

**Lighthouse Bible Church**

**September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

**John 3: 1 – 10**

**‘You must be Born Again’**

*scripture reading Phil. 3: 1 - 9*

**Stand – Read – Pray**

John had just finished, in Chapter 2, giving an example of people who believed in His name. But it was nothing more than a superficial belief based on the signs they saw that would meet their selfish needs and not on the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lamb of God that can take away their sin.

Because Jesus knows the hearts of the people, He knows those who are truly converted and those who are playing religion, those who are keeping the rules, those who are religious but lost because they put their faith in their religious practices. And we are about to meet one of those in a minute.

He knows those who truly recognize that they are sinners and deserve punishment for their sin, as the tax collector did in Luke 18, and those who are seeking a quick fix to personal problems or to have some felt need met or to have some type of emotional experience.

Jesus didn't receive everyone who came to Him did He? The rich young ruler went away sorrowful when He came to Jesus asking how to be saved, **Matthew 19: 16 – 26**. The 3 people who came to Him saying they would follow Him but... they had to do something first in **Luke 9: 57 – 62**.

The reason He doesn't receive everyone who comes to Him is because, as Verses 24 and 25 of chapter 2 said, **He knows all people and He knows what is in them, He knows what is in their hearts.**

And that brings us to our passage where we see someone else come to see Jesus and we see what Jesus has to say to him, because He knows his heart as well, and it is a man named Nicodemus who is a Pharisee. So let's look at it starting in Verse one.

**Verse One: There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.**

This man, Nicodemus, was a very religious man but he was also not a born again believer, he was lost in his sin and on his way down the broad path that leads to destruction in a Christless eternity in hell.

He was what is called a **Pharisee**, the religious elite. That word Pharisee means 'a separated one' or someone who is set apart. They set themselves apart from everyone else by the zeal for keeping the law of Moses and for keeping the traditions that they had made from the law.

The Pharisees are the ones who John the Baptist, in **Matthew 3: 7** called **brood of vipers**. They were the ones that Jesus denounced in **Matthew Chapter 23** when He said:

They bind heavy burdens hard to bear and don't lift one finger themselves  
All of their works are to be seen by men  
They loved to be called Rabbi  
They shut up the kingdom of heaven so they nor others can get in  
They travel land and sea to win one proselyte and make him 2 fold a ...  
They are like whitewashed tombs, clean outside and filthy inside

In **Matthew 15: 12 – 14** they are called **blind leaders of the blind**. They are the ones that **2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3: 5** says **have a form of godliness but deny its power**. Religion to them was everything on the outside with nothing on the inside and they were, and still are, the hardest to reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They had reduced the law of Moses to a list of do's and don'ts and then had a whole bunch of sub-laws that they carried out and expected the people to carry out, that were utterly ridiculous. But that was the essence of religion to them, it was the epitome of legalism.

Many of these laws were made specifically for keeping the Sabbath day holy. The original law said 'remember the Sabbath day to keep in holy and don't do any work on that day'. So the Pharisees and others had to decide what work was and came up with a whole list, hundreds of things, that you couldn't do on the Sabbath day. That was the essence of pleasing God and religion to them.

Ladies, especially you older ladies, would not want to live in those days. They had a rule that you could not look into a looking glass, which would be the equivalent of our mirrors. And the reason being is that you might see a gray hair and pull it out. Pulling out a hair is considered work and you would have violated the Sabbath day.

They believed that there was only one way to God and that was in the keeping of the law. That is why **Romans 3: 20, 28** says **by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight and that a man is justified by faith, apart from the law. Galatians 2: 16** says it as clearly as anything: **a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.**

And the Apostle Paul, he was a Pharisee. That passage that was read earlier Paul said that **he wanted to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.**

Well, Nicodemus was no ordinary Pharisee, he was also a **ruler of the Jews**, he was part of the elite group of Pharisees known as the Sanhedrin.

