

# (John) Jesus and Nicodemus

by Brian Brodersen

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*Jesus reveals to Nicodemus the necessity of being born again to see and experience the kingdom of God.*

**Duration:** 51:33

**Scripture:** John 2:23 - 3:1, John 3:3, John 3:16-17, John 3:21

**Topics:** "Spiritual Birth", "Regeneration"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing the mysterious and unpredictable nature of God's movement in our lives. He encourages the congregation to avoid falling into predictable routines in their worship and to be open to the unexpected ways in which God works. The speaker also discusses the concept of regeneration and the new birth, highlighting the amazing testimonies of individuals who have come to faith in seemingly unlikely circumstances. He shares stories of people who have encountered God through listening to solid Bible teaching and even in the midst of a drug-induced state. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the need for spiritual birth and the recognition of God's mysterious and transformative power in our lives.

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## Transcript

John chapter 2 and we pick up this evening in verse 23. John 2 23. Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, speaking of course of Jesus during the feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did.

But Jesus did not commit himself to them because he knew all men and he had no need that anyone should testify of man for he knew what was in man. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. In our previous study we saw that Jesus began his public ministry by driving out of the temple in Jerusalem those who were making merchandise of the people of God.

And this all happened, as you remember, during the feast of the Passover. And so we pick up the story. Jesus is still in Jerusalem, the feast is still going on, and there has now developed a great interest in Jesus because of the signs that he was performing there in Jerusalem.

Now just exactly what those signs were we are not told. Remember it was in Cana of Galilee that Jesus performed his first sign and his disciples believed in him. But now as he's gone up to Jerusalem at the feast, he is performing many miracles.

No doubt they were similar in nature to the other signs that are recorded in the Gospels. But it's interesting that these things John just simply passes over, makes just a brief mention of the fact that Jesus was performing miracles, but doesn't really give us any of the details. Later on at the end of this Gospel, John will say that there are many things that Jesus did that are not recorded in this book.

He said, if I were to try to write them down, or if there was an attempt to write them down, he said, I would imagine that all the books in all the world couldn't contain the things that Jesus did. So it's interesting that he just sort of passes over it here. Now we are told that because of the signs that Jesus was performing, many believed in his name when they saw these signs.

But it's interesting that Jesus did not commit himself to them. It actually reads more literally, many believed in his name when they saw the signs, but Jesus did not believe in them. It's the same word in the Greek, basically.

And what's being communicated here is that Jesus, knowing the heart of man, he knew that within the hearts of these people, there wasn't a genuine interest in him for who he was. But the interest was primarily centered around what they thought that Jesus might be able to do for them, and so he didn't commit himself to them. But then we read, now, there was a man of the Pharisees.

And the context here shows us that the intention of John is to contrast this man with those that were previously mentioned. So Jesus wasn't able to commit himself to those others because he knew the insincerity of their devotion. Their interest was external.

It had to do primarily with what Jesus could do for them rather than with who he was. But here is a man, on the other hand, that's the gist of what John is wanting to communicate here. This man, Nicodemus, is in contrast to the others.

He's a different sort of a man. He's a man who is sincere. He's a man who has an honest interest in Jesus.

And to this man, Jesus is going to commit himself. Jesus is going to give this man, Nicodemus, an audience. And so we're introduced to him.

Nicodemus, he is a Pharisee, and he is a ruler of the Jews. G. Campbell Morgan said, Christ will always give himself to honesty. If a man in his approach to the Lord will state his difficulties, Christ is ever ready to receive him and to commit himself to that man.

I like that. You know, so often people get tripped up thinking, oh, but I'm not sure about this, and I don't know, and you know, I've had a doubt about that. You know, the Lord can take care of that.

He can handle that. You come to him, and the issue is not whether or not you've had some doubts about this, that, or the other thing. The issue is rather, are you genuine as you approach him? Are you sincere? Do you really want to know the truth? If you really want to know the truth, the Lord will show you the truth.

