

John 3 (Part 1): 1-15 · Nicodemus and the Bad News

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John chapter three, beginning at verse one. We're going to be reading down through verse 15, so follow along as I read.

“¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him.’”

“³ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”

“⁴ 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?’”

“⁵ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’”

“⁹ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can these things be?’”

“¹⁰ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into Heaven except He who descended from Heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.’”

Stop there please. Let's pray.

Father God, as always, we come to You with a heart that desires to learn, but also LORD, with an attitude that says, “Teach me.” For You are the Teacher, LORD. We are the students.

And it is through Your Spirit, LORD God, that we are given understanding. And so Father, we come before You humbly today, and we ask You to open the spiritual eyes of our heart, and also LORD, those spiritual ears, to hear Your voice. Speak to Your people. Teach us, instruct us, exhort us; we ask it in Jesus' precious Name, amen.

I don't know if you've ever wondered how it was that the apostle John could write down this conversation with such detail and stuff when it's Jesus and Nicodemus having the conversation. But you know, because of [the TV series] “The Chosen,” we now know that John was hiding in a stairwell and taking notes. So now we've got that. [laughter] Anyway.

The main— one of the main characters of the narrative here, as you can see, is a man by the name of Nicodemus. And the first thing we learned about him is that he came by night. Now I have read many commentaries over the years that kind of speculate why Nicodemus came at night. And really at the end of the day, it's just speculation because John doesn't tell us why he came at night.

He just simply says he came at night. Now it could have been because he was trying to lay low, keep a low profile. You know, he was a Pharisee, on the ruling council of the Jews. And it could be that he just didn't want to be seen talking to Jesus openly. We don't know. We just don't know, but whatever the reason was, Nicodemus was a man who would've been very interested in the kingdom of God.

And I say that because the first thing Jesus says to him is about the kingdom of God. And you need to kind of put this all together. Nicodemus would've been thinking a lot, as a Pharisee, well as a Jew, about the kingdom of God. And you know, as a teacher of the Jews, he would've even taught the scriptures himself, the prophecies that foretold the coming of a leader, a great leader. Right?

The Mashiach— or the Messiah, as we pronounce it, Who would come, be raised up, anointed by God and lead the people of Israel into great victory; liberate them from their enemies and establish the new era; the new age and the kingdom of God. He would usher in the kingdom of God. And that's what every Jew was raised to believe and it was correct. It was absolutely right. That's what God said (Isaiah 9:6-7 and Daniel 2:44).

Here's the thing though; Nicodemus would've assumed that his entrance into that kingdom was assured. And this would've been based on several different things, not the least of which, the fact is that he was born into a Jewish home.

In other words, he was a son of Abraham. That was critical. You know? As a son of Abraham, he was in. Right? Because the promises were made to Abraham and his descendants, and therefore for Nicodemus this was great. Now, on top of that, he also was trusting in the fact that he had received the Abrahamic sign of the covenant from God, and that was the sign of circumcision, and he was trusting also in that.

And if that all wasn't enough, Nicodemus was a man who had arisen to a very enviable position as one of the pillars of the Jewish religious community as a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Ruling Council. This was a man with authority, a man who was a teacher, who instructed others. People came to him for information and insight and so forth.

And so you see for Nicodemus, this whole idea of the kingdom of God, this was a foregone conclusion “I will be in the kingdom of God. There's no question about it. All of these things that are attached to my life and my upbringing and so forth guarantee it for me.”

You can imagine for Nicodemus the shock of sitting down with Jesus and the and right out of the shoot– the first thing out of Jesus' mouth as they're talking is in verse three, look with me in your Bible. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

Now remember, this is– for Nicodemus, it's– he's all about the kingdom of God. And he's in! He's got his ticket. He's just waiting for the Messiah to show up. And Jesus comes along and He makes this statement that in order to see the kingdom of God, you must be born again. And Nicodemus is just flabbergasted. This has absolutely stopped him in his tracks.

Suffice it to say it's a major blow to all he has ever believed and been taught, “Born again? *Born again?* What are you talking about?” So he (Nicodemus) responds in verse four by saying, *“How's that even possible?”* He says, *“How can a man be born when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb? What's...? You're talking gibberish here, Jesus.”* Right?

Well it's obvious from the response that you see from Nicodemus that he's thinking of this on a physical level. He's interpreting the remarks that are being made by Jesus here as relating to natural birth. And so he's thinking of it along

those lines, and he's asking the question, "How is it possible to repeat a natural birth?" But Jesus isn't talking about a natural birth. He's talking about a Spiritual birth.

