

“Religion vs. Relationship” Delivered by E A Terry August 8 2019

Luke 11:37 – 54; Ephesians 2: 1 – 22; 1st Peter 1: 13 – 25; **John 3: 1 – 21 (Sermon)**

In our scripture lesson from John we introduced to a man named Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin.

This tells us that Nicodemus was a very religious man.

Nicodemus had dedicated his life to studying and teaching The Law, The Prophets, and the Jewish traditions.

As a member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus was one of 70 devout Jewish men who ruled the Jewish nation.

This meant Nicodemus was rich, admired, respected, and considered to be a role model for the Jewish people.

For us to understand what Jesus is teaching Nicodemus and for us to apply Jesus’ teaching to us today we need to know about the Pharisees.

The focus of the Pharisees was to become righteous by strictly adhering to The Law of Moses.

In an attempt to win God’s favor by strictly keeping The Law, the Pharisees wrote over 400 additional laws to interpret The Law of Moses. The word Pharisee comes from a Hebrew word meaning to separate.

The Pharisees’ devotion to keeping The Law forced them to be separated from other people that were not Pharisees because they considered these other people as sinners.

The Pharisees were proud of the fact that they *“kept the Law”* and they wanted everyone to know how religious they were.

So we must ask ourselves why Nicodemus came to Jesus.

While not specifically stated, I believe the reason is clearly implied.

Although Nicodemus was very religious, well-respected, rich, and a person of authority, Nicodemus realized that he lacked something in his life.

Nicodemus knew there was more to religion than just knowing The Law, teaching The Law, and obeying The Law.

Nicodemus knew there was more to religion than going to The Temple each day to pray to God, to sacrifice to God, and to serve God.

I believe Nicodemus was honestly seeking a meaningful life filled with joy.

Nicodemus thought that Jesus just might have what he was searching for because Jesus was truly a miracle worker and in verse 2 Nicodemus said he knew Jesus was close to God.

Nicodemus wanted God to work a miracle in his life.

I believe Nicodemus wanted more than religion and that Nicodemus wanted a relationship with God.

While some people believe Nicodemus came to Jesus at night to avoid exposing his need to the people and his fellow Pharisees, I believe Nicodemus came at night so he could have a quiet, uninterrupted, serious conversation with Jesus.

I believe this because verse 2 says; ***“we know you are a teacher come from God. For no one could perform these signs you are doing if God were not with him.”***

The ***“we”*** in verse 2 has to refer to the Pharisees since the Pharisees did not associate with ***“sinners and publicans.”***

The Pharisees honestly struggled with who Jesus was.

The Pharisees had come to the conclusion that Jesus was a ***“great teacher who had come from God.”***

However, the Pharisees could not figure out how Jesus fit into God establishing His kingdom.

The Messiah most Jews were looking for was an earthly king to sit on David’s throne.

The Messiah they were looking would overthrow the Roman occupation of Israel.

The important point is that Nicodemus invested his time and himself in seeking a personal relationship with Jesus.

Jesus looked right past Nicodemus’ words because Jesus knew what Nicodemus was searching for.

That is why Jesus responded by saying ***“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again”***. (Verse 3)

Jesus knew that Nicodemus did not have a relationship with God.

Nicodemus knew about God but Nicodemus did not know God.

Nicodemus was spiritually dead.

That is why Jesus said, ***“you must be born again.”***

Jesus’ response ***“you must be born again”*** really confused Nicodemus because Nicodemus was focused on the physical not the spiritual.

Jesus was talking about a spiritual birth while Nicodemus was thinking Jesus was talking about a physical rebirth.

Nicodemus missed the whole point of Jesus’ spiritual statement.

Sin causes us to be spiritually dead and to become spiritually alive we must be born again.

Jesus knew Nicodemus wanted to experience the Kingdom of God.

So Jesus guided Nicodemus into a new level of understanding.

The Greek word Jesus uses here means, “*born again*” **or** “*born from above*”.

This ambiguity appears to be deliberate because when Nicodemus states the physical impossibility of reentering a mother’s womb, Jesus uses this opportunity to drive His point home in verse 7 by stating that a person must be born of the Spirit before they can enter the Kingdom of God.

Nicodemus asked, “*How can this be?*”

What does being born again look like?

How can we detect the presence of the Spirit working in a person’s life?”

Jesus answers by using an analogy of the wind.

You cannot see where the wind comes from or where the wind goes but you can certainly see and hear the results.

To be born again means to be focused on spiritual things.

It means a change in a person’s attitude and actions.

To be born again means to have a personal relationship with The Lord.

The sad thing is that many people today are like Nicodemus and like the Pharisees.

They are very religious; they know **about** God, but they do not **know** God.

They do not have a personal relationship with The Lord.

