



SERMONS

by

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Bible readings: Romans 8:12-17 and John 3:1-17

Title: "The New Birth"

In our gospel reading from John 3:1-17, John presents a late-night conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus about what is required in order to be saved.

Backdrop

Prior to this conversation, Jesus refused to commit Himself to some people at a Passover during a feast after noticing that their actions were superficial, centered on rules, not a deep relationship with God. Shortly after, Nicodemus pays Him a visit at night claiming to be speaking on behalf of his people.

So who was Nicodemus?

Nicodemus was a realist/naïve about spiritual matters, a ruler of the Jews – respected member of the chosen people, and a Pharisee who was thoroughly trained in Jewish law and theology. Indeed, he was the leading theological expert and a member of the ruling council – the elite 70 elders.

Now, there are many ways we can deduce the time (late night) of Nicodemus' visit, but I believe it's because he had a questionable faith. In other words, he lacked certainty that Jesus was the Messiah Himself, even though he was claiming to know Him. Even though he had a strong academic knowledge of God and could say the right words and perform the required rituals, he did not have a personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. And this is why he referred to Jesus as a teacher (sent by God) but exhibited the doubting Thomas syndrome. But he was searching to know God, albeit in a doubtful way.

How does this relate to us this morning, brothers and sisters?

I think it's fair to say there is a Nicodemus in all of us. We sometimes want to know God's plan for our lives, especially when we're facing challenges. And so, sometimes, we're quick to attend 'pray for me' churches when we hear people sharing testimonies of being saved or healed.

And for years, some pastors have been convincing us using all sorts of questionable theology and tricks to make us believe that they hold the answers or that there is a shortcut to our problems when in actual fact, the answers or solutions to our problems exist in us, available in the Bible, and should also be made accessible in our churches.

Like Nicodemus, we often have many doubts and questions about who Jesus is. We desire to have a real encounter with the Holy Spirit but are shy to ask or do what is required. We sometimes have deep frustration about the work of God, unanswered questions, a mixture of faith and doubt. We sometimes fail to read our Bible and pray regularly, ask for God's will to be done in our lives. We sometimes feel held back by the secular world, our inner demons, and personal struggles. We sometimes desire earthly things instead of heavenly things. We sometimes want to be assured of

God's salvation for us but are not prepared to allow ourselves to go through the process of being born again.

So what was Jesus' response?

Jesus tells Nicodemus, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God...The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:5-8)

In other words, Jesus is saying like the wind, the Holy Spirit constantly challenges us to keep moving. We can never be sure what's going to happen next or what direction is going to move us to. There's only one thing certain, our inner being is slowly and constantly being refined and God is always with us during this time. And we will make some mistakes along the way, but we must keep in mind that it is a process which requires us to be entirely submissive to the will of God.

In response, Nicodemus said, "How can these things be?" (John 3:9)

It appears Nicodemus understood being born again in an earthly sense. Jesus is amazed, but He engages with him through teaching to unearth the basic/fundamental issue with his life. Jesus didn't say Nicodemus you must live by the law, or stop drinking alcohol or lying. He said Nicodemus you must be born again. In other words, rather than a second biological birth, Nicodemus's whole being/life must be restructured from heaven.

In our first reading, Paul writes, "So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God."

So what can we take away from today?

When we look all around our churches, we can see that our churches are hemorrhaging, especially in regards to our young adults. We're lucky if we see one or two at a service. And we barely get fifteen to twenty-four people at some of our services. It makes one wonder why this is the case when we have vast resources at our disposal and other neighbouring churches are witnessing unprecedented growth. The question is, are we children of a lesser God? Do we worship a lesser God? The answer is frankly a NO! I believe this morning we got to recognize that just as Nicodemus was asked to be born again, our whole church must be born again. Our whole church must be spiritually revived so that our sons, daughters, and grandchildren can live to share their testimony. And we can do this by uniting as a church in one Spirit.

This morning I'm urging us to actively work at putting to death any sin in our hearts or minds, as well as in our words and deeds to our brothers and sisters in order to allow the Spirit to work in us. And that means recognizing that we cannot succeed without the power of the Holy Spirit, and so we

must make a conscious effort to pray, read our Bible daily, and ask God for a deeper relationship with Him.

I'm submitting to us this morning that in the eyes of God, no one is beyond salvation, beyond God's grace, too far gone in life, too far away from God, for His love to reach you. You only have to look to the story of Paul and His encounter on the road to Damascus. The height, the breadth, the depth, the length, and the duration of God's love. It is unlimited, universal, unbelievable, unconditional, unending to those who will believe.

Let me tell you something, brothers and sisters. Like Nicodemus, one day when you meet Jesus Christ, whenever that may be, on the judgment day or in your Christian walk of life, I know one thing, he isn't going to care how young you are, how silly your questions are, or if you're a preacher, steward, or Reverend. What matters is that you believe in Him, you live by the Spirit and not the flesh, and seek to serve and follow Him alone and that you trust in Him alone for your life and allow yourself to be born anew.

I know this because through my loneliest and darkest times, when I lost the zeal for life (times when I've cried by myself or on a public bus), when I've felt the full force of the wind, and in the most joyful times in my life, Jesus has always been my anchor, by my side even when I've questioned Him like Job in his suffering. He's never left me, even when I stopped believing because I felt I couldn't hear His voice or felt forsaken by Him. When I felt ready to give up hope, He picked me up and His love through the power of the Holy Spirit healed me and strengthened me progressively and gave me a new life.

Following and believing in Jesus has been the bedrock of my life, and that's why I want us, brothers and sisters, this morning to keep searching and asking the all-important questions like Nicodemus did, in order to grow, have a personal relationship with God, know the heavenly things, hear God's voice, and to learn what it is to find His love, His new birth, His direction, and His purpose for your life.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as Nicodemus was asked to be born again, we ask that you come into our lives and make us born again by the power of the Holy Spirit and stay with us forever. May our ears, eyes, and hearts be open so that we may hear, see, and understand your word for us and follow you willingly and joyfully. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**