

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

You Must be Born Again

John 3:9-15

Part 4

When people get seriously ill they will go to incredible lengths to get well. I am a case in point.

Last year I was diagnosed as having prostate cancer. As a result of that diagnosis I chose to go through major surgery and a lengthy recovery period. Why did I do this? I did this because I wanted to live. If my pathology report had come back indicating that the cancer had spread, then I was very ready to go through radiation treatments, which would have been the recommended course of action. Why would I have been willing to do this? I would have been willing to do this because I would have wanted to live.

But far more important to me and hopefully to you is being spiritually alive. More important to me and hopefully to you is having a personal relationship with the Lord, which not only can secure for us a wonderful life in the present, but an even better life in the future, when we enter into the glory of heaven. And to what lengths will we have to go in order to experience spiritual life? All we have to do by the grace of God is simply reach out and embrace the gift of spiritual life by faith. We are able to do this because Christ through His death on the cross has placed the wonderful gift of spiritual life within our reach.

This leads us back to the passage we are now studying and to the question that we are now asking. And what is that question? "What do we learn about the *new* birth from John 3:1-15?"

The first thing that we learned about the new birth in John 3:1-15 was the *necessity* of the new birth (John 3:1-3). Let me read this passage for you, "**Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; (2) this man came to Him 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.’ (3) Jesus answered and said to him "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."**

What else do we learn from this passage? The second thing that we learned about the new birth from John 3:1-15 is its basic *components* (John 3:4-8). In other words, we learn what needs to be in place before a person can be considered born again.

We find these basic components in John 3:4-8, let me read these verses for you, "**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? (5) 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. (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 do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Nicodemus was obviously struggling with the concept of "born again." We know this by his response in verse four. Jesus responds to his struggle by outlining its basic components in John 3:4-8 and more specifically by listing its basic components in John 3:5.

The first basic component of the new birth that Jesus lists for us in John 3:5 is being "born of water" or in other words fully participating in that which the baptism of John portrayed which is true repentance. True repentance is not just simply feeling bad about our sin it is actually turning from our sin. It is not something that we initiate but it is something that God initiates.

But this is not all there is to the new birth. There is a second component. The second component of the new birth which, we can also see in John 3:5, is being born "of the Spirit." We are born of the Spirit when we come to Christ in faith and He baptizes us with the Spirit who then joins us to Christ and therefore to His life. Being joined with the life of Christ allows us to pass from spiritual death to spiritual *life* or in other words we are "born of the Spirit."

So what have we learned so far about the new birth? We have learned about the necessity of the new birth. We have learned about its components. What else do we learn?

Thirdly we learn that the *focus* of the new birth is Christ (John 3:9-15).

Let us begin by looking at verse 9, "**Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"**" What was Nicodemus communicating when he asked this question?

Nicodemus by asking this question confesses that he is baffled by what Jesus had been saying. He was baffled by the necessity of the new birth. In other words he was baffled by the necessity of being "born of water" and "the Spirit." For Nicodemus what Jesus had been sharing was not reasonable.

How will Jesus respond to Nicodemus? Let us look at verse 10, "**Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?"**"

Jesus responds to Nicodemus by confessing his own bewilderment at Nicodemus's inability to embrace what he had said. How can you, "the teacher of Israel not understand that you must be born again?" How can you, "the teacher of Israel not understand that you must be born of water and the Spirit?"

In other words, Jesus is just as bewildered as Nicodemus but for a different reason. What was that reason? Jesus evidently felt that Nicodemus as the teacher of Israel should have understood the necessity of the new birth. The title "the teacher of Israel" did not refer to an official position but rather it was a title commensurate with the *respect* bestowed on him by the people of Israel.

When Jesus addressed Nicodemus as "the teacher of Israel" He is recognizing Nicodemus as someone who was highly respected in Israel for his knowledge and understanding of Old Testament Scriptures.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Jesus apparently felt that someone so highly respected for his knowledge and understanding should have easily understood what He had been saying about the new birth and readily concurred with what He had said. Unfortunately this had not happened. I suppose that if you were Nicodemus you could have interpreted this as a mild rebuke.

Is Christ's response to Nicodemus fair? I believe it is extremely fair. Let us for a moment consider certain Old Testament passages that Nicodemus should have been familiar with that would indicate that being delivered from sin is not about working harder or better but rather it is about being spiritually born from above.