And so this man, Nicodemus, he comes to Jesus. He came to him by night, it says. And he 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.

Now, Nicodemus was really the best of men. He really was. He was about the best that humanity could offer up.

He was a sincere man, as we see. He was genuine. Like Nathaniel, probably you could have said regarding him that there was no guile in him.

He was a man who loved God to the best of his ability and according to his understanding. You know, oftentimes when we hear the term, the Pharisees, we generally tend to think of them in the negative because they did, for the most part, stand in opposition to Jesus and his ministry. But there were many among the Pharisees who actually did believe in Jesus and Nicodemus was one of them.

Of course, Paul was a Pharisee. But he was a man who genuinely loved God. He was a man who loved his neighbor, sought to.

He was a man who kept the commandments. He would have epitomized ceremonial purity. He was a ruler of the Jews, we are told.

And it seems quite probable that he was part of the Sanhedrin, that he was part of that ruling body. He was there when they were seeking to condemn Jesus. Nicodemus was in their midst.

He was a just man because he stood against those who were coming against Jesus and he challenged them not to condemn Jesus before they could hear his side of the story. He stood up against them. He was a courageous man.

He actually, along with Joseph of Arimathea, later would help bury Jesus after his crucifixion. So Nicodemus was an outstanding individual. He was a religious man.

He was a Pharisee. He wasn't a hypocrite. He really was, in many senses, the best that you could hope for among men.

But what we're going to discover is that that wasn't enough. That was not enough. You see, our best is not adequate.

The best we could possibly offer, the best we could be is not enough to allow us entrance into heaven. We've got to have something beyond that and that's what Jesus is going to go on and reveal to this man, Nicodemus. And so we read in verse 3, Jesus answered and said to him.

Now it's interesting, Jesus answered and said to him, Nicodemus hadn't at this point really asked a question. But he approached the Lord and he said, we know that you're a teacher come from God. Jesus, of course, he knew all men as we just read.

Jesus knows our hearts. He knows our thinking process. He knows the things that are really on our mind.

You know, sometimes we get caught up in some hypocrisy. You know, we're saying one thing to the Lord with our lips, but in our hearts we're somewhere else. The Lord knows.

You might as well not be saying it because he knows the truth. He knows what's going on. There's sometimes I'm I'm struggling maybe to, you know, maybe I'm struggling to pray for somebody.

Maybe, you know, there's somebody that just really irritates me and yet I'm pretending like they don't irritate me that bad and so I'm going to pray for them. But yet in my heart, you know, my lips are saying one thing but my heart's saying something else. And there have been times I'll actually catch myself.

I think, okay, forget it. Lord, you know the reality. This is what I'm saying, but this is how I really feel.

So Lord, help me. Change my heart. So the Lord knows what's going on in our hearts and he knows what's really going on in the mind of Nicodemus.

Nicodemus has questions weighing heavily upon him. He recognizes in Jesus he must be from God. No one could do the things that he's doing.

Nicodemus no doubt would have known about the ministry of John the Baptist being a Pharisee. Remember, it was a delegation from the Pharisees that was sent to John. And he would have known that John was proclaiming that he was the herald of the Messiah.

And so Nicodemus is coming as this ruler, as this teacher, and he's got these things heavily upon his heart. And Jesus, he cuts right through everything and he answers and says to him, most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Born again, here's that term.

This is where it first appears in the New Testament. I was selling the Men's Fellowship on Thursday night. I remember years ago somebody tried to tell me that Chuck Smith was the one who invented the born-again movement.

I was sharing with somebody and they said, are you a born-again? And I said, yeah. They said, oh yeah, Chuck Smith, he's the one who invented that. I said, well, you know, it does predate Chuck a little bit.

A couple thousand years actually. Jesus is the one who said it. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Now, this term, born again, some want to squabble over the language and say, well, you know, it actually should be born from above. And it could be translated born from above, but it can also rightfully be translated born again. And I think the context lends itself better to the translation born again than born from above.

