

John Series: That You May Believe
#10: The New Birth (Jesus and Nicodemus)

Text: John 3:1-8

Jesus' clearing of the Temple and miraculous signs attracted the attention of one of the members of the ruling Sanhedrin, a Pharisee named Nicodemus. He came to Jesus by night for a private interview with Him. Jesus surprised Nicodemus with His teaching.

I. Nicodemus (vs 1-2).

1. Who Was Nicodemus? A Pharisee, member of the ruling Sanhedrin court. He was a man of "high moral character, deep religious hunger, yet profound spiritual blindness," (Wiersbe). Possibly very rich. The Pharisees were good in many ways, but had "externalized religion," (Hendricksen). Here was the best of the best – the teacher of God's covenant people, Israel; and he could not even SEE the kingdom of God. (Ph 3:4-6)

2. He came to Jesus. Affected by the Temple clearing and signs? He came "by night." Either he was timid and cautious, or just wanted an extended interview with the busy Jesus.

3. "We know." (v 2). He came to Jesus telling Him what "they" knew. Is this our approach to God? Coming to Him with a focus on US and what WE KNOW? A Teacher? Is that all?? What he thought he knew was very limited (Isaiah 55:8-9). Jesus was about to show Nicodemus that he didn't know anything.

Prepare yourselves to learn the same thing!

II. Jesus Confronts Nicodemus With the New Birth (vs 3-8).

1. Can't See or Enter God's Kingdom Unless Born Again. Jesus makes it clear that despite what man KNOWS, he cannot even SEE the Kingdom of God unless he is born again (born "from above"). Something supernatural and divine must happen to us before we can do anything for God. (**Water and the Spirit** – physical AND spiritual birth, or a reference to John's baptism of repentance, speaking of repentance and faith).

Even a Jew (and a Pharisee at that!) needs to be born again!!!! (Is 64:6)

2. Nicodemus' Misunderstanding. In another example of one of John's themes, Nicodemus takes Jesus as speaking physically instead of spiritually. He is still blind.

3. Jesus' Explanation.

A. Flesh and Spirit. (v6). Jesus declares that man cannot improve himself, or do anything to cross realms from physical to spiritual. There is NO self-improvement in the things of God. This sets Jesus apart from all other religions. Human nature can never reproduce anything better than itself. (Genesis 1 – each animal "after its kind." Nothing reproduces apart from its kind. Fallen men produce only fallen men, Phillips). Job 14:4, Ps 51:5

B. You MUST be born again. (v7). Jesus speaks of this as a necessity. Man MUST be born again, but he is unable to cause himself to be born again (what did you do to cause your physical birth?). Jesus doesn't mean, "You better do it. It means that something MUST happen to you." He does not say, "You must birth yourself;" He says, "You must BE born again." We must see our extreme inability to better ourselves spiritually and our deep need of God. We are at the mercy of God.

C. The Wind. (v8). Wind and Spirit are the same word in Greek and Hebrew. Jesus compares the moving of the Holy Spirit in regeneration to the wind. The wind's moving is:

a. Invisible. Can't see it! You can only tell the wind's there by seeing what it moves.

b. Unpredictable. It moves where it wishes. Unexpected, comes and goes.

c. Uncontrolled. Man cannot direct or attract the wind.

III. Born Again: The Doctrine of Regeneration.

1. Regeneration Defined. Regeneration is the making alive of the dead sinner, uniting Him with Christ by the Holy Spirit. Ezekiel 36:26-27, Titus 3:5

2. Regeneration Needed. Our problem is not one of sickness, but death! Ephesians 2:1-5, Eph 4:17-19 1Cor 2:14, Ezekiel 37:1-10

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:5 locates **the time regeneration takes place**: when we were dead. All attempts to give the 1st work to man are smashed with this one verse.

3. Which Comes First, Regeneration or Faith? Is the new birth a reaction by God to man's faith? Or is man's faith a result of God's gracious act of regeneration? Does the dead and sin-fallen man make an infinitely righteous decision of faith before he is made alive by God? Or does a gracious God resurrect a dead man who instantly believes on Him? **Monergism** teaches that the Holy Spirit makes us alive apart from any cooperation of our fallen, dead-to-God, unregenerate man. **Synergism** teaches that the will of the unregenerate man cooperates with the Holy Spirit of God to enact the new birth. Synergism has an idea that in the fall we didn't lose all inclination toward holiness nor all power to seek for it (Gen 6:5,8:21); a belief that there is still SOME good left in us by which we can choose Christ, respond to the Gospel in our own power. Would God command us to do something we cannot do (repent and believe)? ABSOLUTELY. The 10 commandments! We are unable to obey every command God gives us apart from His help; His grace. (Quotes) Romans 8:7, 1 Cor 4:7

When 2 billiard balls collide on a pool table, which ball strikes the other one first? They hit at the same time, though one ball (the one moving towards the other) CAUSES the strike. The Holy Spirit gives us life and we believe on Christ – in one instant. But God has taken the initiative, causing the conversion.

