

BORN AGAIN

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: John 3: 1-21

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 have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said 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? He cannot enter a second time into his. Mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life".

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

I know that's been quite a mouthful, twenty-one verses, but we'll go over them. I'd like us to get an idea of what Jesus is telling Nicodemus in this nocturnal meeting that they both had. But, at the very outset, I want you to see two bookends – one where Jesus started, and then how He ends on the same theme.

In v2, Nicodemus says to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Then in v21 Jesus says, "Whoever practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

Jesus is saying: Nicodemus, this question that you asked in the beginning, because that's what Nicodemus has brought to Jesus. He is wondering about eternal life. he is wondering about the teachings that Jesus has been talking about. Then he comes to Him and makes this

statement – we know that You are the one who has come from God. There is no doubt about it because no one who is doing the things that You do, can come from anybody but God. He acknowledges that and says that these kinds of deeds come from somebody who has God in Him or has come from God. And then, at the end of this discourse, Jesus is saying, “When you practice the truth that comes to the Light and stays in the Light, the deeds that come forth then will be seen as deeds that come from God Himself.”

In other words, when deeds like these get manifested, it is evident that the persons who are manifesting these deeds are not only in the truth but are people who are from God and who have God working within them. If that’s the way Nicodemus started, and Jesus says, “If that’s what you’re trying to get at, here’s where we are going to end.” Then everything that Jesus said in the middle needs to be understood. So, let’s unpack it a little bit and see what Jesus is saying.

Jesus tells him in v3, “I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Now, you and I who live in this dispensation, and live on this side of the Cross, understand what born again means. It’s been talked about, preached, and we’ve heard it. But it would have been very, very strange for Nicodemus to hear these words ‘born again’. So rightly then, he says, “Wait a minute, Jesus, what are You talking about? I’m already born. You want me to go back into my mother’s womb? How is that possible? What does this born again mean? Have can one who is already born, be reborn?”

Then Jesus says, “I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don’t be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must born again’.” So, He clearly delineates and says: There is one kind of birth that is of the flesh – that’s who you are. You’ve been born of the flesh. But there’s another kind that says that you must be reborn in the Spirit. And that is important for eternal life. the flesh isn’t important, for it cannot be important for eternal life; but being born of the Spirit is. And that’s what Jesus means when He says, “You must be born again.”

Then Nicodemus says, “How can this be?” And Jesus says to him, “Are you a teacher of Israel that you don’t know these things? You should know these things.” And then He says, “Let me remind you.” He says in v13, “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven,” which is the Son of Man. And so, Jesus is placing Himself right there in that equation.

But as you can see, Nicodemus still hasn’t got it. But Jesus has said that the Son of Man who is here is one who has come from heaven. Then He says to Nicodemus, “Let Me take you back into your history. This is something that you will understand. Remember Moses and the serpents. You remember as he led the children of Israel out and how they murmured against him, asking him why he had brought them out. They were better off in Egypt where they had food and shelter. God was upset and angry and sent snakes among them (Numbers 21). And Nicodemus would have known about that.

And Jesus said that they repented and cried out to Moses and said, “We have sinned against you and against God. Cry out and bring us salvation from these snakes.” And Moses went to God, and God said, “Make a bronze snake and put it up, high up in the camp, and everybody who is bitten, needs to look at that snake and they will be healed.” God didn’t give them some kind of antidote to the venom. God didn’t say – here are little packets. Just like you had

man from heaven, here are little things, when a snake bites you, put it there. No! God said, “Look up at a bronze snake and believe that you can get healed. Look up at that snake. Just like that, the Son of Man too is going to be lifted up. And just as men and women who were bitten, looked up and were healed and had life, similarly when you look up to the Son of Man, when you believe in the Son of Man, you too will have eternal life.” And Jesus is honing in on that thing that is almost unsaid here from Nicodemus, but is important for this whole conversation because to be born again means that you then will have eternal life. The next line says, “so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. So, the first thing that you need to do is to believe. Secondly, in whom do you believe? You believe in Him and then you will have eternal life.

Why is God doing this? Then you have this beautiful verse that all of us know by heart: For God so loved the world – just out of love for you and for me – He sent His Son to die so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but will have eternal life. Then He goes on to say, Jesus hasn’t come to judge the world, He’s come to save the world. But if you don’t believe in Him, automatically you will be judged because this is the antidote – that God has sent His Son; and if you reject the Son, there does not remain anything for you but the end of that first birth.

Then he ends by saying: The Light has come but people have loved the darkness more than the Light. What is the darkness? It is the evil deeds that we have gotten caught up with. And unless you are willing to go to Him and be born again in the Spirit, you will continue to stay in the darkness. And if you stay in the darkness then you have automatically judged yourself and said – I don’t accept this work of Calvary. And if you don’t, then all that is left for you is the death that comes out of being born in the flesh.

Jesus ends by saying, “But he or she who practices truth, the truth that comes from being in the light, those deeds that are manifested as having been wrought in God, those deeds that come when walking in the truth – those deeds prove that you are a child of God. You are one whom God is in.

If that’s the way those 21 verses can get unpacked, I see three important questions that we need to ask ourselves this morning. Let’s leave Nicodemus out, and put ourselves in with the knowledge we have of the Cross as well; with the Son of Man being lifted up. We know what happening in the lifting up. Calvary happened.

