

# Drawing Near to Jesus

3.17.24

Week 1 Be Born Again: Moving Beyond What We Know. John 3:1-13

Week 2 Believe in Him: Embracing a New Kind of King John 3:14-21

Week 3 Worship: Even When All Seems Impossible John 19

## **John 3:1–21** (CSB)

There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>This man came to him at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him.”

<sup>3</sup>Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

<sup>4</sup>“How can anyone be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked him. “Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?”

<sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup>Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. <sup>8</sup>The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

<sup>9</sup>“How can these things be?” asked Nicodemus.

<sup>10</sup>“Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things?” Jesus replied. <sup>11</sup>“Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup>No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man.”

<sup>14</sup>“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup>For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so

that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.”

## 1. John Introduces us to Nicodemus

A. No other writer mentions Nicodemus.

1. But John introduces him very early in Jesus’ ministry.
2. He is mentioned three times: [John 3](#), [John 7](#), and [John 19](#).
3. Each time, he draws closer to Jesus.

B. This time of year, there is an extra awareness that God is up to something.

1. Next Friday, we will host a time of prayer and laying on of hands for the sick from noon-6.
2. We have Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Resurrection Sunday.
3. There will be crosses held along the highways.
4. First Baptist puts balloons along the town on Resurrection Sunday.

C. I hope that, in our hearts, we are drawing closer to Jesus than ever before.

1. My prayer and desire is that in this season, your love for Jesus will greatly increase.
2. That the lost will be saved.

3. The sick will be healed.
4. Jesus will be glorified in us and around us.

D. Many of us in this room are asking, "What is my next step?"

1. How do I draw closer to Jesus?
2. For these next sermons leading up to Resurrection Sunday, I hope to use Nicodemus's life to show us how we draw nearer to Jesus.
3. We see what Nicodemus did, and, more importantly, we see what Jesus did.

## 2. Nicodemus was part of the knowledgeable elite.

*There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>This man came to him at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him."*

A. Nicodemus is a ruler or leader among the Pharisees.

1. The Pharisees were one of the two major Jewish groups.
  - a. The others, the Sadducees, were far more political and liberal, operated the Temple, and depended upon good relationships with the Romans.
  - b. They did not believe in the supernatural or anything outside of the first five books of the Old Testament.
2. The Pharisees were from among the ordinary people, believed in the supernatural, were very Torah or Word-focused, and were much more conservative.

B. Nicodemus, then, was a very intelligent, God-fearing man who had dedicated much of his life to knowing and learning about God.

1. He was a great candidate to see and understand who Jesus was and where He came from.

2. He had all the information and a great view of what was happening.

C. But Nicodemus came to Jesus at night.

1. More than likely that is because Nicodemus did not want to be seen with Jesus in the daytime.

- a. Nicodemus had a lot to lose.
- b. He could lose his position, his respect, and his family.
- c. Furthermore, what if Jesus wasn't the Messiah?

2. Many scholars also see a deeper interpretation because of Jesus words at the end of the passage:

<sup>19</sup> This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God."

- a. Nicodemus' coming to Jesus in the dark shows his fear but also his condition.
- b. He was still in the "dark".
- c. He knew who Jesus was, where to find him, and even how to talk with Him.
- d. But Nicodemus was still in the dark.

3. Nicodemus was close but not close enough.

A. Notice what Nicodemus knew about Jesus:

- 1. Nicodemus knew Jesus was a teacher.
- 2. Nicodemus knew Jesus was performing signs from God.
- 3. But knowing is not enough.

B. Nicodemus could not yet recognize Jesus as God and King.

1. Seeing Jesus as a moral and good teacher is not enough.
2. Calling Jesus a miracle worker from God is not enough.
  - a. Islam recognizes Jesus as a prophet and a moral man.
  - b. Many in the world today do not question the existence of a historical Jesus.
3. Nicodemus could see that God was with Him, but what he couldn't see was that Jesus was God in front of Him.

C. Question: Who is Jesus to you?

1. Jesus fulfills lots of roles in our lives:
  - a. Jesus is Savior, who keeps us from eternal death.
  - b. Jesus is our friend.
  - c. Jesus is our healer.
  - d. Jesus is our provider.
2. But Jesus, the Son of God and King, is most important.
  - a. Jesus wasn't crucified because He healed the sick.
  - b. Jesus wasn't crucified because He was a friend.
  - c. Jesus was crucified because of His claim as God and King.
  - d. Jesus was not resurrected because He was good or moral; He was resurrected to prove and confirm His position as Son of God and King.

#### 4. Entering the Kingdom of God.

A. Nicodemus' knowledge did not give him access into the Kingdom.

**John 3:3** (CSB) <sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

1. The goal, Jesus said, is to see the kingdom of God.
2. The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God.
3. Who is in charge of a “kingdom”?

B. Knowledge and works are not enough to enter the kingdom.

1. Nicodemus had the knowledge and the religious works to support him.
2. Like the Apostle Paul, Nicodemus’s zealousness and knowledge were not enough to enter the kingdom.
3. **It isn’t about what you know but who you know.**
  - a. And for people like me, we often substitute knowledge for relationship.
  - b. Knowledge is easy.
  - c. Knowledge is something I can do apart or away from people.
  - d. I was that kid in school who hated group projects.
4. *Knowledge may take you to the ticket booth of the kingdom but it doesn’t grant you entrance.*

5. Jesus said, [You must be born again.](#)

A. Nicodemus does not understand Jesus’ words.

1. How can we be physically born again?
2. Furthermore, as adults, we have a history and a past that we cannot ignore.
3. How is it possible for full-grown adults to be born again?

