

John 3: 1-17 (ESV) – Born Again

Main point: Jesus calls us to be born of the Spirit, to start a new life with God.



Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: The Pharisees were the Jewish religious rulers of the day; they were the top of the heap, and they knew the Jewish law backwards and forwards. At this point in the story, the Pharisees are already aware of Jesus and getting worried about him. Jesus is gaining popularity and is a threat to the established order, teaching with authority and performing miracles.

Focus of the study:

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”³ Jesus answered Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”⁴ Nicodemus said to Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where the wind comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹ Nicodemus said to Jesus, “How can these things be?”¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?¹¹ 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. [optional: ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”]¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that God gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Questions:

1. v. 1: *Who came to see Jesus?*
 - a. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews (Pharisee)
2. v. 2: *What time of day does Nicodemus come?* At night.
3. *Why do you think Nicodemus came at night?*
 - a. Worried about being seen? Could get into trouble.
4. v. 2: *What does Nicodemus say? Does he ask a question?*
 - a. Nicodemus says “we know” (so possibly he’s representing a group of Pharisees)
 - b. Nicodemus makes a statement, not a question. What does he/they know about Jesus?
 - i. Jesus is “a teacher” because he does signs (miracles)
5. v. 3: *How does Jesus respond? Why do you think Jesus starts with “Truly truly”?*
 - a. Really wants Nicodemus to pay attention!

- i. “Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
- 6. *Did Nicodemus ask anything about “seeing the kingdom”? I wonder why Jesus says this?*
 - a. Jesus is drawing Nicodemus into deeper conversation immediately
- 7. *What does it mean to be born, physically? What is involved? What happens?*
 - a. It’s hard! Parents and baby involved; something new comes to life
- 8. *v. 4: What are Nicodemus’ questions? Do you think these are good questions?*
 - a. “How can a man be born when he is old?”
 - i. “Jesus, what are you talking about??”
 - 1. How easy is it to be born in the first place? Not easy!
 - 2. Physically, it’s not possible to be born again!
- 9. *v. 5: How does Jesus answer? What comparison is Jesus trying to make?*
 - a. Birth in the flesh and birth by the spirit – two different things, but with something in common
 - b. *What starts when you’re born?* Life; something NEW
 - c. *So what would being “born again” mean?* A NEW life
- 10. *Nicodemus is asking something profound: “How is it possible to be born again when you’re already old? How can you possibly start over?” What would it feel like to think that you knew everything, that you were set, and then hear that you have to start over? Have you ever heard the saying, “You can’t teach an old dog ... new tricks”? What makes it hard to start over? [discussion]*
- 11. *Again, what kind of birth is Jesus talking about here?*
 - a. Spiritual birth – not physical
- 12. *v. 8: How does Jesus describe the Spirit?*
 - a. Like the wind: it has effects, even if you can’t see it: strong, constant, moving, shaping
 - b. Being born in the Spirit is invisible (not physical), but the effects are visible
- 13. *v. 9: What is Nicodemus’ next question?*
 - a. “How can these things be?” You can almost hear the pleading in his voice! *How do you think Nicodemus might be feeling?*
 - i. Confused; everything Nicodemus thought he knew about what it means to be close to God is in the balance. The Pharisees followed the letter of the law of Moses to a T – and Jesus is saying, The kingdom of God is much more than that, more than a checklist, more than your own human/physical work.
- 14. *Jesus is talking about God’s teachings – that people must let God’s Spirit work in them, make them new. Who should know this better than anyone?*
 - a. The teachers of Israel! (In verses 10-11, Jesus is now speaking in the plural: “you all”)
- 15. *[optional:] v. 14: Why do you think Jesus brings up Moses?*
 - a. Every Jew, especially teachers/rabbis, would know this story (Numbers 21:4-9) of the rebellious Israelites, who mumbled and complained. God sent fiery serpents to punish them. Then God told Moses to put a bronze serpent on a pole, with the promise that whoever looked at it would live.
 - i. “lifted up” – double meaning of crucifixion and resurrection
- 16. *Read v. 16-17 again: What does Jesus say is true about God? How does God feel about us?*
 - a. God LOVES the world; sent Jesus to save the world.
- 17. *Could God condemn the world?*
 - a. Yes – the world is already under judgment of sin – but God desires to save.

It's hard to start over and ask God to open your eyes to a new way of seeing, to invite God's spirit inside you to bring new life ... but Jesus said that's the way to see and enter the kingdom of God.

- Ask for any other prayer requests for today.
- Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
- End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

John 3: 1-17

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