

Mountain View 13 — The Ultimate Question

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Introduction (Connection):

[Invite to John 3]

Last week I dared you all to share about being born again with someone you know doesn't believe in Jesus. Raise your hand if you have any cool stories about it?

Tension:

Our lives are filled with a series of questions, and asking certain questions can altar the course of your life.

There are those questions that might change your morning:

- Should I go for a run or stay in bed for another 40 minutes?
- What should I have for breakfast?

Then there are questions that will change your day:

- Why did I think having 5 pancakes for breakfast was a good idea?
- Do you want to go out on a date with me sometime?

Then there are those life changing questions:

- Is that two blue lines or one?

- Will you marry me?
- God, are you really leading me to move all the way up to Northeast PA to pastor a church that someone said is 10 minutes past the boondocks?

Then there are those really famous questions:

- Are you talkin' to me?
- Do I feel lucky?
- Who you gonna call?

Then there are those really introspective questions:

- What pain do you want in your life?
- Why do I do the things I do?
- Who am I, really?

Most of these questions have the potential to change the course of your life, but there is only one question that can altar the course of your eternity, one question that rises above them all to where any other question we ask in this life is as weighty as a grain of sand compared to this question...

And oddly enough, of all people in history, some guy 2,000 years ago asked this ultimate question, this eternity-altering question: Nicodemus.

Exposition:

Let's take a quick second to look back at the profile we developed on who Nicodemus is:

Nicodemus is...

- 1) **Morally Religious** = he relates to God based on morality and goodness
- 2) **Spiritually Curious** = he is open to hearing out other beliefs
- 3) **Unilluminated** = he is lost in darkness and disbelief

Which is why his response to Jesus is a bit off.

v. 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?”¹*

Nicodemus is thinking painfully literally, rather in an almost crass way, so don’t go too far into following that visual.

“Hey Mom... We have to talk.”

Jesus talks about being born again in v. 5-8, and Nicodemus is still baffled, which is where we get to our main text.

v. 9-15 — 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.²

Nicodemus doesn’t get it still and he says, “How can these things be?”

“These things” being what they just talked about: Being born again to be saved.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 3:4.

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 3:9–15.

But Nicodemus' question is more rightly stated, "How can this happen?"³
Or...

How Can I Be Born Again?

If I have to be born again to see and enter the kingdom of God, then how do I get born again?

This is literally the most important question ever, because asking it means you understand who you are and what you most desperately need, asking it means you understand what it brings.

Asking this question means you have finally come to realize life is more than "what's for breakfast?" or "how can I get an edge on my job" or "how can I make more money" or "how can I spend my money to satisfy me?" or "How can my relationship with my boyfriend make me feel better about myself?"

There is no higher question to ask than this.

There are three parts to this answer, and the first part is...

1) God Must Do It

In a very real sense, God has to be the one who causes us to be born again.

³ D.A. Carson says, "Nicodemus' incredulous question is not *How can this be?* (niv), but 'How can this happen?'"

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), 198.

1:12-13 — “[God] gave (us) the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

God accomplishes our being born again, not us, not some bloodline or ethnicity, not by our morality or us white-knuckling into existence our new birth.

v. 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.”

Remember last year when that tornado ran through Northeast PA and ripped up buildings and trees?

How many of you tried to make it go another route? Like, you went outside, stood in front of its path and said, “Not today, go back south, I’m telling you what to do,” and it listened?

Nope, because you can’t control the wind.

Being born again, in once sense, is outside of our control; God recreates whomever he wills.

How can I be born again? God must do it.

But then we see Jesus answer this question in vs. 13-15.

v. 13 — “No one has gone up into heaven except he who came down from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

This gives us our second part to the answer:

How can I be born again?

1) God must do it

2) The Son of Man must be lifted up

There are two Old Testament references here that Nicodemus would have connected with instantly: (1) The Son of Man and (2) Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness.

Let's first talk about the Son of Man, a title that Jesus always calls himself and has probably confused you many times because you're thinking, "Isn't He the Son of God, though? Why this whole 'Son of Man' bit?"