And that's what He (Jesus) goes on to clarify in verses five and six. If you look with me in your Bible, it says, "*Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'*" And then He emphasizes it even further in verse six by saying, "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" Right?

So Jesus is clearly telling Nicodemus, and us, that what is needed to enter the kingdom of Heaven is not another physical or natural birth. You've already had that happen once. What is needed is a Spiritual birth. You must be born by the Spirit. You are already born of your mother. Now you must be born of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Now this is not the first time we've encountered this idea here in the gospel of John. We're not that far into this book; just starting the third chapter. But way back in the first chapter, you'll remember that the apostle John talked about this idea of phys– spiritual rebirth. Let me show it to you on the screen, from John chapter one. It's verses 12 and 13.

John 1:12-13 (ESV)

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John writes, "*But to all who did receive Him, [Jesus] who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.*" Well, how are you made children? You're made children by being born. But what kind of a birth is it? He tells you there, first of all, what *it's not*.

He says, "*...who were born not of blood.*" That's natural birth. He says, "*...who were born not of the will of the flesh.*" That again is natural birth. He says, "*not of the will of man,*" which is natural birth but, "*born of God.*" That's Spiritual birth. So John has already given us this. We've already been introduced to it.

Now. So we're going to talk today about Spiritual birth and what it means; what it is. But before we move on, I know that there are some of you who are probably wondering what Jesus meant when He made that statement, "*Unless one is born of water and the Spirit....*" And if you are wondering what that

means, you're in good company because people have been wondering for a long, long time what Jesus meant by those words.

But let me just tell you that some people have concluded that the reference to water there is in relation to water baptism, and they have concluded by that, that what Jesus is telling you and me, is that water baptism is required in order that we might be born again.

That conclusion is wrong. It is mistaken, and we know that it is wrong because the rest of God's Word leads us to that conclusion. You know, people ask me every so often, "Pastor Paul, what resource can you recommend to me for studying the Bible and helping to understand it?"

And I tell them, "Well the best resource to understand God's Word is the very Bible that you're reading. Because one of the very first elements, or aspects, of true biblical interpretation is: let the Bible interpret the Bible." Okay?

So knowing the Bible and what the Bible has to say is the best interpretive tool that you can use. And when we look at verses like this and we ask ourselves the question, "What did Jesus mean when He said, *'being born of water and the Spirit?'*" The best thing to do is to consult the rest of God's Word and we do that. And there— and you know, when you look through the New Testament, and you read those passages that speak about how we're to be saved. Right? The Good News essentially. Most of those passages do not mention anything about water baptism. They simply say, "*Believe.*"

In fact, we're going to get, you know, John 3:16, we'll get to it next week, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.*"

There's no mention there of water baptism, and that is the case with many, many passages in the New Testament that speak of our salvation. When Paul, in Ephesians, chapter two, talks about how we are saved, he says, "*It is by grace through faith that you are saved and this, not of yourself, it is the gift of God so that no one may boast.*"

There's no mention there at all of water baptism, and that is the way it is in most of the passages. But you know frankly, one of the most revealing statements that I feel, that is in the New Testament related to this, is a statement that Paul made when he wrote his letter to the Corinthians, his first letter. Let me show you on the screen. Chapter one, verse 17.

1 Corinthians 1:17 (ESV)

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” The apostle Paul, who is given the commission by God to go out into the uttermost parts of the world and share the gospel, raise people up unto salvation and start churches said, “God didn't send me to baptize.”

Now that's really interesting. If baptism is a required element for salvation, then Paul wasn't doing the whole job. He wasn't he wasn't even the finisher. He might have been telling people about Jesus, but somebody had to come along later and dunk them, or his job wasn't finished. Well, it's ridiculous.

Many, many times in Paul's own letters, he references the fact that we are born again. We are saved by putting our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

And that and *that alone saves you*. You always got to go back to the thief on the cross. You know? Here's this guy hanging on the cross, nailed to a cross just like Jesus. Cries out to the LORD, “*LORD, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.*” (Luke 23:42)

And Jesus said, “I'm sorry, but you've got to get baptized and you're nailed on the cross and that ain't going to happen.” (laughter) That's not what happened, is it? He said, “*This day you'll be with Me in Paradise.*” (Luke 23:43)

So there are many, many references in the Bible that I could go on and quote, but I won't. Frankly one of the clearest statements that will help us understand what water *does refer to* here in this passage is right here in the context. Have you heard people say that? “Stick to the context,” and the context means this is the theme of what is being said, so stay with the theme.

