

You Must Be Born Again!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 September 2020

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to John and chapter 3. John chapter 3, and we're going to look at the verses that we read earlier, verses 1 to 15.

But if we just read again at verse 1. John chapter 3, verse 1. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

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.

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

You know, it was my good friend, J.C. Ryle. He once said, The conversation between Christ and Nicodemus, which begins in these verses, is one of the most important passages in the whole Bible.

[1 : 10] Nowhere else do we find stronger statements about those two mighty subjects, the new birth and salvation by faith in the Son of God. A man may be ignorant of many things in religion and yet be saved.

But he says, To be ignorant of the matters handled in this chapter is to be on the broad way, which leads to destruction. To be ignorant of the matters handled in this chapter is to be on the broad way, which leads to destruction.

And you know, for that reason, my unconverted friend, I'd like your attention this morning. I want your attention. I'd like you, if you're able to turn up the volume on your TV or your iPad or whatever device you're using.

And I want you to make sure that you can hear what Jesus said to this man, Nicodemus. Because you know, my unconverted friend, you and I both know that you are like Nicodemus in so many ways.

And the message which Jesus gave to Nicodemus and the message which Jesus is issuing to you today is the clear message. You must, you must, you must be born again.

[2 : 31] This is a must of necessity. This is non-negotiable. This is a requirement. Because the Bible says very clearly that unless an unconverted man, woman, boy or girl, unless they are born again, they cannot.

They will not. It is impossible for them to enter the kingdom of God. And with this, Jesus is absolutely clear. And for that reason, my unconverted friend, you must be born again.

And you know, Nicodemus, he came to Jesus because, just like you, he wanted to know more about Jesus. Just like you, he had an interest in Emmanuel.

Just like you, he had a concern for the Christ. Just like you, he was looking for the Lord. Just like you, Nicodemus was seeking the Saviour. My unconverted friend, Nicodemus was just like you.

And I say that because, why are you watching YouTube on a Sunday morning? Why are you listening to the gospel when there are so many other distractions around you?

[3 : 44] Why do you make a point of sitting down on a Sunday morning and tuning in when there are so many other channels that are available on this box?

And you know, every one of these channels, they're able to numb your mind to the reality of eternity and the truth about Jesus. But you know, my unconverted friend, I believe that you're like Nicodemus because although you might not show it outwardly to other people, you want to know about Jesus.

You want to know about Jesus. My unconverted friend, turn up the volume and make sure that you can hear what Jesus said to this man, Nicodemus.

Because what Jesus said to him is what Jesus is saying to you this morning. And just like you, Nicodemus, he came to Jesus because he had a concerned conscience.

But when he came to Jesus, he engaged in what was for him a confusing conversation. But it all concluded with a clear cross-reference.

[4 : 57] And there are headings this morning. A concerned conscience, a confusing conversation, and a clear cross-reference. A concerned conscience, a confusing conversation, and a clear cross-reference.

So first of all, a concerned conscience. A concerned conscience. We're told there in verse 1, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

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.

Now in these opening verses, John tells us a lot about this man, Nicodemus. But before we even consider what John had to say about Nicodemus, you know, we have to note what John said in the last verse of chapter 2.

Because John gives us this little note that Jesus didn't need anyone to tell him what was going on in their heart because he knew what was going on in their heart.

[6 : 04] And you know, it's with that little note that John gives us this illustration or this example of Jesus' knowledge of our hearts by this conversation with Nicodemus.

Because when Jesus met Nicodemus, he didn't have to read Nicodemus because Nicodemus was like an open book before him. Jesus knew what was in Nicodemus' heart, just like Jesus knows what's in your heart.

Jesus doesn't need anyone to tell him what's going on in your heart because Jesus knows what's going on in your heart. He knows if you love him or not. Jesus knows if you're committed to him or not.

Jesus knows if you've confessed your sin or not. He knows if he's Lord in your life or not. He doesn't need anyone to tell him because Jesus knows what's in your heart.

