

INI Hymns:
2nd Sunday in Lent

John 3:1-17

Sermon 26-16
3/1/26

“3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 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.’ 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 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.’ 9 Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ 10 Jesus answered him, ‘Are you 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 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. 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. 16 ‘For God so loved the world, 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.’”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This is such a familiar text, one that you have probably heard or read many times. But it contains such profound, life changing truths that it is worth looking at again. It is all about a man coming in the dark to see the Light of the world. Jesus told Him He needed to be Born Again! Let’s explore that beautiful and important concept.

Born Again!

1. Its Necessity, 2. Its Cause, 3. Its Result,

-I- First we consider the Necessity of being Born Again.

Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Being Born Again is absolutely necessary for salvation. You can’t even “SEE the kingdom of God,” much less enter it, unless you have been born again.

Jesus explains why, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” We are born of sinful parents and that is what we inherit, sinful flesh that is spiritually dead. Not only that, but Paul says, “The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other.”

Galatians 5:17 That is why you simply cannot see or understand the things of the Spirit until you have been born again by the Spirit.

One time, years ago, I was coming out of a nursing home carrying my Bible, and one of the residents there saw the Bible in my hand and asked, "Do you find anything good in that book?" I said yeah, sure it's all good. Then he started ranting with cursing and said he doesn't see anything good in there. It was really quite sad, a man who would soon be standing before God yet he couldn't see the Kingdom of God or its goodness. He really demonstrated Jesus' point.

Nicodemus himself is proof of Jesus' words. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. He spent his life working in the church and studying God's word. Yet he didn't understand the basics of God's kingdom and the working of the Spirit. He asked Jesus, "How can these things be?" Jesus said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?" Still today someone can be a teacher of Scripture and not understand what the Bible is about. The natural mind of man will always and only understand the way of the Law. If I do what is right I will be rewarded, if I do what is wrong I will be punished. Salvation by grace makes no sense at all to the human flesh. Human nature wants to have some reason for pride in our own achievement.

So being born again is absolutely necessary. The next question then is, "How one can be Born Again?"

-II- What is Its Cause or Source?

Have you ever known anyone who decided they were going to be born into the world? Did you choose who your parents were? We have absolutely no say about where, when, how or to whom we are born. We don't get to make those decisions. That's why Jesus describes our conversion, our coming to faith in Christ, as being born again. He indicates that it is not something we can decide or choose. In the very first chapter of John's Gospel God says, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." That sounds like everyone had a choice whether to receive Jesus or not. Except the very next verse goes on to say about those who did receive Him, they "were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:11-13) It wasn't by their will or by any other human's will. It was purely by God's will that they were born again. That's why Jesus says, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." The Holy Spirit is the cause of our new birth.

This is a difficult thing to grasp because what we see is that some people receive Jesus and believe in Him and some people don't believe and reject Jesus. It seems like their choice both ways. But God tells us that the natural, unconverted person does not have the spiritual ability to choose to follow Christ. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Therefore we are only able to reject God, unless and until we have been born of God. That's why Jesus compares the working of the Spirit to the wind blowing. You can't actually see the wind, you only see and hear the results of the wind. "So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." You can't see the Spirit working in the heart, you only see the results in a person's life. So it looks like the person made the choice to believe and confess Christ as their

Saviour, but God tells us that was the work of the Holy Spirit. He gave them a heart to believe. The Apostle Peter confirms, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” 1 Peter 1:3.

We can see that in Nicodemus. He came to Jesus and said, “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.” God used the miracles that Jesus performed to draw people’s attention. Nicodemus said, “WE know that you are a teacher come from God...” All the Pharisees and Priests could see that. God was drawing them through that obvious truth, yet their sinful stubbornness still rejected Jesus because they didn’t want to give up their hope and trust in their own works. But God kept drawing Nicodemus’ heart. Against his own natural inclination to trust in himself and against his fear of rejection by the rest of the Council, God was drawing him to find out more about Jesus.

Jesus’ words drew him in even more. Somewhere along the line, whether it was that night or some time later, the Holy Spirit finally broke through his hard heart and caused Nicodemus to be born again. When Jesus died, Nicodemus finally trusted God enough to come out as a follower of Jesus and take Jesus’ body to bury Him together with another council member, Joseph of Arimathea. The Holy Spirit keeps working away at the natural resistance with His Word until He brings the individual to faith. Jesus talks about being born of “Water and the Spirit.” That is a reference to baptism. What a blessing that we are able to bring our children to God in Baptism and the Spirit works that faith in their heart before the natural heart becomes hardened in unbelief.

-III- Finally we want to see The Blessed Result of being Born Again.

When Jesus said, “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” that indicates that the first glorious result of being born again is that you can see the Kingdom of God. You can see what the majority of people in the world cannot see. We can see Jesus ruling all things. We can see God's loving hand in all things. We see a King who looks at His subjects as His own children and truly does everything for their good not His own.

One of the most cherished passages in the Bible is found in this text. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” The verses before explain it more fully. “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” Jesus tells Nicodemus that He had “descended from heaven.” He is not just a teacher from God, He’s God who came from heaven. AND He is going to be lifted up and hung on a pole like that serpent in the wilderness. Everyone who was bitten by the poisonous snakes in the wilderness could look at the snake on the pole and be healed. So we have been poisoned by sin, but Jesus says, “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.” We see a King, no we HAVE a King who would rather suffer and die on a

cross than to see His children suffer for their sins.

Jesus gave Himself for us so that we not only can see the Kingdom of God, looking on from the outside, we have entered the Kingdom of God. We are members of that Kingdom and recipients of all the blessings of God's Kingdom. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." You have received every spiritual blessing, love, joy, peace, the ability to pray to God any time for any need, and the list goes on, but the greatest is God's grace and forgiveness, a clean conscience, and life with God, we can " dwell in the shelter of the most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty." (Psalm 91:1)

Best of all, we receive eternal life in the presence of God where we will see His full glory with our own eyes. Rejoice that you have been born again and can see what others do not see. Rejoice even more that you have Jesus as your King, the King who serves us with His life.

The description of being born again suggests another amazing result of this new birth, that is that we become a new person. When you were born into this world, you were a totally new individual, completely unique. You were not reincarnated from some other form of life. So it is when you are Born Again, you become a completely new person. You are given a new heart and spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 God says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." God gives us the power and ability to live like the new creation that we are. We live to glorify God. The new person that God has caused to be born is like Christ. "Therefore," Paul urges us, "be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Ephesians 5:1-2

We now have the power and ability to be like Christ. With Christ and the Holy Spirit living in us, we are able to love one another as Christ loved us. We can forgive one another as Christ forgives us. Which means we forget the wrongs done, and don't hold anything against anyone. No matter what they may have done to us, we can be like Jesus and not let it affect the way we treat them. It is a love that looks beyond the wrongs they have done to see a person God loves dearly and you can show them God's love and forgiveness. This doesn't come naturally to us. In fact it goes totally contrary to our human nature that still clings to us. But remember, you are not the person you once were. You have been born again. You are a child of the Living God. We are to imitate our Father and love like Jesus our brother. When you find that difficult, even when you fail at that, look to your Saviour again in repentance. He will forgive you and fill your new heart with such great love it will spill over to all others. Thank God for a new heart and life, may we live in it always.

Amen.