Nicodemus certainly got the impression that that's what Jesus was talking about because he goes on to ask how could it be possible when a person is old to have another birth. So born again is the right way to understand what Jesus said. But I want you to notice this.

He said that unless one is born again, they cannot see the kingdom of God. Now, he's going to go on and then add to that that unless one is born again, he cannot enter. But first of all, he says, unless one is born again, he cannot see or perceive or comprehend the kingdom of God.

You see, the problem with people is that. They do not have the. They do not have the capability.

Of comprehending the kingdom or the things of the spirit. And you know how that is, probably. I know how it is because I remember being in that position at one time in my life.

I didn't get it. I couldn't see it. People would talk about knowing the Lord and hearing God's voice, and it seemed so weird, seemed so foreign.

I couldn't perceive of such a thing. I couldn't grasp it. Paul, the apostle, said that the natural man receives not the things of the spirit of God.

Neither can he know them. They are foolishness to him, he said. That's the condition of man by nature.

The kingdom, the things of the spirit, the things of God, the reality of all of that is in a dimension that I cannot even perceive apart from a work of the spirit upon my heart. That's what Jesus is talking about as he speaks here to Nicodemus. And 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. Jesus is talking about a spiritual birth. What does it mean to be born again? That's the question.

You know, lots of people have used that term in reference to themselves. All kinds of people come forward and they will say, sure, I'm born again. But what does it really mean? Well, Jesus is talking about the necessity of a spiritual birth.

Now, man was created in a spiritual state, state of communion with God. Man is, as has been said, an inferior trinity. Man is made in the image of God.

God is father, son, and Holy Spirit. Man is spirit, soul, and body. But something happened.

God created man, spirit, soul, and body, spirit being uppermost in man's experience. But sin entered and brought spiritual death, resulting in man being reduced to a two-dimensional being. No longer spirit, soul, and body, but now predominantly body and soul.

Human life has become similar to animal life, but not identical to it. You see, man still possesses a spirit. And although man's spirit is dead in trespasses and sins, there are still traces of man's spiritual aspect.

There are still elements that are there. The spirit died because of sin, but there's still traces of that within our lives. Man is a moral being that shows his connection back to God.

Man is a religious creature. Man is a worshiper. You know, all people worship.

Now, of course, not everybody worships the true and the living God. People worship false gods. Some people claim to not worship God at all.

They claim to be atheists. But even the atheist is a worshiper because the atheists, they have their celebrities, they have their heroes, they have their ideologies. They have those things that they worship.

But the fact that man is a moral being, the fact that man is a worshiper is indicative of man's previous connection with God. And as I said, it shows the remnant of the spirit that still resides within man. So, being born again is to have that spiritually dead part of man brought back to life by the infusion of the Holy Spirit.

That's what happens. The Spirit of God comes and brings his life to bearing upon man and brings man back to life spiritually. That's what it is to be born again.

J.C. Ryle, in his commentary on John, he said, the change which our Lord here declares needful to salvation is evidently no slight or superficial one. It is not merely reformation or amendment or moral change or outward alteration of life. It is a thorough change of heart, will, and character.

It is a resurrection. It is a new creation. It is a passing from death to life.

It is the implanting in our dead hearts of a new principle from above. It is the calling into existence of a new creation with a new nature, new habits of life, new tastes, new desires, new appetites, new judgments, new opinions, new hopes, and new fears. All this and nothing less than this is implied when our Lord declares that we all need a new birth.

Man is always seeking reformation. Man is seeking to amend or to alter himself. Jesus said none of that is adequate.

None of that is sufficient for what actually needs to be done. There needs to be an entirely new life, and that's what he's referring to when he says to Nicodemus that you must be born again. Now, he says here, 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. What does it mean unless one is born of water and the Spirit? Well, the assumption quite often is that water is a reference to baptism, but that is an assumption that's not really based in Scripture. The Bible does not teach that regeneration or being born again is the result of baptism.

As a matter of fact, the Bible teaches that baptism is something that follows the new birth as a witness publicly to the fact that the new birth has occurred. But many people have mistakenly assumed that Jesus is teaching us that baptism is the means to conversion or to regeneration or to being born again. That is not the case at all.

