

Mountain View 12 — You Must Be Born Again

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Introduction (Connection):

[Invite to John 3]

I'm going to go ahead and start off this morning by admitting something that I wish were totally different about me and my faith and passion for the expansion of God's kingdom around the world.

First off, let me say, my wife and I both graduated with degrees in missions; we wanted to go to unreached tribal groups and preach the gospel and plant churches.

We both have been on numerous missions trips all over the globe, from Papua New Guinea, to Morocco, Brazil, Mexico, and The Dominican Republic.

In 9th grade, I did cold turkey street evangelism in Central Park of New York City, which was a wake up call because there are some wacky people in New York City.

I even spoke to a guy in West Harlem on the banks of the Hudson River who claimed he was a god and we were all gods.

Being in 9th grade, I had no clue how to respond to that, so I was just like, "Ok, have a great day!"

I wish I had been like, "Prove it! Make light! Part the Hudson River and walk over to New Jersey. No wait, if your a god you can do better than that Walk on the water!"

But, usually my witty remarks are thought of two to three years after I have a conversation.

Anyway, all this to say, I've had some experiences all over the world in preaching Jesus.

Can I tell you one thing that absolutely terrifies me though?

Sharing my faith with someone locally, especially with people who are in my social circles, whether it be with a friend who doesn't know Jesus or a regular acquaintance.

Am I the only one that is just terrified of that?

I know its needed, I know their souls are worth going after, but I get unnerved by the idea of being looked at as a religious wacko.

How do have a conversation that seems natural and yet is about supernatural things?

Well, I've always believed Jesus is the perfect evangelist, someone who knows how to share the gospel with lost people perfectly, and today's text is actually a story about this exact topic: how to share Jesus with lost people.

We're entering a section of the Gospel of John that shares a few stories about how Jesus engages with lost people of extremely diverse

backgrounds, starting with a religious Jew¹, then an adulterous woman at the well,² a Gentile official,³ a crippled man,⁴ and much more.

And we're going to look at all of these stories as case studies on how to share Jesus with people who don't know or have Jesus coming from very different places.

First up, a man named Nicodemus.

Exposition:

John 3:1-8 — 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."

One of the main topics we'll be addressing today is the need to be Born Again.

¹ 3:1-15

² 4:1-26

³ 4:43-53

⁴ 5:1-15

Let's make a [case profile of Nick](#) here.

The first thing we see about Nicodemus in our text is that he is...

Morally Religious

First, in v. 1 we see he is a **Pharisee**, meaning he was zealous for truth over emotion, zealous for right and wrong, believing that doing right and not doing wrong secured God's favor and blessing and future life with Him.

Also, he is a **Ruler of the Jews**, meaning he was on the ruling council, referred to elsewhere as the Sanhedrin, the same council that plotted Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, held his illegal trial and condemned him to death.

Secondly we see that Nick is...

Spiritually Curious

Did Jesus go after Nick or did Nick go after Jesus? Nicodemus approached Jesus according to v. 2, which says a lot about the state of his willingness to investigate a theology or belief outside of his own.

And not only that, he admits some serious truths about who Jesus is.

In v. 2 He says Jesus is a **Rabbi, a teacher come from God...** that God was with Jesus like he was with Jeremiah or Moses,⁵ but that's not all Jesus is, right?

In reality, Nick is one of the most open-minded individuals we'll ever find in any of the gospels.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 186–187.

And yet, ultimately, we know the most critical part of Nick's profile is that he is...

Unilluminated

He isn't truly saved by faith under new covenant terms and conditions; we know this primarily for two reasons:

First, Nick approaches Jesus during the night time.

Sure, this may be because he was ashamed of going to Jesus and wanted to hide the reality of his curiosity.

But the night means more: the best clue of its meaning comes with how night is used elsewhere in the gospel.

In each instance⁶ the word night is used metaphorically for moral and spiritual darkness.

Sure, he came to Jesus in the darkness of nighttime, but his own 'night' was blacker than he knew.⁷

That's the first reason we know this; the second is the reason for Nick approaching Jesus.

It was because of the signs Jesus was doing: ***no one can do these signs you do unless God is with him.***

⁶ 3:2; 9:4; 11:10; 13:30.

⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 186.

Remember what we learned two weeks ago about a faith that comes to Jesus because of the signs he does? Jesus doesn't entrust himself to those who trust in Jesus with a consumeristic faith.

Nicodemus comes as an emissary of all those people who were believing in Jesus only when they saw him do signs; he isn't relating to Jesus with a faith that wants Jesus or sees his signs as a means to the end that is Jesus himself.

