

Series: The Glory of the One and Only
Message: The Necessity of a New Birth / Ryan Patty / 10.27.19

Good morning Christ Community! If you have your bibles please grab them and open up to the book of John, chapter 3. We've been for a few weeks now in a study of John that we have called "the glory of the one and only." Our hope, taken from ch. 20 of John, is that you would behold the glory of Jesus Christ, God's one and only son. That you would behold that glory from the signs we read about, from his teaching, from his life, and ultimately from his death and resurrection. All of it reveals the glory of Christ, and all of it we are called to behold.

So John ch. 3 is where we find ourselves today. This chapter is famous in and of itself. It is one of those passages that has been preached on a ton, and not without due reason, and many of you yourselves have probably taken an unbeliever to this passage so that you might show them their need for a new birth, their need for a new life in Christ. And so that's where we see our title of this morning's sermon, "The Necessity of a New Birth." Before we jump in allow me to tell you a quick story..

George Whitefield was a famous preacher in England during the 1700's. He had a booming voice, one that anyone in a crowd could hear, at one point he preached to close to 100,000 people in Scotland without any means of amplification. Not only was his voice booming, but it was said to be one of the most beautiful preaching voices a man or woman could hear. One person said it sounded like an organ, flute, and harp all at the same time. I know many of you would say the same for me... (sorry Pastor Daniel). But Whitefield who came to faith after meditating on the new birth in Jn. 3, would often preach on this very subject, the need for a new birth. A friend of his, who often accompanied him in his travels to various churches, asked him one day, "why do you so often preach on, "you must be born again?" To which Whitefield soberly looked at him and said, "*Because you must be born again.*"

So let us read the passage. John 3:1-21, follow along with me.

There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to him at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him."

3 Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 “How can anyone be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked him. “Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?”

5 Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. **8** The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

9 “How can these things be?” asked Nicodemus.

10 “Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things?” Jesus replied. **11** “Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. **12** If I have told you about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man.

14 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15** so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. **16** For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **18** Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. **19** This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. **20** For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it,[g] so that his deeds may not be exposed. **21** But anyone who lives by[h] the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.” (CSB translation)

Pray with me.

As I said before, many Christians are familiar with this text. John 3:16 is the first verse I ever memorized, so I understand the familiarity. The difficulty with familiarity though is assuming the passage no longer has anything to say to me. It no longer confronts me as the word of God, when in actuality that is exactly how it confronts us. So we must guard ourselves and look with fresh eyes on this text. From those of you who are here and have questions about Jesus and about Christianity and the things of God (glad you’re here, God’s word has something to say to you), to those of you who can confidently say I am born again, to everyone in between, this text speaks to you. It confronts us with truths that we must hear and respond to. So let’s jump in. Three truths and a warning from the text that we see.

1. The Need for a New Birth (vv. 1-8)

Verse one of chapter three opens up with a man named Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night. John identifies him as a leading Pharisee. Most likely apart of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council for the city, and he's curious about Jesus. He's curious, maybe skeptical, but curious enough to come to Jesus and converse with him. Now he had most likely heard of the signs he was doing, most likely heard of this man who healed the sick, who turned water into wine, who taught with authority, and so he goes to him and greets him at night.

Now with John, light and darkness are themes that run throughout his book. The light he tells us in chapter 1, has come into the world and shines in the darkness, a theme he picks up at the end of this passage. But here we have a man coming at night to see Jesus. Now there are different reasons as to why some think he came at night, but John seems to portray this out of timidity or fear because later on in the book Nicodemus is recounted as the one who came to Jesus at night. Nicodemus had a high standing, he had recognition as he walked on the streets, people knew who he was, he was apart of the Jewish leadership, and to come as an honest skeptic during the day would probably be too much for Nic here. He could lose status, what would the other Pharisees think of him? But him coming at night is a larger picture of his spiritual state. He, himself, is still in the darkness. And Jesus confronts that.

Nicodemus greets him, Rabbi! We know you are from God because **only God could be behind these signs you do.** He comes respectfully and gives him a friendly greeting. He tells him that he must be from God because of these miracles you are doing. One would think that Jesus would respond, "good! I am glad you recognize this, now if only everyone else would!" But he doesn't. Jesus responds, "*Truly I tell you unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" Nicodemus acknowledges that Jesus is from above, but Jesus tells Nicodemus he has a problem. Seeing signs and miracles and healings, and being amazed by them saves no one. Anyone in their fallen, sinful nature would be amazed. They could probably along with Nicodemus say it's from God. Even the demons can acknowledge what God does. But Jesus says this is missing the mark! Jesus is telling him, "don't be amazed at the supernatural in me, You need to experience it in yourself. You need to be born again!

