

The Author of the New Birth

Salvation

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Bible Text: John 3:1-10

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John chapter three and we will begin reading with verse number one and read down through verse number 10.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?¹

We have a very popular little phrase in America called: What would Jesus do? And we have come up with all kinds of definitions, statements, ideas, concepts, what Jesus would do in certain kind of circumstances. And it is not all bad to consider that phrase, but how many of you, considering that phrase, would have responded to Nicodemus the way Jesus

¹ John 3:1-10.

did? Not very many, I would say because the approach in our day is all fluff and nice and pat on the back. Be nice and kind. Win then with a cherry pie.

That wasn't Jesus. Oh, Jesus was certainly kind and gracious to people, but he also sometimes delivered what we would call a verbal slap in the face. And that is what this was. Nicodemus was the teacher in Israel. He was the head honcho. He was the guy that everybody came to if they had a question about Scriptures. They would come to Nicodemus and Nicodemus would pontificate and he would tell them what the Scriptures said. And here is Jesus stumping him with one phrase.

And we will see in a few moments he stumped him with an Old Testament phrase that Nicodemus should have known. And that is why Jesus rebuked him later in verse number 10.

“Are you a master of Israel and you don't know this? How can you sit in the seat of being the head teacher of Israel and you not know this?”

That is what he said to him.

Oh, a vital truth, I dare say.

Nicodemus came to Jesus approaching him like, oh, you are a good teacher. Of course, you are not as good a teacher as I am because I am the head teacher. You are just a good teacher.

Don't you think one slap in the face deserves another one?

That is what Nicodemus did to Jesus. Nicodemus belittled Jesus and made him lower than him. And Jesus was the king of all the earth, the Son of God incarnate in human flesh and Nicodemus didn't even know it. That is setting. That is the setting.

And Jesus said to Nicodemus those very clear words in verse number three, “Verily, verily I say unto you, Nicodemus, teacher of all Israel, head of the teaching ministry among Israel, unless you are born again, you will never understand the kingdom of God. And that is why, Nicodemus, you called me a rabbi and a teacher, not the Son of God like I am, because you don't know what you are talking about.”

That is what Jesus said to him.

Now that is the Tom Hill version, but that is what he said. That is, in essence, what he said to him. Unless you are born again, you won't even understand who I am. To you I am just another itinerant teacher walking about doing wonderful things. Oh, you don't understand who I am, is what he was saying to him. And you will not understand who I am unless you are born again.

And Jesus then proceeds to explain to Nicodemus what that means. And in explaining it to him he explains the author of this new birth, because that is what it is. That phrase born again literally means a new birth born from above, not born from the earth, born from above, a new kind of birth, a different kind of birth that needs a different author than a human author, authoress of human light. And Jesus explained to that to him. He said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh. You have all been born of the flesh. Nicodemus, you were born of the flesh. That is flesh. I am talking about a spiritual birth. That requires something different from a fleshly human birth.

Now, this has become of vital importance in our day for a number of reasons. First of all because of its necessity. I heard a preacher this morning use an example of a famous evangelist of years ago that I enjoy, George Whitefield who frequently preached on this concept of the new birth and you must be born again. And someone came up to him and said, "George, why do you talk about constantly this being born again? Why do you keep bringing that up in your messages?"

And George Whitefield thought a few moment and he smiled and he looked at him and he said, "Because you must be born again. "

You must be born again. You will never see it. You will never understand it. You will never grasp it. You will never believe it unless you are born again.

So it is a vital necessity this new birth. You must experience it.

That means, then, everything else short of that new birth is worthless. It is worthless. It is of no value. If I must be born again then all of the good things that I might attempt to do to improve my life, to justify myself before a holy God to somehow grasp with eternal life, it is all worthless because Jesus said unless you are born again you won't understand the kingdom.

Do you see that?

It is of vital importance. Everything else is worthless. Nothing else will help you. You must be born again.

There is another reason why we must examine the truth about being born again and it is this.

There are many fallacies about in our day that have attempted to explain and describe this new birth. And they are wrong. They are false. And I want to remind you of a few of them so that when we come to talk about the new birth you will see the distinction, you will see their contrast, how they differ.

There are those who would approach it in this fashion, "Well, you see, I really don't understand this new birth because it just doesn't make sense to me." And they try to approach it as though they are very intellectual and very wise and all knowing and

superior in intellect and this foolishness, this simplicity, this commonality of being born from again and above and, “You know, that just doesn’t resonate with me.”

That was Nicodemus. That was Nicodemus. Read it. He said, “What are you talking about? This doesn’t make any sense to me.”