Jesus knows what you're thinking right here, right now. He knows if you're listening or not. And he even knows why you're tuned into YouTube this morning. My unconverted friend, Jesus knows what's going on in your heart.

[7 : 11] And he knew what was going on in Nicodemus' heart. Because Nicodemus had a concerned conscience. Nicodemus had a concerned conscience. And it seems that the conscience of Nicodemus became concerned following the public demonstration of Jesus cleansing the temple.

You remember we looked at that last Lord's Day. How Jesus cleansed the temple. And he threw out the money changers. And all those who were in the temple. But here Jesus has this meeting with Nicodemus.

And what Nicodemus is going to receive from Jesus is this private declaration. Reminding him that it's not only the temple that needs cleansing. But he needs cleansing too.

But you know for everyone in Israel, including Nicodemus himself, they would have thought that the last person who needed his heart to be cleansed was Nicodemus.

Because you know the first thing we need to know about Nicodemus and the first thing John tells us about Nicodemus is that you don't get any better than Nicodemus. You don't get any better than Nicodemus.

[8 : 23] Because Nicodemus was a Pharisee. And you don't get any more careful than a Pharisee. Because Nicodemus, he was not only a churchgoer and a regular attender at the sanctuary on the Sabbath.

But he was a Pharisee. And as a Pharisee, Nicodemus, he lived by the strictest possible rules and regulations of his religion. In fact, the Pharisees, they often invented their own laws in order to ensure that they didn't break any of God's laws.

They were obsessed with keeping the law of God. They lived strict and stringent and even stern lives. But you know, more often than not, the reality was the heart of the Pharisee was far from God. And their lives were just a performance. A performance of pomp and piety. Their lives were just a display and a demonstration of deception.

Where they were always seeking outward acceptance with God based upon their outward appearance before men. My friend, the Pharisees were holy hypocrites.

[9 : 35] They had this false face. And they had a frightening facade of religion. Because when the Pharisees gave money to the temple, they sounded a trumpet so that everyone would know.

When they prayed, they didn't pray privately. But they prayed on the street corners so that everyone would hear them. And when the Pharisees fasted, it wasn't a personal decision, but a public declaration.

Where they put on a face so that everyone would know that they were engaged in this holy act. My friend, for a Pharisee, it was all about presentation. It was all about posing.

It was all about a parade. But none of it pleased God. None of it pleased God. And that's one of the greatest dangers of religion.

That we do things just to be seen by others. And you know, let's not pretend that Pharisaic practices are dead. Because they're not.

[10 : 33] They're alive and well in our hearts. In fact, it was recently said that wearing a face mask to church isn't something new.

Because the church has been wearing face masks for centuries. Wearing a face mask to church isn't something new. Because the church has been wearing face masks for centuries.

And you know, is that not what Jesus repeatedly challenged and confronted in the gospel? He often said that we are guilty of honouring God with our lips. But our heart is far from Him.

We're often guilty of honouring God with our lips. But our heart is far from Him. My friend, when it came to Nicodemus, Jesus knew that his heart was far from Him.

But is your heart far from God? Where is your heart in relation to God? Maybe there was a day where you felt closer to the kingdom than you do now.

[11 : 36] But other things have gotten in the way. Where is your heart in relation to God? Because the example of Nicodemus, it's affirming to you that your religion, that will never save you.

It's not your outward appearance that will save you. It's not your public prayers that will save you. It's not your free will offerings that will save you. It's not your piety that will save you. My friend, it's not even your Bible knowledge that will save you.

Because as we're told here, Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews. He was a teacher in Israel. He was a professor of theology. He was the people's theologian.

In fact, he was the theologian in the nation of Israel. Which means that Nicodemus wasn't ignorant of his Bible. He knew what the scriptures said. He knew what they taught.

But what Nicodemus needed to discover, and maybe what you need to discover this morning, is that there's a vast difference between knowing what the Bible says in your head and loving what the Bible says in your heart.

