

23. The Gospel of John—3:8-15

“You Must Be Born Again” Pt.2

(3/18/18)

Last week we began looking at John 3:1-21—which to many is one of the greatest sections in the Bible.

Many skeptics of Christianity would respond by saying, *“What does a conversation between a religious guy and a Jewish carpenter have to do with me—what’s so great about it?”*

It’s great because in it Jesus tells a very religious man named Nicodemus that his religious works cannot get him into heaven—and then proceeds to tell him the only way he and everyone else in the world can be saved and enter heaven.

In fact, we could broaden the impact of this conversation by saying—this section of Scripture is great because, in reality, it’s a conversation between God and mankind on the single most important subject of life—eternal life!

I’ve divided the first 21 verses of John 3 this way—

I. The Confused Seeker—v.1-12

II. The Condescending Savior—v.13-16

III. The Condemned Sinner—v.17-21

I. The Confused Seeker—v.1-12

A. The context—v.1-2

John 3:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ 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." (Explain)

B. The confusion—v.3-12

John 3:3-7 (NKJV)

³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, 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, "Most assuredly, 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.' (Explain)

D.L. Moody—

"Being born again...is not a reformation—is not a turning over a new leaf, as some call it, is not a making up your mind to simply lead better lives. They must be born of the Spirit, and then they will live according to the Spirit. Unless they do this, reformation will be worthless. To be born again does not merely mean a resolve to be better."

And then Jesus illustrates spiritual birth using the wind—

John 3:8 (NKJV)

⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Now as we see in verse 9 this sends Nicodemus' confusion level off the charts—

John 3:9 (NKJV)

⁹ Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

Well, let's see if we can't understand what the Lord was saying thru this illustration—so let's read v.8 again—

John 3:8 (NKJV)

⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Now, you wouldn't know it from the English—but verse 8 contains a play on words in the Greek.

The Greek word *pneuma* means both 'wind' and 'Spirit'.

The work of **the Spirit** (*pneuma*) is invisible and mysterious like the blowing of **the wind** (*pneuma*)—and so, Jesus says, in that regard the new birth is very much like the wind.

You see, when it comes to *physical* birth—every adult knows what's involved in producing a baby so there is no mystery to it.

And then, nine months after conception the baby is born for all to see (I was in the delivery room to watch the birth of all three of my children)—again, no mystery.

But the same is not true when we talk about spiritual conception and birth—as Jesus said, *that is a mystery*.

How the Holy Spirit plants the seed of God's Word in a person's heart and then nurtures it until faith is full grown and the person receives Christ and is born again—is a mystery.

Moreover, the new birth, like the wind, is unpredictable—no one knows when or where or how the Holy Spirit will touch a person's life and they'll get saved—sometimes the people you'd least think would get saved do get saved!

And even when a person is born spiritually, unlike a physical baby that can be seen and touched—a person who has just been born again is still the same person outwardly—physically, no change has taken place.

In other words, the person doesn't look any different—but like the wind that can be heard and then seen only by the effect it has on things it touches—so is one who is born spiritually.

They don't look different, but you can see clearly the effects of the Holy Spirit on that person's life in the way they now speak (like the wind can be heard) and you can tell that the Holy Spirit (pneuma—wind) has touched them by the changes in the way they now live (again like the wind that effects things it touches while being invisible)—

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Think of how you lived before you got saved compared to the way you're living now—your life has radically changed! (Explain)

One author put it this way,

“[Jesus said,] ‘Nicodemus, being born of the Spirit is like your experience with the wind. You can see the wind’s effect, but not the wind itself.’ With those who are born again, the effects of the Spirit are visible in their lives, even though the Spirit cannot be seen. One of the reasons we have not seen our country swept for Christ is that there has not been sufficient evidence of the Spirit in Christians’ lives. In many cases ‘salvation’ is a bogus experience.” (see Titus 1:16)

Now, as I said, Nicodemus was off the charts confused by all this talk of the new birth and wind, and so he says to the Lord—

John 3:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹ ... "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

Here, Jesus chides Nicodemus, who He calls ‘**the teacher of Israel**’ (a teacher all the other Jews looked to for spiritual understanding of the Scriptures), for not understanding what He is saying.

