

Ministry is Midwifery

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to John, John chapter 3, John chapter 3, page 888 in the Pew Bible.

I will take as our text the words of verse 7. John chapter 3, verse 7, where Jesus says to Nicodemus, Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

You must be born again. Do you know whether you've witnessed it or went through it firsthand, or you've watched it on the TV program, One Born Every Minute?

When you see a baby being born into the world, and as we're saying to the children and taking its first breath or crying for the first time, there's nothing like it in all the world.

To see a new birth, a new life, a new beginning, something or someone brand new. And you know, the first thing that always comes to my mind when I see a baby is, how can anyone doubt the existence of God?

[1 : 3 4] How can anyone looking at a baby believe in evolution? How can anyone think that we are the result of a big bang? Because when you see the tiny toes and the cute button nose and all the dainty details of the finely formed and fashioned fingernails, how can anyone deny the designer behind it all?

Because as we were singing earlier in Psalm 139, we sang those wonderful words where David said, For you, O Lord, created me. You wove me on your loom.

My inmost being you have formed within my mother's womb. Because I'm wonderfully made. With all your praise I tell. Your workmanship is marvelous. And this I know full well.

How can anyone deny the designer behind it all? But the other thing that comes to my mind when I see a baby being born is what Jesus says here in this passage about the new birth.

Because in this well-known passage, Jesus uses the image. He uses the illustration of the labor ward. He uses the image and illustration of the labor ward. And He does so in order to emphasize and explain that we need to be saved and enter into the kingdom of God.

[2 : 5 7] And you know, my unconverted friend here this morning, or watching online, I'll be honest with you. After Matthew was born, after we got over the labor ward part, you were on my mind so much.

And I kept thinking about you because you need a new birth. You need to be born again. You need a new beginning.

You need a new heart. You need to be born again. And that's what Jesus says here in this passage about the new birth. Because in this well-known passage, Jesus, He's using the illustration and the imagery of the labor ward.

And He's saying to us here, not that you need to be born again. He says you must. It's an absolute must of necessity.

You must be born again. You must be born again. I don't know if you saw the intimations this week, but the intimation and the notice that was with it, there was a quote.

[4 : 06] There's a quote every week. But you know, it says, if you're not born again, then one day you will wish that you had never been born. You know, I thought that was the most solemn statement ever.

If you are not born again, then one day you will wish that you had never been born. And that's why Jesus says here, you must, you must.

There's an absolute must of necessity. You must be born again. And so this morning, I want us to enter the labor ward with Jesus. I want us to enter the labor ward with Jesus and see our need to be born again.

I want us to see that we must be born again. And I want us to think about this under three headings. First of all, the patient, and then the predicament, and then the proclamation.

The patient, the predicament, and the proclamation. So first of all, we see the patient in the labor ward. The patient, verse one. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

[5 : 10] This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you're a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.

In this chapter, John, the gospel writer, he introduces Jesus' patient by first of all, describing him to us. And the way John describes Jesus' patient, it actually reveals a lot about the patient.

Because we're told, first of all, before we're even told his name, we're told that he was a man of the Pharisees. That's how John begins. Now there was a man of the Pharisees.

So he was a man of the Pharisees. Because that's what distinguished him in his community. That's what differentiated him from everybody else in his congregation.

He was a man of the Pharisees. And as you know, the Pharisees, they were not just conservative in their views. The Pharisees were ultra, ultra conservative in their views.

[6 : 11] Because the Pharisees, as you know, they lived by the strictest and you could say even the most stringent rules of their religion. In fact, the Pharisees, they were so obsessed with the law of God that they added laws to the law of God.

They had this thing that was called the Mishnah. The Mishnah was a Pharisaical interpretation of God's law. And what the Pharisees did was that they added laws on top of and in addition to the law of God.

And they prided themselves in following not only God's law, but also all of their laws too. Because they believed that their religious purity and their religious passion, it made them different.

It made them distinct from everyone else to the point that they were more sacred. More sacred than any other worshiper in church on God's special day.

They were more special to God because they followed all of God's law. But the reality was, as Jesus highlights time and time again in the Gospels, the Pharisees, they worshipped God with their lips, but their heart was far from Him.

[7 : 24] They worshipped God with their lips, but their heart was far from Him. Because for the Pharisees, their lives were just a stage. Their lives were just a show of outward appearances.