It comes from this crazy vision that the Prophet Daniel has found in Daniel chapter 7, and it might wig you out.⁴

So circle Son of Man in your bible and write, Daniel 7.

Daniel has this vision of four hybrid-monster-ish beasts coming out of the dark sea, each one scarier than the one before.

Yet, the fourth beast is so mutant that nothing can be used to describe it, and it is violent beyond all measure.

The next scene is this divine courtroom in heaven with the Ancient of Days sitting on his throne, clothed in white, surrounded by fire, and next to him was another throne that sat empty.

Then Daniel's attention turns back to the fourth beast where he sees this beast is slain, it is utterly destroyed and tossed in the fire.

⁴ The following explanation of Daniel's dream compiled from The Bible Project's video called "The Son of Man" available online at <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/son-of-man/> [accessed online September 4, 2019].

And what we see next will connect all the dots for you.

Daniel sees this “one like a son of man,” ride up on the clouds, is presented before the Ancient of Days, and he receives dominion, glory, and the kingdom, and all the people of the earth worship him.

This Son of Man is no ordinary human, he is a God human who conquers the beast and rules the world and receives the worship of all peoples.

Fast forward back to Jesus, and we see Jesus saying he is the Son of Man who has descended from heaven, is in the middle of conquering the vile beast, and will ascend again on the clouds, which is what Jesus says hours before his death...

[Matthew 26:64](#) — “After this you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

In other words, Jesus’ words to Nicodemus are clearly showing him that the Son of Man is going to destroy the violent beast of sin, but how was he going to do it?

[Enter, our second Old Testament reference:](#) Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness.

You’ll find this story in Numbers 21, so circle “Moses lifted up the serpent” and write Numbers 21.

This was during Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness because they didn’t want to go into the Promised Land.

They get really antsy and impatient and they start complaining to God and Moses:

“Why are we even here! Why did you make us leave Egypt, just so we can die out here? There isn’t any food or water, and we hate this worthless manna stuff you keep making for us.”

I’m sure you all have kids that sound exactly like this.

It is insanely wicked how they are complaining about things!

God set them free from slavery, saved them from annihilation from Pharaoh’s army, led them to the borders of this beautiful land, and they said, “Nope, let’s go back.”

So God sends poisonous snakes into the camp of Israel, which is symbolic of their sin, and people start dying because of these snakes.

Israel confesses their sin to Moses and ask him to pray that God take away the snakes.

So Moses prays, and God doesn’t take the snakes away, instead he tells Moses to make an image of a poisonous snake, lift it up on a pole, and everyone who is bitten can just look at that snake and will live.

Now, go back to what Jesus says in v. 14, “Just like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so too must the Son of Man be lifted up.”

Connecting Daniel’s dream and the bronze serpent together here means the vile beast of sin will be destroyed by the Son of Man when the Son of Man is lifted up.

The words “lifted up” in the book of John only refer to two things: being physically lifted up on the cross, and exaltation.

Jesus is saying here, in order for us to be born again, the Son of Man will destroy the vile beast of sin by himself being slain, crucified on the cross.

Therefore, if you and I want to be born again, we have to understand that there is this grotesque, wicked beast of sin that has plagued every single one of us, and that sin deserves the wrath of God, and in order for us to be born again, something has to happen in order for the wrath of God to be removed.

The Son of Man must be lifted up!

Jesus has to be crucified; without that, we cannot be born again, we cannot experience new, incomprehensible life!

We have to be washed from our sin so that the Spirit of God can come in and make us new!

Those are the first two answers Jesus gives to Nicodemus as to how to be born again.

And then there is this third part...

3) Believe in the Son of Man

Look at v. 15...

v. 15 — "so that whoever believes in [the Son of Man] may have eternal life."

Just believe.

Keep in mind the comparison Jesus makes with the snake on a pole.

If that is the framework in which we're to think about believing in the Son of Man, then what does it mean to believe in him?

Look... just look.

Don't try to be, don't go to a certain place, don't try to fix yourself up enough, don't try to improve yourself, don't wait until you're in a better place...

Numbers 21:9, Just look... and you will live!

Just believe and you will be born again into new eternal life!

Charles Spurgeon became a Christian in a rather unique way.

