

# Highest Priority

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala emphasizes the critical necessity of being born again to truly understand and experience the life God offers through Jesus Christ.*

**Duration:** 29:04

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 3:3, John 3:16-17, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9

**Topics:** "Priorities"

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## Description

In this sermon, the pastor emphasizes the importance of the gospel message and how it brings new beginnings and peace to those who believe. He highlights the sacrificial aspect of God giving his son, Jesus, to die for our sins and the mission of Jesus to save, not judge, people. The pastor encourages Christians to remember that their role is to represent Jesus as saviors, not judges. He concludes by quoting the famous verse, John 3:16, which emphasizes God's love for the world and his desire to save rather than condemn.

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## Transcript

The Bible is made up of 66 books and lots of doctrines and teachings. Some are what you would call primary, fundamental. Others you would call secondary.

Christians over the years have disagreed on secondary teaching, and we're not to argue about that. We can discuss it in a good spirit. For example, prophecy, interpreting the book of Revelation.

There's all kinds of places in the scripture where Christians are not in total agreement. And then there are teachings and truths which have the utmost importance. If you don't understand those, you don't understand Christianity.

And then among those teachings, there is this passage that I'm gonna read to you, which is very, very familiar to you. And if you don't grasp this, not only will you never know what it is to be a Christian, I'm separating now that from churchgoer, Protestant, Catholic, Baptist. These words don't mean anything to God.

There's only two kinds of people on the earth. There's believers and non-believers, Christians, his sons and daughters, and those who are not in his family as of yet. If you don't understand this, you also can't check your own faith, and you also can't know what to tell your children.

And it is amazing not only that people who go to church don't understand this passage, but as I travel around the country and the world, I have found ministers who, when pressed to it or over lunch or in Q&A times, when you say, what's the goal of the whole thing? What's the goal? Why did Christ leave us here on earth when he could have us in heaven now? Obviously, God is not ultimately into praise and worship because if he wanted us to do praise and worship, real praise and worship, we wouldn't be just fiddling around like we are today. He'd have us in heaven where they're doing real praise and worship. How do you think you'll praise and worship God when you see Jesus face to face? What kind of worship would that be, right? And no matter how we study the Bible, even the most learned theologian still, according to 1 Corinthians 13, we see through a glass darkly.

There's mysteries to Scripture. So Bible study is wonderful, but we're never gonna know everything. Nah, but this, to share this message, to understand this message, to apply this message, this is where it's all at.

So let's look at it. Very familiar, John chapter three. Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

That's the Sanhedrin. He came to Jesus at night, probably because he was fearful, and said, Rabbi, which means teacher, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the signs you were doing if God were not with him. And just a pause here.

In other words, he was saying, like, we understand you. I understand you, at least. We know you're sent from God, and you're like the most excellent teacher, and the way you do these acts of healing and whatever, these miracles, we know God is with you.

And then Jesus, as it were, skirts any direct response to him and takes him to a whole other level, which is what Nicodemus needed to hear. Jesus replied, very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. How can someone be born when they are old, Nicodemus asked.

Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born. Jesus answered, very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God, no one. Not one person can ever enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Flesh gives birth to flesh. But the Spirit, capital S, Holy Spirit, gives birth to Spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again.

This is one of the few places where Jesus says the mandatory coercive must. You must be born again. This gentle, wonderful Jesus is telling Nicodemus, you and everyone else must be born again.

And then later on in the chapter, the most popular verse in probably the Bible, New Testament for sure, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. Let's go back and start it over and read it together. 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. Notice the two things, God gave his Son, God so loved the world that he gave his Son, God sent his Son. One is the sacrificial aspect of God giving his Son to die for us, Christ, and then the other is the sending on a mission.

Not to judge. Every Christian ought to think of that every day. If you're representing Jesus, you're not sent to judge people, you're sent to save people.

Wouldn't that be helpful to everyone in the world? Our job is not to be judges. There was a book of judges, that's over now. God is not looking for judges, he's looking for saviors, small s, who will represent Jesus, the Savior, capital S. So Nicodemus comes by night, he's a Pharisee, there's record in history in the Talmud that at the end of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD when the temple was taken apart and burned and razed to the ground by the Roman allegiance that there was a man named Nicodemus who survived that all and who was a member of those who believed in Yeshua as the Messiah, Jesus.

He along with one other person who provided a tomb for Jesus seemed to be two people who were boy, they were in the soup, they were part of the Jewish ruling council that condemned Jesus but they believed in Jesus. So he comes to him by night and he begins to say complimentary things. We know that you're a special teacher from God and we know that God must be with you or you couldn't do these miracles.