They ruled over the civil, criminal and religious laws of the Jews and, according to Verse 10, Nicodemus was **the teacher of Israel**. He was the foremost in the knowing and the teaching of the law to the nation of Israel.

This ruler of the Jews, this teacher of all Israel comes to Jesus, look at it in Verse 2.

**Verse 2: this man came to Jesus 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.**

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night and he comes to Him because he recognizes Jesus as a teacher, a Rabbi, come from God. And it was, undoubtedly, because he was in Jerusalem for the Passover and heard and saw the signs that Jesus had done and concluded that He was from God because **no one could do those signs unless God is with Him.**

But, like the many of chapter 2 who believed, it was a superficial non-saving belief that Nicodemus had because of what he had seen. Jesus knew that Nicodemus was merely acknowledging what He had done and then classified Him as a teacher from God, a miracle worker.

And you know, there are many people, even today, who believe in Jesus, but they too believe that He was only a good teacher or a miracle worker but not God in human form who alone can atone for their sin. Look how Jesus answers in V3

**Verse 3 Jesus answered and said to him, ‘most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’**

Jesus doesn't respond to his statement but answers the question that Nicodemus never asked but had in his heart, because, as Verse 25 of Chapter 2 said, Jesus knew what was in man. He knew the heart of Nicodemus and He knew what Nicodemus was thinking.

Nicodemus wanted to see and be a part of the **kingdom of God** and he thought that through his religious practices he was there or at least moving in that direction.

That phrase **kingdom of God** deals with the spiritual realm of those who have been saved, been born again by the power of God, through faith and become a part of God's kingdom both now and eternally.

Remember the rich young ruler of **Matthew 19: 16 – 26** that wanted eternal life, wanted to be in the kingdom of God? Jesus said in **Matthew 19: 24** **it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to (what) enter the kingdom of God.** The disciples response was **who then can be saved?** And Jesus said **with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**

You see, for Nicodemus, he was busily trying to earn his way into this kingdom by all the religious things that he was doing. All of these ritual practices and observance of the laws and sacrifices, over the years, were his way of passionately trying to get into the kingdom of God.

So Jesus tells Nicodemus **unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of heaven.** You can't get into heaven, you can experience salvation, you can't please God with all of your religion; you have to have a transformed heart. He says you have to start all over again, be a baby again, be like a little child and have a child-like faith.

For Nicodemus to hear this would have been frustrating for him, at the least. He is thinking, you mean I have done all of these religious things all of this time and it doesn't help me at all? Jesus says, no it doesn't help at all.

That is why **Romans 3: 20, 28** says **by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight and that a man is justified by faith, apart from the law.** Because, as **James 2:10** says **he who keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, is guilty of all.**

You see, religion, being religious, doing religious things, can't save you. Going through all the religious motions has no spiritual value, in God's sight whatsoever, and brings no one any closer to Him. We are looking at some of the churches in Revelation on Thursday evenings that were doing the same thing.

Nicodemus was in the wrong family and not a part of God's family. Remember what Jesus said of the religious leaders in **John 8: 44** **you are of your Father the devil.** Nicodemus needed to be born again into a new family, the family of God, not by works of righteousness but by faith. Look at Nicodemus' response to that in Verse 4.

**Verse 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?.**

Nicodemus had not misinterpreted what Jesus said as something that must be physically done, he was in essence saying that it is a physical impossibility to go back into my mother's womb and so You're telling me it is spiritually impossible, in and of myself, to get into the kingdom of God, that I already thought I was in.

Nicodemus knew that Jesus was asking something of him that was not humanly possible; to be born again, just like the disciples said in Matthew 19 **with man it is impossible....**

What Jesus is in essence saying to him is ‘you had not part in your own physical birth, so too, you have no part in your own spiritual birth into the kingdom of God’. This meant that Nicodemus would have to give up everything, all of his human efforts, all of his religion, all of his works righteousness system that he thought would get him to heaven and please God, and be born again.