In January of 1850 when he was 16 years old, he was heading to church and snowstorm kept him from going, so he turned into a small Methodist chapel, where about 15 people were waiting.

The Minister couldn't get in to the chapel because he was snowed in, which will never be my story since I live next door.

One of the church members decided to stand up, went to the pulpit, and read this passage:

[Isaiah 45:22](#) — “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.”

He said, “My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, ‘Look.’ Now lookin’ don’t take a deal of pain. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just, ‘Look.’ Well, a man needn’t go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, ‘Look unto Me’... Look to him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Look unto Me; I am sweatin’ and great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin’ on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin’ at the Father’s right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!”

When he had finished, he noticed Spurgeon sitting there, and fixing his eyes on him, he said, "Young man, you look very miserable. And you always will be miserable — miserable in life, and miserable in death — if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved. Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but to look and live."

Spurgeon wrote in his autobiography, "I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, 'Look!' What a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could have almost looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to him. And now I can say —

*E'er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And Shall be till I die."*⁵

Friends, what makes the gospel we preach so amazing is that it says...

Look and Live!

For the one who has exhausted themselves trying to maintain their own sense of goodness and morality, look and live!

For the one who is too ashamed of themselves to even be deeply known by others, look and live!

For the one who feels the sting of sin and knows its poison will only bring you to perish, look and live!

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography: The Early Years¹, 87–88

If you want to be born again, God must Do it, the Son of Man must be lifted up, and you must believe in the Son of Man!

Just look and live!

This is how Jesus shares the gospel with Nicodemus; these are the instructions Jesus gives to Nicodemus.

Application/Challenge:

So what can we take away from this?

Keep in mind we're looking at Jesus as the perfect evangelist here, showing us how to share Jesus with particular people.

So what are some things we can personally take away from Jesus' example?

Preach The Story

One of the things that frustrates me the most is those people standing on sidewalks shouting out, "You're a sinner, Jesus saves!" or you leave a tract in the bathroom stall that asks on the cover, "Which way are you going? Up or down? 1 or 2?"

I understand their passion, but we have so many ineffective methods in sharing Jesus with people, so I'm sorry to anyone in here who had plans this afternoon to go to central park in Honesdale to give this strategy a whirl.

The Gospel is a story, a narrative, just as Jesus communities it to Nicodemus here, so preach the narrative, just as Jesus did.

- Tell them who made them and why, that they were made by God for God, to be with God; their original purpose was to know God and enjoy him forever in his presence.
- Tell them that the beastly monster of sin poisoned all of mankind because we thought ourselves higher than God, and our sin only leaves behind a wake of destruction.
- Tell them that we will perish if the venom of sin isn't removed
- Tell them that God has given the cure, God lifted up his own Son on the Cross
- Tell them all we have to do is simply "look to Jesus and live!"
- Tell them that when we look to Jesus for our rescue, we will be born again, that we get to experience the regeneration of the kingdom of God now and forever!

Conclusion (Cast Vision):

Now, let me ask one final question which leads to our last takeaway:

By the end of this conversation, do we see Nicodemus getting dunked in the Jordan River and running up and down main street Jerusalem shouting, "I've been born again"?

No, in fact, we don't know how this conversation ends, or what Nicodemus' reaction is.

Here's what we do know, though: In John 7, Nicodemus defends Jesus in front of the chief priests and pharisees.

And you know where else we see Nicodemus? In John 19, Jesus has just been crucified, breathed his last breath, Nicodemus comes, in broad daylight, anoints Jesus' lifeless body with myrrh and aloes, and helps bury him.

Where once Nicodemus approached Jesus in the dark of Night, his story ends with him serving Jesus in the light.

Let me say this, if you have been desperately praying for your husband or your wife or your kid or a friend to come to know Jesus, and you've preached the gospel to them before and didn't see anything change... Nicodemus is shouting to us...

Don't Lose Heart!

Don't give up! It may take years!

You may have to preach the gospel 250 times to them, but God knows it may be the 251st time of hearing the gospel that they'll finally look to Jesus!

This Gospel is just too good for us to give up on sharing it.

[Pray]