

Sermon Title: A New Birth

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Scripture Reference: **John 3:1-17**Thesis: **Nicodemus comes to Jesus seeking God and Jesus tells him how to find God;**Purpose: **and we can still use the same advice today.**

Key Word: "Faith"

Key Points:

1. A Spiritual Birth
2. A Spiritual Insight
3. A Spiritual Faith

I) Introduction:

Scripture Reading is: **John 3:1-17**

A) The Setting:

1) **How many of you remember your own physical birth?**

- (a) No One; and yet it doesn't take much faith to believe it happened for here you are.
- (b) People will tell you to have a little faith; but, just what is Faith?

2) **Illustration:**

- (a) One young pastor was traveling with his family when his car ran out of gas.
- (b) **His wife remembered that there was a gas station about 2 blocks back.**
 - (i) SO, looking for something to carry the gas in the only thing he found in the trunk was a bedpan that was sometimes used for their young child.
 - (ii) But since this was all he had; off he went to get some gas.
- (c) **Carefully, he carried the pan back to his car**
- (d) While pouring it into the gas tank a former member he knew was driving by . . .
- (e) He stopped, got out and came back to his car and stated, "*If I had known you had that much faith I never would have left the church . . .*"

3) **While this tongue-in-cheek story makes us smile it points out that real faith requires action.**

- (a) Nicodemus was a Pharisee who apparently had seen Jesus at work.
- (b) I believe that he was a man seeking God who came to see a man who claimed to be God.
- (c) So, one evening, Nicodemus comes to see Jesus in hopes of finding God.

4) **What transpires next is a conversation with Jesus about how to find God.**

- (a) Jesus tells him no less than 3 times that He must be born again.
- (b) But what we are going to see is that being born again requires an act of Faith.

5) **Let us see the story for ourselves with our scripture reading for today in John 3:1-17.**B) *Sermon Prayer*

C) (The Hook)

1) **Nicodemus was a bit of an enigma; he was a Pharisee.**

- (a) This identified him as one who believed that he was guaranteed to be in the kingdom of God because of his birthright.
- (b) After all Nicodemus was a descendant of Abraham and one of God's chosen people.
- (c) Nicodemus was a religious leader who took his duties seriously.
- (d) And he was a member of the Sanhedrin who were the ruling class of religious leaders.

2) **Now here comes Jesus claiming that the Kingdom of God is near chastising the religious leaders for their misguided perversion of God's laws and ways.**

- (a) Jesus' judgment is harder on those who profess to be of God and to speak for God.
- (b) Those who want to teach will always be judge more strictly.
- (c) People will judge if a teacher does what he teaches or if hypocritically, shows they don't believe or follow their own teaching; (*Do as I say, not as I do.*)

3) **Nicodemus is not really a bad guy.**

- (a) I believe that he comes under the cloak of darkness to see Jesus because at first he does not want the other religious leaders to see him.
- (b) Perhaps afraid of their judgment or ridicule; as happens to many who follow Jesus.
- 4) **But there is just something about Jesus that intrigues him and makes him want to understand.**
 - (a) Later during one of Jesus' arrests he defends Jesus imploring that he be given a chance to speak stating, *"Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?"*
 - (b) Then after Jesus' death he goes along with Joseph of Arimathea to take the body of Jesus down and assist with his burial.
- 5) **I believe Nicodemus becomes a believer and follower of Jesus.**
 - (a) But it is in this conversation with Jesus at night that changes Nicodemus' world view of what it means to be in the Kingdom of God.
 - (b) It is in this conversation that perhaps we will find our own worldview challenged.