He's been focused on the wrong things. He's a Pharisee, an observer of the Law, in light of him coming and seeking answers from Jesus he was probably an honest one, one who tried in some measure to do good. But all the focus on the externals, all the

focus on the signs in and of themselves, has missed the point. He has been trying to earn salvation and when it cannot be earned. He's been trying to please God himself when in and of ourselves we can't do that. He's been living in darkness and is failing to see the light of the world right in front of him. And so Jesus tells him he must be born again.

Illustration: Imagine with me you come here for an interview. You are interviewing at here in town, maybe at INL for a position. The interview from your viewpoint has gone well but at the end of it they sit you down and tell you that they are not offering you the job. You're saddened, but respectful and inquisitive. And so you ask sir, ma'am, may I ask what I can work on. What area of my resume was weak. Is there a further knowledge I can gain, is there a different training I should pursue, anything would be helpful. And they respond, "well none of that is it. You just need to be born again." You would pick up the idea. It's not your list of qualifications that they reject it is fundamentally you. You must be born again. And it's the same idea here with Nicodemus. He has the resume, the qualifications, the training, and experience and Jesus looks past all of that and says, you must be born again, you must be born anew.

This being born again language picks up on a fundamental problem of humanity. Simply being born once is not good enough, we have a fundamental problem. We are born into sin, inherited the guilt and corruption from Adam, and not only are we born into sin but all of us have sinned and therefore must be remade in a radically new fashion.

Paul expounding on the relation of Adam to us says,

- "There is no one righteous, not even one." _Romans 3:10b
- "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" - Romans 3:23
- "For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." - Romans 5:19

Jesus looks at Nicodemus and sees the heart of the man. Sees the fundamental problem with him and tells him that he must be born again. So we along with Nicodemus must respond, "How?" How can this happen?

2. The Means of the New Birth (vv. 4-8)

“Jesus answered, truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (v. 5)

- The new birth is God’s work by His spirit - He regenerates.

Nicodemus has a genuine question of how can this happen. Jesus responds that it is an act of God. An act of his spirit in regenerating the person to a new life. And real quick I want to say a word about “water and spirit.” Water in John is closely associated with the spirit, as we will see later in Jn. 7. Likewise, Jesus is carrying on this idea from what Ezekiel the prophet was declaring would happen one day to Israel:

- 25 I will also sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; (notice the closeness of water and spirit there) I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances. - Ezekiel 36: 25-27

In other words, water and spirit are two aspects of our newness. “There is a cleansing of the old and a creation of the new.” - Piper And Jesus is implying this. These two things, water and spirit go together to bring about new life.

Later in ch. 37 God declares that he is going to do this through regenerating his people. God tells Ezekiel to prophecy to a valley of dry bones. This valley of death filled with bones and graves. The picture from this is clear. God is the one who brings new life to that which is dead. His Spirit revives our hearts of stone so that we are reborn as sons and daughters of God.

It's not a new leaf we have to turn over but a new life we must receive. It's not trying to behave better, or be more responsible, or be more active in church, or trying to be a better parent or friend, you trying harder will only exhaust you to the point of futility. We can't save ourselves! And many people today in churches around the world can relate to Nicodemus. They are trying to please God. They are trying to do some good works. Trying to make it so that the good things they do outweigh the bad. And the faith surveys show just that in American churches; if I am a good person I go to Heaven, If I am a bad person I go to Hell. And there is some truth to that. Good people do go to Heaven... The problem is that none of us are good! Only Jesus Christ was truly good. None of us are innocent, all stand condemned before God. And so Jesus tells Nicodemus that God's spirit has to do a work in his life and Nicodemus, for all his religious training and standing, still can't grasp it, “How can this be?” He asks.

3. The Gift of the New Birth (vv. 9-16)

9 “How can these things be?” asked Nicodemus. **10** “Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things?” Jesus replied. **11** “Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. **12** If I have told you about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven —the Son of Man. **14** “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15** so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. **16** For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

And so Jesus here is direct with Nicodemus; he should’ve known this. He should have understood the prophets when they said that God would have to deal with sin. He should have understood that “good” works apart from God’s spirit never meant anything before God (Ez. 36). Nicodemus, how can you be one of the teachers of Israel and not understand this? He’s correcting and instructing here as Nicodemus wonders how a person can be washed and given new life. Jesus is direct. He has the authority to speak on these things because he alone has come from Heaven. He is an eye-witness of what he is talking about.