You know Paul, a Pharisee steeped in religion, was confronted with the same choice and he said in **Philippians 3: 7 – 9 what things were gain to me I count loss for Christ. I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ....**

In that statement of Nicodemus’ in verse 4, he is asking for some clarification as to how he can see and enter the kingdom of God, because he doesn’t understand how that can happen apart from works. So Jesus answers that in Verse 5

**Verse 5 Jesus answered ‘most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**

Jesus is saying that you need to be born again to see or enter the kingdom of God in salvation and He says this is how you do it. You must be **born of water and the Spirit**. In other words, in order to be saved you must be born of water and the Spirit.

What does that mean, because if that is how someone is born again and saved in that time, it is the same in our time today? What does it mean to be born of water and the Spirit?

Well, some people take this verse to mean that you must be baptized to be saved. Well, that is not what this verse is saying. I have listed some verses in your bulletin that show that baptism is not a part of salvation.

*1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1: 14 – 17, Acts 11: 13 – 17, Acts 10: 47 – 48, Acts 8: 35 – 37, John 3: 23, Acts 16: 31, Luke 23: 40 – 43, Luke 1: 77 – 78, Romans 6: 3 -4, Ephesians 2: 8 – 9, John 5: 24, 3: 16, 36, 6: 40, 47, 11: 25, Acts 26: 18, John 7: 38 – 39*

Look with me at **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1: 14 – 17** Read

Look with me at **Acts 10: 44 – 48**

So this passage, as some may think, is not talking about being baptized to be a part of God's kingdom. That would contradict what the Bible says about being saved by grace through faith and (what) that not of yourselves. That would be a work of the law that Paul said no one could be justified by or saved by.

What Jesus is saying here and what Nicodemus would have understood Him to be saying is that the water represented, symbolically, the Old Testament act of purification and cleansing and spiritual renewal, as it did many places in the Old Testament.

Turn with me to **Ezekiel 36: 24 – 27** Read

It is they symbolism of the cleansing by water that is accomplished by the Spirit of God in the heart. In other words, what Jesus is saying is 'except a man be cleansed and purified, a work that only the Holy Spirit can do, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.



How does that cleansing and purifying work? What does **Ephesians 5: 26** say **Christ will sanctify and cleanse His church (how) by the washing of water by the WORD.**

It is the Word of God that the Spirit of God uses to regenerate, transform, purify and cleanse a sinful, dirty heart. We are in essence, at that moment, baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit. That is why **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12: 13** says that **for by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body.**

Jesus tells Nicodemus that it is nothing that you can do that can transform and regenerate your heart and open the way to the kingdom of God, but the transforming power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit of God that changes a person. *I am not ashamed of the gospel faith comes by hearing and ...*

Jesus then answers another thought that may have been in the mind of Nicodemus. ‘There has to be something that I have to do to be saved, isn’t there? So Jesus says in Verse 6

**Verse 6 that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**

He says whatever is born of the physical flesh can only produce more physical flesh and nothing more. Can an Ethiopian change his color or a leopard his spots **Jeremiah 13: 23** asks. Can you be saved on your own Nicodemus, no? And that which is **born of the Spirit** produces spiritual transformation that results in entering the kingdom of heaven.

What Jesus has been saying to Nicodemus flies in the face of everything that he had been taught and known about salvation. He believed that, based on his works, that he was good enough and religious enough to get into the kingdom of heaven and now he hears that he is not and it has all been for nothing. So Jesus says to him in Verse 7

**Verse 7 do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.**

Again, Jesus knows exactly what Nicodemus is thinking and he is marveling at what Jesus was saying. He was in awe, he was astounded, he was taken back by what Jesus was saying. That is what that word **marvel** means.

It was hard for Nicodemus to hear, but he had to hear it in order for him to realize that all of his righteous, religious acts were nothing more than filthy rags in God's sight and that only by the power of the Spirit of God could someone enter the kingdom of heaven and be born again.

Nicodemus is saying 'it can't be that easy can it'? 'Don't I have to do something?' 'You mean all this time I have been wrong?' I don't understand how it can all be inside and not without my help, I have to see it to believe it'. 'How can it be true if I can't feel it or touch it or see it or do something'?