This idea is a dominant idea among many, but it's not really a biblical idea. Jesus is not talking about baptism here. Some say, no, he's not talking about baptism.

He's actually referring to the natural birth, the natural birth process. But that seems to be mistaken in my thinking simply because he's talking to a person that's already been born in the natural sense. I don't think that that would need to be reiterated at all unless one is born of water.

If he's talking about a natural birth, it's quite obvious if you don't exist, you don't need anything beyond that. So I don't really see myself that it's the natural birth that's being referred to here. The other possibility, the one that I think is actually the correct understanding, is that Jesus is speaking metaphorically of the word in relation to regeneration.

Now, it's interesting, Jesus said, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit. The Greek word for spirit is translated three different ways in the New Testament. It's translated spirit, it's translated breath, it's translated wind.

It's all the same word. Jesus quite possibly could have been speaking at this instant metaphorically to Nicodemus. He might have actually meant to say, unless one is born of water and wind.

Of course, getting Nicodemus to zero in and try to comprehend exactly what he's talking about. But I personally think that he is speaking metaphorically of the word, and the reason I think that is because water is used metaphorically of the word in other places in Scripture. In this very gospel, the 15th chapter, the third verse, Jesus said, to his followers, he said, you are clean because of the words that I have spoken to you.

So, he speaks of the word as being that cleansing agent. And then the Apostle Paul, when he's writing to the Ephesians in the fifth chapter, the 26th verse, he referred to the washing of water by the word. So, we see that water is used as a metaphor of the word.

But then, this term born again, it appears in 1st Peter 1:23 directly connected to the word of God. Peter there says to the believers that you have been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God that lives and abides forever. You see, the two components that bring about the new birth are the word of God and the spirit of God.

And I believe that that is what Jesus is referring to here. Unless a man is born of the word and the spirit, and they work in unison with one another, the spirit of God takes the word of God, plants that within the heart, and the life of God is produced from that. So, it's a combined effort between the spirit of God and the word of God.

I believe that that is what Jesus is referring to here. So, unless one is born of water and the spirit, notice he says now he cannot enter the kingdom of God. So, the new birth is necessary to have an experience of the kingdom of God here and now to be able to perceive it, comprehend it, experience it in the here and now.

But the new birth is also necessary for me to ultimately enter kingdom of God. There's the question that often comes up these days regarding people who are not born again. Are they going to be in heaven? Jesus said, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

The answer is no. Now, for some people that's harsh. Oh, I can't believe you would say that.

But that's what the Lord said. Now, of course, we have to factor in that God is working in the world. He's working in the lives of people.

He is seeking to bring people to the place where they would respond to his spirit and they would be born again. But unless a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Now, Jesus went on and he said to Nicodemus, do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

Nicodemus must have been visibly blown away by the things that Jesus was saying to him. He's not able to really grab hold of what Jesus is talking about. Jesus said, don't marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

He said, the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but can not tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the spirit. You see, there is a mystery here to some degree.

This is a miraculous thing that Jesus is talking about. Nicodemus can't get his head around this because he's thinking in human terms. He says, how can I get back into my mother's womb? Jesus said, that's not what I'm talking about.

That which is born of the flesh is the flesh. Even if you got back in your mother's womb, it would only reproduce the flesh again. See, Nicodemus isn't comprehending the deep spiritual thing that Jesus was trying to get him to understand.

He was thinking in human terms. He wasn't seeing the spiritual element of things. And isn't that the problem with so many people today? They only think in human terms.

They only think in terms of what they can figure out or what they can understand or what they've seen. People say, there's no such thing as miracles. How do you know? I've never seen one.

And that's the end of it. I've never seen one, therefore it can't be. There are lots of things that cannot be seen that are.

So Jesus is describing something here that has a mysterious element to it. He's describing a miracle. A miracle is what needs to take place for a man to get to heaven.