And as he is teaching he answers Nicodemus’ question: This washing and rebirth by the spirit is only possible through the Son of Man coming to earth and being ‘lifted up’ on the cross.

Jesus coming as a man, living the life we couldn’t, dying in our place, and being raised as the first of a new creation is the Gift from God of the new birth. Verse 16, “For God loved the world in this way,” How did he love it? *He Gave* his one and only Son to us. Gave him to us in order that he might be the sacrifice, that he might be our righteousness, that he might be what gives us eternal life. I hope we hear and see this clearly. We cannot save ourselves. God must save us, and God has provided the gift of His Son TO save us.

Illustration: I remember hearing of a pastor preaching on this very topic, the call for the Christian to be born again. The new birth itself. A young man comes up to him afterwards and says, “pastor, I really enjoyed your sermon. But do you really feel that our condition is that bad? I usually think of us as drowning with a hand reaching up and God reaches down and grabs our hand. We work together in this, he said. The pastor

looked at him and said, friend, our problem is not that we are drowning but the we have already drowned.

And this is exactly what God in his word tells us. God brings new life to a spiritually dead person. We were dead in our trespasses and sin and God raises us to new life through faith in his son. So please here me clearly this morning, **Being right with God depends not on you, but on what God has done for you**

And that's exactly how Jesus illustrates his point. Look with me at v. 14-15

14 "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

Jesus here refers to an incident in Israel's desert history from Numbers 21. The Israelites were afflicted because of their impatience and grumbling, yet God graciously provides a way of healing. Moses casts a bronze serpent and sets it high on a pole. The Israelites had to simply look at that to be healed. The only way out of their plight and to survive was by accepting God's solution, and so Jesus uses this imagery to tell Nicodemus that now all people must accept God's solution to the problem of sin.

And that's to look to the Son who will be lifted up. It is only by him that they will have eternal life. By foreshadowing and anticipating his death on the cross Jesus declares himself as the gateway to Heaven. We are called to believe. To believe that his life, death, and resurrection were enough. Not anything we do, not our striving, our works, our good intentions, but the finished work of Christ. We must look to him.

A Warning About the New Birth (vv.17-21)

And lastly, this leads us to the warning of the passage. John includes this in his Gospel because it gives us insight into our human condition. Into what Jesus is trying to convey to Nicodemus. The focal point of God acting is his son. Tying in with point number 1 and our need for a new birth, we have a need because we are dead in our sins. John tells us in v. 18 of the condemnation we have. That apart from the saving work of Christ we stand condemned. Already under the just judgment of God. But with Jesus Christ coming we can now be rescued. Can now be made right with God. And what Jesus is calling Nicodemus to, and what he is calling all hearing this now to, is a trust in the specific and objective act of rescue by God. **We are called not to some subjective inner feeling, but a real trust in the real work of a real person which has real consequences.**

And given that God has acted in this way, it would seem preposterous not to believe in Jesus. Because if you're like me, you read this and wonder, "*How could anyone not believe?*" How could they see the beauty of Christ, the sacrifice he made, the gift of God in sending him, the love with which they lavish on us, how could they read of all these things and **not** believe? John tells us. He forces us to come face to face with the fact that we, all of us in our sin, do this. Look what he contrasts in v. 16 and v. 19. In verse 16 we have the full display of a God who loves a rebellious world in need of salvation. A God who loves a wayward people by sending his son. But then in verse 19 he tells us what sinful humanity loves. It loves the darkness. It loves its sin. It loves fleeing from God because we don't want to submit our lives to him. So the call for you and me is to do just that; to submit our lives to God, to submit our lives to his plan of salvation and redemption. To stop striving in and of ourselves but to look to Jesus, the one who was lifted up and to trust that He is enough. To know, as John says that by believing in him we no longer are condemned. We have been given eternal life. And this eternal life is not just to be thought in terms of *quantity*, as to the extent of the life, but the *quality*; a life free from sin where we rule and reign with God on a new Earth. That is the eternal life Jesus offers and promises to those who believe in him. He was calling Nicodemus to something new, both a new birth and a new life found only in him. And he's calling all of us to the same.

Pray with me.