

John 3

by Dennis Kinlaw

Jesus teaches Nicodemus about the importance of being born again and having faith in him in order to see the kingdom of God and have eternal life.

Duration: 1:03:18

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 21:12-13, John 3:3-16

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a group of girls who were enjoying themselves in a restaurant when a French gentleman approached them and criticized their happiness in a world filled with suffering. The speaker then transitions to the story of Jesus healing a paralyzed man, emphasizing that the man was brought to Jesus not because of his sins, but because of his physical condition. The sermon then shifts to the familiar story of Nicodemus visiting Jesus at night and their conversation about being born again. The speaker concludes by referencing John the Baptist's recognition of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Transcript

Our scripture lesson this evening is a very familiar one. It's the third chapter of John. Hear the word, this very familiar passage.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, who came to Jesus at night and said, Rabbi, we know you're a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the miraculous signs you're doing if God were not with him. In reply, Jesus declared, I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. How can a man be born when he's old? Nicodemus asked.

Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born. Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water in the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit.

You should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again. 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.

How can this be? Nicodemus asked. You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus, and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe.

How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the son of man. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so the son of man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only son. This is the verdict.

Light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

Will you pray with me for a moment? Our Father, we know that if your word is to come alive to us, we need you to give to us your Holy Spirit to quicken our minds and our hearts to see. So we ask you tonight to come to us again. You've done it before, but we need it again.

And so we pray that tonight you will come and touch every heart and every mind here. We thank you that we can trust you to keep your promise to us, because you did promise that if we'd come together in your name and ask you, you'd be in our midst and you would bless. So meet us tonight, we ask, and we will give you praise in Jesus' name.

Amen. This passage, I suppose, is about as familiar as any portion of the New Testament. Yet, it's a passage that I do not think I ever really put together fully before a matter of a year or so ago.

It began to break through to me how this passage relates to the rest of the Gospel of John and to the rest of the ministry of Jesus. Now, I'm not going to suggest that I've seen by any means all of it. One of the miracles to me about the Word of God is the way you can spend your life with it, and you will find familiar portions--you know this as well as I--that you've read a thousand times, and suddenly you'll see something that you never saw before.

But in recent years, I've begun to see the way this story fits into the chronology of Jesus' life. And when I saw it in the chronology of Jesus' life, I saw something that I had never seen before, and it cleared up a problem in the passage for me that had been there through the years. Let me go back for a few minutes and reconstruct the months in the life of Jesus prior to this event.

Now, to do that, you have to read not only John 1 and 2, but you have to read the early part of the Gospel of Mark, or else you have to read Matthew or Luke, because John gives you one segment of the life of Jesus, and Mark, Matthew, and Luke add to it and supplement it. You will remember John tells us about how his ministry began. It began down by the Jordan River.

The first chapter tells us about it. John the Baptist had come preaching. It had been hundreds of years since there had been an authentic prophetic voice in Israel, and now one appears again.

And the hearts of the people responded so fervently that we are told that the whole countryside went out to hear him. You will read in the Gospel that it says all Judea, all Jerusalem, and all Judea went out to hear him. That would be like a preacher coming along in the Chicago area and somebody saying, all Chicago and all Illinois went out to hear him.

Now, that's the kind of impact John the Baptist had. The impact that he had was so great that the temple said, what's going on here? It would be interesting if you had a preacher emerge in the United States who won great crowds of people to him, and he came with such sort of sudden impact that everybody said, this is an astounding new star on the horizon. And when he appeared, some newspaper reporter went to him to get his story and said, what denomination are you? And he said, I'm a Methodist.

And when that story was read in the bishop's house, his wife would look over at the bishop and say, who is this guy? I never heard of him. And the bishop would say, you know, that's strange. I never heard of him either.

Now that's the way John the Baptist exploded on the scene. The temple had nothing to do with him. He was down there in the wilderness and he came out preaching and everybody went out to hear him.

Now he made such an impact that there are indications in the text that people thought, wait a minute, this may be the Christ. If you read John 1, you will find that a delegation was sent from the temple to John the Baptist to ask him who he was. And when they came to ask him, they asked him, are you the Christ? Now you will remember that Israel had been waiting for 1,900 years for the Christ.