Now look, as N.T. Christians we understand that the kingdoms of this world are entered into thru physical birth—a person born in a country is automatically a citizen of that country or kingdom.

On the other hand, the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom and as such can’t be entered into thru a physical birth, it has to be entered into thru a spiritual birth—but we can’t fault Nicodemus for not understanding that since he didn’t have the benefit of N.T. doctrine yet.

Also, I don’t think Jesus is chiding Nicodemus for not understanding the mystery of the new birth itself and how it works (that’s why the Lord called it a mystery because no human being understands it!)—

No, He is chiding Nicodemus for being ignorant of the power of the Holy Spirit to transform a life—which I believe was the purpose of Jesus giving the illustration about the wind in v.8.

Again, when the wind blows no one can see it because it’s invisible—but the effects are clearly seen.

The same is true when the Holy Spirit touches a person’s life—the Spirit is invisible, but the effect He has on a person’s life is powerful and unmistakable.

And so Jesus says to him, *“As one of the top teachers in Israel, don’t you understand that? As a teacher of the Jewish Scriptures you, yourself don’t know these things?!”*

1 Samuel 10:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NKJV)

²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.

John 3:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ **Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.**

The “**We**” and “**Our**” relates to Jesus and His disciples—but would also include “*all who are born of the Spirit.*”

And the “**you**” (plural) refers to Nicodemus and his religious colleagues—also including all who are not born of the Spirit and therefore can’t understand the things of the Spirit. (1Cor.2:14)

This was a contrast He made crystal clear in John 8:23 when, in talking to the Pharisees, He said—“*You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.*”

John 3:12 (NKJV)

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

What did the Lord mean when He said to Nicodemus, “**If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe**”—what earthly things is He referring to?

That it takes a spiritual birth to enter into God’s earthly kingdom.

Okay, but then what did He mean when He said, “**How will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?**”—what are these heavenly things?

Probably the means by which a person is born of the Spirit—or in other words, the truths which are explained in the following verses concerning the wonderful way by which a person receives this new birth.

Which brings us to our second main point—

II. The Condescending Savior—v.13-16

When we think of someone being condescending to us, we think of them putting us down—and when you’re talking about one human being to another—that *is* insulting because we’re all equal in God’s eyes and we should treat each other with mutual respect.

But when we talk about God condescending to us—it is legitimate.

The dictionary defines ‘condescend’ in this way—

“To behave as if one is conscious of descending from a superior position, rank, or dignity: To put aside one’s dignity or superiority voluntarily and assume equality with one regarded as inferior.”

Understand, that God’s condescension towards us isn’t a put down—it’s an act of mercy and love (as we will see from the text)—

John 3:13 (NKJV)

¹³ No one has ascended to heaven...

When the Lord said that “**no one has ascended to heaven**”, He didn’t mean that OT saints like Enoch and Elijah had not gone up to heaven.

The difference was that they had been *taken up* by God whereas no person ever ascended to heaven by their own power—or in other words by their own human goodness and hard work as the Pharisees sought to do.

To ascend into heaven a person would have to be as perfect as Jesus (sinless)—for that is the only righteousness that God will receive up into heaven—the righteousness of Christ. (John 16:10)

Every religion on the earth apart from Christianity is based on human achievement where man endeavors to make a ‘stairway to heaven’ where each step is made up of a good work—and if he can do enough good works during the course of his life—he believes he can ascend to heaven.

However, Jesus made it clear that no one has ever reached heaven that way—

John 3:13 (NKJV)

¹³ No one has ascended to heaven **but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.**

Only one Person is qualified to speak about heavenly things, since He is the only One who was in heaven—

John 3:12 (NKJV)

¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

The Lord Jesus was not merely a human teacher sent from God, like John the Baptist (John 1:6)—He was and is One who lived with God the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity and came down into the world.