Psalms 51:1-10, "(1) Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. (2) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. (3) For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. (4) Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost judge. (5) Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. (6) Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part Thou wilt make me know wisdom. (7) Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (8) Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice, (9) Hide Thy face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. (10) Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. " David knew that he had a sin problem at the very core of his being and that it would not get better just by working harder and better.

Ezekiel 36:25-27, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. (26) Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." David was not the only Israelite that had a sin problem at the core of their being the whole of the nation of Israel had that same problem. In fact, the whole of the world has that same problem. A problem that cannot be remedied by simply working hard or better.

Should Nicodemus have understood from Old Testament Scriptures the necessity of a new birth orchestrated and carried out by God? And the answer is, absolutely.

But though Christ is bewildered by the inability of Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, to understand the necessity of the new birth He does not give up on him. Rather He enters into a rather lengthy monologue directed at Nicodemus, this very educated, highly respected, but baffled teacher.

Let us read **verse 11, "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and you do not receive our witness."**

For the third time in this conversation Jesus uses the solemn expression "Truly, truly, I say to you." But this time He is not using this expression to emphasize the necessity of being born again as He has done earlier in this passage.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Rather this time He is using the expression "truly, truly" to emphasize the reliability of His own testimony concerning the new birth. To help bolster His claim of being a reliable witness in matters concerning the new birth He invokes a plural pronoun.

Let us read verse 11 one more time, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, WE speak that which WE know, and bear witness of that which WE have seen, and you do not receive OUR witness.**" When Jesus referred to "we" in respect to bearing witness He is referring Himself and John the Baptist. He most likely was including John the Baptist in that "we" rather than the Old Testament prophets because the emphasis seems to be more on a present witness rather than on a past witness.

I believe that this particular perspective is enhanced when we consider that John the Baptist in essence bore witness to the same truths concerning the new birth as Christ. What was the message of John? John the Baptist was continually calling people to repent in order that they might be prepared to receive their coming king who would baptize them with the Spirit. This was just another way of telling people that they, "must be born again."

Should Nicodemus have considered the witness of Jesus reliable? He should have considered the message of Jesus reliable because His message in essence was the same as John's. But obviously Nicodemus was not accepting the testimony of either Jesus or John in matters concerning the "new birth." This unwillingness to accept the reliability of Jesus testimony concerning the new birth even though confirmed by John the Baptist quite naturally led Jesus to question whether Nicodemus was in any position to accept what he had to say about things that were equally or even more difficult to understand. This leads us to **verse 12**. Let me read this verse for you, "**If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?**"

What are the earthly things and what are the heavenly things? Some take "**earthly things**" as referring to the physical elements that he had just mentioned in **verses 6-8** such as "wind and natural birth." But this is very unlikely when we consider the fact that Jesus tells us in **verse 12** that Nicodemus did not believe the "earthly things." Obviously we cannot say that Nicodemus did not believe in the "wind." And neither can we say that Nicodemus did not believe in "natural birth."

It is best to understand Jesus reference to "earthly things" as a reference to matters related to the new birth, which, Nicodemus chooses to repeatedly reject. Why would Jesus refer to matters related to the new birth as "earthly things?" Jesus refers to the matters related to the new birth as "earthly things" because it takes place on earth.

You might think that after Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that he was stumbling over the most elemental of things such as the "new birth" or in other words an earthy thing that Jesus would not have chosen to share with Nicodemus, things that would require even greater faith or in other words "heavenly things." But this is exactly what Jesus chose to do.

It is best to understand "heavenly things" as a reference to matters related to the outworking of God's redemptive plan that makes the new birth on earth possible.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

What is the first heavenly thing that he shares with Nicodemus? The first heavenly thing that Jesus shares with Nicodemus is His *descent* from heaven (John 3:13).

Let us read **verse 13, "And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man."** Let us for a moment, look at the very first phrase, "and no one has ascended into heaven." In the time of Christ, stories were circulating of bygone saints who had ascended into heaven and received special insight into God's ways and plans. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that all of this is bogus. Jesus insists that no *man* has ascended to heaven to later return and talk about what he has seen or heard. This statement by Christ was not a difficult statement to understand and perhaps even to accept. But this statement was not meant to stand by itself. Jesus was simply making this statement to lay the foundation for a heavenly bombshell.

Let us continue to read the verse, "**And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man.**" Though no man had ascended to heaven to later return and talk about what he had seen or heard Jesus as the *Son* of Man had descended. Therefore if anyone should know whether or not the new birth is a necessity it would have been Jesus, the Son of Man.