[12 : 44] But you know, it was because of his religious persuasion and his theological education that Nicodemus was in this position of authority. He was not only a Pharisee, he was a ruling member of the Sanhedrin.

And for that, he was well known. He was well respected within his community. But that was a stumbling block to him. That was the stumbling block to Nicodemus, especially when he had a concerned conscience.

Because we're told there in verse 2 that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. This well known and well respected Pharisee, this man of the community, he came to Jesus under the cover of darkness so that no one else would know what was going on in his heart.

Of course, Jesus knew what was going on in his heart. But Nicodemus didn't want anyone within his family or within his community or within his sphere of work, his colleagues, he didn't want anyone to know that he had a concerned conscience and that he was seeking Jesus.

And you know, my unconverted friend, maybe you're the same. Maybe you only come to Jesus under the cover of darkness. Maybe you only come to Jesus when no one is home and no one in your family knows and no one in your workplace knows what's going on.

[14 : 13] Maybe you read your Bible and you pray in secret. Maybe you come to Jesus at night because you don't want anyone to know what's going on in your heart. You don't want anyone to know that you have a concerned conscience.

You don't want anyone to know that your sin bothers you. You don't want anyone to know that your soul is important to you. You don't want anyone to know that the gospel interests you. You don't want anyone to know that you're actually being drawn to Jesus.

Well my friend, if Nicodemus is just like you, then you make sure that you come and have a conversation with Christ.

You make sure you come and have a conversation with him. Because that's what Nicodemus did. But for Nicodemus it became a confusing conversation. Which is what we see secondly.

A confusing conversation. A concerned conscience and a confusing conversation. A confusing conversation. Look at verse 3.

[15:18] It says, Now I love the way Jesus initiates this conversation with Nicodemus.

Because Nicodemus, he doesn't even need to open his mouth to ask Jesus a question. Because Jesus just answers him. That's what we're told at the beginning of verse 3.

Jesus answered him. Jesus answered him. And Jesus answered Nicodemus. Because as soon as Nicodemus started knocking on Jesus' door that night. Jesus knew what was going on in his heart. Jesus knew that Nicodemus had questions that his religion couldn't answer. Jesus knew that Nicodemus had a concerned conscience. Jesus knew that his sin bothered him and his soul was important to him.

And so Jesus initiates the conversation about Christianity. Christianity. And you know, do you know my unconverted friend? There may be times when you have a concerned conscience.

[16:50] And you want to speak to someone about Jesus. You want to speak to someone about your sin or your soul. Because they're bothering you. But you know, like it was for Nicodemus.

I know that it's hard for you to initiate that conversation. It's hard to ask your questions publicly. When you maybe have so many questions privately.

But the thing is, I want you to pray for an opportunity to speak to someone about your sin and about your soul. And if you have to, if you have to be like Nicodemus, come to that person by night.

Come and knock on their door. Come and have a conversation about Christianity. Come to the manse. Pick up the phone. Write a text. Send an email.

Do whatever. But don't leave your questions unanswered. Because the promise is, everyone who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds.

[17:54] And to the one who knocks like it was for Nicodemus, it will be opened. And the door opened that night for Nicodemus. And Jesus was on the other side.

And Jesus, he initiates this conversation about Christianity. But it very quickly becomes a confusing conversation for Nicodemus.

Because when Jesus states in verse 3, that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And Jesus was affirming to Nicodemus. Jesus was affirming to Nicodemus that, and he's affirming to you, that you can't become a Christian unless you're born again.

You can't be saved. You can't be saved. You can't receive forgiveness. You can't experience salvation. You can't see or you can't enter the kingdom of God unless you're born again.

And with such an alarming statement, Nicodemus, he questions his teacher, this teacher who had come from God. And in his confusion, you can almost see Nicodemus putting up his hand and asking the teacher, How can a man be born when he is old?

[19:04] Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb? Nicodemus, he's trying to get his head around this whole issue. He's trying to understand what Jesus is saying. But he can't.