TS: **But the first thing we need to see is that Jesus says it all begins with . . .**

II) Body: (Key Points)

A) Key Point #1: **A Spiritual Birth**

- 1) **Notice the first thing that Jesus says to Nicodemus after Nicodemus' compliment to Jesus calling him Rabbi meaning teacher.**
 - (a) He also acknowledged that Jesus must come from God because of the things Jesus is able to do.
 - (b) Nicodemus has been paying attention to Jesus.
 - (c) Perhaps he was one of the first Pharisees sent to see what Jesus was doing?
- 2) **And now he wants to understand Jesus; however, Jesus does not return the compliment or even acknowledge it.**
 - (a) He simply dives into the heart of the problem and tells Nicodemus what it is that he needs to do if Nicodemus wants to see the Kingdom of God.
 - (b) Verse 4, *"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."*
- 3) **The only birth that Nicodemus understands is physical birth and so, he is confused asking,**
 - (a) *"How can anyone be born after having grown old?"*
 - (b) *"How can he enter a second time into the mother's womb to be born again?"*
- 4) **A very good question; but, not what Jesus is talking about here.**
 - (a) So Jesus answers Nicodemus a second time saying in verses 5-6, *"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit."*
 - (b) What Jesus is saying is that being born in the flesh even if you are Abraham's descendant is not enough to get you into the Kingdom of God.
- 5) **When a baby is born physically what is the first thing that needs to happen?**
 - (a) The water breaks; this is a reference to our physical birth.
 - (b) So, Jesus is introducing a totally, radical new concept here . . . that we need to be somehow born of the Spirit.
 - (c) No wonder Nicodemus is confused; it is a hard concept for many of us to understand.

TS: **This is why a Spiritual birth takes a . . .**

B) Key Point #2: **A Spiritual Insight**

- 1) **Jesus continues his conversation with Nicodemus telling him in verses 7-8,**

- (a) *"Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above. 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'"*
- (b) Now at first glance this is a hard saying to understand and this is why we need to study together to better understand God's Word.
- 2) **First Jesus says don't be astonished, or shocked, marvel not for to be born from above you need the Spirit of God.**
- (a) It is the Spirit of God that convicts us of our SIN and NEED for GOD.
- (b) But God's Spirit, just like the wind is invisible.
- 3) **Jesus told Nicodemus that, "You must be born from above."**
- (a) The King James Version says *"You must be born again."*
- (b) Meaning you need a new birth from above.
- (c) One that involves the Holy Spirit.
- 4) **It doesn't say you should be born again; but that you MUST be born again.**
- (a) This is true for all those who come to the kingdom of God, *"You must be born again."*
- (b) We need to be regenerated, reborn, replaced by the new you, a new creation.
- 5) **We need help and that is why we need to invite the God's Spirit to come in and guide us.**
- (a) We cannot see where God's Spirit comes from or where it is going.
- (b) This is why we cannot judge who has received the Spirit of God.
- (c) That is for God to know; but what we can see is the effect of the wind blowing.
- 6) **In the same way we can see the effect of the Holy Spirit working in the life of Jesus' disciple.**
- (a) We will see the FRUIT of the Spirit beginning the transforming work in the life of one committed to following Jesus.
- (b) We can see the GIFTS of the Spirit manifesting themselves in the new creation.
- (c) We can see one growing in their faith.
- 7) **Nicodemus next wanted to understand saying to Jesus, "How can this be?" V. 9**
- (a) This is where Jesus gets a little tough on Nicodemus asking him as I paraphrase just a bit, *"As a teacher of Israel how is it that you do not understand the things of God?"*
- (b) Harsh, but Jesus is letting Nicodemus know that he is still lacking and needs the Spirit of God if he hopes to enter the kingdom of God.
- (c) Better to be truthful and risk hurting his feelings than to let him continue down a path that will lead him to hell!
- (d) I am sure this worked hard on the conscience of Nicodemus and eventually led him to a saving faith.

TS: So, this leads us to our final point and that is a Spiritual birth takes a Spiritual insight (help from the Holy Spirit) leading us to . . .

C) Key Point #2: **A Spiritual Faith**

- 1) **In verse 11-14 Jesus is listing off His credentials to make the bold claims He is teaching.**
- (a) He can testify of these things because HE alone has come from God.
- (b) He left his place with the Father to come and be born as a man to establish a relationship with us.
- (c) He came to set the record straight; not to condemn us; but to save the world.
- 2) **Jesus used a familiar passage from Numbers 21.**
- (a) As the Israelites left the Mount of God and headed toward the promised land many of them began to complain speaking against God and Moses.
- (b) Their new life in the wilderness was hard.