Therefore, what's happening here is the Perfect Evangelist is evangelizing someone who is morally religious, spiritually curious, and yet unilluminated.

This stands in juxtaposition to the woman at the well who is quite the opposite: a broken, sinful adulterous woman ashamed of her sin.

So already, we see this major point already made about evangelism and who needs Jesus:

No matter how well put together, good, or clean you are, no matter if you're an intellectual, if you try to be a good person and always do what is right, you must be born again.

What's even crazier is... isn't this the profile of a majority of the people in Wayne County, in NEPA?

I have found that most of the people I run into and have conversations with who wouldn't say they're a born again, evangelical Christian still have an inclination to morality and doing what is good, an openness towards spiritual truths, and still they don't relate to God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

I have the statistics to back that up too, though it wasn't easy to track down.

Of the people in Wayne County, 48% don't declare a religion at all.

30% are Catholic, 14% are mainline, and only 3% are Protestant Evangelical, which is what we are.⁸

All around us are people who match this exact profile!

This doesn't get any more precise for how we can share Jesus!

So how does Jesus handle this evangelism opportunity?

Well, we know he doesn't respond to Nick with "Awwww shucks! You're took kind! I'm so glad you think I'm that! I mean, you know, it's whatever you want to believe these days anyway, am I right? Alright, see ya!"

This is what he says:

v. 3 — Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Let me first explain what Jesus means by the Kingdom of God.

Jews in Jesus' day were awaiting the day of a Messiah that would come and conquer the world, transform the soul of every Jew to live in line with the promises and commands of God, to recreate and renew all of fallen creation, and to live under the rule and reign of the Son of David, the LORD's servant, the LORD himself, a Messianic Age that would mark the end of history.⁹

⁸ <http://www.city-data.com/city/Honesdale-Pennsylvania.html>

⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 188.

So Nick would have heard Jesus' words "to see the kingdom of God" as "to participate in the kingdom at the end of the age, to experience eternal, resurrection life."¹⁰

Nick would have also understood that the way to enjoy the Kingdom of God was by being born a Jew and living according to the Law of God.¹¹

And yet, Jesus is saying the way to see and enter the kingdom of God is by being born again, or born from above.

The common ingredient here is a theological word called:

Regeneration ("New Birth", "Born Again")

To generate means to bring about, or to create, so to regenerate means to "recreate" or "re-new."

The coming kingdom at the end is often thought of as a regeneration or recreation of the world, but what Jesus is saying here is that what is required is the regeneration of the individual before the end of the world in order to enter the kingdom.

In other words, it is the future regeneration of creation coming into you now; God making you new, making you a new creature.

You know what this isn't?

The New Birth isn't turning over a new leaf, it is a new nature.

It isn't an improvement of the old, semi-good nature.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 188-198.

It isn't an amendment of a part but the renewal of the whole nature, which means that everything in us is defective and needs to be made new.¹²

And that comes about through the new birth!

How though? How can such an amazing and eternal gift such as being born again be given to such undeserving, rebellious people?

Jesus answers that question in v. 5.

v. 5 — Unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

This one has caused all sorts of problems throughout the ages, because he says, "water and spirit."

Well, what's he mean by water and spirit?

Some have suggested that water refers to Christian Baptism, or John the Baptist's baptism of repentance, but that argument doesn't hold much water (get it) because no where else in Jesus' discourse here or his preaching elsewhere does he tie in baptism with salvation.¹³

¹² (Calvin, 1. 63) D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 190.

¹³ D.A. Carson comments, "*If water = baptism is so important for entering the kingdom, it is surprising that the rest of the discussion never mentions it again: the entire focus is on the work of the Spirit (v. 8), the work of the Son (vv. 14–15), the work of God himself (vv. 16–17), and the place of faith (vv. 15–16).*" *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 192.

Some have suggested this is just talking about our first physical birth, since that is of a clear, watery-like substance, "oh my water broke!" It's not really water.

The problem is that no where in ancient antiquity did they ever referred to natural birth being "of water."

Here is the most likely understanding of this passage based on the Old Testament usage.

Water in the OT was habitually used to refer to renewal or cleansing, especially when it is found in conjunction with 'spirit.'¹⁴

This is most clear in...

Ezekiel 36:25-27 — "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ 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."¹⁵

So basically, God is promising this blessing of both cleansing from sin with water and filling with God's presence by his Spirit.

If you remember last week, when we studied the temple, what were the two provisions the temple supplied for God's people?