Jesus entered this world on a search and rescue mission—He said, “*I have come to seek and to save those who are lost.*” (Luke 19:10)

The Bible teaches that man is not basically good—it teaches that he is a sinner and who could never reach heaven through his works of righteousness which God calls '*filthy rags.*' (Isa.64:6)

Since, we could not *go up* to where God is, He *came down* to where we are—He condescended to rescue man out of the pit we had fallen into through sin and lift us up to heaven someday.

But before *we* could be lifted up, first *Jesus* had to be lifted up—

John 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

Sin had to be judged and paid for before God could offer sinners forgiveness and salvation—this was illustrated in the O.T. story recorded in Numbers 21:4-9—which Jesus is alluding to in v.14.

As the children of Israel wandered through the wilderness toward the Promised Land—they became discouraged and impatient and began to complain against the Lord.

And so, the Lord punished them by sending fiery serpents into the camp of Israel to bite the people—and many of them died.

When the survivors cried out to the Lord in repentance pleading for mercy—the Lord told Moses to make a serpent of brass and put it on a pole and lift it up in the center of camp.

The idea was that anyone who had been bitten by one of these snakes if they looked upon the brass serpent on the pole by faith—they would be miraculously healed.

Jesus quoted this OT incident to illustrate how the new birth takes place.

Mankind has been bitten by the serpent of sin and as such is now dying from the ‘venom’ that has been injected into the human race by the sin of Adam.

And anyone not healed in this life will be condemned to *eternal death* in the life to come—(i. e. ‘*eternal separation from God in hell*’).

The serpent of brass was a type or picture of Jesus, who became sin for us—the pole speaks of the cross of Calvary upon which the Lord Jesus was lifted up.

Brass, in the Bible, speaks of judgment which represented the fact that on the cross sin was judged and paid for.

The Lord Jesus was sinless and should never have been punished—but He took our place and bore the judgment which we deserved—

Isaiah 53:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

It’s important to understand that those who were bitten by the fiery serpents were provided only one way from God to be healed—they had to look upon the brass serpent lifted up on that pole by faith.

If anyone bitten refused to look upon that brass serpent by faith (“what will that do!?”) then they died—needlessly.

And the same is true for you and me—our sins are not automatically forgiven because Jesus was lifted up on that cross—we must look to Him by faith (i.e. *‘believe in Him and receive Him as our Lord and Savior’*).

John 3:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

The healing of sin and salvation from hell—is as easy as looking to Jesus by faith.

Warren Wiersbe—

“On January 6, 1850, a snowstorm almost crippled the city of Colchester, England; and a teenage boy was unable to get to the church he usually attended. So he made his way to a nearby Primitive Methodist chapel, where an ill-prepared layman was substituting for the absent preacher. His text was Isaiah 45:22—“Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” For many months this young teenager had been miserable and under deep conviction; but though he had been reared in church (both his father and grandfather were preachers), he did not have the assurance of salvation.

The unprepared substitute minister did not have much to say, so he kept repeating the text. “A man need not go to college to learn to look,” he shouted. “Anyone can look—a child can look!” About that time, he saw the visitor sitting to one side, and he pointed at him and said, “Young man, you look very miserable. Young man, look to Jesus Christ!”

The young man did look by faith, and that was how the great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon was converted.

The difference between perishing and living, and between condemnation and salvation, is faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus could well have come to this world as a Judge and destroyed every rebellious sinner; but in love, He came to this world as our Saviour, and He died for us on the cross! He became the “uplifted serpent.” The brass serpent in Moses’ day brought physical life to dying Jews; but Jesus Christ gives eternal life to anyone who trusts Him. He has salvation for a whole world!”

Now, let me stop and say once again as we close that—John chapter 3 contains some of the most well-known and best loved verses in the Bible among Christians.

And I’m thinking primarily about the first 16 verses which basically revolve around two great *‘must’* statements given by Jesus.

These ‘*must*’ statements are found in verses 7 and 14 where Jesus said—

John 3:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (the ‘must’ of the sinner)

John 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up... (the ‘must’ of the Savior)

And together they lead up to and climax in the single greatest *message* of love and hope ever given to mankind—

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

We’ll look at that incredible verse and those that follow next week.