

BAD NEWS
for **GOOD**
PEOPLE &
GOOD NEWS
for **BAD PEOPLE**



Dennis M. Rokser

BAD NEWS
for GOOD PEOPLE
and
GOOD NEWS
for BAD PEOPLE
or
“You Must Be Born Again!”

Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)

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INTRODUCTION

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. (1 Timothy 1:15)

Someone has said that Jesus Christ came from the bosom of the Father to the bosom of a woman. He put on humanity that we might put on divinity. He became Son of Man that we might become sons of God. He was born contrary to the laws of nature, lived in poverty, was reared in obscurity, and only once crossed the boundary of the land in which He was born—and that in His childhood. He had no wealth or influence and had neither training nor education in the world's schools. His relatives were inconspicuous and uninfluential. In infancy He startled a king. In boyhood He puzzled the learned doctors. In manhood He ruled the course of nature. He walked upon the billows and hushed the sea to sleep. He healed the multitudes without medicine and made no charge for His services. He never wrote a book and yet all the libraries of the world could not hold the books about Him. He never wrote a song, yet He has furnished the theme for more songs than all songwriters together. He never founded a college, yet all the schools together cannot boast of as many students as He has. He never practiced medicine and yet He has healed more broken hearts than all the doctors have healed broken bodies. This Jesus Christ is the star of all discords, and the healer of all diseases. Throughout history great men have come and gone, yet He lives on. Herod could not kill Him. Satan could not seduce Him. Death could not destroy Him and the grave could not hold Him.

Thus, Jesus Christ was *born* in a stable so that you and I could be *born again* 2,000 years later. So let's listen in on a relevant and revealing conversation regarding this new birth between a rich and religious man named Nicodemus and the only Savior God ever provided, the Lord Jesus Christ. It could be titled:

BAD NEWS for GOOD PEOPLE

and

GOOD NEWS for BAD PEOPLE

or

“You Must Be Born Again!” (John 3:1-21)

“Born again” has become a buzz word in religious circles over the last thirty years. Recovering alcoholics speak of a “rebirth.” Chrysler, under the leadership of Lee Iacocca, claimed to be “born again.” People from all walks of life give testimony to having entered into the “born again” experience. All of this raises several questions for the honest seeker of biblical truth.

- What does it mean to be “born again”?
- Is it really necessary to be born again?
- What is the nature of the new birth?
- How can one be born again?
- Why aren't more people born again?

To answer these questions, let's examine the most definitive passage in the Word of God that addresses this subject: John chapter 3.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 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." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." 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?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' "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." Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. "For God did not

send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

THE CONTEXT OF JOHN 3

(John 3:1-2)

HISTORICALLY

This recorded conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus transpires early in Christ's Judean ministry. John the Baptist had heralded the Messiah's coming (Matthew 3:1-12). Jesus had been baptized by John and heard from the Father, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*" (Matthew 3:13-17). Satan had tempted Him unsuccessfully in the wilderness, demonstrating His human and Divine character credentials for being Israel's Messiah and the Savior of the world (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus had begun calling His disciples and the multitudes were beginning to follow Him wherever He went (John 1:35-2:25).

In the midst of all this activity, John chapter 3 sets forth an extremely informational and relevant personal encounter between a devoutly religious but lost soul and the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ: "*for the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10). This encounter

should remind you that Jesus Christ is concerned about you personally and your eternal destiny.

SPECIFICALLY

Several important details emerge in verses 1 and 2 about the individual who converses with Jesus Christ.

- His **Gender** – *“There was a man...”* Male Jews of this time thanked God daily that they weren’t born as a Gentile or a woman. Yet before God, it makes no difference *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23).
- His **Religion** – *“of the Pharisees...”* He was part of the strictest religious sect of Judaism whose religious traditions made the Word of God of none effect (Matthew 15:6). He was religious but spiritually lost.
- His **Name** – *“named Nicodemus...”* This literally means “ruler of the people,” perhaps given him due to the aristocratic nature of his family.
- His **Position** – *“a ruler of the Jews.”* This indicates that he is a member of the politically governing body in Israel—the Sanhedrin.
- His **Family** – The Talmud refers to Nicodemus as one of the four richest men in Jerusalem. In the Jewish mindset, wealth meant righteousness with God. Yet, financial riches cannot purchase a right standing before God or the forgiveness of your sins.
- His **Fame** – *“teacher of Israel”* (John 3:10). This sets forth something about his popularity and promi-

nence as a teacher of the Law. While he religiously instructed others, we will see that he missed the most basic of spiritual truths.