But Jesus jumps way ahead of that and he lays out this. Born again, which is the phrase we use, are you a born againer, actually means in the Greek language more accurately born from above. Unless you are born again or born from above which means born again, you cannot even understand the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus, you think you're making strides and you know who I am? Unless you're born again, you don't even know what God's kingdom is about. Unless you're born again, you can't understand this Bible and find it as food for your soul, you can't. Unless you're born again, you don't understand the movings of the Holy Spirit.

Unless you're born again, you don't know the peace that passes all understanding. Unless you're born again from above, a miracle from God, you'll never know the joy that's unspeakable and full of glory. You can go to church, you can try to live a good life, you can read your Bible every day, you can compare yourself with others, but you're as far from the kingdom as we are from the sun which is 93 million miles away.

Jesus said you have to be born again. There's another realm of life that you have to be introduced into. It's the realm of eternal life.

It's the life that God is and has and gives. It's not just eternal in the sense that it has no end. It has no end.

But it's a quality of life. It's an atmosphere of life that you'll never know it until you're there. That's why people can come into a Christian meeting and everyone's weeping and praising God and so happy and there's joy and the other person is looking around and saying I don't get it.

Come on, some of us were like that before we got converted. How many before you were born again, you didn't get it? Come on, lift your hand, right? You didn't get it, like what are they, why are they so happy they're crying? Some people from a well-known award-winning TV series came years ago to us and wanted to do a special on the church and the choir. But while we were talking and discussing the possibility of that, which we did not do, we're not looking for publicity, we want to do the work of the Lord, amen? To be well-known means nothing, zero.

Many things that are well-known are an abomination to God and some things that are not even known to anyone are God is just so impressed by it and he's blessed by it, amen? So notoriety is not something

Christians should seek, nor churches, nor ministers. In fact, Thomas Akempis in The Imitation of Christ wrote seek obscurity. I remember writing that in my big Bible that I was reading from then.

Seek obscurity, seek not to be known, not to be seen, not to be heard. Because then if God wants to give you some exposure, he'll do it and it'll be safe because you're not looking for it. But to want to be famous and have your 15 minutes of fame is a very dangerous drug.

So while we were talking, he came into my office and he was here for a Sunday service and he had been mingling with you all and everywhere he was in the service and he said, pastor, what's the energy I feel here? There's energy all around this building. Like he had a little meter that measured energy. I said, no, you don't get it.

That's just the love of God, that's the presence of God. No, it's energy. I said, no, it's not energy, it's Jesus.

You can't understand anything unless you're born again. You can understand the law, do this and get that. Obey that and then you're rewarded.

That you can understand because that's the natural mind. But grace, to be saved though you don't merit it, to be accepted by God even though you've sinned all your life, that is totally not understandable unless you're born again. Unless you get new eyes to see.

You get new ears to hear. You hear what God is saying, you see. And the more we grow in God, the more we can experience the things of God's invisible kingdom, which is spiritual.

So let's just think about that. Here's the life that's offered. I don't know how a seed is planted for grass and then the first blade of grass comes up, that's alive, that's living, that's life, that's plant life.

It could be an apple tree, it could be a bush, it could be whatever. Could be one of those redwoods out in California. Those are living things, that's plant life.

But way, way, way above that plant life is animal life. Even though it's an amoeba or go to some little fish or go to a polar bear or go to whatever it might be, there are levels of intelligence in it, but it's animal life and it's way, way, way, way above plant life. But way, way, way above animal life is human life that can write Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, that can paint a beautiful painting, that can design and construct a skyscraper, that can write a beautiful song with harmonies, that can write novels, that can invent the computer.

That human life, it's got ears and eyes and a will and energy and things that plant life and animal life know nothing about. Jesus is saying to us, Nicodemus and everyone, there's another life way above human life. It's called God's life, eternal life.

The world of God, the world of spiritual, invisible things that have no end. Human life is conditioned by a beginning and an end. You're born, you die.

Eternal life, God's life has a beginning when you're born again. What's the seed? It's not a human sperm. It's the word of God, the word of the gospel, but it has no end.

It has no end. The person who's born again never dies. Will never be separated from God.

A billion years from now, all of us who are born again, we're gonna be praising God. How many are looking forward to that, like a billion years from now? Here in this human life, we're conditioned by disappointment, jealousy, hate, prejudice, murder, getting walked out on by somebody, having someone stick a knife in your back and turn it once or twice. Sickness, disease, fear, guilt, sin, temptation, struggle, that's all part of flesh gives birth to flesh.

But the life that God gives is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. You begin to experience it here right now when you're born again, but it doesn't come into its full fruition until we enter eternity where there's no more pain, no more sadness. Aren't you looking forward to that? I am so sick and tired of this world.