When Jesus answered Nicodemus the first time Jesus said, “***No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.***” (Verse 3)

Then in verse 5 Jesus said, “***No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.***”

The water is symbolic of a person’s need for spiritual cleaning when it is used in conjunction with The Spirit.

To help Nicodemus understand, Jesus referred to the familiar account in the Old Testament in Numbers 21 about Moses and the bronze snake on a pole.

You see, when the children of Israel were in the wilderness they sinned when they complained about their circumstances, the free food, and the lack of water.

They sinned when they failed to thank God for choosing them, for providing for them, for protecting them, and for fighting for them.

The people's ungrateful attitude and their disobedient actions angered God so much that God sent deadly poisonous snakes among the children of Israel to remind them of who they were, that God is the giver of life, and that people are accountable to God.

However, the good news is that God provided a way for them to be saved from physical death.

In order for a person to live that had been bitten by one of these poisonous snakes, that person had to believe God's Word and to look at the bronze snake on the pole.

These people were not healed by the bronze snake on the pole but rather they were saved by believing that God would heal them if they obeyed God's instructions.

Just as the Israelites were healed from the deadly venom of the snakes in the wilderness when they believed God's word and looked at the bronze snake on the pole, all people today can be healed from the deadly venom of sin by believing God's word and accepting Jesus' substitutional death on the cross.

When Jesus reminded Nicodemus about the bronze snake on the pole, Jesus was clearly telling Nicodemus that Jesus is the only cure for sin, and that Jesus is the only giver of life.

Romans 10:9-10 says, ***"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."***

In verse 14 of our text Jesus was also clearly predicting His crucifixion and His resurrection.

The question then becomes how does a person be born again?

This account about Nicodemus tells us how a person becomes born again.

First and foremost a person must come to Jesus.

Jesus said, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except through me."***

Jesus also said, ***"I came that you might have life and life more abundantly."***

Secondly, you must come with a repentant heart.

You must be earnestly seeking more than an outward form of religion.

You must be seeking to fill the spiritual void in your life that only Jesus can fill.

You must be honestly seeking an inward transformation.

You must be earnestly seeking a personal relationship with Jesus.

Ephesians 2:12 reminds us that before we came to Christ we were foreigners to the covenant of promise and we were without hope.

But after we come to Jesus we have peace with God because we are adopted as children of God.

Jesus said, ***“Seek you first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness then all these things will be added unto you.”*** (Matthew 6:33)

Being born again is the beginning of a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

True life, or spiritual life, begins when you choose to put Jesus first in your life.

When you are born again you love The Lord, you choose to obey Jesus’ commandments, you want to serve Jesus, you love other people, and you choose to model your life after Jesus.

Romans 6:11 tells us when we come to Christ we are no longer dead in our trespasses and sins but we become alive in Christ Jesus.

In verses 19 and 20 Jesus uses the illustration of light and darkness to help Nicodemus understand what it means to be born again.

Evil is depicted as darkness and as you know, Jesus is The Light Of The World. People who have an evil heart resist coming to Jesus.

The unsaved people around you may never read The Bible or ever go to church but they will observe the way you talk and the way you act.

Other people can easily observe the effect of God’s Spirit working in you.

Remember in verse 21 Jesus says, ***“Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”***

There are two primary truths about being born again in our text this morning.

First being born again is not about human efforts (verses 1-2).

If anyone *“deserved”* to enter into The Kingdom of God, it would appear that Nicodemus had all of the right qualifications.

Nicodemus certainly seem to be worthy of eternal life.

Nicodemus was religious to the core but Jesus told Nicodemus he was religious but spiritually dead and he needed to be born again.

Nicodemus found out that being religious will not save you.

Becoming a member of a church, becoming a pastor, an Elder, or a Deacon or memorizing The Bible will not get you into The Kingdom of God.

You must be born again!

The second primary truths about being born again in our text is being born again is a spiritual birth that is a supernatural event that is initiated by God and controlled by God.

Being born again only comes through Jesus Christ, The Giver of Life and The Savior of the World.

Our part in being born again is to have a sincere desire to have personal relationship with Jesus The Christ.

We have to be willing to come to Jesus, expose our sinful self, and to invest some time with Jesus.

God's word to us is clear; no matter how religious we are, how much scripture we memorize, how intelligent we are, or what church we belong to, we are spiritually dead until we are born again.

To be born again we must come to Jesus with an open mind, a repentant heart, and a sincere desire to be with Jesus each day so Jesus can teach us the truth about God.

Then we must apply God's truth to our daily lives.

God's word to us today challenges each of us to wrestle with the following questions;

Am I seeking more than an outward form of religion?

Do I care enough to seek Jesus out and to have a private meaningful conversation with Jesus?

Do I really want Jesus to transform my life?

This morning we all need to honestly ask ourselves; "*am I practicing a religion **or** am I enjoying a close personal relationship with Jesus The Christ?*"

AMEN