When they gave money to the temple, they sounded a trumpet, so everybody would know. When they prayed, they would stand on the street corner and pray so that everyone would hear them.

When they fasted, they put on this pale face so that everyone would know that they are fasting in their dedication to God. You know, the Pharisees, they lived for the acclamations and the affirmations of other people.

They lived for applause. They lived for the approval of others. But it was all an act. It was all a facade. It was all hypocrisy.

And what's worse, none of it, absolutely none of it, pleased God. Now, let's not pretend that Pharisaic practices are dead because they're not.

[8 : 29] They're still alive and well in the hearts and minds of people today. Because, you know, there are many people in church today who worship God with their lips, but their heart is far from them.

There are many Pharisees, you could say, in church today who have all their religious purity and their religious passion, and they think that that's enough to get them into heaven.

There are many Pharisees in church today who put on a show and who come just to be seen by others, to tick their box. There are many Pharisees in church today who live for the acclamations and all the affirmations and all the applause and all the approval of other people.

But, you know, Jesus warns us. He says, make sure you're not one of them. Make sure you're not one of them. Because as we're introduced to Jesus' patient, John not only tells us that he was a man of the Pharisees, he also tells us, secondly, that his name was Nicodemus.

His name was Nicodemus, which is actually interesting because even though Nicodemus was a very religious and very self-righteous Jew, he had a Greek name. Nicodemus, the name means victory of the people.

[9 : 51] Nicodemus means victory of the people. And, you know, I'm sure that Nicodemus, he lived up to his name. I'm sure he was victorious for the people as a man of the Pharisees. I'm sure that Nicodemus was this popular person.

I can imagine Nicodemus to be a people person. He was a man of the people, victorious for the people. He lived up to his name and he lived for all the acclamations and the affirmations and the applause and the approval of other people in his congregation and his community.

Because Nicodemus, a man of the Pharisees, he had this image to uphold. He had an impression to present and to portray to other people, which made it so much harder for him to come to Jesus.

Because he had the image. He had to watch how he came to Jesus. In fact, that's why we're told that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, verse 2.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night because, well, he was afraid of what other people might say if he went to Jesus. He didn't want anyone to know that he was going to Jesus.

[11 : 03] He didn't want anyone to find out that he was going to Jesus. He didn't want anyone to fuss that he was going to Jesus. He wanted to just secretly have this interest in the gospel and seek Jesus quietly.

Especially because, as John introduces Jesus as patient, he tells us that this man, he's a man of the Pharisees, he's named Nicodemus, he's a man of the people, he's also a ruler of the Jews.

He's a member of the Sanhedrin. He's high up in the Jewish church. He's one of the head honchos in the church. In fact, Jesus later describes him in the passage, he describes him as a teacher of Israel.

He's a professor of theology. This man, Nicodemus, he's a lecturer in Old Testament and Hebrew. Nicodemus knows all about the Old Testament, all about the law and the prophets and the writings.

He knows all about it. And yet, what's fascinating is that this Nicodemus wants more. He's interested and he's intrigued by Jesus.

[12 : 13] There's something about Jesus that's drawing him. And he has this desire to find out more. And even though he's a man of the Pharisees and a ruler of the Jews, he wants to come to Jesus.

And he comes to Jesus by night. And you know, there are many people like Nicodemus who want to come to Jesus by night. I imagine my unconverted friend, many of you are like him.

Nicodemus, are you here today where you would rather seek Jesus in secret because you're afraid that your friends or your work colleagues or your family would find out.

Maybe it's just the fact you don't want a fuss. You don't want all the fuss. You just want to come to Jesus quietly. You don't want the focus to be upon you. But you know, my friend, I hope that you are like Nicodemus because the beautiful thing about Nicodemus is that when John tells us that he came to Jesus by night, John is more than telling us the hour of the day or of the night that he came to have this night time meeting with Jesus.

John is telling us that prior to this moment, Nicodemus was walking in darkness. But the amazing thing is Nicodemus, as he goes towards Jesus, he's being drawn to the light.

[13 : 42] He's being drawn to the light. Jesus, who is the light of the world. Nicodemus was walking in darkness, but he's been drawn to the light. Are you Nicodemus?

Are you like Nicodemus, walking in darkness, but yet been drawn to the light of Jesus, the light of the world? I hope and pray that you're like Nicodemus, that you've been drawn from darkness to light.

But as Nicodemus was being drawn from darkness to light, Jesus is patient. He has this predicament. That's what I want us to think about. Secondly, the predicament.