And through the centuries, as they passed, the picture of what he was to be like had developed and become clearer. Now the last 400 years had passed without any authentic voice, but the hope of the Messiah had not died. And the stamp of the Roman heel on Israel made every good Jew wish he'd show up and get those Romans off their backs.

And now John appears and they said, could this be the one we've been waiting for? The mark of God was on him. So the delegation came down from the temple and they said, are you the Christ? And he said, no. They said, then who are you? He said, I'm his voice.

I'm his front man. I've come to get you ready for him. And he's out there in the crowd.

Now it was the temple's business to check out any spiritual leader that developed in Israel. Do you think that delegation went back to Jerusalem that day when he said to them, he's out there in the crowd? I suspect some of them stayed around to see if they could locate him. We know that the next day John saw Jesus coming.

And when he saw Jesus coming, he raised his voice and said, there he is, the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Now, if any of that delegation was there, you can count on it that their eyes got big and they zeroed in to see who this was, that John the Baptist, the most authentic spiritual voice in 400 years in Israel, the one that John said, he's the Christ. And so you will remember John baptized him.

After he baptized him, you will remember the spirit of God descended upon him. And John turned to the crowd and said, here's the proof. I was told beforehand that I would know him by the descent of the spirit of God upon him.

This is he for whom we look. Now you will remember, if you remember the first chapter of John, that the next day John sees Jesus coming and he calls out again, behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. This is the one whom you seek.

And this is the one that you're supposed to follow. Now there were some guys listening to John who were friends of John. In fact, they were more than friends.

They were disciples of John. One of them's name was Andrew and the probabilities are that the other one was either James or John. And you will remember, they looked at each other and said, we've been following John and thought he was the one we were to follow.

He says we're to follow him. Now we believe John about everything else. Why shouldn't we believe him on this? So they came to Jesus and said, where are you staying the night, master? And they went home with him.

And after they'd spent a little time with Jesus, Andrew said, I got to go get my brother. And he went and found Peter. And he said, we found the one for whom Israel looks the one of whom all the law and the prophets have spoken.

Now you see, Andrew was saying, this is one we've been looking for. Now you will remember, Simon Peter came and that's where he began to follow Jesus. Now you will remember that the next day Jesus bumps into Philip and he says to Philip, follow me.

And Philip says, good, but let me go get my buddy first. And he goes to get Nathanael. And when he gets to Nathanael, he says to Nathanael, come see, we have found the Messiah.

Now, do you see how early in the life of Jesus, Jesus was identified by his closely knit group as the Messiah. I read the gospel for years and thought it was only 36 months later. You will remember when at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus turned to the disciples and said, who do you think I am? And Peter said, you're the Christ.

Now that's in Mark. But if you read John, the second day of his public ministry, there are people identifying him other than John the Baptist is the Christ. So when, when Philip says to Nathanael, we found him, Nathanael says, where's he from? And he says, well, he's from, uh, Wilmore.

He's from Nazareth. And Nathanael said, can any good thing come out of that place? And, uh, Philip says, you come and see. And when he came, he turned to him and said, yes, you are the King of Israel, the son of God.

It is very interesting to me that the first three days of Jesus' public ministry, every major messianic title was used of Jesus by one of the persons who heard him. He was called the King of Israel. He was called the son of God.

He was called the lamb of God. He was called the Christ. He was called the one whom we seek, the one of whom Moses and all the prophets spoke.

Now with that background, you will remember on the fourth day, Jesus said, I've got to go north. Do you want to go with me? And so these five or six fellows went along with him. They came to Cana and at Cana, he performed his first miracle.

And when he performed that miracle, you, if you remember the passage, John, the evangelist, the gospel writer says, after he performed that miracle, that his disciples believed on him there. Now I felt that they had had some kind of belief when they left their jobs, their homes, their friends, their families to follow him in the first place. But you see, now they see him perform a miracle and their faith is confirmed.

And they're saying, yeah, this is the one. They left Cana and came to Capernaum. Now Jesus made Capernaum his hometown for the next three years.

And he operated in and out of Capernaum. And you read about it in the first chapter of Mark. You will remember that on the Sabbath, he shows up in the synagogue.

It was his business to go to, to worship on the Sabbath. And so he shows up in the synagogue and they give him the text and he begins to teach. And as he taught, the people in the crowd said, he's different, isn't he? Now I love the passage.