- (c) God had rescued them from the Egyptians; but now they had to learn to depend on God and provide for themselves.
 - (d) Even as slaves many thought they were more secure and had better things to eat than they did in the wilderness.
 - (e) They did not accept the hard times of life as being for their good; instead they complained against God and His servant Moses.
- 3) **So, God sent poisonous snakes into their camp and many were getting bitten and died.**
- (a) As is the case for many who follow God;
 - (b) When things get desperate, that is when they repent and cry out to God for help.
- 4) **Moses even interceded for the people but God did not remove the snakes.**
- (a) But God did provide a way of escaping death from the bites.
 - (b) Instead God had Moses make a bronze snake and set it high on a pole so it can be seen anywhere in camp.
 - (c) Whenever anyone got bit by a snake all they had to do was to look up at the bronze snake and they would live.
- 5) **This represented an act of FAITH.**
- (a) The people had to believe what Moses told them and act on it by looking up at the bronze snake.
 - (b) True FAITH requires action to show that there is true belief.
- 6) **Illustration: A Pastor tells a story about his oldest daughter who was about 5 years old at the time.¹**
- (a) They went to spend an afternoon at a river and some of the adults decided to walk out to an island in the middle of the river.
 - (b) **His daughter wanted to come out with him; so, he returned to shore and took her hand.**
 - (i) She stepped into the water but still held on tightly to a branch on the shore.
 - (ii) She was afraid of the river but wanted to go where her father was going.
 - (c) **He told her, "You must let go of the branch if you want to come".**
 - (i) She said that she was afraid that she would sink.
 - (ii) He told her, "*I have your hand. You won't sink and if you start to, I will lift you up*".
 - (d) **Fearfully she let go of the branch.**
 - (i) The water was just over waist deep and he guided her feet to each rock.
 - (ii) When they began, she had no confidence, but as she stepped on the rocks with her father's guidance with each step she gained more confidence until she was eagerly reaching for each stone and soon reached the middle.
 - (e) **Looking back the pastor realized that this is exactly how God deals with us.**
 - (i) Psalm 37: 23, "*The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way.*"
 - (ii) As we act on our FAITH we gain more confidence in God's promises to help us grow.

TS: **So, this brings us to how we can experience a new birth . . .**

III) Conclusion (Life Application)

- A) **Jesus said in probably the most famous verse quoted, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."** (NRSV)
- 1) Anyone who believes in HIM, (JESUS) can have eternal life.

- 2) It is a gift and not something you earn.
- 3) But you must first believe.
- 4) Our language is not adequate in explaining the level of what it means to believe.
- 5) Remember, that we have been teaching that Jesus taught that our belief in Jesus requires an ACT of FAITH.

B) This is the meaning behind what James wrote in His letter about Faith being accompanied by works; not to earn salvation but as evidence of our Spiritual birth showing that we have given ourselves to Jesus as our Lord.

- 1) **Hear what James writes concerning Faith Without Works - James 2:14-26 (NKJV)**

"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? **17** Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. **19** You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! **20** But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? **22** Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? **23** And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. **24** You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

25 Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? **26** For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

- 2) **What we are trying to say is that our belief must be accompanied by a change in our behavior.**
 - (a) If our faith is real, we need to act on it by surrendering our will to the Spirit's leading.
 - (b) In other words we need to be reborn or born again into the Spirit.
 - (c) And we must act on that Faith by showing that we believe what we are saying.
 - (d) You must be born again.
 - (e) Only then can the Spirit come in and begin the process of making us new creations.
- 3) **God so loved us, that HE made a way that we can be restored into a right relationship if we put our FAITH in HIS one and only SON.**
 - (a) Jesus said I am the way, the Truth and the Life.
 - (b) If you want to be sure you are entering the kingdom of God; be sure you have put your FAITH in Jesus.

IV) Invitation: **Let us Pray!**