

## The Gospel of John: Part 9, The New Birth

**John 2:23–3:15 (ESV)** — **23** Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. **24** But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people **25** and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man. **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?

Tonight we are studying John 2:23-3:12. Last time we discussed Jesus clearing the animals and merchants out of the temple complex. Tonight we are going to move on to a middle of the night meeting by a man named Nicodemus and Jesus. As you noticed when I read the verses I’m including the last 3 verses of chapter 2 with this section in chapter 3. Let me start by

## The Gospel of John: Part 9, The New Birth

saying that the original Greek did not have chapter and verse separations. The **Chapters were added by Stephen Langton in the 13 century**. The verse separations did not come into being until the Geneva Bible in 1560. Unfortunately there are a few places where I feel the chapters break up a subject and this is one of them.

I feel that these three verses are important to understand the dialogue being said between Jesus and Nicodemus. So back to verses 23-25. *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*

### ***Our Hearts***

The thing I'm wanting us to see here is that Jesus knows our true motives. We saw this a few weeks ago when Jesus told Nathanael He saw him under the fig tree. In John chapters 6 and 16<sup>1</sup> we see where Jesus knows the very thoughts and questions in a persons mind. We can deceive man but we can never deceive God.

It's funny in a sad way how a person will go to great lengths to impress people but forget about God. If I told you that we were going to follow you around with hidden video cameras for the next week, you would not see them but you would know that you were being filmed at every moment of the day. Oh and we also need you to wear these special sensors so we can read your thoughts.

We are then going to put all this together and let your friends, spouse, boss, pastor and every one we can find watch it and hear your thoughts. You would be a nervous wreck. Think about it. How often would you try to curb your mind if you knew the person you were having an

---

<sup>1</sup> John 6:61, John16:19

## The Gospel of John: Part 9, The New Birth

evil or lustful thought about could hear it. When you look down on the homeless man and think, “the slob should get a job”, or the black man and think to yourself; “criminal”. The addict that you call a “stupid fool”. Jesus calls these the least of these and when you think this way about them you are thinking that way about Him<sup>2</sup>.

But see, Jesus hears all of these things. Jesus sees our every deed and hears our every thought, yet we are not afraid to continue on as we were. We are more afraid of man than God.

Jesus knows our hearts!

### ***False Profession***

The second thing I want to look at here is that it says *many believed in His name*. I think this verse is really important and it probably should be compared with Jesus teaching in Matthew 7:21-23 “*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’*”

I believe this verse in John is talking about the same thing and that is a false profession of faith. Here in the south, we do not find many people that say they are not a Christian. But it is easy to claim we believe in Jesus and then deny Him with our life. We must remember that believing who Jesus is and accepting Him as Lord and Saviour are two separate things.

In James 2:19 James tells us that even the demons believe that God is one and they shudder. In Mark 1:24 a demon calls Jesus the Holy One of God. So saying you believe in Jesus,

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25:45

## The Gospel of John: Part 9, The New Birth

believing he is the son of God, believing that he came to destroy Satan and sin puts you on the same level with the demons.

Think about this. You can go through life saying you believe in Jesus and then on the Day of Judgment be told, I never knew you. That is a scary thought. Some people react to that news with denial. God would never send me to hell when I said I believed. He is sending the demons to Hell, and they believe probably more than you do. Some people react in fear that they will never know if they are truly saved. But we do not have to do that we can be assured of our salvation.

So what does it take to be saved? What does it take to see Heaven?

Let's look and see what Jesus told a man whom asked the same question.

### ***Who Is Nicodemus?***

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Who is Nicodemus? Two details are stated in this verse. He was a Pharisee and a Ruler. A third detail can be picked up from verse 10. "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?" He was a Teacher.*

Lets start with A Pharisee. A Pharisee was one of three religious sects at the time of Jesus. The other two being the Essenes and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were the strictest Jewish group at this time. They studied the scriptures diligently and tried to live Holy lives dedicated to the scriptures. They were more of the middle class and were looked up to by the common people for their holy lifestyles.

The Essenes were communal groups. They lived in villages and shared everything. They sought purity and avoided the temples because they felt the priest had defiled the temples. We can learn a lot about them studying the Dead Sea village where the Qumran scrolls were found.

## The Gospel of John: Part 9, The New Birth

The third group was the Sadducees. These were wealthy priestly men who did not get along even with each other. They believed that only the Pentateuch was scriptural and they denied the resurrection. So by saying Nicodemus was a Pharisee, we are saying he was a devoutly religious man well thought of by the Jewish people.<sup>3</sup>

A ruler of the Jews. From this we can gather that Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a judicial council of the Jews. It had seventy members consisting of priestly families, scribes, and elders. Tradition links the Sanhedrin to the seventy elders appointed during the wilderness wanderings<sup>4</sup>. This group was appointed after Moses father in law Jethro suggested that Moses needed help in leading the people<sup>5</sup>.

A Teacher. Nicodemus was a teacher He was a man that sought God. A man who studied scripture and explained it to others. So Nicodemus was a good man. He is someone we can respect for his love of God, love of scripture, his desire to teach and serve politically.