Now my mind's sort of queer, so you'll forgive me if I, the way I think of it, but I can see Andrew and Simon Peter listening to him. And I can see old Peter nudge Andy and said, Andy, did you ever hear a preacher preach like that? He's different, isn't he? And Andy said, yeah, Pete, what is it that's so different about him? And Peter looks back and says, he makes sense. How long since you heard a preacher that made sense? You see, the text says he spoke as one who had authority.

Now, what is, who is a person who has authority? A person who has authority is a person who knows what he's talking about. Now, you know, as well as I, that oftentimes those of us in the pulpit, we don't sound like we know a great deal about what we're talking about. Our sermons just blew right past you.

I'll never forget a lawyer, my younger days I had in my church. He'd come out afterwards and look at me with a quizzical look in his face and say, what under the sun were you talking about this morning, Ken Law? I thank God for a little Irish grandmother that had about 20 grandchildren who'd come out after him and say, thank you, son. And she helped me along.

But nevertheless, I think that what is being said there is that they listened to him and they said, for heaven's sakes, he sounds as if he knows who we are. He sounds as if he knows where we are. I'll never forget a lady who said, why do you always point that finger at me? I didn't even know she was there.

But you see, that's when God is in it, when the person listening said, that's me, that's I he's talking about, you see. I think they felt he knows who we are. He sounds as if he knows where we are.

He sounds as if he knows where we ought to be. He sounds as if he knows how he could get us there. And they said, he sounds as if he knows what he's talking about.

And the great crowds came to hear him. Now, while he was preaching, you will remember there was a demoniac in the crowd and he disturbed the service. And so Jesus turned and rebuked the evil spirit and set out.

And the evil spirit, you will remember, was removed, banished. And the man was sane and well and normal and whole. And you remember, Mark says that the people in the crowd nudged each other and says, what kind of authority is this? He has power even over the demonic.

I want to tell you the way I understand that. I think they said, I think Peter looked at Andrew and said, Andrew, did you see him? He took the devil right out of that guy. He took the evil right out of his heart.

Do you think he could take the evil out of my heart? Do you know anybody who hasn't sometime somewhere wished he could find somebody who could deliver him from the evil in his heart? I don't believe there's anybody that's ever lived that hasn't sometime somewhere wished he could find somebody who could deliver him from the evil in his heart. And they said he has power even over the demonic. You can understand why people came to hear him.

They flooded the place. You will remember Peter said, let's take him home with us. And so Peter did.

When they got home, his mother-in-law was ill. And so Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. The next story is the healing of a leper.

So what are you getting now? He speaks to their heads and their hearts. He shows them he has power over the demonic, over evil, Satan himself. He has power over the physical body.

He can take a leper who is separated from his family and his friends and his job, isolated, and restore him to the bosom of his home, to those he loves, and to his normal life. He has all of this. Little wonder great crowds came to hear him.

And Jesus said, boys, we better leave. And so he took them away and preached somewhere else. Now I think the reason he left was so that they'd have time to think through some questions.

What do you think they talked about in Capernaum when he left? I think all they talked about was Jesus and what they'd seen him do and what they'd heard about him. And in due time, he came back after they'd soaked a little. And when he came back, the grapevine spread it real quickly and said, he's back.

And nobody asked who he was. They all knew. And they came together in the synagogue.

And it was so jammed, there was no way for people on the outside to get to him. And in that crowd out there were four fellows who had a paralytic friend, and they were bringing him so he could, Jesus could heal him. You see, they believed that whoever this guy was, he could heal their friend who was paralyzed.

You see, who Jesus was, was beginning to be known. And so, when they got there and they couldn't get to him, they climbed up on the roof, and they opened the tiles, lifted the tiles over where Jesus was speaking, and lured him right down. It's tremendous drama in these stories, isn't it? It was a group like this one, much bigger than this.

But suddenly, right at about this point in the service, suddenly the roof comes off, and down comes a guy. And as he comes down, Jesus looks over at him and calmly says, son, your sins are forgiven you. Now, that created some interesting reactions.

I'm sure one of those four guys upstairs nudged the guy next to him and said, what'd he say? And the first guy who got nudged said, I thought he said his sins are forgiven. And the first guy said, yeah, that's what I thought he said. How'd religion get into this? They didn't bring him because he was a sinner.