So Jesus answers in verse 5, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

So Jesus explains to Nicodemus that what he needs is not a physical birth, but a spiritual birth.

Because the kingdom of God is not a physical kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom.

Therefore, you enter the kingdom of God not by your first birth, but by a new birth. In fact, my friend, it's our first birth that keeps us out of the kingdom of God.

As the Bible reminds us in Psalm 51, we were conceived in iniquity. We were born in guiltiness and sin. It's our first birth that keeps us out of the kingdom.

[20:10] But, you know, it was this confusing conversation about the new birth. It went against the grain of everything that Nicodemus had ever understood about salvation.

Because as a Jew and as a Pharisee, Nicodemus always thought that it was by your physical birth that you're saved. Nicodemus always thought that if you're born as a Jew, and if you live as a Jew, and if you practice your religion as a Jew, then you'll be saved.

Nicodemus always thought that it was by his circumcision and his knowledge of the scriptures and that by living according to all the traditions that he would be accepted into God's kingdom. But Jesus says, no. You need a spiritual birth. You need to be born of water and of the Spirit. You need cleansing and you need the Spirit. Now, when Jesus said that he needed to be born of water, Jesus wasn't saying that you need baptism and the Spirit.

[21 : 18] Because baptism has no power to save a sinner whatsoever. And, you know, sadly many people, even those who have been brought up in our community, they think that baptism is this safety feature.

It's a safety feature for children, just in case something happens to them. But baptism doesn't save anyone. Baptism has no saving powers.

It doesn't protect a child or an adult. It doesn't make you a Christian. And it certainly doesn't guarantee that you're going to heaven. And, you know, this is why talking about Christianity can sometimes be a confusing conversation.

Because what you find is that people have so many different views of Christianity and what a Christian is. For some, they use the term Christian very loosely.

Where they think that they're a Christian because they were baptized as a child. Or others think that they're a Christian because they went to Sunday school or they attend church or they've said a prayer or they've responded to an altar call.

[22 : 23] Many people think that they're a Christian by choice. Or by their upbringing or by the way they live their life. Roman Catholicism emphasizes that you're a Christian because you follow the teaching of the church.

And you partake in the mass and you pray to the Virgin Mary. But, you know, my friend, none of these things, none of them belong to genuine biblical Christianity.

Because as Jesus taught Nicodemus, it doesn't matter about your physical birth. It doesn't matter if you're brought up in a Christian home with Christian parents.

It doesn't matter if your father was an elder and your mother was a godly woman. It doesn't matter if you went to Sunday school as a child. It doesn't matter if you keep the Sabbath day holy. It doesn't matter if you religiously read your Bible morning and evening.

It doesn't matter if you uphold all the traditions of your father and live a strict holy life. It doesn't matter, my friend, if you spent your life going to church, sitting under the sound of the gospel.

[23 : 25] Yes, these things are good. But if you're clinging to them for your salvation, none of them will save you. None of them will save you.

None of them will give you a new birth. None of them will give you a new beginning. None of them will give you a new heart or make you a new creation. Because as Jesus says here, you must, you must, you must be born again.

And you know, my unconverted friend, this is what you need to hear from Jesus. Because so many people think that they're safe and secure in a Christianity of their imagination.

But they're lost. And my unconverted friend, you're lost. And you're going to a lost eternity. That's why Jesus is making clear to you that you must be born again.

You must be born again. And as we said, this is a must of necessity. This is non-negotiable. This is the requirement for salvation. Because unless you are born again, you will not, you cannot.

[24 : 41] It is impossible for you to enter the kingdom of God. My friend, you must, you must, you must, you must be born again.

You must be born again. You know, George Whitefield, he was a powerful evangelist during the 18th century.

And he preached all over Britain. And he was used mightily by the Lord during the Great Awakening in the United States. And it's said that throughout his ministry, George Whitefield preached at least 18,000 times.

And he preached to about 10 million people throughout his ministry. But as an evangelist, George Whitefield's favourite text was from this chapter.