Now I get why people write songs, Lord, I wanna go home. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus. How many wouldn't mind if he came like right now while the meeting is going on? Yes, Lord.

No, but we have a job. That's why we're here to pass on this message, you must be born again. Born from above, it's a miracle.

Notice it has nothing to do with self-effort. Did you have anything to do with your biological birth? Did you like say, now I wanna be born? No. It was a miracle on the human level, shall we say.

This is born from above. This is the total misunderstanding of Christianity by 86% of the American population says, I feel I'm gonna go to heaven if I live a good life. This has nothing to do with living a good life.

It has nothing to do with turning over a new leaf. It has nothing to do with crying tears and saying, God, I'm gonna try harder. That does not make you a Christian.

The only way to be a Christian and go to heaven is to be born again. Born from above. Listen, a new heart, new eyes.

They're not here, they're here. New ears, they're not here, they're here. New desires, wanting to live right.

How many people are trying to be a Christian and fighting against everything that makes them fleshly and human and they have no outside help from God because they've never been born again? The Protestant Reformation began. It'll be celebrated its 500th year anniversary next year, 1517 to 2017. Martin Luther was a monk and when he went in studying to be a lawyer, he said and writes, if anybody wanted to live a good life, it was me.

If anyone was sincere and wanted to beat that sin out of them and live for God, it was me. But I lived in such torment that I got to hate God. And I went to my superior and said, you tell me to love God.

How can I love God? I hate God. Because all I see in him is judging me for the mistakes I make. And when they would have confession together, he would not have to some days throw himself in front of everyone and confess lust and this and that and evil thoughts and all of that.

And then when he stood there and saw others confessing, he realized that he was proud now that he wasn't there and then he confessed that sin and it was an endless thing. When he sinned, he sinned and when he didn't sin, he sinned for pride and self-righteousness until he wanted to just end his life. He thought he could beat it out of him.

So he made a whip with metal in it and he would do flagellation and beat himself and they would find him in the morning unconscious laying in his own pool of blood. Why? Because he was sincere. I wanna live for God.

I wanna be right with God. How am I gonna get right with God? Does he accept 90% good? How about 95% good? Oh, yesterday was a mess. I was only 50% good.

When does he accept it? Listen, he'll never accept it. What he accepts is when you accept Jesus into your heart. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that not whoever tries to live a good life, whoever receives Jesus will never perish but have everlasting life.

When you receive Jesus, you receive the gift of another kind of life. Don't you get it? It's a gift. Teachers can come along and help develop that life.

You can learn how that life works. You can grow in maturity, sanctification, prayer, knowledge in the word but if you don't have life, you don't have life. It's like going to a corpse and saying, now get up and let's play basketball.

He can't, he's a corpse. But when God comes, he brings life. Come on, everybody happy that he brings life of another kind.

So if anybody knows about turning over new leaves, it's me. As I've told you, some years in my life, I turned over more new leaves than Central Park. But don't laugh at me, you've done the same.

And I'll do better, I'll be better. No matter how better you ever are gonna be, it'll never be enough. Can you give it up? Can you just admit that? Because you gotta compare yourself with God.

Don't compare yourself with me, you might look very good compared to me but how about God? That's why Jesus said, Judaism is at its end now because all you know is command and do. Obey this, the Sabbath and don't kill, don't do this, don't do that. That's all you know.

Circumcise your children, all of that and it's all for naught. The only thing that counts, Paul says, is a new creation. And Jesus came into this world and he's here today among us, not to judge anyone.

What does he want to judge? He died on the cross, he didn't come to judge you. There'll be a day of judgment but it's not now. Now he stands just, who can I help, who can I save? And I just want to close because, I guess I'm thinking of it because of current events but yeah, Jesus is weeping over this country which has had so much light, the gospel.

But he's weeping over England. Don't make America special, he's weeping over Ghana. He's weeping over Nigeria.

He wept over Jerusalem. And maybe he's weeping over you today. And he's saying, I spoke to you, I sent a song, I sent a verse, you had an aunt who brought you to church.

I let you be exposed to my love and my light. Oh Jerusalem, this is before they crucified him. Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how many time I would have gathered you but you wouldn't let me.

That's the mystery of human will. You can turn God down. No, no, God's gonna do what he's gonna do.

I know you can find those verses but the Bible also says whosoever will may come. You can say yes, I want to be born again. I want to put my faith in Jesus.

You know, it's so simple that it's made for a two year old child so it's on the lowest shelf where a child can get it, right? But that's the trouble for us adults. You gotta bend over sometimes and humble yourself. You gotta go onto the lowest shelf and say, you know what, I ain't all that.

