

How many here are familiar with the 3rd chapter of John? When I was growing up, the verse John 3:7 was printed boldly over the baptismal at our church: “. . . Ye must be born again.” Many of us are familiar with the story of Nicodemus. For those of us who have been believers in Christ for most of our lives, we’ve probably heard this preached many times over the years. Did you know that John 3 is the chapter most preached or taught. John 3:16 is the most searched verse on the internet. How often have you just seen “John 3:16” on a poster at an event, on a roadside billboard or on the under eye patches of a football player? When you see it . . . do you really SEE it?

Today, I am going to ask you to remove the lenses you may have worn coming into this Bible study today. Forget what you already know about this passage, about John the Baptist and John the disciple, even Jesus and John 3:16. I want to encourage you to SEE this chapter with new eyes and from a different perspective. We are so blessed to have the entire Bible, the inspired WORD OF GOD, the revelation of God’s awesome plan for humanity, in our very hands. If you are a student of the Bible and a believer in Jesus, you already know how it’s all going to end. I want to encourage you to step into the shoes of the people we will study today. They did NOT know the end of the story. They THOUGHT they knew what Jesus was sent to do but He is gently trying to help them understand that their idea of a Savior is NOT who He is.

Let’s start in John 3:1:

3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus^[a] 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."

Let's start with some insight into Nicodemus: he is a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin which is the ruling council much like our Supreme Court. He is wealthy. He is a devout Jew who probably felt he was assured of a place in God's kingdom. According to John Stott, the Jewish people truly believed that the Messiah was coming ONLY to save them because of their race and their obedience in circumcision. (Stott).

BUT, Nicodemus was SEARCHING and he believed that Jesus had answers that even he did not have, despite being a very educated man. He came to Jesus PERSONALLY when he could have easily sent an assistant or student to ask questions and report back to him. He wanted to EXAMINE Jesus for himself, separating FACT from FICTION.

Now, a lot is mentioned in almost every commentary that I have read and what I have heard my entire life about Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night. Many felt that he was fearful of what the Pharisees may think if he was seen with Jesus, yet another author, Michael Card, discussed that evening was often a time that Rabbis reserved for biblical discussions. During the day, Jesus often drew a crowd, but in the evening, Nicodemus would have his undivided attention. There would be no distractions and he could ask honest questions and have thoughtful discussions about the answers

he was given. When you are searching for answers from Jesus, take time to study His word and pray at a time when you can just be in His presence, undistracted.

³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, 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, "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 (PLURAL) must be born again.' ⁸ The wind[Ⓜ] blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Jesus cuts to the chase from the outset: No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. YOU (plural, it means EVERYONE) must be born again. The kingdom of God is PERSONAL, not NATIONAL or ETHNIC. Entrance into the kingdom of God requires repentance and spiritual rebirth. According to JC Ryle, to be Born Again requires a thorough change of heart, will and character. Passing from death to life, implanting in our dead hearts a new principle from above. A resurrection to a new creation.

Nicodemus tries to make sense of this from a human and physical perspective, "how can a man return to his mother's womb?" That would be a miracle! Jesus gently redirects him and tells him that unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter God's kingdom. Now, John uses the picture

of Water often in his writing of this Gospel describing Baptism, Birth, Jesus' 1st miracle turning water into wine (**Thanks Maureen!**), and later healing waters. John is the only one of the Gospel writers to describe the piercing of Jesus side with a spear that caused a flow of water and blood from His wounded side at the crucifixion.

Jesus knew that Nicodemus was a scholar of the old testament. He knew that Nicodemus could recall the words of Ezekiel in chapter 36 verses 25-26, when the Sovereign Lord is telling the people of Israel how he will bring them back to Himself and save them even when they have cursed his holy name: "I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a **NEW HEART** and put a **NEW SPIRIT** in you. I will remove from you, your heart of stone and give you a heart of **FLESH**." Jesus who is here, in the **FLESH**, speaks to Nicodemus in terms that he can relate to, but he is still perplexed.