John chapter 3, verse 7. You must be born again. In fact, when George Whitefield was once asked, he was asked the question, Mr. Whitefield, why do you always preach that you must be born again?

[25 : 49] And George Whitefield responded by saying, Because you must be born again. You must be born again.

It's a must of necessity. And here Jesus says to Nicodemus, verse 7, 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. And what Jesus reminds Nicodemus is that like the wind, which you can't see.

But you can see evidence of the wind. You can see its presence and its power. And Jesus says, just like the wind, that's how the Holy Spirit works. Because salvation, he says, it's a hidden work. It goes on in the heart of a sinner where nobody else knows what's going on. And it's all of grace. And this is what Nicodemus needed to learn.

[26 : 52] He needed to learn that salvation isn't earned. Salvation isn't worked for. Salvation isn't achieved. But it's a gift. It's all of grace.

It's all of grace. As the saying goes, salvation is not a goal to be achieved. But a gift to be received. Salvation is not a goal to be achieved.

But a gift to be received. But you know, not even this convinced Nicodemus. Because he goes on to ask in verse 9. He says, how can these things be?

How can you be born again? How do you receive eternal life? How do you experience a new birth? How do you receive this gift of salvation?

And Jesus says to him, you look to the cross. You look to the cross. That's how Jesus dealt with a concerned conscience. That's how Jesus concluded a confusing conversation.

[27 : 52] He gives a clear cross reference. He gives a clear cross reference. And that's what we see lastly. A concerned conscience. A confusing conversation.

And lastly, a clear cross reference. A clear cross reference. Look at verse 10. Jesus answered Nicodemus, are you the teacher of Israel?

And yet you do not understand these things. 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? No one has ascended into heaven. Except he who descended from heaven. The son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.

So must the son of man be lifted up. That whoever believes in him. May have eternal life. You know, as with every conversation about Christianity.

[28 : 53] It must come to the cross of Jesus Christ. Because you know, this world's one and only remedy for the curse of sin and death. Is the cross of Jesus Christ.

The difference between eternal life and eternal death. Is the cross of Jesus Christ. The difference between being saved and being lost. Is the cross of Jesus Christ.

The difference between being on the broad road to destruction. Or the narrow path to life. Is the cross of Jesus Christ. My friend, the difference between being a sheep or a goat.

Between being wheat or a tear. Between wisdom or folly. Light and darkness. The difference is always the cross of Jesus Christ. The difference between heaven and hell.

Is the cross of Jesus Christ. You know, that's where Jesus points Nicodemus. He gives this Old Testament professor. He gives him a clear cross reference.

[29 : 52] From Numbers chapter 21. Because in Numbers 21. We're given the account of when the Israelites sinned against the Lord. And the Lord, he sent venomous serpents to bite the Israelites.

So that they would die. But when the Israelites repented of their sin. The Lord commanded Moses to make this bronze serpent. And set it upon a pole.

So that when someone was bitten by a venomous serpent. If they looked to the bronze serpent. They would live. And with that, Jesus says to Nicodemus.

Verse 14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. So must the Son of Man be lifted up. That whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Do you know, my unconverted friend. In order to be saved. All that Jesus said to Nicodemus. And all that Jesus is saying to you this morning. Is look and live.

[30 : 51] Look and live. Jesus is saying, if you want to be born again. If you want a new birth. If you want a new beginning. If you want to be given a new heart.

If you want to become a new creation. Then look and live. Look and live. Look away from yourself. And look to the cross. Look away from your sin.

And look to the Saviour. Look away from what's going on in your own heart. And look to Jesus Christ. Because the promise is that whosoever believes in him. Shall have eternal life. Whosoever believes in him. Shall have eternal life. Look and live, my friend. Look and live.

But you know, the question which remains is. Did Nicodemus look and live? Did Nicodemus look and live?

[31 : 51] And you know, this is the point of this passage. Because when John told us that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. He was more than telling us when this night time meeting took place.

