

“A Conversation About Heaven”

John 3

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“George Whitefield was known for preaching the same message over and over—‘You must be born again.’ Someone finally asked him, ‘Why do you keep preaching that?’ And he answered, ‘Because... you must be born again.’

Dwight L. Moody said:

“You can be brought up in a Christian home, go to church all your life, and still not be born again.”

Billy Graham often said:

“A person can go to church, say prayers, and still not be born again.”

1.The Person (Nicodemus)

John 3:1-2 ¹ 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.”

• *Nicodemus* –

- It's noted he was a man.
- He was a Jew with a Greek name.
 - **Nike (νίκη)** = *victory*
 - **Demos (δῆμος)** = *people*
 - His name meant, “*Victory of the People*” or “*One who conquers the people.*”
 - “*For the most part those who lived in Judea had Hebrew or Aramaic names. However, those in the upper classes, who were exposed to Greek as well as Jewish culture, often gave their children two names, a Greek name as well as a Hebrew one. Evidently this had been true of Nicodemus, which indicates that he had a Greek education.*” ¹ Boice, J. M. (2005). *The Gospel of John: an expositional commentary* (p. 187). Baker Books.

- Three things could describe Nicodemus: Rich, Religious, & a Ruler.
 - *Rich*
 - We know that he was wealthy because, in John 19, we read that Nicodemus brought costly myrrh and aloes to the tomb of Jesus.
 - **John 19:39** “And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.”
 - *Pharisee* –
 - *“Nicodemus was a Pharisee, which meant he lived by the strictest possible religious rules. Not all of the Pharisees were hypocrites (as one may infer from Jesus’ comments recorded in Matt. 23), and evidence indicates that Nicodemus was deeply sincere in his quest for truth.”*¹
 Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 294–295). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
 - *“William Barclay notes that there were never more than six thousand Pharisees, and that because of their limited number they actually formed a kind of select brotherhood. Moreover, they were serious about the law. The Pharisees were the theological conservatives of their day. They believed that the Old Testament was the revealed Word of God and that the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, contained an inspired code of ethics to be believed and practiced literally. In some ways the greatest glory of the Pharisaic religion lay in the fact that it applied the law literally. It was the goal of the scribes to work out the exact meaning of the law; it was the determined purpose of the Pharisees to keep it. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus represented those of his day and ours who seek the meaning of life in religion but do not find it. He belonged to the church, but he knew nothing of that personal, life-transforming relationship to Jesus Christ upon whom the true church is founded.”*¹ Boice, J. M. (2005). [The Gospel of John: an expositional commentary](#) (p. 187). Baker Books.
 - *Pharisee* – It was their job to enforce the Jewish law.

- *Scribes* – They would interpret the law.
- *Ruler*
 - *Ruler of the Jews* – he was a member of the Jewish elite, the seventy-member Jewish Supreme Court.
 - *Sanhedrin* – Position of high regard and respect.
- *Nicodemus had everything you could want! He was successful, was in want of nothing, and respected by the community.*
- He came to Jesus by night
 - Most likely to get alone time with Jesus.
 - Based on his comment to Jesus, “*We know...*”
 - Implying others knew he was with Jesus.
- *Nicodemus had everything, but something was missing!*

2.The Problem (he was spiritually dead)

John 3:3-8 “³ Jesus answered and said to him, “**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**”⁴ 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?”⁵ Jesus answered, “**Most assuredly, 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 the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

- *You MUST be “born again”* –
 - *Jesus did not say.*
 - *You must be baptized.*
 - *You must walk forward.*
 - *You must pray the sinner’s prayer.*
 - *He said.*

- *Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*
- **Born again –**
 - Spiritually reborn because heaven requires inner change.
 - **1 Corinthians 15:50a** “...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”
 - *“Birth is our mode of entrance into the world and brings with it the potential equipment for adjustment to the world. To be born again, or “born from above,” means a transformation of a person so that he is able to enter another world and adapt to its conditions. Anōthen, which many bible versions translate as “again,” in the Johannine writings normally means “from above,” and it should be rendered thus here. To belong to the heavenly kingdom, one must be born into it.”*¹ Tenney, M. C. (1981). *John*. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts* (Vol. 9, p. 47). Zondervan Publishing House.
 - **By default, we are born spiritually dead.**
 - **Genesis 2:16-17** “¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”
 - **By default, we are born with an earthly nature**
 - **Romans 8:6-7** “⁶ For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. ⁷ Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”
 - Therefore, to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must be reborn.
- Until this statement, Nicodemus thought he was going to heaven.
- He trusted in who he was and what he had done.
 - He was born a Jew.
 - **Matthew 3:7-9** “⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Therefore bear fruits worthy

of repentance,⁹ and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."