Jesus said let Me explain what I mean, let Me give you an illustration from nature that you will understand. Look at Verse 8

**Verse 8 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.**

Jesus says ‘Nicodemus, you can’t see the wind but you know it is there by the results it produces, leaves rustling, trees swaying or dirt kicking up. You don’t see the wind and you don’t know where it comes from or where it goes but you can see what it does.

Well, it is the same way with the Holy Spirit regenerating a person’s heart and soul, changing them from a lost sinner to a saved born again believer. That is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says you don’t have to see it to believe that someone can be born again by the Spirit of God so that they can enter the kingdom of heaven. You know what the wind can do by the results, look at what the Spirit of God does by the results.

**Verse 9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, ‘how can these things be’?**

He is no better off now than he was in verse 4, he still doesn’t get it. As I thought about that, when you share your faith with someone, they may not get it the first or 10<sup>th</sup> time either, but you continue to share as you have opportunity.

You have friends and family who are very religious but they are lost and not born again. You need to continue to share with them and trust the Spirit of God for the outcome. Like Nicodemus, they may be steeped in their religious works and not willing to let go.

After this point we do not hear about Nicodemus for some time and the indications from this passage are that he does not come to faith in Christ. But something happened to him, at some point later, he was willing to defend Jesus before the Sanhedrin in **John 7: 50 – 51** and helped Joseph of Arimathea to prepare Jesus’ body for burial **John 19: 38 – 39** says.

Then in **Verse 10** Jesus says **are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things?**

You who know the entire Old Testament almost from memory, you who teach the people the law of God, you who hold to all of the traditions and laws down to the minutest detail, you don't know these things.

The implication is that if he doesn't know it, then the nation of Israel doesn't know it either and he didn't and they didn't either. That is why Paul says in **Romans 10: 1** **brethren, my hearts desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness have not submitted to the righteousness of God.**

The same question can be asked of people who are the 'leaders and teachers' of others in churches and parishes and synagogues Bible studies and home groups or anywhere today. You don't know these things?

You see, so many today teach the very same things that Nicodemus taught. If you just keep performing these **ceremonies** or these **rituals** or these **traditions** or keep these requirements, you will be on your way to the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus would say the same thing to you today. All of your religion wont do you a bit of good when it comes to entering the kingdom of heaven. Only the new birth that comes by a genuine repentance in saying that you are not good enough or religious enough to get to heaven and then putting your faith and trust in Jesus as your Savior from sin. Then and only then can you be born again.

You must be born again in order to see or enter heaven. Are you?

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Introduction and Review

Matthew 19: 16 – 26, Luke 9: 57 – 62

Verse One: Nicodemus, a Pharisee and Ruler of the Jews

Matthew 3: 7, Matthew 23, Matthew 15: 12 – 14  
2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3: 5, Romans 3: 20,28 Galatians 2:16

Verse Two: He came to Jesus by night

Verse Three: Unless one is born again he can't see ...

Matthew 19: 24, James 2: 10, John 8: 44

Verse Four: How can a man be born when he is old

Philippians 3: 7 – 9

Verse Five: Unless one is born of water and the Spirit

*Acts 11: 13 – 17, 10: 47 – 48, 8: 35 – 37, 16: 31*  
*John 3: 23,36, 5: 24,6:40,47, 11:25, 7:38-39*  
*Luke 23: 40- 43, 1: 77-78, Acts 26: 18*  
*Romans 6: 3-4, Ephesians 2:8 – 9, Acts 10: 44-48*  
Ezekiel 36: 24 – 27, Ephesians 5: 26  
1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12: 13

Verse 6: Born of the flesh or the Spirit

Jeremiah 13: 23

Verses 7 – 9: You must be born again of the Spirit

John 7: 50 – 51, John 19: 38 – 39

Verse 10: You are a Teacher and you don't know these things

Romans 10: 1

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