1) Atonement for sin

¹⁴ cf. Nu. 19:17–19; Ps. 51:9–10; Is. 32:15; 44:3–5; 55:1–3; Je. 2:13; 17:13; Ezk. 47:9; Joel 2:28–29; Zc. 14:8

¹⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eze 36:25–27.

2) Access to God

And here, God is saying there will be a new birth where I will wash you clean from all your sin and I will come in and dwell in you.

The New Birth is how we become the temple of God; being born again is the practical application of your salvation!

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...”

1 Peter 1:3 — “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...”

Application/Challenge:

There are so many more passages we could quote, but several of them mention some of the things that happen to us, some of the changes we see in us as a result of the New Birth; of them, two are primary.

Being born again gives you a new sensibility and identity.¹⁶

New Sensibility

Go back to

v. 3 — unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

¹⁶ Tim Keller, “You Must Be Born Again” (sermon, The Gospel Coalition’s 2019 National Conference, April 1, 2019), available online at <https://youtu.be/m4CuRYHvkTI> [accessed online August 29, 2019].

Nicodemus approaches Jesus thinking he can see something of who Jesus is in the miracles, but Jesus says no one can see, or perceive, the saving reign of God unless he's born again.

Let me try to illustrate what this means.

This painting by Pablo Picasso is called the weeping woman, painted in 1937.

I've stared at this painting for a significant amount of time this week trying to perceive what all is going on here and here's what I came up with: I see a woman with a nasty condition and needs her face put back together.

Do you think I'm understanding this painting rightly? No.

We could have people come in and expound for hours on the hues of color he chose and analyzing each brush stroke and the intensity you find in her eyes showing the depths of her grief, likely from the loss of someone dear...

I don't see it; it doesn't make sense to me, and yet this is one of the most renowned pieces of artwork of the century.

The same is true of people who haven't been born again who try to understand the kingdom of God but can't.

I've heard so many new believers say they grew up in such-and-such a church and not once did they hear the gospel... but I know those churches love and preach the gospel boldly... its because they couldn't see it.

But once you get this [new sensibility](#), things that you heard all your life but never understood start to make sense.

You start to really see how empty influence, power, money, sex, drugs, alcohol, and isolation are as attempts to satisfy your soul.

Morality becomes less of an obligated lifestyle and more of a passion.

The list of loves in your heart start to get reordered, and your love for your career gets replaced by your love for your spouse, your love for money is replaced by your love for Jesus.

You start to understand exactly what this right here is all about and how amazing this is.

That's one of the new changes of being born again, here's the another:

New Identity

This is all contingent on the fact that your identity is received, not self-made; you don't get to make your own identity or earn one based on how you feel or what you think — you don't get to say, "I was born in 1969 but I identify as a 22 year old."

Jump up to...

v. 5 — unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

We don't even get to go in unless we're born again; why?

Because without being born again, our identity is that we're dead in our trespasses and sins, we are sons and daughters of disobedience, alienated and hostile...

But when we are born again, God creates us with a new identity.

Remember back in John 1:12-13 how we were born of God and given the right to become children of God, Sons and Daughters of the Creator, adopted into this family, of which we now belong for the rest of eternity!

We get this new identity that marks us as belonging to God's kingdom, citizens of heaven, we are alive, saved by grace, heirs of God, coheirs with Christ, redeemed from our past, guaranteed his promises now, and destined for heaven forever!

Being born again brings about a new creature, one with a new sensibility and a new identity.

Here's the craziest part about people who are born again.

Look at...

vs. 7-8 — 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.

Don't miss this... Jesus uses the mysteriousness yet powerful effects of the wind to illustrate who?

Sure, the Spirit of God is a part of this, but who primarily? Everyone who is born of the Spirit!

The mysteriousness of the movement of and undeniable power of the Spirit of God are put on radical display through everyone who is born again.

We can't be controlled by culture's demands or the pressures of modern society, and what we do and how we live won't be understood by people who haven't been born again — that's the whole point!

Therefore, when you are sharing Jesus with people who don't know Him, who fit a similar profile as Nicodemus, then...

Preach the New Birth

Conclusion (Cast Vision):

Why? Because there is no scar, no brokenness, no flaw, no habit or history that the new birth cannot repair!

We get to offer them this new sensibility and new identity, we get to offer them renewal and hope and everlasting life to be enjoyed now!

I mean, isn't it incredible that this is the gospel we get to enjoy and preach?

I want to challenge you this week to tell a non-believer that fits Nick's profile about the new birth this week. I dare you.

And next week, we're going to see Jesus answer Nick's questions about how to be born again.

[Pray]