So first of all, the patient, and then the predicament. We read there in verse 3. Jesus answered to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

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? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

[14 : 50] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. But you notice there how verse 3 begins.

How does verse 3 begin? How does it begin? Jesus answered him. Jesus answered him. John tells us that when Nicodemus went to Jesus by night, Jesus answered him.

When the patient met the practitioner, Jesus answered him. But the thing is, Nicodemus hadn't even asked a question. And yet Jesus answered him.

Nicodemus hadn't asked a question. The only thing that Nicodemus had said was this statement. He said, Rabbi, we know that you're a teacher come from God. No one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.

There's no question there. And yet Jesus answered him. And my friend, the reason Jesus answered Nicodemus is because Jesus knew what Nicodemus was really thinking.

[15 : 54] As soon as he came through the door to Jesus, Jesus knew what Nicodemus was thinking. As soon as you came into church today, Jesus knew what you were thinking. In fact, we're told at the end of chapter 2, that's amazing, at the end of chapter 2, we're told that Jesus knew all people.

Jesus knows what's in man. He didn't need to be told what someone was thinking because he knew what they're thinking. Jesus knew what Nicodemus was thinking. As soon as he walked through the door, he knew that Nicodemus had questions that his rituals and all his religion couldn't answer.

And needless to say, Jesus knows what you and I are thinking as we sit in church this morning. He knows if you have questions about Christianity that you want answered.

My friend, if you have questions about Christianity that you want answered, ask them. I will happily talk to you day or night. Any question you have, come and ask it.

Any other Christian will happily sit with you and talk to you. So if you have questions about Christianity that you want answered, ask them. But the amazing thing is Jesus knows you have questions.

[17 : 11] Jesus knows what you're thinking about this morning. He knows what you're thinking about as we look at this passage and what we're reading and what you're hearing from the Bible. He also knows if you're not thinking about it at all.

He also knows if you're thinking about next week and what you're going to do tomorrow. He knows if your mind is completely elsewhere this morning. Jesus knows what you're thinking.

And yet he says to Nicodemus, he answers him, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus, Jesus says to Nicodemus, Nicodemus, you're trapped. You're trapped by your rituals and your religion.

You're trapped by your routine. You're trapped by all your outward appearance. You're trapped by this need for the applause and approval of other people. Nicodemus, you need to break free from this.

[18 : 17] You need to break free from your rituals and your religion. You need to see the kingdom of God for what it really is, a kingdom of salvation. Salvation from slavery to sin.

Nicodemus, you need to be born again. You need a new birth. You need a new beginning. You need to be made brand new. You need to be renewed, Nicodemus. You need to be regenerated.

You need to be born from above. Because unless you're born again, you cannot, you will not. It is absolutely impossible for you to enter the kingdom of God.

But for Nicodemus, hearing Jesus, he couldn't see it. He couldn't see it. Jesus' statement, it only causes more confusion in his mind. It created more questions than answers.

It leaves Nicodemus in this predicament. He says there in verse 4, Nicodemus says to Jesus, how can a man be born when he is old?

[19 : 20] Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born? And you know, when Jesus, when Nicodemus asks Jesus this question, he's not trying to be smart.

He's not trying to show off. He's not trying to catch Jesus out like the Pharisees often tried to do. No, Nicodemus, he's genuinely questioning, he's genuinely querying what Jesus has just said.

And he says, how is it possible? How can a man be born when he is old? How can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? How is that possible?

Is it even possible? And Nicodemus, he's completely confused by what Jesus says. He's in a predicament. But if Nicodemus was confused by Jesus' first statement, he's going to be completely baffled by the next statement.

Verse 5, Jesus answers him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

[20 : 22] That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Now, over the years, Jesus' statement here, it's not only been misunderstood, it's also been misapplied to baptism.

Many claim that in order to be born again, you need to be baptized, which is not what Jesus is telling Nicodemus here. Your baptism does not equal being born again.

Interestingly, and this is what I was reading recently, some have explained that being born of water, as Jesus says, and then of the Spirit, it relates to the two births we need in life.

Because one is physical and the other is spiritual. One is natural, the other is supernatural. And it was really interesting reading about it because it said that prior to giving birth to a baby naturally, it's often said that the waters break in the womb.

Therefore, we are naturally born of water. But to be born again supernaturally, we need to be born of the Spirit. And although that's not what Jesus is saying here, it's quite interesting.