You see, that which parades itself as an intellectual dilemma is nothing more than moral perversity. Now, what do I mean by that? Moral perversity is a twisting of the heart because of ignorance that causes one to rebel against the truth, to reject God, to deny him for who he is. They have ignorance about the truth of God’s Word. They have not been enlightened from this new birth. They don’t see it. They don’t understand it. And what they in themselves would present as an intellectual road block is in reality a moral problem of the heart. It is unbelief, cutting to the chase, cutting to the very crux of the problem. It is unbelief. They don’t believe it. They would prefer to believe something false because it appeals to their intellect or to their personality or to something about them, their feelings, their person. They would rather believe something is false than to deny themselves and fall before Jesus.

That is not intellectual dilemma. That is rebellion. That is rebellion. And it has swept our nation. It has invaded the world. And that is the way people think about the gospel.

There are others who believe that this new birth is tied to baptism. You hear many people say, “Well, I have been baptized. I was baptized as an infant. I was baptized when I was 15. I was baptized when I was 30. I remember the day.” And they will present to you as you talk to them about spiritual matters, “Oh, I remember when I was baptized.”

It is not baptism. It is not baptism.

Others will say this new birth is new birth is merely a reformation of life. “I have improved myself. I don’t live the way I used to live. I am much more moral and upright and kind.”

Oh, it is beyond mere reformation of lifestyle. Because there are many people who by sheer will power can change their behavior. That is not the new birth.

Others would say the new birth rests upon religious activity and they will present to you and say, “Oh, I have been faithful to church. I have been to church ever since I was a youngster. I have been faithful in attendance. I read my Bible. I pray. I am a good person.”

Not religious activity. Jesus said, “Except you be born from above you will never understand the kingdom.”

I want us to examine Jesus’ response to Nicodemus and his brief explanation here about this new birth, this birth from above. And Jesus responded to him. First of all, he responded with two pictures that help describe this new birth and then he explained it

further with an explanation that it comes through a work of the Holy Spirit upon an individual and that is his explanation and I want us to see these three things as Jesus presented them to Nicodemus.

The first one he presented to him is in verse number five after Nicodemus responds to the first statement of Jesus. He says, "How can these things be? Am I born again? Do I go back into my mother's womb somehow?"

And that is almost like some sales people like to reduce things to the ridiculous to try and prove a point. I wonder if that is what Nicodemus was doing here with Jesus, trying to reduce it to the ridiculous by saying, "Oh, what do you mean, Jesus? I got to go back into my mother's womb again? We know that is impossible. That is not going to happen."

Jesus responded to him and says, "Unless you are born of water and of the Spirit..."

Now here is where people go astray with that statement, "Unless you are born of water and of the Spirit," where they grab on to that.

"See, there is that baptism. That is baptism. Unless you are baptized and the work of the Spirit..."

And they try to bring in baptism because Jesus talked here about water, being born of water and of the Spirit.

No, it is not baptism because nowhere in Scripture are we taught that baptism is essential for salvation. Nowhere are we told in Scripture that the absence of baptism condemns a person. In fact, we are taught the opposite. We are taught, for example, in Mark chapter 16, he says, "Go out and preach the gospel to every creature and go out and you preach for he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. But he that does not believe will be condemned."

So who is condemned? The unbeliever, the one who fails to believe, not the one who isn't baptized, but the one who doesn't believe.

Then, secondly, we have another example of when Christ hung on the cross dying on behalf of sinners like you and me one of the thieves, beside him crucified for his crimes called out in his dying moments, cried out to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And you recall the response of Jesus. "And today thou shalt be with me in paradise."

Well, when was he baptized? He wasn't. He wasn't ever baptized. He never had an opportunity to be baptized. He died right there on the cross alongside Jesus. And that very day he joined the Lord Jesus in paradise.

No, baptism won't save you. Baptism is not the new birth

There is another example I would bring to your attention and then we will move on. When Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi there was a great earthquake and all the prisoners escaped except Paul and Silas and the jailer was concerned that all of the prisoners escaped when the earthquake occurred. And Paul hollered out to him, “No, don’t take your life,” because he was ready to kill himself. He... that would be his end if all the prisoners escaped. He was responsible for them.

“So I might as well take my life. I don’t want to go through that humiliation.”

Paul said, “Oh, no, no, no, no. Don’t do that. We are all here.”

And the jailer responded back to him, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Paul said, “Well, you need to go down to the river and be baptized.”

No. That is not what he said. That is not what he said. He said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, faith, you see.”

So no water here in Jesus’ response to Nicodemus does not refer to baptism because Scripture doesn’t confirm it anywhere else. So that means it is talking about something else. And here is where Jesus was pinpointing to Nicodemus his failure to understand the Old Testament scriptures because in the Old Testament Scriptures water is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It is very clearly stated.

For example, don’t turn there because I am going to turn to several of them. I will turn and I will read them. If you want the references later I can tell you what they are. But just for sake of ease of moving along I will just cover them.

