

Having been away from this book for several months—I want to begin with a brief review of two things—[1] John's overall purpose for writing, Jn.20:30-31—"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 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..."

John primarily uses two means to underscore Christ's identity as the eternal Son of God—[a] Various signs, and [b] various discourses—in fact He records 7 signs and 7 discourses within the first 132 chapters—often times the sign giving occasion for the discourse—what we find in 3:1-21 is our Savior first formal discourse on the new birth...

[2] The relation of our text with that which immediately precedes—at the end of chapter 2—we learned that many Jews professed to believe on Christ—but Christ did not trust them—"for He knew what was in man"—He knew man's native depravity and deception—thus John uses Nicodemus as an occasion to illustrate our Savior's knowledge...

Now—it becomes obvious as you read this passage—that the primary and central theme is regeneration or the new birth—thus I want to consider it with you this morning under two broad headings—the nature and necessity of the new birth—I then want to apply this passage along three lines of application...

- I. The Nature of the New Birth
- II. The Necessity of the New Birth
- III. Applications

I. The Nature of the New Birth

1. Before I come to consider the NATURE and NECESSITY of the new birth—let me say a few words about Nicodemus...
2. [a] He was privileged, v1—"There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews"—the Pharisees were a strict sect among the Jews...
3. They were stricter than average Jews in that they vowed to commit themselves to the traditions of the Jews...
4. In addition—Nicodemus was "a ruler of the Jews"—that is—a part of the Sanhedrin, the highest court among the Jews...
5. Thus—Nicodemus was a part of the Jewish elite—a ruler and teacher of Israel—a man of authority and knowledge...
6. [b] He was timid, v2—"This man came to Jesus by night"—that is—for fear of the other Pharisees and Jews...
7. Some have suggested that Nicodemus came by night simply because it was more likely that he would find him...
8. But—this seems very unlikely—for the other two times John mentions Nicodemus—he describes him as—"he who came to Jesus at night (Jn.7:50; 19:39)..."
9. Thus—it seems best to understand that Nicodemus was timid—he was afraid of what others would think of him...
10. Now—we do need to keep in mind—that though he was timid and came at night—he DID IN FACT come to Jesus...
11. [c] He was sincere, v2—"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these things that You do unless God is with him..."
12. The fact that Nicodemus uses the plural pronoun "we" may indicate that other Pharisees thought in a similar way as he did...
13. He says—"we know that You are a teacher come from God"—that is—a prophet or at least a miracle worker...

14. It's possible that Nicodemus was already questioning whether or not this Jesus from Nazareth was the Messiah...
15. Now—we know from the rest of John's gospel that Nicodemus later becomes a devoted follower of Christ...
16. In fact—if we examine the three times that John mentions Nicodemus—there's something of an evident progression...
17. Here in John 3—he becomes interested—in John 7 he defends Jesus—and in John 19 he assists in burying Jesus...
18. Thus—in explaining the NATURE of the new birth—I want to briefly examine three phrases found in this passage...
19. [1] Born again—our Savior twice uses the phrase—"born again" (v3,7)—literally—"born from above" with the inference being—"born a second time..."
20. We are all born once from below—that is—we are all born physically—we all need a second birth from above...
21. V4—"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..."
22. It seems likely that Nicodemus simply misunderstood what our Savior meant—he understood Him in a literal sense...
23. But surely brethren—our Savior is referring to a spiritual birth—what Scripture describes as a—new heart...
24. [2] Born of the Spirit—our Savior twice uses the phrase—"born of the Spirit" (v6,8)—"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit..."
25. To be born "of the Spirit" is to be "born by the Spirit"—the Spirit is the one who accomplishes the new birth...
26. Now—here I need to digress for a minute and point out—the verb "born" is passive and thus the KJV rightly renders it—"except a man be born again..."
27. That is—we do not birth ourselves anew—the new birth is the powerful and sovereign work of the Holy Spirit...
28. Or, put another way—the sinner is passive in the act of regeneration—we are acted upon—we are born again...
29. Theologically—sometimes you might here regeneration referred to as monergistic—that is—the work of one...
30. [a] New birth—a baby plays no part in its conception—so too—in the new birth God creates life within the soul...
31. [b] Resurrection, Jn.5:24—"Most assuredly, I say to you, he 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..."
32. A dead corps contributes nothing to its resurrection—the only thing it contributes is spiritual and moral stench...
33. [c] New creation, 2Cor.5:17—"Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new..."
34. [3] Born of water and Spirit—without doubt this is likely the most difficult phrase to understand in our text...
35. RC Sproul—"I have struggled with this text for more than forty years, but I'm still not completely sure what it means..."
36. The difficulty of course refers to the word "water"—what does it mean to be—"born of water and the Spirit..."
37. Fundamentally—there are two very possible views—both of which are clearly taught within the word of God...
38. [a] Water refers to physical birthing—that is—by water is meant water associated with natural or physical birth...
39. If this is what Jesus means then He meant—sinners must be first born physically and then born again spiritually...
40. Jn.3:6—"That which is born of the flesh is flesh (physical birth), and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (spiritual birth)..."