They brought him because he was a paralytic. They didn't think of their buddy as a sinner. They knew his need was physical, and this guy could meet physical needs.

And now Jesus is talking about something else. Now, wait. Mark tells us that there were some Pharisees over against the wall.

Who were those Pharisees? I think they were the same people that went to see John the Baptist. They were there from the temple. If the temple wanted to know whether John was the Christ before anybody had really identified him, and without his ever performing a miracle, do you think the temple didn't keep an eye on Jesus when he was turning water to wine and cleansing lepers and exercising the demons and healing people? You can count on it.

All three of the synoptics give evidence that from the opening days of Jesus' ministry, the temple had its eye on Jesus, and they followed him the same way J. Edgar Hoover's FBI followed Martin Luther King. And there they stand. And one of them nudges the Pharisee next to him and said, what did he say? And the Pharisee who got nudged said, I thought he said his sins are forgiven.

And the first Pharisee said, yeah, with some apoplexy. That's what I thought he said. Who does he think he is? Nobody can forgive sins but God and God alone.

And you know, at that point, I think Jesus looked over and caught the eye of that first Pharisee and went and said, that's right, boys. You're catching on because he's going to do what only God can do. Then who is he? Now, Jesus never looked at him and said, I'm the Christ.

He just did the Christ work. He did more than what they thought the Christ would do. He did God's work.

Now, don't you think that shook Jerusalem up? The temple said, we better get on top of this. And then the first Passover came and at Passover, every good Jew came to Jerusalem. And so Jesus headed for Jerusalem and he comes with several months of messianic work and witness behind him.

Now, when he came to Jerusalem, where'd he go? You know, when the president is inaugurated, where does he go? He goes to the white house, doesn't he? It's his house. It's his. He's been elected, but more than that, he's been inaugurated and the whole world knows now who he is and it's his house.

And he walks in and takes over. And so Jesus headed for the temple. That's where the Christ belonged to go when he came to Jerusalem.

It was his house. And when he walked in, you'll remember he didn't like what he saw. The same way Nancy rearranged the furniture in the white house, Jesus started rearranging some things.

The priest came to him and said, who do you think you are? This is not your house. He said, that's where you made a mistake. It is my house.

It's my father's house and you made it for me. And they said, we'll have to get rid of this guy. And the next story is Nicodemus comes to see him at night.

Now, you know, I think there's an interlude in between that John didn't bother to tell us. Are you going to tell me that when Jesus walked in and looked at those priests and said, this is my father's house and he straightened it out? Are you going to tell me they didn't have an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin? You know, jolly well, they did. If I came into your house with you and started rearranging the furniture in your house, your wife would say, come here.

Who is that guy? And who does he think he is? Well, they had an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin and they said, what are we going to do with this guy? Do you know who was in that emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin? Nicodemus was in it. You know, that never crossed my mind until fairly recently. So when Nicodemus shows up at night to visit Jesus, is he officially there or unofficially? Was he sent by the Sanhedrin or did he go on his own? It really doesn't matter because, sometimes unofficial visits are more official than official visits.

If you've ever been involved in that kind of thing, you know that usually the real work is done unofficially and the official work is just sealing what's already been settled. So Nicodemus shows up to Jesus and he says, we know you're a great guy because nobody could do the stuff you're doing if God wasn't with him. And Jesus looked at him.

Now, you know, that indicates that he'd done a lot more miracles than John has told us. Nicodemus says, we know that you've come from God because nobody could do the things you've been doing if God weren't with him. They knew all about his miracles.

And Jesus looks at him and says, Nicodemus, unless you are born from above, you cannot see the kingdom of God. Now that's interesting. Unless you are born from above, you cannot see the kingdom of God.

Now let me make two comments there, things I never noticed. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin and a leader of the people of Israel, a leader of the Jews. Later on in this passage, Jesus looks at him when Nicodemus has said, I'm an old man.

Can I enter my mother's womb the second time and be born? I don't understand you. Jesus looks at him and says, are you the teacher in Israel? And you don't understand these things. Now my translation doesn't say the teacher, the Greek does.

Now let me tell you something. Jesus was a Hebrew. I taught Hebrew for several years.