John was telling us that Nicodemus came to Jesus in the darkness. And that he left before dawn still in the darkness. And that's because there was another kind of darkness shrouding the soul of Nicodemus.

But you know, the question which hangs over Nicodemus. The question which remains is. Did Nicodemus ever come into the light? He may have had a concerned conscience.

He may have engaged in a confusing conversation. And he may have received a clear cross-reference. But did Nicodemus come into the light?

Did Nicodemus look and live? Was Nicodemus born again? Of course, John, he gives us glimpses of Nicodemus later in his gospel.

[32 : 57] In chapter 7, we see Nicodemus defending Jesus. Then in chapter 19, we see Nicodemus burying Jesus. But the question remains.

Did Nicodemus come into the light? Did Nicodemus look and live? Was Nicodemus born again? And you know, John doesn't tell us.

And I wonder if the reason John doesn't actually tell us what happened to Nicodemus is so that that question will just stay hanging there.

But you know, the question really is not about Nicodemus. The question is about you. The question is about you.

And the question is, my unconverted friend, have you come from darkness into light? Have you looked and lived? Are you born again?

[34 : 00] Because as Jesus has told you clearly this morning, unless you're born again, you cannot, you will not.

It is impossible for you to enter the kingdom of God. Therefore, you must, you must, you must, you must be born. Again, it's a must of necessity.

It's non-negotiable. This is a requirement. And you must see to this requirement urgently. Today. Because, my friend, you must be born again.

You must be born again. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Now, let us pray. O Heavenly Father, we give thanks to thee for thy Son, that he is the Gospel, that he is the good news, and he is presented to us ever so clearly on the pages of Scripture.

And Lord, our prayer is that we would be born again, that we would know that new life and that new beginning, that new heart, and experience that new creation by trusting in Jesus, that we would look and live, that we would look to Jesus, and that we would be drawn from darkness unto thine own marvellous light.

[35 : 27] Bless, Lord, our unconverted friends. O, we plead for them, that they would be born again, that they would come and know thee, that they would know and be assured even this morning that the Lord's people are praying for them, ever conscious of their lost state.

But Lord, we pray that our unconverted friends would be conscious of their lost state, that they would come to Christ whilst they still have time, and call upon him whilst they're on mercy's ground, that they would seek the Lord while he's to be found.

O, do us good, then we pray. Bless thy word to our souls. Have mercy upon us. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning, and we're going to sing, this time in Psalm 87.

Psalm 87, it's in the Sing Psalms version, and we're going to sing the whole psalm. Psalm 87, and we're singing the whole psalm.

And Psalm 87, it's a psalm which describes Zion and Jerusalem, but ultimately Psalm 87 is about being born again. and it's speaking about all these different nations, people who weren't Jews, who were being born again.

[36 : 49] It speaks about places like Egypt and Tyre and Babylon, and those from Cush, and it says that they are born, and they are added to the register.

They are added to the Lamb's Book of Life. And you know, my unconverted friend, my prayer is that your name will be added to that register, that your name will be added to the Lamb's Book of Life this morning, when you come and look and live.

So Psalm 87, on Jerusalem's holy mountain, he has founded his abode. More than all of Jacob's dwelling, Zion's gates are dear to God.

Glorious things of you are spoken, Zion's city of the Lord. Many drawn from all the nations, as your people I record. Then it says in verse 6, born in Zion, God will enter in the people's register.

They will sing as they make music. All my fountains are in her. Psalm 87, to God's praise. Glorious things of you are spoken, Zion's city of the Lord.

[38 : 09] Many drawn from all the nations, Those two people I record.

I will play last those that know me, Legion, Tyre, and Babylon.

Fkα gorda ■ juste engag. Philistine, along with Gushai, Thy will confess Zion, Lord.

Yes, it will be Savior, Zion, This and that one here behold, And on her the highest blessing Will descend and make her strong.

For in Zion God will enter In the people's register They will sing as they be put All my fountains are in her.