Jesus likens the Spirit to the wind. We just witnessed the devastating effect of a hurricane in the South this past week, we cannot "see the wind" but we can see the effect. At other times, on a really hot summer day, how wonderful it is a gentle breeze that comes along and helps cool us off?

⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you (**SINGULAR**) 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^u do not receive our testimony. 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.^[a] 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.^[a]

Jesus establishes that he is the Son of God descended to earth from heaven. He again tries to relate to Nicodemus as a scholar of the Old Testament by using an example from Numbers 21: 4-9 that will be a foretelling of what is to come. In this passage the Israelites were wandering in the desert, plagued by snakes because of their rebellion against God. Once bitten by a snake, they were doomed to death. BUT GOD, made a PROVISION for them by instructing Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it HIGH on a pole where ANYONE could see it. WHOEVER had been bitten by a snake could be saved from death, all they had to do was LOOK UP. Just lift their eyes to the serpent. How much easier could he make it?

For God So Loved the World

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world,^[a] that he 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. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever

does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Nicodemus, John and the disciples had NO IDEA what was about to unfold for Jesus ~ the trial, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord. They have already identified him as the Messiah and the Lamb of God. But many more encounters with Jesus will come, which will solidify their Faith in Jesus. Nicodemus will appear again in John 7: 50 to 51 when religious leader attempted to arrest Jesus and he defended him by asking a question: Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing? We will meet him again at the crucifixion of Christ in John 19: 38-39 when he appears with Joseph of Aramathea to claim the body of Christ. This is not a man who is afraid what people may think of him, this is a man who is a believer in Christ.

Again, John 3:16 is the most quoted verse of the New Testament. We should stand in AWE of the words that we read in this verse. God the Father loved the WORLD, (this is an ALL INCLUSIVE, radical, reckless LOVE that includes everyone, not just the Jewish people) so much, that He GAVE His ONE and ONLY Son (both in the INCARNATION of Jesus coming to earth as MAN and in the Crucifixion to be hung on a cross as a condemned criminal) that whoever believes in HIM will not Perish but have eternal life. He did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, or to be a great warrior king that would defeat all nations, but that the world would be saved through him. Knowledge is NOT salvation. To believe is more than an intellectual decision or agreement

that Jesus is God. To believe in Jesus is to have a PERSONAL relationship with him. Romans 2:4 reminds of the the kindness of God that is meant to lead us to repentance. Sending your one and only Son to pay the price for the sin of humanity . . . this is kindness, no condemnation. But it does not end there,

¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

Maybe you feel like your sin is too great and you don't want to be exposed to the light that would just magnify how unworthy you are of this great LOVE. But we are ALL unworthy. No one is righteous, not one, we all need a Savior. If you don't know Jesus as your Savior, you CAN know Him. You CAN trust Him with your life. You must acknowledge that you are sinful, doomed to death because of your rebellion against Him and LOOK to Jesus, the author and finisher of our Faith.

John the Baptist Exalts Christ

²² After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. ²³ John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being

baptized ²⁴ (for John had not yet been put in prison).²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ **He must increase, but I must decrease.**" ³¹ He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.

John adds a statement here that only an eye-witness could add, assuming we already know this information: "John (the Baptist) had not yet been put in prison." This is the only place we see mention of John the Baptist in prison in this Gospel. Jesus and John are baptizing in different locations and a discussion about purification (water) arises between some of John the Baptist's disciples and a Jewish man. They came to John to point out that Jesus is also baptizing and people are following Him. John uses this as an opportunity to remind them that He was given the awesome responsibility to be the forebearer of Christ, "I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him." He continues to point to Christ and not himself. John the Baptist uses the illustration of the Best Man guarding the bride (believers) for the Bridegroom (Jesus) and

states that his Joy is now complete: He must increase and I must decrease.” I am just a servant of the most High God who comes to earth from heaven.

³² He **(JESUS)** bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. ³³ Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom God has sent **(JESUS)** utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

This is a reiteration of what we have heard already through the first chapter and third chapter of John’s Gospel. We learn best by repetition and John gives that to us here.