B. We are born again through the ministry of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

1. Jesus proclaims that unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

2. There are a few ways to interpret what Jesus meant, but the most likely interpretation is that we must be born naturally (of water) and then again through the Spirit.

3. We are not conceived and born sinless or perfect.

4. Unlike Jesus, we are born with a sinful nature.

5. Flesh births flesh and flesh dies.

C. Spirit births spirit, and spirit is everlasting.

1. This is a work only God can accomplish.

2. Our natural birth had nothing to do with us.

a. We don't choose our parents.

b. We don't choose their timing.

c. We are merely born.

3. Similarly, we cannot save ourselves by our own works or by our knowledge.

a. Salvation is a gift.

b. Peter says this in **1 Peter 1:3–4 (CSB)**

*<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead <sup>4</sup>and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.*

4. Think about our "old" birth:

a. We are born into a world of pain and despair, but Jesus gives us a birth into a living hope.

b. We are born to die, but Jesus is the first fruits of those who are raised from the dead.

c. We are born into inheritances full of sin, struggle, heartache, and pain, but Jesus gives us an inheritance that

is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading and that He is keeping safe for us in heaven.

5. To be born-again is to experience a radical alteration to our present and future existence.

## 6. How are we born-again?

A. Jesus says we are born of the Spirit by believing.

<sup>9</sup> "How can these things be?" asked Nicodemus.

<sup>10</sup> "Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?" Jesus replied.

<sup>11</sup> "Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

1. Nicodemus could not accept what he was seeing and hearing.

2. How can this be?

a. To be born again, at least how he understood it, was physically impossible.

b. Nicodemus is like many of us: he struggled with making the jump from a natural way of thinking to a spiritual way of thinking.

3. Jesus questioned Nicodemus' failure to accept his testimony.

a. If what Jesus said is true, then we must accept it.

b. Jesus' testimony is either true or false.

c. But if Jesus is speaking truth, how are we born again?

B. John 3:16: Everyone who believes in Him will have everlasting life.



1. "Jesus is referring to the miracle that takes place when the divine activity remakes anyone."<sup>1</sup>

2. Belief is the entry way or ticket into the kingdom.

a. It isn't knowledge, and it isn't hard work.

b. It's believing the testimony of Jesus.

c. Believing what?

d. That Jesus is Son of God, resurrected in power and crowned King.

C. Notice again the words of Peter:

**1 Peter 1:22–25 (CSB)**

<sup>22</sup>Since you have purified yourselves by your obedience to the truth, so that you show sincere brotherly love for each other, from a pure heart love one another constantly,<sup>23</sup> because you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God.<sup>24</sup> For

**All flesh is like grass,**

**and all its glory like a flower of the grass.**

**The grass withers, and the flower falls,**

<sup>25</sup>**but the word of the Lord endures forever.**

And this word is the gospel that was proclaimed to you.

1. Peter said we are made clean by obeying the truth.

a. And it seems that obedience and belief are part of the same coin.

b. If I believe, I obey.

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 193.

- c. Because I am born again, I can obey and be cleansed.
- d. And it's the work of Jesus that makes it possible for me to be obedient.

2. Peter said that we are born again, not of flesh but of imperishable material, through the word of God.

- a. Then he quotes the Old Testament.
- b. The flesh withers and fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

Apply: Are you ready to move beyond what you know?

A. **Here is my concern:** Many of us are close to the Kingdom but aren't there yet.

- 1. Knowing is not believing.
- 2. Works are not obedience.
  - a. Many of us in the room are growing in our knowledge.
  - b. The Bible makes more sense, the church services are more meaningful, and we are growing.
- 3. But do you believe? Are you born again?
- 4. Are you still like Nicodemus, searching for Jesus in the dark?

B. What do I do?

#1. Confess your sins to Jesus and put Him in charge.

- a. Belief is the entry into the Kingdom.
- b. And we must believe that Jesus King not only of the universe but of our lives as well.
- c. Furthermore, we believe that Jesus died for and in place of our sin and that He offers forgiveness for all who believe.

#2. Stop acting like it all depends on you.

a. This seems contradictory; we have work to do, but we aren't saved by work.

b. The difference is the purpose.

c. When we "do" in order to earn God's favor, that is works.

d. When do because we have God's favor, that is obedience.

1. I tithe not to get God's blessings but because I have God's blessing.

2. I worship because God is worthy, not because I must earn my worth.

3. I serve and obey because I have God's favor, not to earn God's favor.

e. Pray not because you have to but because you get to.

f. Read the Bible not to make God happy but because you want to draw closer to Him.

g. Worship because God has given you a song to sing, a song of the redeemed.

Prayer: God is inviting you to be closer.

A. Nicodemus had knowledge.

1. But Jesus offered life.

2. Before Nicodemus knew what questions to ask, Jesus already the answer.

B. Today I want to invite this congregation to take the next few minutes to ask Jesus to draw us closer than ever before.

1. If you've never given your life to Christ, do it now.

2. If you are living a life that is not pleasing to God, confess and change.

3. If you feel stuck, stilted, or wilted, tell Jesus and allow Him to refresh, refill, and restore.

Prayer