So, first of all, Isaiah chapter 41 verses 17 to 20 talks about water as a symbol of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 41:17-20. It says this.

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.²

It is a prophecy about the Holy Spirit, talking about the Spirit of God and what God will send the Spirit of God to those who are thirsty.

² Isaiah 41:17-20.

We read in Revelation it talks that those who are athirst come. It talks about water and the quenching of thirst. And it is done through the Spirit of God. He is the one who quenches the thirst.

Again in Isaiah chapter 44 we read another prophecy that makes reference to water and it is talking about the work of the Spirit of God. It says this Isaiah 44 verse number three.

For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.³

There is another one in Ezekiel and we will move on. These are references that the teacher of Israel, Nicodemus, should have known.

If he is going to be the teacher of Israel, if he is going to be the one who is the head man, to whom everyone comes for interpretation of the Scripture, he needs to know that. And Jesus very rightly and correctly reprimanded him and corrected him for not knowing the Scriptures that spoke of this very thing, this new birth of the Spirit of God.

Ezekiel 36 verse 25. We read this.

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.⁴

If you think the first couple of ones were maybe, well, you know, I don't quite catch what Tom is trying to say there with those, that is pretty clear. That is pretty clear. I am going to put a new spirit in you. I am going to put a new heart in you. And you will walk after my law. You will obey me.

Well, now how is that going to be? God is going to do that. Described it right there.

“I will give you a new heart. I will put my spirit within you.”

Nicodemus should have known those teachings from the Old Testament.

Well, further, we also read in talking about water and Jesus using it as a picture of the work of the Spirit of God in the life of a person. He makes reference in the New Testament to the water and the Spirit as being a picture of the work of the Spirit of God.

³ Isaiah 44:3-4.

⁴ Ezekiel 36:25-27.

For example, when the Lord Jesus a little bit later on when we come to... if we were to come to John chapter four we read that famous story of the Lord Jesus talking to the woman at the well in Samaria. And what was the picture he used? Water.

“Whosoever will drink of the water that I will give them shall never thirst.”

And then, again, in John chapter seven he talks about the Spirit of God being like rivers of water within us.

What Jesus was using here was a common picture of double emphasis. Water is used in Scripture as a picture of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Spirit of God. What the Spirit of God does is like what Water does. Water quenches our thirst. Water cleanses us and washes us and makes us clean as we read in I think it was the Ezekiel passage where it talks about cleansing us. And water gives us encouragement and strength. These are all pictures of what the Spirit of God does.

So Jesus in responding to the question from Nicodemus as using a double answer in saying there is water and the Spirit when in actuality it was one thing. So he is using water as a picture of the Spirit of God.

We also have in the New Testament a use of water in its relation to the Word of God. The Word of God cleanses us like water. And there are references in Scripture that we could look to that give us that description. Well, what is the Word of God? Where did it come from?

The Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God breathed upon men who wrote.

So Jesus was making clear to Nicodemus by picture and by statement this new birth comes from the Spirit of God. We will look at that again in a moment.

There is a second picture here that the Lord Jesus used to help explain this new birth and he used wind. We all have familiarity with wind in some fashion, don't we?

Boy, this is a windy day. And what do we have to do? We have to hold on to our hats and our coats and our purses and our belongings. We have to... unless the wind blows it away.

Well, where is that wind coming from?

Well, sometimes, oh, it is coming from the north or it is coming from the southeast and so we sometimes have a notion, but other times we just don't have a notion where that wind is coming from nor what even caused that wind in the first place.

Wind is a beautiful picture of the work of the Spirit of God in the life of a person because those who have experienced this new birth can't always tell where it came from. They know they have it. They know they have experienced it, but where does it come from? How did this happen? The wind is very mysterious in its operations. Wind can be very forceful and mighty. Wind can be blowing here, but not over here. It can be blowing today and not tomorrow. That is the work of the Spirit of God. You can't put the Spirit of God into a box. He is like the wind.

And that is why it is of vital importance that whenever you sense the Spirit of God speaking to you, you better respond then because the wind might not blow tomorrow. So Jesus used the picture of the wind to help explain this new birth. The work of the Spirit of God in the life of a person is somewhat like the wind. We don't always know just quite where it came from, but we know it is there. We feel it. We sense its effect upon us. And it is mighty. It is invisible. It is mysterious like the wind.

Yeah, that is the work of the Spirit of God.

Nicodemus was presenting by picture and by statement that this new birth comes as a gift, as a work of the Spirit of God upon someone by the initiative of the Holy Spirit. He comes to you. He performs a work in your heart and in your life and he gives you a new heart. He doesn't work with that old heart.

I was complaining to my wife this morning watching a few moments of television of someone who was a fairly well known national television personality speaking on television and he was talking about letting Jesus into your heart.