Now he speaks of the wind. Think of the wind. There's something mysterious about the wind.

We can't handle it with our hands or see it with our eyes. We only hear, see, and feel its effects as it comes into contact with other things. You know, we sort of think that we see the wind, but if you stop and think about it, you realize, no, I really don't see the wind.

I just see the effects of the wind. We don't know where it comes from, where it originated. We don't know where it's headed.

Jesus said, so is everyone who is born of the Spirit. You see, there is a mysterious element to this. There's, of course, a miraculous thing that he's talking about here.

And let me just encourage you. Be careful to not put God in a box. You know, we can do that.

We can sort of think that we've got God figured out. And then we can start to say, well, this is what God does, and then he does that too. But no, he doesn't do this over here.

But inevitably, God will prove you wrong. Happens over and over and over again. So we've got to be careful.

You know, we study the scriptures, and we develop a systematic theology. And it's an airtight position. And we've got God completely figured out.

We know just exactly how he does everything. You know what? Sooner or later, he'll blow that thing to bits. He's not going to be contained in that.

There's a mysterious thing going on here. And when you talk about regeneration, when you talk about this new birth, when you hear the testimonies of people, I never cease to be amazed at hearing people's testimonies, at how they came to the Lord. And sometimes, quite honestly, I would think if somebody would have asked me in advance if a person could come to the Lord under these circumstances, I would have said, absolutely not.

Never happened. And then I meet the person that it happened to. I think, wow, how do you explain that? A good friend of mine, his brother became a Christian by listening to a good, solid Bible teacher.

Came into a community and was out working a labor job and got a hold of a radio and turned it on. And he heard this great Bible teacher, solid guy, preaching the word. He thought, this is interesting.

This is intriguing. I've never heard anything like this before. And he kept listening, kept listening.

Finally, he said, I've got to go find this person. He went, went to their church. They gave an invitation.

He received Christ. Went back and began to witness to his brother. His brother said, that's foolishness.

I don't want to hear any of that. That's ridiculous. And the tension grew between them to the point where the brother said, I'm out of here.

I don't want to hear anything you have to say about this God thing. I'm going to get as far away from you as I can. So he moved to another state.

And while he was living in this other state, just out of curiosity, as he was flipping around on the TV, he came across Christian television. And he started watching a guy who, in my opinion, is a bona fide heretic. And he came to Christ by listening to this guy preach.

I don't like that. Lord, that doesn't fit in my box. But it's a reality.

He's saved. He's as saved as I am, serving the Lord. You know, we have to be careful.

Because the wind blows where it does. You don't know where it's coming from or where it's going. And so is everyone who's born in the Spirit.

There's a mystery there. I have another friend who is in ministry today and is doing a fantastic job of pioneering a church in a very, very difficult city. And he was high on drugs.

He was into all kinds of, you know, dark, medley kind of music and all of that. And one night, as they were all stoned and all standing around listening to some metal death kind of a band, they were singing about death and the devil and all of that. And the lyrics of the particular song were something to the effect of giving your soul to the devil or something like that.

I can't remember exactly what the words were. And as he's just, you know, he's high and he's caught up in this whole vibe and he's singing these words. And as he sings those very words, all of a sudden, he's stricken in his heart with conviction.

And he stops in his mind. He says, no, I don't want to give my life to the devil. No, that's not what I want to do.

Jesus saved me. And the Lord saved him right on the spot. He was stoned.

He was on drugs. You can't get saved while you're stoned. You got to get sober first.

You know, back in the Jesus days, Jesus people days, half the congregation that came to this church was stoned. And I've heard the stories. Some of the bands that were leading the worship, the guys were stoned while they were doing that too.

God was convicting, though. God was working. God was dealing with them.

And he brought them around. And so we've got to be careful. We've got to be careful not to put these parameters on God, not to say, no, God, you can't do that.

Because as I said, he will inevitably, he will burst that. There's something mysterious, but I love the analogy that Jesus gives this analogy of the wind. And there's something about that that's so exciting.