This is not a new teaching. This truth has been taught by Augustine, Martin Luther (who called this the heart of the reformation), John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and even the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas. They got it from Scripture.

4. Spirit and the Word. The 2 Spiritual "parents" of the new birth. 1 Peter 1:23-25, James 1:18,

5. New Birth Brings New Nature! 2Peter 1:4, 1 Pt 2:2-3, Heb 5:11-14, 2 Cor 5:17

Born Again: All things new!

Application: You must be born again! But there is nothing you can do to make yourself be born again! Acknowledge this severe lack and need on your part to God. Acknowledge that you are at His mercy. Repent of your sins, as God enables you, and look to Jesus Christ in faith!

If you are born again (with evidence and fruit) then give God glory and praise!!! He has regenerated a helpless and hopeless dead sinner who deserved hell and wrath! Glory to God!!!

Scripture References & Quotes

Ph3:4-6 – "though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: **5** circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; **6** as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless."

Isa 55:8-9 – "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. **9** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Isa 64:6 – "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."

Job 14:4 – "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one."

Ps51:5 – "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Ezekiel 36:26-27 – "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put 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 be careful to obey my rules."

Titus 3:5 – "he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,"

Eph 2:1-5 – "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved"

Eph 4:17-19 – "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is

in them, due to their hardness of heart. **19** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."

1 Cor 2:14 – "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

Ezekiel 37:1-10 Valley of Dry Bones

Gen6:5 – "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

Gen 8:21 – "And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done."

Rom8:7 – "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."

1 Cor 4:7 – "For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"

1 Peter 1:23-25 – "since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; **24** for All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, **25** but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you."

James 1:18 – "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

2 Peter 1:4 – "by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

1 Pt 2:2-3 – "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation-" **3** if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."

Heb 5:11-14 – "About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, **13** for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. **14** But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."

2 Cor 5:17 – "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Monergism: **Monergism**: In regeneration, the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ independent of any cooperation from our unregenerated human nature. He quickens us through the outward call cast forth by the preaching of His Word, disarms our innate hostility, removes our blindness, illumines our mind, creates understanding, turns our heart of stone to a heart of flesh -- giving rise to a delight in His Word -- all that we might, with our renewed affections, willingly & gladly embrace Christ. The Prophet Ezekiel inspired by the Holy Spirit asserted "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. **Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.** They will be my people, and I will be their God." (Eze 11:19, also 36:26) The Apostle Paul said, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because **our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit** and with full conviction." (1 Thess 1, 4, 5). I.e. In regeneration the word does not work alone but must be accompanied by the "germination" of the Holy Spirit. And again "...you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, **through the living and abiding word of God.**" (1 Pet 1:23)
From www.monergism.com

"We can no more assist the Holy Spirit in quickening our souls than Lazarus could help Jesus raise him from the dead."
R.C. Sproul

Could Lazarus hear Jesus' command, reason, think and choose his response and then act on it? **Was Jesus hopeful of Lazarus' ability to choose or was He confident in His power to raise the dead?**

"When ye shall see dead men raising themselves from their graves, when ye shall see them unwinding their own sheets, opening their own coffin-lids, and walking down our streets alive and animate, as the result of their own power, THEN perhaps ye may believe that souls that are dead in sin may turn to God, may recreate their own natures, and may make themselves heirs of heaven, though before they were heirs of wrath. But mark, not till then." CH Spurgeon

"Go, Arminian, and tell your hearers that they will come if they please, but know that your Redeemer looks you in the face and tells you that you are uttering a lie. Men will NOT come. They never will come of themselves. You cannot induce them to come, you cannot force them to come by all your thunders, nor can you entice them to come by all your invitations. They WILL NOT come to Christ that they may have life. Until the Spirit draws them, come they neither will, nor can." CH Spurgeon

"To say that we are able by our own efforts to think good thoughts or give God spiritual obedience before we are spiritually regenerate is to overthrow the gospel and the faith of the universal church in all ages." John Owen