In Hebrew, you don't have a superlative form. You know how we say good, better, best, and the best is the superlative of good or bad, worse, worst, and worst is the superlative negatively. All right.

Or we add ER and it's a comparative and EST and it's the superlative. Hebrew doesn't have that. If you want to say the best looking man in the house, you say he is the best looking man.

You just put the article in front of it. If you want to say the best looking woman, you say she is the best looking woman. And if she's the best looking woman, there's nobody else are equal.

Jesus looks at Nicodemus and says, are you the teacher in Israel? And you don't understand these things. Now, hold on. You notice he says, you cannot see the kingdom of God unless you're born from above.

I read that for years and never noticed something. You know how common the expression, the kingdom of God is in the teaching of Jesus for the kingdom of heaven is like, or the kingdom of God is like, and the parables are all introduced that way. And seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other.

Let me tell you something. The expression, the kingdom of God occurs only twice in all 21 chapters of the gospel of John. All the expressions about the kingdom of God in the gospels other than two are in

Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Once Jesus used with one person twice the reference to the kingdom of God is with Nicodemus. Now, do you know why? I think I know why, and I think it's this. He was the teacher in Israel.

What was Israel's basic, most important teaching? It was about the messianic kingdom. It was about the kingdom that was to come. It was about the kingdom of God, and Nicodemus was Israel's expert on it.

He said, Nicodemus, you've got a PhD in the subject, and you know all the language, but you'll never see what you lecture on, and you'll never enter into it unless you're touched from above. Now, here's where let me jump something. Do you know, I never understood why this passage ends with John 3.16 until recently.

You see, John 3.16 says, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. That is the climax of the passage where Jesus says to Nicodemus, you'll never see the kingdom of God until you're born from above. Now, let me tell you what happened when Jesus cleansed the temple.

The archaeologists tell us that they have dug up enough remnants of stones that they now know that around the temple court when Jesus walked in it to cleanse it that first time, he walked past, I think it was 16 stones strategically placed, that said any Gentile who goes farther into the temple, any Gentile who goes beyond this point will promptly be stoned to death. Wouldn't it be interesting if in the Methodist church up here in the narthex there was a sign that said any Baptist who goes beyond this point will probably be shot. Now, I can remember in Wilmore when across the street from the college where the seminary is now, there was a little Baptist church and some of us used to enjoy going over there.

There weren't too many Baptists in Wilmore in those days and the Baptist preacher would preach about once a month on the heresy of the people who believed what they taught across the street. So, we'd go to listen and hear, but none of them ever shot us or executed us. But when Jesus walked into the temple there were those stones placed saying any Gentile who goes beyond this point will be subject to stoning immediately.

Now, why were those there? You see, the Jews thought the kingdom of God was for the Jews. The Jews thought the kingdom of God was for the Jews. He was their God.

And the Christ was going to be their Christ. And the King of Israel was going to be their King. And these defiling, unclean Gentiles, you'd have to keep out.

Is that why Jesus talked about God loving the world in this passage? You see, the end of chapter two is the cleansing of the temple. Chapter three is Nicodemus. He's just gone in, but now what did he say when he went into the temple? If you look at the cleansing of the temple, he did it twice at the beginning of his ministry and at the end.

His ministry is sandwiched in between these two demonstrations of his messianic rites. You will find that he calls it his father's house and he calls it a house of prayer. Now, it's interesting that those two expressions lead us to two passages in the Old Testament, which I never saw until the last three years.

One of these is Jeremiah 7, where Jeremiah stands in the temple courts and God says, preach to them. And he did. And what he preached was, the temple, the temple, the temple, don't ever let me hear you say the word again in the temple courts.

Because you think the temple, because you got it and you own it, you'll be protected from the judgments of God. Now that's the Jeremiah 7 passage. You know, there are a lot of people that think we're special because we're Christians and we're part of the Christian West and we're Methodists or Baptists or Episcopalians or Lutherans.

And so we've got a special corner. Jeremiah said, pure superstition. If your heart isn't right, and if you're not walking with God, and if you don't know God, the temple will be your judgment instead of your salvation.

That's one of the passages. But now what's the other one? The other one is Isaiah 56. I wish we had the time to open it and go through it.

We don't. But you ought to read Isaiah 56. You know what's in Isaiah 56? That's the passage where it says, my father's house will be a house of prayer for all nations.