41. [b] Water refers to spiritual cleaning—that is—by water is meant the moral cleansing that takes place in regeneration...
42. Ezek.36:25-26—"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh..."
43. Tit.3:5—"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit..."
44. Thus—it's very possible that by "water" is meant the washing of our hearts—by or through the gospel of God...

II. The Necessity of the New Birth

1. [1] It's an ABSOLUTE necessity, v3—"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God..."
2. Every phrase in this verse underscores the absolute necessity of a new and heavenly birth—"Most assuredly"—that is—truly, truly—I am telling you the truth...
3. Throughout the four gospels—our Savior on occasion—introduced certain statements in this way—literally—Amen, Amen...
4. The Greek word "amen" means—"truly or surely"—we use it in this way when we say "amen" to something...
5. Thus Jesus begins this statement with the clear affirmation—that what He's about to say is—truthful and important...
6. Furthermore—He says—"unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom"—unless this happens this will never happen...
7. He says two things will never happen unless we are born again—v3, we cannot see the kingdom, v5, we cannot enter the kingdom...
8. Now—by "the kingdom of God" is meant—the gracious rule and reign of God within our hearts by Jesus Christ...
9. Nicodemus, along with most Jews, understood the Messiah would bring in a political kingdom upon this earth...
10. Our Savior gently rebukes him by describing His kingdom not as outward and political—but inward and spiritual...
11. Again Nicodemus, along with the Jews, thought—this kingdom would concern Jews by nature as Abraham's seed...
12. But again Jesus make clear to Nicodemus—something more than nationality was needed—a birth from above...
13. Now—I suggest that most likely by "seeing" and "entering" the kingdom means—becoming a kingdom citizen...
14. The Scriptures often use the imageries of "seeing" and "entering" to describe the workings of saving FAITH...
15. Isa.45:22—"Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth" Jn.7:37—"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink..."
16. Thus—what our Savior is teaching is—unless a person is born again—they will never see their need of a Savior and come to Christ for salvation...
17. Acts 26:17-18—"I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 'to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me..."
18. Thus—man must be born again if he is ever to enter the kingdom of God—God must give him a new heart...
19. [2] It's a UNIVERSAL necessity, v3—"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom..."
20. That is—the necessity for a new birth is universal—there's no one excepted—everyone needs a second birth...

21. Now—from the fact that Nicodemus needed a new birth—I suggest we learn five things about the universal need for a new birth...
22. [a] Jews—simply being a physical Jew wasn't enough—Jew and Gentile equally needed to be born from above...
23. Nicodemus was born with great privilege—but simply being born with religious privilege is not in itself enough...
24. [b] Educated—Nicodemus was very educated—but education isn't enough—the educated and uneducated need a new birth...
25. [c] Wealthy—from Jn.19:39—we find that Nicodemus brought 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes for Jesus' burial...
26. Thus being rich or poor makes no difference before God—every person, regardless of social standing, needs a new birth...
27. [d] Religious—Nicodemus was obviously a deeply religious person—he outwardly performed every religious duty...
28. [e] Moral—because he was a Pharisee it's likely to assume—he lived outwardly moral and was even kind to others...
29. Thus—it makes no difference who or what we are by nature—we are all equally in need of a new birth from above...

