

#9 – John 3:1-21

Need: To understand the concept of the “New Birth.”

Aim: To bring people to a clear understanding of the “New Birth” and encourage them to make the choice to experience it for themselves.

Title: “New Beginnings”

Prop: In Jn. 3 Jesus had a one on one experience with Nicodemus as He taught the message of the **I. Need to be Reborn – 3:1-4**, followed by an **II. Illustration of Truth – 3:5-8**, ending with an **III. Reaffirmation of Truth – 3:9-15** all of which should bring people to Christ.

Intro: In chapter 3 of the book of John we find the classic encounter

between Jesus and Nicodemus. The interaction was intriguing as

Nicodemus was one of the leaders of the sect of Pharisees. Nicodemus

could have been one of the men charged by the Sanhedrin as an envoy to

check out John the Baptist, bear witness and then report back upon the

nature of his ministry.

John the Baptist had faded from the scene by this point, his mission completed as Jesus had now become the focal point of the Sanhedrin; He was a greater threat to Jewish authority than John the Baptist ever proved to be. Jesus’ teaching was radical and uncompromising, as He claimed to be Messiah. The masses were coming to Jesus to hear His message, but their true reason was to see and or experience His healing power. Jesus was rapidly becoming a “**Religious Rock-star!**”

I understand that Nicodemus was in a precarious situation. He was a leader in a sect which was rapidly turning to oppose Jesus. Yet Nicodemus had seen truth in what Jesus said, proved to be true by His miracles. So Nicodemus came to Jesus by night for a personal interview and to hear what Jesus had to say one on one. It was a bold move on Nicodemus' part, but nevertheless he pursued Jesus as His words had struck a chord in Nicodemus' heart. Nicodemus was an old man; he had spent his entire life studying the Scriptures. Yet a longing had been growing in his heart for something more, something concrete in his religious pursuit and experience.

Prop: In John 3 Jesus had a one on one encounter with Nicodemus as Jesus taught the message of the I. Truth of a Need to be Reborn – 3:1-3, followed by an II. Illustration of Truth – 3:4-8, ending with an III. Reaffirmation of Truth – 3:9-15 all of which should bring people to Christ.

Transition: Let's begin with the truth of need to be reborn found in verses 1-3.

I. Need to Be Reborn – Jn. 3:1-3

A. Situation (1-2a)

1. Conditions – If this was a sequential event, Nicodemus early in His ministry. He had turned the water into wine, healed the sick and cleansed the temple. Only one of those miracles, the water into wine, was hidden; all the others were very visible and public acts. The miracles were to prove that Jesus' words were true and a public witness to who He was, Messiah. No one in the entire Biblical account in the history of Israel and the history of the whole world could heal at will like Jesus did.

Because of the furor of the past events, Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, away from the crowds, in secret for two possible reasons:

(1) To conduct a professional review of Jesus and **(2)** For personal reasons as Jesus's words struck a chord of emptiness in Nicodemus' heart.

2. Public Office – In verse 1, Nicodemus was described as one of the rulers of the Jews which meant he was part of the Great Sanhedrin, one in a leadership position. There were two levels of the Sanhedrin. Each town had a body of men numbering 23 to deal with minor legal, civil and religious matters. The Great Sanhedrin was comprised of 71 members from all over Israel who served as the final authority in all matters of Jewish life, the supreme court of the Jews.

The Pharisaical wing, the conservatives were particularly concerned with the traditions and purity of Judaism. It was this court which was the final authority in legal, civil and religious matters. It was this court which was very concerned about Jesus and eventually sent Him to the Cross.

Nicodemus was a member and he came to see Jesus.

3. “By Night” (2a) – The very nature of the phrase “**by night**” meant that the meeting was somewhat secretive in nature. Whether Nicodemus was given a task of investigation by the Sanhedrin is unknown, but I feel it was unlikely. He came to Jesus on a personal level as he had seen the signs. He knew Jesus had to come from God, given the miracles and he wanted to know more. Jesus had claimed to be Messiah.

B. Question of the Ages (2b-4)

1. Words of Respect (2b) – In verse 2, Nicodemus began with words of respect, by calling Jesus “**Rabbi,**” then acknowledged Jesus’ origin;

“We know that You have come from God (for the purpose as a)

“Teacher.” “For no one can do these signs/miracles that You do unless

God is with Him.”

2. Relinquishing Authority – With those words Nicodemus relinquished his authority as a ruler in Judaism and gave himself over to Jesus for the purpose of instruction. Nicodemus was a renowned scholar in his own right, had his own school of disciples, was a master of the scriptures, yet he did not know anything when it came to eternal life. He just hoped that he had been good enough.

He was in the same situation with people who think that all God requires is a good and moral life. But that is not nearly enough!

2. Divine Perception (3) - There was no small talk recorded as Jesus in verse 3, perceived Nicodemus' question and concern. So at the very beginning of their conversation Jesus gave him the score: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”**

The statement was loaded with spiritual truth. In Nicodemus' present condition, his theological training, his understanding of the Old Testament, his godly lifestyle, didn't mean **“squat.”** Something which he himself could not achieve on his own must be done by God alone – he must be **“born again.”** Nicodemus had been born in sin into this world through his mother's womb. He was physically alive, but it wasn't enough, he must be born again spiritually. Like all mankind he was born spiritually dead.

Unless that took place, there was no hope of ever reaching God. Through salvation we become a part of God's family, which Adam relinquished in the Garden of Eden. When Adam sinned, the result was that we as his descendants were born spiritually dead. That part of us which connects us to God is lifeless

3. Response of Confusion (4) – I am sure we have all heard those words, but in many cases the words “**born again**” were not used in the sense which Jesus did here in verse 3. “**Born again**” has come to mean a new religious experience, to begin anew signifying a change in lifestyle. But here Jesus meant something which must be done as an act of God in which we are passive. It is done to us by God. Just as we had no part in our physical birth we have no part in our spiritual birth.