[21 : 42] But the Bible, because the Bible says that our natural birth, when we're born the first time, that's what keeps us out of the kingdom of God. The Bible reminds us that we were conceived in iniquity, born in sin.

And because of our sin, we are dead in trespasses and sin. It doesn't matter if we were brought up in a Christian home. It doesn't matter if we had Christian parents. It doesn't matter if our father was an elder and our mother was a godly woman that prayed all the time.

It doesn't matter if we are a good upbringing with family worship and going to church and attending Sunday school. Our natural birth, the way we are born, it keeps us out of the kingdom of God.

Therefore, the only way to enter into the kingdom of God is to have a spiritual and a supernatural birth. The only way is to be born again. And so when Jesus says to Nicodemus, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God, he is saying simply to Nicodemus, unless you are cleansed from your sin and made alive by the Holy Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

You cannot be saved. Unless you are cleansed from your sin and made alive by the Spirit, you cannot be saved. Nicodemus, Nicodemus, this morning, you need a spiritual birth.

[23 : 12] You need a supernatural birth. You need to be renewed and regenerated. You need to be born from above. You need a new birth, a new beginning, a new heart.

You need to become a new creation. You need to be made brand new, like a newborn baby. Nicodemus, you must be born again.

Where are you at, Nicodemus? Where are you at? Because you must be born again. This brings us thirdly and finally to the proclamation.

The proclamation. So the patient, the predicament, and the proclamation. We read there in verse 7. The proclamation is, do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

You must be born again. You know, I read an article a number of years ago and the title was very interesting. That's why it stuck in my mind.

[24 : 20] The title was called Ministry is Midwifery. Ministry is Midwifery. Funnily enough, the title came back to me very recently as I watched and witnessed an amazing job that, the amazing job that midwives do in the labor war.

They do an absolutely amazing job. But you know, I've always thought that it's an interesting analogy to say that ministry is midwifery. I don't see myself as much of a midwife and I don't suppose you do either.

But the article was interesting. Ministry is midwifery. And yet that's what Jesus is actually saying here in this passage. Because as you know, when it comes to the natural birth of a baby, the natural birth of a baby, it's all of God.

It's all God's doing. God has formed, God alone has fearfully and wonderfully formed and fashioned the baby in the mother's womb. And it's God alone who gives new life.

God alone is the giver of life. Even at the point of giving birth, the midwife is only there to support the process. She can't really get involved.

[25 : 27] She's a bystander in giving birth. And Jesus says the same is true spiritually. Because our new birth, our spiritual birth, it's supernatural. It's all of God.

It's all of grace. Because it's God alone who gives us new life. It's nothing to do with you. It's nothing to do with me as the minister. It's nothing to do with the elders or even our Christian friends around us.

They are only the midwife to support you in the process. They're a bystander in new birth. Because it's all of God and it's all of grace.

The new birth is all of God. It's all of grace. Which might sound confusing but this is why Jesus says to Nicodemus in verse 7. He says, Do not marvel that I say to you, you must be born again.

Do not marvel that I say to you, you must be born again. Jesus, he's emphasizing and explaining to Nicodemus that just like you don't need to understand how a baby is formed and fashioned in its mother's womb, you don't need to understand how God saves you.

[26 : 33] You don't need to understand the mysteries of salvation. You don't need to understand all about election and predestination and foreknowledge and foreordination and free will.

You don't need to understand all these things. You just need to believe. You just need to believe and commit your life to the Lord.

And you know, Jesus stresses this point to Nicodemus because he moves away from the image of the labor ward to the image and illustration of wind. He says there in verse 8, the wind blows where it wishes.

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. Jesus says to Nicodemus, they're having this night time meeting and Jesus says to Nicodemus, Nicodemus, you can't see the wind, can you?

You can hear it but you can't see it. You don't know where it comes from, you don't know where it's going. You can only see the effect that the wind has. You can only see the impact and the influence that the wind has and we've seen that even in recent weeks with so many storms.

[27 : 43] And Jesus says to Nicodemus, so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. You don't need to understand how God saves you.

You just need to believe that Jesus died on the cross for you. That's what he's saying. You don't need to understand how God saves you.

You just need to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save you. And this is why Jesus proclaimed to Nicodemus what Martin Luther regarded as the heart of the Bible and the gospel in miniature.

Jesus proclaimed to Nicodemus John 3.16. Nicodemus you want to know the truth. Here it is. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, me that whosoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.