III. Applications

A. By way of INSTRUCTION

1. That is—I suggest from this passage—that we behold in Christ a perfect example of what sinners need to hear...
2. I remember several years ago being told by someone—that it was wrong to tell sinners they have to be born again...
3. But—this runs contrary to the example of our Savior—who told Nicodemus three times—that he needed to be born again...
4. Now—we must bear in mind—that our Savior's conversation with Nicodemus actually runs through verse 21...
5. So—our Savior didn't merely tell Nicodemus about the new birth—but also the love and judgment of God...
6. But—the question I want to here address is this—why would our Savior tell someone they needed God to do something to them...
7. Now—before I answer that question—let me first suggest two broad principles that we need to keep in mind...
8. [1] Sinners are never told to wait for God to give them new birth—they are never told to simply do nothing...
9. [2] Sinners are dealt with as rational creatures—this is to say—the Spirit gives new life in connection to the gospel...
10. 1Pet.1:23—"you have been born again...through the word of God"—thus sinners must be taught the truth about themselves...
11. [a] To show the sinner's WICKEDNESS—that is—they must know that by their first birth they are ONLY flesh...
12. Jn.3:6—"That which is born of the flesh is flesh"—it's fallen and corrupt humanity—it's enmity against God...
13. Brethren—every person born according to the flesh is ONLY flesh—we all born fleshly, carnal, and depraved...
14. Gen.5:3—"And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot *a son* in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth..."
15. Job 14:4—"Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? No one"—that is—that which is born of the flesh is flesh..."

16. [b] To show the sinner's WEAKNESS—that is—they must know that they possess no native ability to remedy their condition...
17. Jn.6:44—"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day..."
18. This drives the sinner away from dependence upon himself—it drives him away from himself to Christ for mercy...

B. By way of EXAMINATION

1. Here I want to provide three marks of the new birth for the purpose of self-examination—that we might know whether or not we have been born again...
2. Now—before I provide these evidences (marks)—let me remind you the work of God in the new birth is mysterious..
3. V8—"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..."
4. In other words—there are certain similarities between the way the wind blows and the way the Spirit works...
5. Nobody knows how the wind blows or commands it to blow—the wind blows sovereignly and mysteriously...
6. But—wherever the wind blows it leaves effects—you can tell the wind has blown by the effects that it leaves...
7. For example, even a light breeze moves the trees—and a stronger wind can bend the trees and even uproot them...
8. The same is true of the Spirit of God—while the Spirit blows upon whom He wills—He always leaves a trail...
9. Thus—I want to suggest there are three fundamental and universal effects that result whenever the Spirit blows upon a sinner...
10. [1] They TRUST the King—those who've entered the kingdom—have renounced their own righteousness and embraced His righteousness...
11. [2] They LOVE the King—that is—they not only take Him as their Savior—but they also take Him as their Husband...
12. [3] They OBEY the King—every person who enters the kingdom—does so in submission to Christ as Lord...
13. Isa.45:22-25—"Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I *am* God, and *there is* no other. I have sworn by Myself; The word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness, And shall not return, That to Me every knee shall bow, Every tongue shall take an oath. He shall say, 'Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength. To Him *men* shall come, And all shall be ashamed Who are incensed against Him. In the LORD all the descendants of Israel Shall be justified, and shall glory..."
14. Jer.23:5-6—"Behold, *the* days are coming, says the LORD, that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this *is* His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS..."

C. By way of EXHORTATION

1. Here I simply want to speak to those who are unregenerate—who have only been born once and never by the Spirit...
2. [1] Get convinced of what you are by nature
3. [2] Get convinced that without a new birth you will never go to heaven
4. [3] Get convinced that unless God give you a new birth you will never have one
5. [4] Get convinced that Christ in His atoning death has secured everything for you even a new birth