In verse 4 Nicodemus was obviously confused: “**How can a man be born again when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?**” It was a not really a legitimate question as spiritual rebirth was not a new concept. In Old Testament terminology – “**A new heart,**” was found in the book of Jeremiah as given by God to all who would believe.

Transition: With the cards on the table so to speak, Jesus spoke revelatory truth in verses 5-8 about the “new birth.”

II. Illustration of Truth – Jn. 3:5-8

A. Distinction in Understanding (5-6)

1. Need for Both Physical and Spiritual Birth (5) – In verse 5 Jesus made clear distinctions. Each person born into this world must come through his or her mother’s womb. That was the way God designed it: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water.”**

In all the births of my kids, which I witnessed, water was a key factor. With all three kids the doctor broke the water manually. When birth took place the water, amniotic fluid, provided the lubrication to facilitate birth. Everyone comes the same way. We are all born alive physically, but dead spiritually. Jesus took that natural process and applied it to spiritual life.

2. Two Distinctions Revealed (6) – There was a clear distinction of separation between the two events. The family you are born into has no bearing on your spiritual rebirth. Each one must experience it on their own. Just because I was born into a Christian family, attended a Bible College and Seminary does not exclude me from the need to be reborn, **“born again”** into God’s family. All must come through the same manner!! No exceptions! Only those who trust Jesus as Lord and Savior and ask Him into their life are truly **“born again”** into God’s family with the promise of eternal life. Works or good behavior is a non-factor in being **“born again.”**

B. Words of Illustration (7-8)

1. Revelatory (7) – As I mentioned before the words Jesus spoke in verses 7-8 were revelatory in nature. Nicodemus was circumcised on the 8th day after his birth in accordance with Jewish Law. At that point he became a son of the law and lived under all its conditions and provisions. At age 12 he became a full member of the Law and was thus responsible for his own actions and choices. But in his educational and theological study he had not come across the concept of being **“born again.”** It didn’t make sense. So Jesus’ words in verse 7 to Nicodemus was for him to not lack understanding but to listen clearly: **“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”**

2. Spiritual Rebirth Likened to Wind (8) - In verse 8, Jesus used wind to illustrate the nature of new birth. As natural birth is physically evident, the spiritual renewal is just as apparent, though not seen; it takes place on the inside. It is like wind. Not even modern science can fully understand the ways of wind or weather. One can hear the wind, see its effects, but **“No one knows where it comes from and where it is going...”** One cannot physically witness the Holy Spirit of God bringing one into the state of salvation, but one can clearly see the effects of conversion.

Transition: In verses 9-15 Jesus continued His teaching about spiritual rebirth.

III. Reaffirmation of Truth – Jn. 3:9-15

A. Question Concerning Understanding (9-12)

1. Question of Lack (9) – In verse 9 it was clear that Nicodemus still didn't get it: **“How can these things be?”**

2. Witness & Testimony (10-11) – In verse 10 Jesus took not so much a shot at Nicodemus, but at the total lack of understanding of Judaism in that day, which failed to communicate the truth of being **“born again.”** Jesus spoke from the divine side in verses 11-12, as He bore witness to what He said was true. Jesus had proven that His words were of God; even Nicodemus had given assent that Jesus was sent from God in verse 2.

Again in verse 12, Jesus reaffirmed Nicodemus' lack of understanding the basic truth of **“born again,”** Jesus spoke: **“I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how you will believe if I tell you heavenly things?”** Theological understanding and incorporation of Jesus' words into our lives, must start at the cross. Only through our relationship with Jesus will we be able to understand; thus will our faith and belief grow in this life and on into eternity. Everyone must begin with trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior and asking Him to come into our life.

B. Affirmation (12-15)

1. Heavenly Home (13) – In verse 13, Jesus continued to affirm His words as true by referring to His eternal qualities, He knows all things, having been in eternity past and now came in the form of man to reveal spiritual truth.

2. Old Testament Affirmation (14) – To understand verse 14, one must know the history of Israel. In the desert, in the midst of their wandering 40 years because of their sin of unbelief and because of their continual complaining and whining, God sent punishment. serpents came into the camp and sank their fangs into a good deal of the population. So great was the pain and suffering, that the people cried out to Moses for relief; people were actually dying from the effects of the venom.

As a kid I use to catch garter snakes. If I was not careful I would get bit and it would hurt, but there were no fangs, just bite marks. The snakes here were most likely vipers which included cobras. These snakes had fangs which were like hypodermic needles and the venom was caustic and deadly causing a great deal of pain.

God instructed Moses to form a serpent out of metal, attach it to a pole and raise it up for all to see. Those who looked and believed were saved. Those who failed to do so died a horrible and painful death.

In the same manner, the Son of God was lifted up for the world to see; He was nailed to a cross, suffering and dying for our sin. Anyone who believes in Jesus as Lord and Savior will live eternally with Him in heaven.

The call was to be **“born again,”** to trust Jesus as Lord and Savior. All must come through the way of the cross. When one comes to the end of life and stands before God, there will be no inquiry about how **“good”** you make think you are, or how **“good”** of a life you lived. It will be a question of **“have you been born again? Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord?”** Nicodemus was the prime example: His religious life and service in the name of God didn't mean anything. He felt the lack and wanted more, but he needed to come by faith alone and be **“born again.”** We all find ourselves in such condition at some point on our lives. I answered the call and so must you.

In verse 15, we find the promise to all people: **“So that whoever believes in Him (Jesus) will in Him (Jesus) have eternal life.”**

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