I need him, I need Jesus. I need to be born again. You can have a new beginning, don't you get it? Born again, isn't that what we all want? In life is a new beginning.

I remember being in the second and third grade and the teacher would say, here are your crayons. Now draw a house with a tree and a thing. And I always was sitting with kids who were artistic and they would draw nice things and the sky and I have no artistic ability.

And my pictures, I almost wanted to cover them so that nobody would see them, they were that bad. And then when I would go over the line where I should have gone, I wanted to crumple it up and throw it away and say to the teacher, could you give me a new sheet of paper? Give me one more shot at this. That ever happen to anybody? Here's what Jesus is saying.

You can have a new beginning, but with my equipment, because your equipment can't make it. Oh, have you found out, how many have found out with my equipment and your natural ability, you can't live the way God wants you to live? How many have found that out? Lift your hand real high. And then what happens if you try and go down that road, you live with guilt, you don't have peace, you can't sleep at night, you're afraid to talk about dying.

Every time you hear of a terrorist attack, you get nervous. Why, because you don't wanna die while the person who's born again says, even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus. If I live, I live for him, if I die, I'm gonna go to be with him, so let's get this thing on.

All that matters is to be born again. You can be, if you're not born again here today, please do not, so that no one's, I have no, I don't wanna use the ultra raw expression of blood on anyone's hands, but I don't want the responsibility for anyone's guilt. There are churches that are not telling you you must be born again.

They're saying just join and live any old way you want, and as long as you tithe and come to the church, everything's good, that is a lie. You must be born again, but you can be born again. He wants you to be born again, he wants you to have a new beginning.

I was praying with this man on Friday night, and God is giving him, I believe, a new beginning, a new start. And if you're here today and you are a Christian and you're in the ditch and you've left the road, come on, get a new beginning, just get back on trusting Jesus. If you've drifted away, just trust Jesus.

Don't try to do anything. If you could do anything, God wouldn't have sent his son. He sent his son because that's how hopeless we are.

That's how helpless we are. So just get back to Jesus. Yeah, go to church if you like this one, praise God, but it's not the answer.

Nothing's the answer but Jesus. Could you close your eyes with me? Anybody here, before I closed the service, who would say, pastor, the wind, the spirit was blowing in my heart while you were talking. And now I'm reminded how much Jesus loves me, how much God loves me.

He gave Jesus to die for my sins on a cross, shed his blood so that my sins could be forgiven and that I could have a new beginning. This is the simple gospel message, but if you think I'm embarrassed to preach it, you have no concept how happy I am to tell you the good news. You can be born again.

You can have a new beginning. You can have peace. All that depression you're suffering from, he'll give you joy, he'll give you peace.

If you left the road, you can come back. But he didn't come to judge you today, he came to help you. Don't turn his help away.

Don't turn it away. Anybody here wanna just stand where you are and say, pastor, pray for me before you end the service because God brought me here for a reason today? That message, simple as it is, I needed to hear it. Just stand where you are so I can pray for you.

Thank you, sir. Thank you. Just stand up right where you are.

Don't be embarrassed or shamed or anything like that. My goodness, Jesus was stripped just about naked and hung on a tree and beat to death, crucified for us publicly, and now you might be afraid. I might be ashamed to stand and say I need him.

No, no. He's gonna help you. Whoever humbles himself, he'll exalt.

Whoever exalts himself, those he casts aside. I know this is a Christian audience, but obviously there's a bunch of folks God has been talking to. If you stood, come on down quickly to the front here.

We're just gonna say a prayer over you and help you because today's your new beginning. Anyone here need a new beginning? I said, does anyone here need a new beginning? Would you come down here? Right to the edge. Jesus, I thank you for your word that we can be born again.

By trusting you and what you did on the cross, we can have a new beginning. We can have peace, joy, forgiveness, eternal life. And now God, the good news of what you've done and what you offer has caused these people to respond.

Show mercy, Lord. People in the front here, repeat after me. Congregation, let's help them.

Dear Jesus, thank you for loving me. I'm at the end of myself. I need a new beginning.

I need you. You are my beginning and the middle and the end. I confess my sins, no excuses.

Forgive me. I want to live a different way, but I can't without you. Come into my life.

Change me from the inside out. Give me a new mind. Give me a new heart, new desires, new interests, new friends.

I choose today to trust in Jesus. Thank you for not condemning me. Thank you for loving me.

I love you back because you first loved me. And I believe in my heart and confess with my mouth that you are the Son of God, raised from the dead. And I'm gonna be with you forever and ever.

Help me the rest of today, in Christ's name. And everyone said.

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