The three questions:

1. **Do you want eternal life?** Or are you satisfied with this life and the end of it? Are you happy to say: When I close my eyes, then I’m done? I’m not interested in the life hereafter. If you are only born in the flesh, then when the flesh dies, that becomes ‘the end’. So, the question for you and me this morning is: Do you want eternal life?

A month and a half back, we had our seminar for PLACE, the one we do with Asbury. We had 27 students who came on the first day, went through the entire eight hours, and went home. The next day, 26 students showed up. The one student who didn’t come had passed away that morning. He had sent a message that said, “Will you please excuse me? I can’t make it because I have a severe back pain”. At 11 o’clock we got the news that they had taken him to the hospital, but he died on the way.

None of us have a guarantee on the next breath; we don't. And if this is our last breath, then you and I need to know whether we are satisfied with death being an end, and away from God. Or do we want this eternal life that Jesus is talking about, that He is going through such great pains to tell Nicodemus that he must be born again?

So, answer the first question, beloved, in your mind. And if you've answered yes, and said yes, I do want this eternal life, then the second question for you is...

2. **Are you willing to be born again?** Is that your will? What does it mean to be born again? Well, to believe, isn't it? But believe in what? What is it that we are believing in? If we back up and just look at our own lives, the Bible says in Romans 3:23, *For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.* Every one of us; there is not one person who can say, "I have not sinned." Given that, what does that mean in our relationship with God?

Romans 6:23 says, *For the wages of sin is death.* That sin, that we are all part of, leads to death. It doesn't end there though. It says, *"But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ."* For God so loved the world that He gave Jesus Christ. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

What does that mean? How does the wage of sin and Jesus' gift to us come together? If the wage of sin is death, and we all have sinned, then all of us are going to pay that penalty. But the reason that God sent Jesus into this world was to take that penalty on our behalf. That's why He went to Calvary – to bear your sin and mine and say, "I will pay that price, that penalty, that wage. I'll take on Myself." And that's why He gave His life on Calvary.

You may say, "I believe all that. I've grown up with that in a Christian home, and so I know all of that." It doesn't matter if you've talked about Jesus ad nauseam, for your entire life, you've attended service every Sunday, you've gone for Bible studies, you've sung in the choir or in the worship team, whatever! Nothing matters if all you have done is known about Jesus.

What needs to happen is that you acknowledge that you are a sinner, and if you are a sinner, that you need a Savior. And that you have that dialogue with Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, I have sinned and I know that the punishment for my sin is death. But You gave Your life for me and I accept the life that You gave. I accept that You paid the penalty for my sin." That needs to happen in everyone's life. It cannot be that you say that I go back Christian four generations. It doesn't matter. You have to come to a point where you make that kind of a transaction with God and accept that penalty.

I've used this illustration before. If I have a headache and you come to me and say, "Pastor, you have a headache. Here's Crocin, it's the best for headache." And you keep it on the table in front of me. And I say, "I've heard that too. I know that Crocin is good for headaches because it has Paracetamol." And you agree and we have a great discussion on paracetamol and Crocin. Then somebody walks in and I say, "You know what? Crocin helps headaches." Has my headache gone? No. Everything that I know about Crocin and paracetamol are of no use until I take that tablet into me.

It's the same with Jesus. If you haven't made that transaction, then all you have today is the first birth which ends with eternal separation from God. So the question for us today is: Do we want to be born again? Do I want to make sure that when this life is over and I move through that door, I will be in eternity? I will be in God's presence. I will see again my loved ones who trusted Him.

But that can only happen with the second birth. "You must be born again!" Beloved, there is no decision you will make in your entire life that is more important than this one, because it defines your destiny. It defines what happens after this life.

3. **Are you willing to practice truth?** Are you willing to stay in the light, be drawn to the light, allow your behavior to showcase God so that people all around will look at you and say, "I perceive that this is a holy man or woman of God," as the Shunammite woman said to Elijah; that everything that comes from us people will see and say, "This is a godly person." Are we willing to let our behavior at all times only showcase Him? "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify My Father who is in Heaven." Is the world seeing your good works? Is God in heaven being glorified through you, through the words you utter, through your attitude and demeanor, through your deeds? Is God being lifted up?

So, those are three questions that we must answer this morning. Do you want eternal life? if yes, are you willing to be born again? Are you willing to showcase God in your life thereafter?

Let's pray together. I want to focus on that second question. If indeed you've answered the first, and you're saying, "Yes, I've never done that. I've never had that interaction with God, but I want to do it today." I want to ask you all, if you don't mind, to bow your heads and close your eyes. If you are saying, "Pastor, I want to be born again," then I want you to put your hand up and hold it there till I see it, because I'm going to lead you in a prayer. If you want to be born again today and accept Jesus, put up your hand.

Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I have gone against Your will and I know that the punishment is death. But I know Lord, from Your Word, that You paid that penalty and I want to appropriate that penalty for my life. Thank You for going to the Cross for me and paying the penalty for my sins. I invite You into my heart. Come and dwell Lord Jesus, and lead me through Your Spirit whom I now receive into my heart. Take charge Holy Spirit, and lead me into all truth so that I may walk in the light, and that my behavior, my words, my thoughts, my attitude will reflect your goodness and that You will be glorified. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.