- His **Spiritual Interest** – “*This man came to Jesus by night ...*” He apparently had a spiritual hunger or curiosity that caused him to seek out Jesus under the cover of darkness.
- His **Respectful Approach** – “*and said unto Him, Rabbi.*” “Rabbi” is a respectful term for teacher.
- His **Representative Role** – “*We know...*” Nicodemus is acting as a representative of the Pharisees perhaps similar to their delegation that visited John the Baptist (John 1:19ff).
- His **Beliefs about Jesus** – “*that You are a teacher come from God ...*” This puts Jesus on the same level as the Old Testament prophets, but not on the same plain as the Messiah. He was like many today who want to claim that Jesus was a good teacher, but deny that He is God.
- His **Reason for His Belief** – “*for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.*” The nature and number of Christ’s miracles evidenced power from God.

Though Nicodemus is still in the dark—physically and spiritually—about who he is conversing with, Jesus Christ takes advantage of Nicodemus’ personal contact and present beliefs to instruct him about the most important issue in life—he needs to be *born again*.

THE CONTENT OF CHRIST'S CONVERSATION (John 3:3-21)

The SPIRITUAL NECESSITY of the New Birth. (3:3)

How stunning and surprising for religious Nicodemus to hear Jesus Christ say, “*unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” From a human perspective, one of the greatest candidates to enter the kingdom of God was Nicodemus. Yet, like many in our day, he was religious but not regenerated. He had been born once, but needed to be born twice. Though he was a son of Abraham, he was not a child of God. While Nicodemus was seeking to be righteous before God, he was going to Hell with the Old Testament under his arm. Unfortunately, the passing of time has not remedied this problem for many religious people and “clergy” in the twenty-first century. Unless people see their *need* to be born again, they never will.

What does it mean to be “*born again*”? Our phrase “*born again*” (*ανωθεν* = *anōthen*) literally means “born from above.”¹ “To be “*born again*” is to have a *spiritual* birth *from God*. Consistent with a birth, to be “*born again*” is used to indicate a completed action, not an ongoing process. One is not born again and again and again. A birth is a once-for-all, non-repeatable event that happens at a point in time. The passive voice of “*born again*” clarifies that sinners are not born again of their own doing, for only God can do this (Titus 3:5).² How devastating this truth is for the religiously lost person who depends on his religious works and rituals to save him from God’s judgment for sin.

¹ *Anōthen* is used later in this same chapter by John the Baptist referring to Christ as “*He who comes from above is above all*” (3:31).

² *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us,...* (Titus 3:5a).

But is it really necessary to be born again? Jesus Christ teaches us an emphatic “YES!”

- “*unless one is born again...*” This sets forth a must, not a maybe; an imperative, not an option.
- “*he cannot see the kingdom of God...*” Apart from the new birth, one “cannot” (not might not) “see” (perceive or participate in) “*the kingdom of God.*”

Why is this? Ephesians 2:1-3 provides the answer:

*And you He made alive, **who were dead in trespasses and sins**, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath**, just as the others.*

Jesus Christ immediately confronts Nicodemus with the necessity for his regeneration. All of Nicodemus’ religious rituals and activities had not afforded him entrance into God’s kingdom. Why?

But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

Nicodemus, like all people—including you—needed to be born again.

The SUPERNATURAL NATURE of the New Birth. (3:4-8)

Did Nicodemus understand Jesus Christ's imperative of the necessity of a new birth? No, he actually missed the point by misunderstanding the nature and source of this birth. His confused response was – "*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?*" (v. 4).

Although this religious leader possessed political, financial, and spiritual clout, he thought in terms of two *physical* births instead of a *spiritual* birth *from God*. Throughout the book of John, Christ's listeners misunderstood³ His spiritual truths, giving them a physical explanation (see John 2:19-22; 4:10-14; 6:29-35). One must wonder how many there are like Nicodemus of the 80 million Americans that claim to be born again.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Master-Teacher, then seeks to clarify the true source and nature of the new birth by declaring – "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of [ek-out from] water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*" (v. 5).