Where is that in Scripture? It isn't there. You get a new heart. Jesus doesn't fix up the old one. He doesn't repair. He doesn't modify it. He doesn't reform it. He doesn't fix it up. He gives you a new heart and he takes that old heart away.

He doesn't [?] with that heart. He takes it away. He removes it. We read that. He removes that heart and gives you a new one. That is his work. The Spirit of God gives you a new heart. It is a work of the Spirit of God that he does in your life.

I can't do it for you. Your loved ones can't do it for you. Your works can't do that for you. That is a work of the Spirit of God that he does in your life. But what are the results?

Well, there are several things that evidence this work of the Spirit of God having taken place in your life. There is enlightenment. Enlightenment about what? About you. You see, that what God says about you is true. You are a wicked person. You are a sinner. You do need a Savior. And you see that. You understand that. You see in some measure your need of a Savior, not just your sinfulness and your wickedness, but the fact that you are utterly helpless to fix it. There is nothing you can do to change that. You need someone to take care of that on your behalf and you then further see that Jesus did that. And you trust Jesus. Your will is changed. No longer do you rise up in opposition to

God. You begin to obey him and you want to obey him. And when you understand in God's Word that you shouldn't live in a certain fashion or act in a certain way, you joyfully set that aside and begin to trust God to enable you to live the way he want you to live. There are changes that are occur.

The Spirit of God makes his impact upon us. He changes us.

So when Jesus was responding to the visitation from Nicodemus at night he startled him with an Old Testament truth that he should have known.

“Except a man be born from above, he will not understand the kingdom. And, Nicodemus, you must be born again.”

And Jesus says that same thing to you and to me. You must be born again. Except a man, a woman be born from above, he will not understand, she will not know the truth about the kingdom of God.

How can the Spirit of God use these truths in your life and in mine today? Well, several things. First of all, he can help us understand the truth. Jesus presented to Nicodemus the truth. I pray that the Spirit of God will open your eyes to see the truth, to see it, that like the little cartoon picture you see where the little light bulb flashes on on somebody's head when they suddenly see something, yeah. Maybe that little light bulb will flash in your mind and your heart and you will see it that what God is saying in his Word is true and you will see it and you will understand it.

Further, the Spirit of God can then take these truths and examine us with them. Have you been born again? Have you been born from above? Have you experienced this new birth of which Jesus spoke and described?

It is possible that as we were examining these teachings that Jesus gave to Nicodemus that if prior to today you had not experienced this new birth, that you have experienced that new birth. It can be that way. It can be sudden. It is possible that God would do that by his Spirit now, give you that new birth and you would begin to see and understand.

Further, the Spirit of God can use these truths in the life of either a believer or an unbeliever to encourage us, to the unbeliever there is hope because much of our lives are hopeless. How can we fix them? We have tried and we can't fix them. It doesn't get any better. It keeps getting worse and worse and worse. What can I do? Oh, oh, there is the answer. And that gives us hope and that encourages us to trust Jesus.

To the believer who has experienced the new birth it can give you joy and peace in your heart. Oh, thank you, God, or what you did for me. Yes. That is mine. I have experienced it. Thank you.

The Spirit of God can also then use these truths to direct us to call upon Christ. Trust him. He is the only Savior. There is no other. The Scriptures tell us there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,

No other religion in the world offers a Savior who died on behalf of those who trust him. None. Trust Jesus. Trust him.

And, as I mentioned a few moment ago about the wind, do it now. Don't wait until tomorrow. Don't wait until the next day. Don't put it off. Don't relegate it to a better day. Oh, I will feel more like doing it. Oh, you know, I really need to think about this for another week or so before I...

No. No. Trust him now.

You say, "Well, I don't trust him for everything."

Trust him as much as you can trust him. Trust him now. Call upon him. Claim him as your Lord and Savior.

Say, "Well, that is all I understand."

That is all you need to understand right now. Just call upon him. He will further teach you. He will give to you the Spirit of God who will further teach you and enlighten you and strengthen you and encourage you and your faith will grow. It will increase You will trust him yet more tomorrow and the next day.

Well, I pray that the Spirit of God will come and do these works in your heart and your life today. It may be that the Spirit of God will give you that new birth even now as you listen. It may be then that the Spirit of God has given this new birth to you at some time in the past, but today he will encourage you with that, strengthen you and you will give him thanks and praise for what he has done.

Let's close with prayer.

Thank you, heavenly Father, for the great gift that you have made available to us. I pray even now that as people have listened, that your Spirit will come and give this new birth to those who have yet not experienced it and that you would bring to them that enlightenment and understanding of the kingdom to see their need of Jesus and to call upon him and to trust him. And I pray that even now, Holy Spirit of God, you will do that and we will give you to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thanksgiving, praise, honor and glory for all that you accomplish. For I ask these things, heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus your Son. Amen.