Now I will tell you right now before we get into this, that there are some verses you can take out of context. I hope you know that, and they are any verse that has to do with the nature of God or something that is true about God. Whatever is true about God is true about God *regardless of the context*.

So if it says that God is a God of justice, then He's always a God of justice *regardless of the context*. If it says that He is a God of love, He is always a God of love *regardless of the context*. You with me? So *anything you say about God can stand in any context*.

But for the rest of things, like symbolic statements made related to water, we need to say, “What's the theme?” And let's stick with that theme so that we can—it'll help us to understand what is being said in the passage. So let's, you know—what's going on in this passage? We got a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Jesus says, “*You must be born again.*”

And Nicodemus responds by saying, “I don't get it. How can a person be born a second time naturally?” Right? This is the context of the conversation. The context is the misunderstanding by Nicodemus of what Jesus had said.

Jesus is speaking spiritually. Nick took it naturally, or physically. That's the context. Okay? So now let's go on and look at it in that context. Again, verse four, “*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time in his mother's womb to be born?*”

Jesus answered. What is He answering? He's answering Nicodemus' misunderstanding, which is the context of the passage. So He answered, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*” And verse six goes on in our LORD's response. And He says, “*that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*” Guys remember, the whole context of this passage is about natural birth versus Spiritual birth. Natural versus Spiritual. Natural versus Spiritual.

You must be born of water, natural; and the Spirit, the Spiritual birth. And so if you're going to keep to the context of the passage, the only conclusion that makes any sense is that born of water is a reference to natural birth, because that's the context. Right? Because you know, when we're born, we're literally surrounded by water, and we're born through water with water. I have actually watched a woman's water break... because we've had four kids. And you know, these—we all know this. And so this is what Jesus is talking about here.

Now He goes on in verse seven to say, “*Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'*” Now why would Jesus say that? Well, that's because Nicodemus was marveling. Not marveling in a way like, “Whoa, that's really cool,” marveling in a way like, “Dude, this does not make a lick of sense.”

Because remember, Nicodemus is a Jew. He's a circumcised Jew. He is a Pharisee. He is a leader of the people, a teacher of the people, and he already believes that the kingdom of God is a shoe-in for him. And yet Jesus comes along and says, “No. No, actually *you must be born again.*”

And I find it very interesting and I— and this is significant People— I find it very interesting that the very first thing Jesus says, I mean, the first thing out of His mouth is that He zeros in on the one area of Nicodemus' life where he is trusting in his own position, his own status, and where he has his own self-confidence.

Do you guys understand that Jesus often does this in our lives? He addresses those areas of our life where we are self-confident and He reveals to us that our self-confidence isn't going to get the job done, and that we must instead be confident in Him, rather than in ourselves.

And Nicodemus is the poster child for self-confidence when it comes to religious matters, "I am a Jew. I have been circumcised." Right? And it's just all, it's just all a lock in for him. Now you've got to remember the apostle Paul went through these same issues. Do you? Listen, Nicodemus had nothing on the apostle Paul. Paul was also a Pharisee. Paul was also a Jew. He had the pedigree. He had everything in line.

The apostle Paul— he was Saul before he became the apostle Paul. He was a man who had it dialed in as it relates to God and God's kingdom. But something happened to Saul on the road to Damascus. You remember? He met the living Jesus (Who) knocked him on his keister, blinded his eyes, and made him realize that whatever he trusted in beforehand, he could no longer trust. He actually wrote about it in his letter to the Philippians. Let me show you: Philippians chapter three.

Philippians 3:4b-7 (ESV)

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

He says, "If anyone thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh," he says, "I have more." Listen to this: "'Circumcised on the eighth day,' check. 'Of the people of Israel,' check. 'Of the tribe of Benjamin,' check. 'A Hebrew of Hebrews,' check. 'As to the law...' Hey man, 'I was a Pharisee. As to zeal...' Are you kidding me? 'I was so zealous,'" he says, "'I was a persecutor of the church.' I hated those Christians. 'As to righteousness under the law,' he says, '(Man) I was blameless.'"

Look what he goes on to say, “*But whatever gain I had,*” he says, “*I’ve counted loss for the sake of Christ.*”

How did that come about? That came about because Jesus revealed to him in no uncertain terms, “You’re not enough.” And nobody likes to hear that, “You’re not good enough.” Remember when you were playing sports as a kid and they were picking sides for teams, and they’re going, (Pastor pointing) “You’re on my team.”