So this is the man that comes to Jesus and makes the statement, *“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.”*

### ***Nicky's Place***

Let's try to put ourselves in Nicodemus' place for a minute. You are a teacher of the law. You are living in a city surrounded by pagan Caesar worshipping Romans. Every decision about the land promised to you by God is controlled by pagans. You hate these vile, violent, and offensive people. You look forward to the time of the Kingdom of God. It will be a time when God will take control and remove these pagans and God will rule here. You pray for it daily. You

---

<sup>3</sup> More information on these groups can be gathered in the ESV study bible pg 1769. Also the book Craig A Evans, Holman Quick Source Guide To the Dead Sea Scrolls,(B&H Publishing Group,Nashville, TN,2010)99-107, 182-213

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 11

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 18

## The Gospel of John: Part 9, The New Birth

make tons of rules so that you can live righteously and force others to obey them in hopes that this will please God and He will deliver you.

Then one day after 400 years without the voice of a prophet a man shows up and with a whip chases greedy men from the temple. Then this man goes into the courts and performs miracles and healings. (John 2:23) You look to the heavens and ask God if this is a prophet that can tell you when this kingdom will appear? You feel unexplainably drawn to this man.

You listen to the other Pharisees and they are talking about this man. “How dare he stop our temple markets?” “How dare He build up followers that listen to Him more faithfully than us? You are embarrassed for believing that Jesus was sent by God so in the evening you sneak off and go to talk to Him.

You start off telling Him that you noticed God is using Him in a powerful way. You give Him respect by calling Him teacher, and then he cuts you off answering the very question you came to ask and not only that He makes what seems an impossibility as a requirement for gaining this Kingdom of God.

*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

What? Born Again that is impossible. *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?”*

*“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.”*

### **Born Again**

## The Gospel of John: Part 9, The New Birth

So what does it mean to be born again? So what does it mean to be born of water and spirit?

Let's start by looking at Jeremiah 31:34.

*“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law **within them**, and I will **write it on their hearts**. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will **forgive their iniquity**, and I will **remember their sin no more.**”*

Here God is making the promise of a new covenant where His word will be inside a person's heart and their sin will be forgiven. This is what Jesus came to do. So let's move on to Ezekiel 36:25-27.

*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. 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. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

To get a full understanding of what Nicodemus should have been thinking we have to go to Leviticus 19. The chapters preceding Leviticus 19 are talking about what makes a person unclean. Now understand unclean means you cannot go to the tabernacle and worship. When I

## The Gospel of John: Part 9, The New Birth

say cannot I mean you will die if you try it. So what do you do Leviticus 19:9 NET in the Net bible say *“Then a man who is ceremonially clean must gather up the ashes of the red heifer and put them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They must be kept for the community of the Israelites for use in the water of purification – it is a purification for sin”* Then verse 18 says; *a clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water and sprinkle it on all that is unclean.*

What Nicodemus should be seeing is this ceremony will now be performed by God. He will be the one sprinkling the water of purification. Then God will give a new heart and put His Spirit inside . This is what Nicodemus should be seeing as the promise of God through the prophet Ezekiel.

Verses 6-8 *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 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.”*

A baby is born from the joining of a husband and wife; it is flesh. A child doesn’t just show up as a stork flies by. Just as it takes other beings to create the life of a child it takes the Spirit to bring about the life of the spirit.

The next point Jesus makes is that you cannot see the wind. You can see the effects of the wind. Leaves moving, dust flying, and a whisper of air are the effects, but you cannot see the actual wind. So it is with the Spirit. You cannot see God put His Spirit in someone’s flesh but the effects of it will be very obvious.

Verses 11-12 *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. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?* Jesus has tried to explain



## The Gospel of John: Part 9, The New Birth

how God plans to cleanse us of our sin so that we can inherit the Kingdom of God by using the earthly example of the purification of sin. Nicodemus doesn't understand, so how can he possibly understand the heavenly example? Sometimes we get up trying to understand certain things of God and it exceeds our knowledge, so we strive to explain it. We make rules around it and forget that God's ways are higher than ours and we will not always be able to understand the **How** of things.

### ***Assured***

Now that I have explained it I'm going to try and explain what it means to be saved and how we can know we are saved. What does it take to make sure we never hear Jesus say those words' "Depart from me I never knew you."

What we have learned tonight is that in Jeremiah God promises to establish a new covenant and put His law in our hearts. In Ezekiel He promises to cleanse us and put His Spirit in Us.

Jesus was God's way of doing this. Remember we talked about being sprinkled with the water of purification and that would make you ceremonially clean. Jesus' blood makes us clean it is by His blood that we are sprinkled and cleansed. Then once we have been cleansed He gives us a new heart. His Spirit comes to live inside us and write His law on us. So when we accept Jesus We are cleansed from our sin. Your slate is wiped clean. Then God writes His law on your heart and you start to feel conviction. It isn't like you are going around with a bible in your hand looking up every little thing to see if it is in the rulebook.

You know! You feel conviction!

Its funny how people will ask questions like the bible is a rule book. How much can I drink before it is a sin? How far can I go with my girlfriend, before it's a sin? See you already

## The Gospel of John: Part 9, The New Birth

know the answer when you ask! God has written it on your heart and you feel conviction about your sin and you are seeking to find away to get pass it, as if it might say oh; that isn't really a sin. You feel guilty because your new heart has already told you it is a sin.

Now don't get me wrong we need to read our bibles because they reveal to us who God is. It helps us to understand sin and exactly what Jesus did on the cross. The more you read your bible the more you will love Jesus. And God will talk to you thorough the bible.

### **How Do I Know!**

So can you tell if you have been born again? Jesus gave Nicodemus the answer. *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.*"

Just as you can tell the wind is blowing because of its effect on its surroundings, you can tell if you have been born again by the effects of the Spirit. When you start feeling conviction about sin, that is an effect. When you start praying more that is an effect. When your prayers stop being about your needs, but about others, that is an effect.