. We can still walk in our flesh. The sin nature is still there and those sins are still in our flesh. Or we can walk in the Spirit and walk in our new life with Christ and put our flesh to death daily through His power. We now have the ability to walk in the Spirit let's not waste it. Life in the Spirit is so much better than life in the flesh. Let's live for Him, because we can now.