What is the significance of the title Son of man that Jesus has chosen to use to describe Himself? Let us read **Daniel 7:13-14, "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like the Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. (14) And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the people, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."** When Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man He was asserting that He was the *Messiah* who would descend from heaven just as Daniel foretold (Daniel 7:13-14).

Would what Jesus just shared with Nicodemus in **John 3:13** have been difficult for him to embrace? The answer would be of course! Would it have been more difficult for him to embrace than the necessity of the new birth? Certainly! Why? Because the new birth was an earthly thing and the descent of the Messiah to earth was a heavenly thing. But this is not the only heavenly thing that Jesus shared with Nicodemus.

The second heavenly thing that Jesus shares with Nicodemus is *why* He descended from heaven to earth (John 3:14-15). Let us read **John 3:14-15, "(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 may have eternal life."**

Jesus begins His explanation of why He came with an Old Testament story. Look at the very first phrase of **John 3:14 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness."** The Old Testament story that Jesus used to explain why He descended from heaven to earth is found in *Numbers 21:4-9*.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Let me read passage for you, **"Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. (5) And the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and you; intercede with the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from us.' And Moses interceded for the people. (8) Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he shall live.' (9) And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived."**

What do we learn from this story? Numbers 21 tells us that many Jews because of their sin had been bitten by snakes and were dying but God graciously provided a means of *healing*. What was the means of healing that God provided? The means of healing that God provided was a bronze snake lifted up on a pole. How did the Jews who were seeking deliverance from their sins and the consequences of their sins take advantage of what God provided. Those Jews who believed that the bronze serpent was God's provision could simply choose to look upon it as an expression of their faith and be healed. Now let us step back and take a look at the bigger picture of the story that Christ alludes to in Numbers 21.

The story in Numbers 21 was all about how God by grace through faith, delivered repentant Jews from the physical consequences of their sin. How does Jesus use this story to explain why He came? Jesus uses the story from Numbers 21 to explain how God by grace through faith can also deliver people from the *spiritual* consequences of their sin. How is God able to do this?

Let us continue to read **John 3:14, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."**

What did Jesus have in mind when He spoke about the Son of Man being lifted up? When Jesus spoke about the Son of Man being "lifted up" He spoke of His future *crucifixion* (John 12:27-34).

Let me read for you **John 12:27-33, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for this purpose I came to this hour. (28) 'Father glorify Thy name.' There came therefore a voice out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.' (29) The multitude therefore, who stood by and heard it, were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, 'An angel has spoken to Him.' (30) Jesus answered and said, 'This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. (31) Now judgment is upon the world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out. (32) And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.' (33) But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die."** Clearly when Jesus tells Nicodemus that he, like the serpent must be lifted up He was speaking of the kind of death that He was to die. He was talking about His crucifixion when God would nail the certificate that we owed because of our sins to the cross, writing across it "paid in full."

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Why was God through the death of His Son willing to do this for us? Let us continue to read but this time we will read through to **John 3:15**, "**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; (15) that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.**"

He did this so that we apart from works could by simple faith in His Son embrace the gift of life.

CONCLUSION

Each of us are ultimately fighting a losing battle to preserve our physical life even though we may be willing to go to extraordinary lengths to do so, like I have done. But even though we may not be able to avoid physical death this does not mean that we cannot avoid spiritual death.

All we have to do is to believe in Jesus. Isn't this exactly what **John 3:15** tells us? But what Jesus do we have to believe in? We have to believe in the Jesus that has been revealed in the Scriptures. But who is the Jesus that has been revealed in the scriptures? The Jesus who has been revealed in the Scriptures is the Jesus who descended from heaven and who was lifted up on the cross so that we might be saved.

Those who truly believe in Jesus in this way will not only humbly submit themselves to Him recognizing His right to rule over their lives. But they will also transfer their trust from themselves to Jesus Christ alone for their salvation.

Have you done this? Hopefully the answer is yes. But if it is not then hopefully tonight you will make that decision. If it is then in the quietness of your own heart you can pray this prayer, "Thank you for leaving the glory of heaven to die on the cross for my sins, I know recognizing the futility of self-effort now transfer my trust from myself and my good works to you alone for my salvation recognizing your right to rule over my life."

So who is the focus of the new birth? Jesus is the focus of the new birth. Jesus, the Son of Man came into this world to die on a cross so that those who believe in Him might experience *life* and *life eternal*.