While there are varied interpretations of this verse, it is this writer's conviction that recognizing the Hebrew parallelism and tracking the flow of thought clears up this apparent interpretative problem. Due to Nicodemus' confusion, Jesus Christ is clarifying that he needed not only a physical birth, but a *spiritual* birth. From the following chart, note this attempted clarification and distinction.

³ "*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

verse	PHYSICAL BIRTH	SPIRITUAL BIRTH
3:3		"born again"
3:4	"womb" ↓	↓
3:5	"of water" ↓	"and the Spirit" ↓
3:6	"that which is born of the flesh is flesh"	"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"

Jesus Christ is not clarifying the *means* of the new birth at this point (which many interpretations of v. 5 give) but the *source* and *nature* of it. It is a *spiritual* birth *from God the Holy Spirit*. Having clarified this, Jesus Christ again reiterates the *necessity* of this spiritual birth by exclaiming – *Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again"* (v. 7). "*Do not marvel*" indicates that Nicodemus was absolutely amazed that he of all people would need to be born again. Is this your response as well? This is oftentimes the reaction of religious people in this matter as they have been deceived by either comparing themselves to others instead of the holy standards of God, or by thinking that they are tipping God's scales of justice in their favor by their good works and religious rituals—just like Nicodemus erroneously thought. Over the centuries, Satan has successfully used religion to blind people to their need of salvation and the means of obtaining it through God's grace apart from religious works and sacraments.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age [Satan] has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should

shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. (2 Corinthians 4:3-5)

When Christ said, “*you must be born again,*” the word “*must*” (δεῖ = dei) refers to something of absolute necessity.⁴ Note also the shift in verse 7 from the singular “*you*” to the *plural* “*you.*” This spiritual birth from God is not only a necessity for Nicodemus, but for all unregenerate persons, whether in the first or twenty-first centuries!

To reinforce the spiritual nature of this birth from God, Jesus uses in verse 8 the wind⁵ to illustrate the invisible yet real nature of this spiritual birth.

The SCRIPTURAL MEANS of the New Birth. (3:9-21)

Having underscored the spiritual necessity and nature of the new birth (3:3-8), Jesus Christ goes on to explain the scriptural *means* of being born again due to Nicodemus' response: “*How can these things be?*” (3:9). Jesus answered and said unto him, “*Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?*” (3:10).

The New Birth is through CHRIST alone. (vv. 9-13)

In order to be born again, a lost sinner must come to grips with *who* Jesus Christ is. Jesus Christ is “*He who came down from heaven*” (v. 13). He is God who became a man. Apart from the incarnation of the Son of God, salvation would have been impossible.

⁴ In John 3, he writes how one “*must*” be born again (3:7), how Christ “*must*” be lifted up (3:14), and how Christ “*must*” increase and John the Baptist decrease (3:30).

⁵ The Greek word *pneuma* is oftentimes also translated “*spirit.*”

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4-5)

The New Birth is through the CROSS alone. (v. 14)

In order to be born again, a lost sinner must come to understand *what* Jesus Christ did for him/her. *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up”* (3:14). Since Nicodemus knew well the Old Testament, Christ’s illustration from Numbers 21 concerning the brazen serpent would be clearly understood.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. (Numbers 21:8-9)

Though the penalty for sin before a holy God is death, God’s grace made a means of deliverance for these guilty serpent-bitten rebellious Israelites through the lifted-up bronze serpent. And just like the brazen serpent was lifted up on a pole, so Jesus Christ must be lifted up on the cross for the sins of all mankind (John 12:32-34).

The phrase *“lifted up”* is an aorist tense verb, referring to a completed action or event, not an ongoing process. Christ’s death for our sins is a once-and-for-all, nonrepeatable event as He paid for all sin for all man for all time. Thus, no amount of good works or church rituals are needed to atone for man’s sin for Jesus Christ triumphantly cried out on the cross, *“IT IS FINISHED”* (John 19:30), which indicates your sins have been paid in full by Jesus Christ.

*Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, **when He had by Himself purged our sins**, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:3)*

*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, **might taste death for everyone**. (Hebrews 2:9)*

*By that will we have been sanctified through **the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. **For by one offering** He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:10-14)*

*For **Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God**, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)*

*And He Himself is **the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world**. (1 John 2:2)*

This is also the third reference in John's Gospel to Christ's death (John 1:29; 2:19). The death of Christ alone satisfied the legal demands of God's holy justice regarding our sin so that He, by His grace, could save undeserving man.

The New Birth is through FAITH IN CHRIST alone. (3:15-18)

In order to be born again, a lost sinner must trust in Jesus Christ alone for his/her salvation. Relating to Christ's analogy of the lifted up brazen serpent from Numbers 21, verse 15 goes on to explain, "*That whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life*" (3:15).

In the camp of Israel, the solution to God's judgment for their sin was not in trying to rid themselves of all serpents. Nor was it in making anti-serpent medicine or laws. Nor was it to make seven promises to God not to sin again. Nor was the solution to ask the brazen serpent into your heart or to make a commitment to obey the brazen serpent in the future. It was simply to do nothing but "*look*" in faith at the uplifted serpent (Numbers 21:9)—the only provision God gave for their problem. In the same way, sinners are to look in faith to Jesus Christ alone and His work on the cross for salvation from a Hell they deserve to a Heaven they do not.

- The **extent** of the offer – "*that whoever...*" God's offer of salvation is available to all. God is offering eternal life to *you*.
- The **condition** of the offer – "*believes...*" This refers to one's willingness to rely on, depend on or trust. There is nothing more.
- The **object** of the offer – "*in Him...*" Your object of faith must be in the Lord Jesus Christ alone—who died for our sins and rose again.
- The **result** of the offer – "*should not perish but have eternal life.*" Instead of perishing in Hell, the believer in Christ has eternal life. The word

“*have*” is a present tense verb indicating a present possession, not a future attainment. It is the believer’s *now*. “*Eternal life*” is referred to 16 times in John, setting forth a *right relationship with God* which will last *forever* and can *never* be lost.

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. (John 5:24)

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:37-40)

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one. (John 10:28-30)

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this? (John 11:25)

To underscore the one human condition of the new birth, the word “*believe*” is found seven times in John 3 (vv. 12 [2x], 15, 16, 18 [3x]). This is consistent with numerous other verses in John’s Gospel that stipulate that faith alone in Christ alone results in eternal life (John 1:12-13; 5:24; 6:40). Verse 16 goes on to say,

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

While numerous scores of people know this verse, few seem to understand it. This confusion surfaces when they are asked, “Do you know John 3:16?” They reply “Oh, my yes.” Then ask, “Do you know for sure that you have eternal life?” and they answer with the agnostic, “How can anyone know that for sure?” That is the point of this verse. God “*loved*” and “*gave.*” We simply “*believe*” and “*have.*”

This great verse (John 3:16) has five parts to it:

- God’s part*For God so loved the world*
- God’s part*that He gave His only begotten Son,*
- Your part*that whoever believes in Him*
- God’s part*should not perish*
- God’s part*but have everlasting life.*

How this truth must have further blown away lost Nicodemus who had a religion of “do” instead of “done,” or “faith *plus* work” instead of “faith *plus nothing.*” The possession and assurance of eternal life is based solely on the person and

the work of Christ coupled with the unfailing promises of God's Word.

*If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. **He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.** (1 John 5:9-13)*

To emphasize further God's purpose in sending Jesus Christ to earth, verse 17 reads,

*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, **but that the world through Him might be saved.** (John 3:17)*

Salvation comes only through Jesus Christ, who came not to condemn but to save. This verse links being "born again" with salvation. Salvation, like the new birth, is a work of God for man, not a work of man for God. The cross-work of Christ paid the penalty of our sin 100 percent. Salvation is not an 80-percent God, 20-percent man proposition. Christ's work accomplished it all. Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross for all your sins is not merely needed to save you, it is enough! Now it is simply a matter of whether helpless, hopeless and Hell-bound sinners will rely on the finished cross-work of Christ alone to save them. Does it really matter? Yes—eternally! For a failure to trust Christ alone means they remain condemned.

*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, **because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.***
(John 3:18)

What ultimately condemns sinners? Their sins? No! For Jesus Christ fully paid for all their sins at Calvary. What a righteous God cannot tolerate is one's rejection of His Son through unbelief. So if being born again, having eternal life, or being saved from an eternal Hell is this simple why don't more people trust in Christ alone to give them eternal life?