That's the truth Nicodemus. You're called to believe. You're not called to understand how God saves you. You're called to believe because whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

[29 : 03] And you know my friend Nicodemus Jesus makes it so simple for Nicodemus. This is a man who knew the Bible inside out grown up with the Bible just like yourselves Nicodemus and yet he makes it so simple strips it all away and he just says you know whosoever believes whosoever believes they will not perish but have eternal life.

Nicodemus you must be born again. You know I'm sure I've told you before what George Whitefield said. He was a powerful evangelist in the 18th century preached all over Britain and all over America and as an evangelist George Whitefield his favorite text was our text this morning verse 7 do not marvel that I said to you you must be born again.

And he preached so often on this verse that people would come up to him and say Mr. Whitefield why do you keep preaching that you must be born again? And George Whitefield he looked at the man and he stopped for a moment and he he said well because you must you must be born again there's nothing else to it you must be born again and that's what Jesus is saying here you don't need to understand how God saves you you just need to believe that Jesus died on the cross to save you you must be born again and as you know the thing about a tiny little baby we're seeing these babies in the congregation a tiny little baby can't do anything for themselves what's amazing is you have a sermon right in front of you in the pew that's what Jesus is talking about a baby can't do anything for themselves they can't walk they can't talk they can't wash themselves they can't dress themselves they didn't pay for their food because the parents did they didn't prepare their meals because the parents did they didn't even feed themselves because the parents handed it all to them they're completely dependent all they do is throw wide their arms and cry for help and Jesus is saying that's what you need to do

Nicodemus this is what you need to do you need to become like a little child you need to let go of yourself and your self-righteousness and your self-sufficiency and you need to depend upon the Lord for your salvation you must humble yourself go on your knees throw your arms wide open and cry to the Lord for mercy that's what you need to do Nicodemus you must be born again because unless you're born again you cannot enter the kingdom of God you will not be saved so all Nicodemus is in here this morning you must be born again here's a question and time has gone here's a question how do you know that you're born again how do you know that you're born again Christian how do you know that you're born again one word desire desire desire in relation to the new birth and being born again the apostle

Peter writes this wonderful verse he says here's your sermon for you right in front of your eyes as a newborn baby desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby as a newborn baby desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby what's the word desire how do you know that you're born again desire you have a desire to read the bible that wasn't there before you have a desire to pray that wasn't there before you have a desire to be in church that wasn't there before you have a desire to be with God's people that certainly wasn't there before and you have a desire to know about Jesus this Jesus who comes to us on the pages of the gospel you have a desire to know him better how do you know that you're born again desire you are desiring the spiritual milk of the word that you may grow thereby my friend if you're not already in the labor ward with

[33 : 41] Jesus you need to get into the labor ward because you must says Jesus you must be born again you must be born again well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray O Lord our gracious God we give thanks to thee for the beauty of thy word that it comes to us with such clarity and it comes to us directly from the lips of Jesus that we would hear his voice speaking to us this morning and that we would take heed to what he is saying that we would seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness that we would see our need to be born again to be born of the spirit of God to have that new beginning and that new birth by simply believing in Jesus for whosoever believes as

Jesus said they will not perish but have eternal life bless thy word to us we pray go before us we ask and do us good for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake Amen we're going to bring our service to our conclusion this morning we're going to sing again from Psalm 139 Psalm 139 in the Sing Psalms version page 181 we're singing from verse 15 down to the verse marked 18 Psalm 139 verse 15 and as we said this is a psalm that shows us that God knows everything about us he knows what we're going to say before we say it he knows if we're going through dark times because they're all as light to him he knows us and he's known us since we were in our mother's womb and what's amazing is he says verse 17 oh

God how precious are your thoughts I scan them from afar and as I seek to grasp them all how numberless they are were I to count them they would be more than the grains of sand when I awake I am with you still safe within your hand how should you respond to the all knowing God this morning you should respond in praise praise and thanks for how good he is towards us so psalm 139a from verse 15 to 18 to God's praise when in the secret place my prayer was made before my birth you saw my body yet the form within the depths of earth and all the days that

I should live which you ordained for me were written in your book oh Lord before they came to me oh God how precious are your thoughts hope I scum them from afar and as I seek to cross them all how number number they are number they are where

I took out them they would be for thunder grace of sand the grace of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us.

[38 : 39] the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.