700 years before Jesus came along, God said the temple is to be a house of prayer for all nations. And he says, the Gentiles, the foreigners, will come from the ends of the earth to these courts, will make their sacrifices to me, and their sacrifices will be acceptable in my sight. That's what the Old Testament text promises.

And when Jesus walked into the temple courts the first time, he walked past 16 stones that says, God was wrong. The temple's not for the Gentiles, the temple's for good Jews. Do you understand why he got a little upset? Now I read for years and never hooked those pieces together.

And Jesus stands and says, Nicodemus, you see, you've never been quickened. You've never had the Holy Spirit touch your heart and open your eyes. And so you see the kingdom is just for you Jews.

But my father, my father's not that narrow. My father loves a whole world. It's his world.

And his heart breaks for it. And he loves it so much he's sending his only son. And I'm he that I can die for it.

Now that's the background, I think, for John 3.16. You see, they narrowed it. Now, I guess that's especially poignant to me because I spent three years in a Jewish university and had developed some friendships with some interesting non-Gentiles. I remember one friend of mine who grew up on the streets of Brooklyn.

His life ambition was to get a PhD from a good American Eastern university and go to Israel and spend the rest of his life farming. I thought maybe if I grew up on the streets of Brooklyn, I might understand that. But I'll never forget one day he turned to me and said, oh, Ken Law, you're nothing but an old goy.

And I knew I was his friend then because a goy is a Hebrew word for the lowest form of human existence. He looked at me and said, you're nothing but an old goy. It's the Hebrew word for a Gentile.

Gentiles are unclean. Gentiles defile everything they touch. No good Jew can eat with a Gentile.

And so they kept these defiling Gentiles out of the temple courts. God's courts were supposed to be clean. Jesus looks at Nicodemus and says, Nicodemus, you've narrowed it.

You've narrowed it. My father built this place for the whole world, and that's what I've come for. And you say, we wouldn't do that.

But you know we have. One of the greatest days in the history of the church was the period of Martin Luther and John Calvin. All of us look back with gratitude to the Reformation.

I notice that even the Roman Catholic Church today is beginning to look back with gratitude to Martin Luther and John Calvin for saving the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone. But do you know something? In the Reformation, do you know what one of their major doctrines was? That only the predestined are saved. That God has a bunch of favorites.

He picks out a whole string of people and says, they'll be saved. And he either picks out the rest and says, let them be damned, or he just simply bypasses them with salvation. The doctrine of predestination, election.

That's an interesting view of God, isn't it? It's no accident that in the Reformation, they talked more about the sovereignty of God than they did the fatherhood of God. So, they theologized a narrowing. And you know the interesting thing? Most of the people that they believed were elect were white and westerners, and particularly Germans, because that's where they were.

They narrowed it. Now, I'm a Methodist. And at this point, you know, I take a little pride because Wesley came along and said that couldn't be.

Wesley said when he came along, he found the gospel table had been set by the Reformers, but the invitation list was too narrow. And that the invitation list had to be extended. And so, he knocked both ends out of the gospel table and lengthened it and stood up and said, whosoever will may come.

Now, that's closer, isn't it? But you know, one of the things I noticed in the Methodist church now, the Methodist church now we say, everybody's going to be saved. God would never let anybody go to hell. And you know one of the interesting byproducts of that? Always when you say everybody's going to be saved, you don't have to worry about anybody getting saved.

So, you can just let the whole world go to hell and say, God will be nice to them. I don't have any responsibilities. And anywhere universalism comes, you can count on it, compassion for the darkness, the spiritual darkness of a world goes.

So, we do it today. We narrow. You know, let me tell you one that shook me a little when I first thought about it.

I think those of us who are evangelicals and fundamentalists narrow the gospel with our new birth theology. If you were to catch the typical believer in this country and say, what does it mean to be born again? What would he say? I think the thing that new birth, being born again connotes to most people is, that's a way to get my soul saved. But if my picture is right, the new birth is not the way to get your soul saved.

It's the way to get your eyes open that God wants to save every man's soul. I've heard plenty of self-centered new birth sermons. Do you know what I mean? If you need to come and get born again so you can go to heaven, Jesus said, Nicodemus, you need to get born again so you can see God's purposes in the world, that he loves the whole world and wants to save the whole thing.

