

<sup>1</sup>There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>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.” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” <sup>4</sup>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?” <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup>The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:1-8)

## I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The gospel of grace is *mostly* a declaration of things that have happened *to us*. Events and happenings that transpired around the shores of Galilee and near Jerusalem (now some years ago) and have had a shocking affect upon your life. You will never be the same. The important part is that *they happened*, and that *they happened to us*. Birth is like that.
- B. A birth is something that happens to a baby, certainly not something that the baby *does*. No one looks at the newborn and says, “Fantastic work! You did it!”
- C. Through the *turmoil*, and *agony*, and *blood* of the mother a beautiful child is brought forth. The cross is like that. We must look at the glorious suffering Christ and joyfully declare, “Fantastic work! You did it!”
- D. Why the message of the new birth (and John 3) is important to us – four reasons:
  - 1. It was spoken by Christ to show our origin and point toward our destination.
  - 2. It was spoken to a very moral man, greatly esteemed by his community.
  - 3. It was spoken to remind us of the seduction of religion and the staggering news of God’s grace manifest through Christ.
  - 4. It is overly familiar. And often, it is the things overly familiar things that become the very things we need assurance of.
- E. I believe the Holy Spirit impressed upon me a word for this morning’s gathering. There were 3 groups that were highlighted to me: some are here and need to remember their *beginnings*, some are here and need to examine their beginnings, and some are here because they need a new beginning.
- F. It is important to know from whom you were born because we are creatures bound to story. Our stories begin before us and continue on after us. The lives of our parents give us a sense as to who we are and why we are here. To consider our birth story causes us to consider that we may not be at the center of everything – and that is exactly the power of story, it causes us to consider a greater purpose.

## II. WHO IS NICODEMUS?

<sup>1</sup>*There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>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.” (Jn. 3:1, 2)*

- A. A Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, a member of the Sanhedrin.<sup>1</sup>
- B. He is a well learned and well trained, a *master* of theology and law.
- C. As a Pharisee, he would have meticulously kept Jew law. It is likely that he is an older man (and likely very wealthy).

## III. WHAT IS THE NEW BIRTH? A SUMMARY

- A. One reason I believe Jesus uses this metaphor is because of its *impossibility*. It is a radical concept to grasp. Birth is not something that you do to, but something that is done to you.
- B. The baby experiences new life and a complete change from the environment of the womb because of the effort and labor of another. Something completely different must begin. One life must end and begin entirely over.
- C. When a person becomes a Christian, the power of God, through their faith in the work and person of Christ, *transforms (regenerates)* their spirit.

*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins... (Eph. 2:1)*

<sup>15</sup> *and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again...<sup>16</sup> Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. <sup>18</sup> Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, (2 Cor. 5:10-18)*

- 1. Paul declares that all things regarding the spirit *become new*; before God, the individual is considered a *new creation*.
- 2. The *old things* relate to the dominion and influence of sin present in the heart. That power is broken, having passed away.  
<sup>18</sup> *And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (Rom. 6:18)*
- 3. The spirit is injected with the righteousness of God, taking on the quality and nature of the righteousness that Christ Himself possesses.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sanhedrin was A 71 member council – essentially the Supreme Court of the Jewish people. One of the common actions of the Sanhedrin was to put false prophets on trial. See <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/sanhedrin/>

*<sup>21</sup> For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)*

D. Often when we think of someone needing to be *born again* we may think of someone who is = at life's lowest point. We may picture the "down and out," the *addict*, or the *poor*. The born again experience is chalked up to a deeply emotional response that produces a new outlook on life, an outward look. *Yet, this is not the new birth.*

E. Jesus isn't primarily after getting people to have an emotional experience; He's after them undergoing a spiritual rebirth at the deepest level, far beyond what they may perceive or understand.

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F. Jesus suggests to Nicodemus an entirely new construct of thinking – not that a man must be born again (because that was a common idea), but that Nicodemus must be born again. The *new birth is essential* not just for the immoral person but the moral person, for the Pharisee.

G. Jesus' call to the new birth is not a call to more morality– it's a challenge to it.

H. The new birth motif pronounces an essential and impossible work. Impossible for man (who can regenerate their spirit?). Possible with God.

#### IV. NO ONE HAS ASCENDED TO HEAVEN

*<sup>13</sup> No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (Jn. 3:13-15)*

A. *No one has ascended...* Nicodemus, you and I are in a dilemma. Our dilemma is that our morality alone will not cause us to inherit eternal life. We can outwardly be the most committed and the most loyal (masters of theology and law). Yet our outward morality disconnected from a spiritual rebirth warrants us nothing. That is what Jesus is telling Nicodemus.

*<sup>3</sup> Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? <sup>4</sup> He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. (Ps. 24:3, 4)*

B. *He who came down...* the One who grants eternal life is He who came down. It is Christ who grants life, having power to regenerate the spiritually dead.

*For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. (John 5:21)*

*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. (Jn. 6:63)*

- C. It is by putting *faith* in Christ that the man or woman is born again. Moses lifted up the serpent in Numbers 21. The people had to *look upon* the standard in order to be healed from the venom of the snake. This is what faith looks like:
1. They repented of their sins. (Num. 21:7)
  2. They acknowledged their need. (Num. 21:7)
  3. They saw themselves as helpless and hopeless without intervention from a power beyond their own strength. They needed an intercessor. (Num. 21:8)
  4. They looked upon the standard and were *healed* of their affliction. (Num. 21:9)

**V. MARKS OF THE NEW BIRTH**

- A. Below are *some* marks of the new birth.
- B. #1 – A conviction that Christ is God in the flesh.
- C. #2 A desire to please God in holiness

***1 John 2:29: “If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”***

***1 John 3:9: “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”***

***1 John 5:18: We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.***

- D. #3 A sincere love for other believers.

***1 John 4:7: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”***

- E. #4 overcoming the world by resisting its desires and value system.

***1 John 5:4: “Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.”***