And then finally, he said, everyone who is born of God overcomes the world. So these are some of the characteristics. These are some of the things that we look for in our lives and we can look for in the lives of others to give that confidence and assurance that the new birth has genuinely taken place.

Now, our final point is the absolute necessity of the new birth. Notice, Jesus said, you must be born again. It's not an optional thing.

Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. Being born again is not for some people and then not for others. And we do have this misconception in the Christian community today when it comes to the idea of being born again.

There are people who will actually tell you, I am a Christian, I'm just not a born again. But the reality is you cannot even be a Christian apart from being born again. Being born again is what makes you a Christian, having the life of God planted in your soul.

Now, remember, these words were spoken to Nicodemus. They were spoken directly to him but they are applicable to all people for all time. The fact that they were spoken to a man like Nicodemus, it really proves that.

You see, again, as was stated earlier, if Nicodemus needed something more than he had to get to heaven, where does that leave the rest of us? Here was a perfect specimen in many ways of a man, but that perfect specimen was not perfect enough for entrance into the kingdom. If that was the case with Nicodemus, where does that leave us? There's not the remotest possibility that we will enter the kingdom of heaven. Apart from the new birth that Jesus spoke of.

Are you born again? That's the question. I assume that most of you are, but perhaps there's someone here or a few of you that maybe aren't. You know, you can be religious and not be born again.

Nicodemus is a proven point. You, now, of course, someone might argue, well, you know, Nicodemus was a Jew, true, but the same thing can happen in the context of the Christian church. There are people that seem to be Christians.

They go to church. They do the things to some extent that you expect Christians to do, but they've not been born again. There have been men in ministry, and I heard the story a while back of a man who had been in the ministry for 45 years, and one day it struck him that he'd never been born again, but he'd been serving in a church all these years.

That's the question. Are you born again? You know, in my life, I had a pre-conversion religious experience. There came a point in my life where I realized that my life was heading in the wrong direction.

I was going down a dead-end street. I knew to some extent that God was the solution, and so I became religious. I went back to church after several years.

Being a Catholic, I went to confession. I started, I resumed receiving communion. I got involved in activity there at my church, in my community, I had a pre-conversion religious experience, and I tried my best to be a good man, but I found over and over again I was failing.

I was miserably failing. Sometimes I was condemned over it. Sometimes I was just hypocritical.

And I'd heard about the born-again thing, but I didn't need that. That's for lightweights. I'm a Catholic.

We've got the Pope. We don't need Chuck Smith. That was my attitude to some extent.

I came here a couple times back in the 70s, and I'd hear Chuck preach, and I'd think, what does that guy know? He's not the Pope. I mean, I was a, you know, I had this ingrained in me from my Irish Catholic father, and I was gonna do it. I was gonna do it my way for God.

Didn't need any of this, you know, this stuff over here. I could do it. But after a while, it became clear I couldn't do it.

It just wasn't working. And you know, one day, I was having a conversation with a friend who had become born-again, and he simply asked me, when did you become born-again? And those words pierced my heart like a sword. And I knew in that very instant that that was the issue that was standing between me and God.

And that minute, I repented and I asked God to save me. And I said simply, Jesus, I wanna be born again. And I was, that minute, that miracle took place.

Are you born again? Have you renounced your goodness and any hope of saving yourself? Have you realized it's not a reformation I need? It's not some self-improvement I need. I need an entirely new life. That's what Jesus Christ came to offer us, and that's what he's talking about here.

You must be born again. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you came.

Into this world so that we could have a new life. Lord, being dead in our trespasses and sins, we had no possibility of altering our condition. Oh, how we thank you that you came and did for us what we could never do for ourself and how, Lord, you offer us that new life.

And Lord, I pray tonight, if there's anyone that's joined us that is not born again, they can't say with absolute confidence tonight that they know that they have passed from death to life. Lord, grab hold of their hearts. Bring them to that place this evening.

Lord, that they might experience the miracle of the new birth. Help them not to leave here tonight before that happens.

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