Now, I'm not against new birth, getting people saved into heaven. It's the only way we're going to get there. But when God saves a man, the thing he does, one of the reasons is not just to save his skin, but to let him be a part of his redemptive work to reach a whole world.

Now, that has begun to haunt me and sort of push me because Jesus said, you have to have your eyes open, Nicodemus, so you can see God loves the whole world. Now, we may not narrow it the way the Jews did, we just may narrow it with our concern. I was audited by the Internal Revenue Service about three years ago.

That was a good religious experience. I sat with a lady, you know, hour after hour as she went through my checkbooks, my check stub. When she got through with me, she knew all about me.

Most American checkbooks don't reveal that they've ever been touched by John 3.16. It's interesting how we narrow in so many ways, isn't it? Elsie and I know a dentist whose day off is Thursday. You know what he does with Thursday? He spends the whole day in intercessory prayer for world mission. You know, I think his eyes have been opened.

I think he's had happen to him what Jesus wanted to happen to Nicodemus. And you know, when I met him, I began saying, Lord, has enough happened to me? Are we narrowing? Now, why did the Jews narrow? With this I'm through. I think they misunderstood the extent of God's love because they misunderstood the depth of his passionate love for his creatures.

I don't think it's an accident that Jesus said to Nicodemus, Nicodemus, God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son. And you know, to have a son, you have to be a father. He didn't say the sovereign sent his servant.

He said the father sent his son. Now the Jews' favorite name for God, title for God was king of all the earth. But do you know, there's a difference between a king and a father and a radical difference.

And I'm convinced that most of us tend to think of God as a judge and king and ruler instead of a father. And because of that, our consciences can be eased about our concern for the world. Let me illustrate them through.

We have a couple of kids that are in France as missionaries. The first one to go over, she and her husband went over when they were in their upper twenties. They had not found a satisfactory mission relationship where they could find a mission board that would send them.

And so we talked it over and I said, Bruce, you're 27, 28. If you don't get French before you're 30, you're going to speak with an accent all your life. And French people hold Americans in enough scorn without speaking the language badly.

You better get over and see what you can do. So he went and they had a little girl. And so they needed a babysitter while the two of them were in language school.

They went to a salvation army captain who ran a hostel in Paris. It has about 700 girls in it. And he's a wonderful Christian guy.

And they said, could you help us? And he said, yes. And so he sent them a babysitter. The babysitter was a Jewess.

She was an interesting person because of not only was she a Jewess, but she was a cripple. When she was 19 months old, she had polio and it left her so crippled, crippled so badly that from that day to the present moment, she's never taken a step without pain. So she was a serious cripple, but a very capable person, very sharp and responsible.

So he said, she will take care of your child well. But she also was a Christian. Now her Christian life had had its problems.

She had had some friends who were Christians who said to her, Marisa see you, if you'd become a Christian, God would heal you. And she said, that'd be nice. Never taken a step without pain.

So she became a Christian and God didn't heal her. So she said, what'd I do wrong? Or why doesn't he love me? She was a member of a small, rather different Christian group. And one day the leaders of it turned to her and said, there's the boy you're supposed to marry.

And they picked out her husband for her. And they said to him, this is your, to be your wife. It'd be interesting to be pastor for a group like that and have that power, wouldn't it? But she, of course, looked at him.

He was healthy, wholesome, intelligent, Christian, a gentleman. Now that had special poignancy in her case, because you see, she had had five fathers and all of them had abused her. And some of them had sexually molested her.

She had never had a wholesome relationship with a male, a masculine figure. And now these Christians look at her and say, look at that nice, attractive, wholesome, young man. He's going to be your husband.

She didn't need to die to go to heaven. That was security for her. She'd have somebody to take care of her as a cripple.

And she respected him. And he said, I'm not sure that's right. And after she'd fallen for him, he backed out.

And it was when she was nursing her wounds from that, that she came to Sally to babysit our granddaughter. So Sally knew she had great problems and hurts. And they began talking.

And she began to say to Sally, Sally, you're a Christian. Doesn't God love me? Doesn't God care? Is there a God? If there is a God, why does he do these things to me? And Sally said, you know, Dad, I didn't know how to answer her. But she said, I found myself looking at her and saying, Marie Cecile, there is a God and he cares.