- Nicodemus' question
 - He didn't ask why, but how.
 - By what process?
- Jesus' reply,
- *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit."*
 - *All that Nicodemus thought about getting to heaven was wrong!*
 - **Romans 4:1-2** ¹ What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God."
 - Before man, he had it all, but not before God.
 - After all, he was 'doing' all the right things.
 - Doing things cannot grant entrance into heaven.
- *Water –*
 - *"It would seem to me that being born of the water would be a reference to our natural birth, as the fetus is in that water sac being protected, and then there is the water bursting and the child is born. To be born of the water would refer to the natural birth, because in context then, Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which born of the Spirit is spirit." And so, He's talking about the two births: born of the water, and born of the Spirit. And that the born of the Spirit is referring to the new birth, the spiritual birth that we have, where born of the water would refer to the fleshly birth."* Pastor Chuck Smith
- *Spirit –*
 - *"But when a person is born of the Spirit, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Then, the spirit becomes alive and begins to rule within my life, and now my mind is occupied with the things of the Spirit, with how I might please God, in the worship of God, in*

the opening up of my life and my heart unto the things of God and of His Spirit, and these are the things that now dominate my mind. A mind dominated by the Spirit is called the mind of the Spirit, which is life and peace and joy.” Pastor Chuck Smith

3.The Provision (Jesus)

John 3:9-18 ⁹ Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, “**Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?** ¹¹ Most assuredly, I say to you, we speak what we know and testify what we have seen, and you do not receive our witness. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. ¹⁸ “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

- *Are you the teacher of Israel?* – All the law and prophets pointed to Me, and John the Baptist prepared the way for Me. How can I explain heavenly things if you can’t understand earthly things?

Now He gives an illustration.

- *As Moses lifted up the serpent* –
 - **Numbers 21:9** “So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”
 - God could have just healed them, but had Moses make a bronze serpent, and all they had to do to be healed was just look at it. (Nicodemus knew this)

- **They had a responsibility to look.**
- All they had to do was look!
 - Can you imagine being so stubborn after being bitten, knowing you could be healed just by looking up, that you keep your head down and die???
 - The same happens today with Jesus!
 - They just had to look up, believing they could be healed.
 - LOOK and LIVE!
 - God made the provision and the way, but man is responsible to respond.
 - They weren't healed apart from looking.
- Brass is a symbol of judgment, the snake a symbol of sin, and being lifted up a symbol of the cross.
 - So, the snake on the pole symbolized their sin being judged.
 - *Jesus was lifted up and bore our sin!*
 - **Isaiah 53:5-6** ⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”
 - Lifted up
 - **John 8:28a** “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*...”
- By looking at Jesus by faith, we can become born again.
 - True biblical faith.
 - **James 2:17-20** ¹⁷...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! ²⁰ But do you

want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?”

- **Be careful you don't become a Christian Atheist!**

- Someone who says that they are a Christian, but lives as if there's no God.

- *For God so loved the world –*

- Because God is love!
 - **1 John 4:8b** “God is love.”
- It is so cool that the Gospel can be fully communicated in exactly 25 words.
 - And right in the center of it is the “Son”.
- In 25 words, Jesus communicates the Father's heart, His plan, and His will.
 - *His heart* – He loved the world.
 - *His plan* – He gave His only begotten Son.
 - *His will* – Whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
 - **Romans 5:8** “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
 - **Ephesians 2:4-5** “⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),..”
 - **1 John 4:9** “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.”

- *Jesus loved*

- An adulterous woman was protected from those who would have stoned her. He told her that he didn't condemn her and that she should sin no more. **John 8:10-11**
- A sinful woman, by telling her sins had been forgiven, as she poured out her oil (her livelihood) upon him. **Luke 7:47-48**

- An outcast Samaritan woman by offering her 'living water.' **John 4:17-18**
- Tax collectors and sinners by eating with them and calling them to repentance. **Luke 5:31-32**
- *He didn't come to condemn, but to save!*
 - **Luke 9:56a** "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save *them*."
- *Who isn't condemned?*
 - **John 3:18a** "He who believes in Him is not condemned;.."
 - **Romans 8:1** "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."
- *Who is condemned?*
 - **John 3:18b** "...but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

4. The Paths (stay in the dark or walk in the light)

John 3:19-21 "¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

- *Sin* – will keep you away from Jesus!
 - **2 Thessalonians 2:9-10** "⁹ The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, ¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, *because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*"
 - Rejecting Jesus keeps you condemned.
- *You cannot earn your way in!*
 - **Romans 3:10** "There is none righteous, no, not one..."
 - **Romans 3:20** "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin."
 - **Galatians 2:16** "¹⁶ ...a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ

Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”

- *So, God did what we couldn't.*
 - **Romans 8:3a** “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son...”
 - **Acts 13:39** “...by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”
 - **Galatians 3:24-25** “...the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”
- *What remains?*
 - *A choice! Stay condemned or be born again.*
 - **John 3:18** “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”
 - **John 5:24** “Most assuredly, I say to you, ^she who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”
- How can you become “*Born-Again?*”
 1. **A**dmit (repent) you are a sinner and have sinned against God.
 - a. **Mark 1:15** “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”
 - b. **Acts 17:30** “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent...”
 2. **B**elieve that Jesus is God, died on the cross, and rose from the dead.
 - a. **John 20:31** “...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”
 - b. **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** “³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to

the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...”

3. **C**onfess with your mouth what you believe

a. **Romans 10:9-10** “⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Come to the light! Leave the condemnation and be born again!