*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and **men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.** For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.* (John 3:19-21)

"Men loved darkness rather than light" – that is why people do not receive the truth. The bottom line is not an intellectual issue, but an attitudinal issue of self-righteous pride (Luke 18:9-14) or unbelief (John 3:11-12). The word "evil" embraces both the concepts of human sin and human good. And in the case of Nicodemus, it would be his human good and religious traditions, not his sinful lifestyle, that would prevent him from trusting the Savior alone (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 9:30–10:4). He erroneously would naturally think, "How could my religion be wrong and my good works not earn my entrance into Heaven?" Yet Jesus Christ taught,

*Enter by the narrow gate; for **wide** is the gate and **broad** is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because **narrow** is the gate and **difficult***

is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

This is why the Gospel is bad news for good people, but good news for bad people. What is the Gospel to you?

Was Nicodemus ever “*born again*” as a result of this conversation with Jesus Christ? There is good reason to think that he was. On one occasion Nicodemus defends Jesus before his fellow-Pharisees.

Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, “Truly this is the Prophet.” Others said, “This is the Christ.” But some said, “Will the Christ come out of Galilee? “Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?” So there was a division among the people because of Him. Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him. Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why have you not brought Him?” The officers answered, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” Then the Pharisees answered them, “Are you also deceived? “Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? “But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, “Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?” (John 7:40-51)

On a later occasion, the apostle John writes,

Nevertheless even among the rulers [Nicodemus was a ruler] many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. (John 12:42-43)

After Christ's sacrificial death, Nicodemus finally comes out of the closet by his willingness to care for Jesus' body.

*After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And **Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night**, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby. (John 19:38-42)*

What has Jesus Christ taught us through His conversation with Nicodemus?

- The *necessity* to be born again – “*unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (v. 3).
- The *nature* of the new birth – “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’*” (vv. 6-7).
- The *means* to be born again:
 - the new birth is through CHRIST alone (vv. 9-13).
 - the new birth is through the CROSS alone (v. 14).
 - the new birth is through FAITH IN CHRIST alone (vv. 15-18)

Dear friend, oftentimes the simplicity of salvation is a stumbling-block to individuals, especially religious sinners. For our own pride tends to create barriers in resisting God's message of undeserving grace. Is it not human pride that deceives us into thinking that while others are unworthy sinners deserving of God's judgment, we are not? Yet the Bible states,

As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." (Romans 3:10-12)

Is it also not our self-righteous pride that deludes us into imagining that we can merit or earn salvation by our good works?

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Therefore, it should not surprise us that "*a proud look*" heads up a list of seven sins that God especially hates and decries as an "*abomination*" to Him (Proverbs 6:16-17). But ask yourself the question, "What did I do to be born? NOTHING. Your mother actually did all the work. You merely were the recipient of her vigorous labor. And in the same sense, when a sinner is born again, they do nothing to accomplish this but merely trust in Jesus Christ alone who did all the work of salvation when He died for our sins and rose again!

Dear friend, receiving God's gift of salvation and being born again is:

- as simple as *coming when called*.

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

- as simple as *drinking water*.

But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. (John 4:14)

If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. (John 7:37b-38)

- as simple as *eating bread*.

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (John 6:35)

- as simple as *entering a door*.

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved. (John 10:9)

- as simple as the *trust of a child*.

Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:2-3)

- as simple as *believing in Jesus Christ alone.*

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. **Do you believe this?**" (John 11:25)*

- as simple as *receiving a gift.*

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

You have probably received many gifts over the years from those who love you. But have you ever received God's gift of eternal life and the forgiveness of all your sins? God, in love, is offering this gracious gift to *you*. Yet, no gift is of any personal value to you until you *receive* it. Will you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and become a child of God through the new birth?

*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. **But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who 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)*

The truth of John 3 was captured in a Vacation Bible School saying I heard years ago. "If you're born once, you'll die twice. But if you're born twice, you'll only die once." Have you ever had a spiritual birth from God through faith alone in Christ alone and His cross-work alone? If not, why not settle the issue of your eternal destiny *right now* by deciding to trust in Jesus Christ alone to save you?

*Do not marvel that I said to you, "**You must be born again.**" (John 3:7)*