And I can't answer all your questions, but I want to tell you something. I don't know how it is, but I believe that the God who's there is a real father, not the kind of fathers that you've known, but the kind they ought to have been. And he cares for you.

And when you hurt some way or other, he hurts worse than you hurt. And she just looked. One day she came in to see Sally and she said, Sally, I have to share something with you.

She said, there were a group of us who were in a restaurant, cafe, and we were a group of girls and they were talking, having a good time laughing. And a French gentleman came up and looked down at them and she, and said to them, I noticed that you're quite happy and having a good time. And they looked back surprised and said, well, yes.

And he said, I think it's obscene. I have a daughter at home. That's five years old.

She's dying with an incurable disease. Medical science can do nothing for her. And while she sits and innocently dies, never having done anything to deserve that, you sit around and laugh and joke.

How can you laugh in a world like this? I think it's obscene. Now in that group were a couple of Christian girls. And one of them looked up at the man and said, sir, you ought to become a Christian.

You ought to pray. If you prayed for your daughter, maybe God would heal her. And he was some bitterness says, I've prayed more than any mortal you've ever seen.

And if there is a God, he hasn't heard. And at that point, one of the girls in Maurice Cecile's group looked up and said, you know, I have problems too about God. My mother burned to death right in front of my eyes.

If there is a God, how could that happen? If he cares, Maurice Cecile said, you know, Sally, I knew somebody had to say something and I didn't know what to say, but I tried. So I looked up at the man and said, sir, I can't answer your questions. I don't know all the answers, but I'll tell you one thing.

I believe there is a God and he cares. And when your daughter hurts, he hurts more than you hurt and more than she hurts. And he looked down at her and said, what do you know about pain? She looked back and said, I know something about pain.

Her friend said, Marie, have you ever had anybody rolled right out in front of you that you loved dead? Maurice Cecile said, the first few years of my life, I spent in a hospital. It seemed that every close attachment I made was with somebody that was terminal. Yes, she said, I've had the people I love, not one, but more rolled out dead in front of me.

She said, Sally, I had an inspiration. I looked up at the man and said, sir, when you stand next to your daughter's bed and look down at her and see her suffer, who hurts worse? You or she? He didn't think twice or wait to answer that one. He said, I hurt worse.

She's too young. She's too innocent. She's too naive to know the tragedy of her own case.

I hurt a lot worse than she hurt. Maurice Cecile said, sir, I believe there's one up there that when you're hurting, looks down at you and hurts worse than you hurt. She said, you know, Sally, funny.

When I began to talk about how he cares, some of my own scar tissues inside seem to just be taken away. Now, what kind of God is there up there? Jesus said, the God up there is not a God that has favorites among his children. Every person that lives, he cares for equally.

And those of you that know me, he says, keep narrowing it down. Keep narrowing it down. When I'm looking for people who can see the way I see, you need to be born again so you can see the way God sees.

And when you do, you're going to know that he loves the world and he loves it enough that he'll give the most precious thing and the most valuable thing he's got so that that world can be loved and can be saved, can be redeemed. And you know, the Nicodemus story has taken on totally different meaning for me now. I noticed that the fourth chapter of John is Jesus talking to a Samaritan.

That's sort of a footnote to chapter three, isn't it? Which lets you know he meant what he said. His disciples came back and said, what's he doing talking to her for? And I've been saying, Lord, let me see the way you see. Let me care the way you care.

Then maybe I can give the way you gave. I believe God's looking for some partners. That's the reason I like this bunch, because I think you know what I'm talking about.

And I think what's happened to me has happened inside you, or you wouldn't be in this group. This is the reason I love Maurice. I think his heart beats like God's heart beats.

And I know so much of my life I've tended to go this way. And here's old Maurice sitting, you know, at the time when you're supposed to sort of begin thinking about putting up your spurs and so forth, and he's going this way. I believe the reason is God's heart, you see, is like that.

And so in these days that we have together, let's ask him just to open our eyes to where we see a little the way he sees. Now, if your eyes are open, let's ask him to take us another step. Let's ask him to let us feel the way he feels.

And let's ask him to let us care the way he cares. And you know, if it happened to a group this small, the end of the earth would know it.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/20/SID20888.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/dennis-kinlaw/john-3/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net