Then the other person gets to say it, (pointing) “Okay, I want so and so.”

(Pointing) “I want Jimmy.”

(Pointing) “I want Jeff.”

(Pointing) “I want Carl.”

And they’d finally get all the teams picked. And they go, “Okay, Paul, come on. We’ll try to win, even despite the fact that you’re on our team.” (laughing) You know, sort of. And you know— you know what’s going on. *You’re not good enough...* to rank in that first, second, third, or whatever position of being picked for the sports team. You’re not good enough. You don’t measure up, but “You know, we’ll let you play because you know, you’re here.”

At the root of everything that’s going on here, this conversation that Jesus is having with Nicodemus, at the root of it is the fact that we don’t measure up. And the apostle Paul talked about it, wrote about it in his letter to the Romans, chapter three on the screen:

Romans 3:23 (ESV)

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

“*For all have sinned and all have fallen short.*” We’ve fallen short. What have we fallen short of, “*the glory of God.*”

We’ve fallen short. We’ve fallen short. (Pastor wails, “ugh, ugh”) By the way, this is what’s called the bad news, in case you’re working your way through it. This is the bad news. We’ll get to the Good News... I promise. But this is the rotten news, “You don’t measure up. You’re not good enough.”

I've had people say to me, "Pastor Paul, I just don't feel worthy to come to Jesus."

I go, "That's because you're not. That's why you feel that way. *You're not worthy*. God doesn't save people because they're worthy." Right? In fact, it's quite the opposite. He saves us when we admit and confess that we're not worthy, but we're going to lay hold of His mercy and receive the forgiveness that is ours now offered to us through Jesus Christ.

That's the beauty of the whole thing. You know? But this is a hard pill to swallow for people. It was— I'm sure it was extremely hard for Nicodemus. I'm sure Paul probably, even blind and knocked on his rear, probably had a hard time swallowing this particular pill, "You're not good enough, Paul. You don't measure up."

And you know, have you ever been sharing Christ with somebody today and you're kind of telling them, "Well, you know, *all have sinned and fall short of the glory*." We use that, you know, when we're witnessing people, usually.

And they're like, "Well I, I know. I mean, I know I've sinned. I'm not perfect. I mean, who is? But I mean, that doesn't mean I'm a bad person. Just because I've messed up, because you know, we've all messed up." They like to say that, you know deflect, you know, what's going on: the conviction of the Holy Spirit; I'm trying to push it away. Well, you know, we've all done that. You know?"

That's the way we do it, don't we? To kind of keep it from stinging a little too much. You know? But you see, beneath that argument is the false premise that, you know, deep down there might just be enough good in me that God's going to notice. Do you understand that when you're witnessing to people, most people believe that God grades on a curve?

And the curve is other people. And that's why they'll say, people will say, when you're telling 'em, "Well, *we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*. You're a sinner just like all people."

"Well yeah, but... I haven't like, committed a murder. I've never robbed a bank or you know, something like that. So there's that." And what they're saying by that is, "Deep down, dig deep down past my flaws. And I'm hoping that when I stand before God one day He's going to say, 'You know, you made it. Just barely, but you made it because there's some good in you.'" You know? And that is the big fat lie, isn't it? That there's some good in me.

And that is again, that's a really hard pill to swallow, you know? Because when you start telling people, "I'm sorry, there's no good in you," oh boy, that's offensive. And we're living in a world now that's very sensitive to being offended. And that makes sharing the gospel kind of a challenge; "How dare you?!"

You guys remember that young Jewish man who came up to Jesus, and he genuinely wanted to know about what it was going to take to get to Heaven. But he framed his question in such a way as to reveal that he believed it was all up to him. Let me show you. Matthew 19.

Matthew 19:16-17 (NIV84)

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. There is only One who is good."

"Now, a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?'"

Now, stop there for just a moment before you read on, give me your attention. You see, you can see what's going on, can't you? Just by the question. And you can tell when people ask questions, what's going on in their heart. He's saying, "What do I have to do? What?" And he doesn't just— he calls it a *good thing*, "*What good thing?*" Now what does that tell you? That tells you that he believes he's capable of doing a good thing. I mean he wouldn't have said it otherwise. He wouldn't have asked, "*What good thing must I do?*" He believes it's possible. Right?

So what does Jesus do? He speaks to the implication. He goes on and He says, "*Why are you asking me about what is good?*" Jesus replied, "*There's only One who is good.*" And He— Jesus didn't have to say it, but what He meant was, "And you aren't it." Right? It's God. It's God Who's good. So, "*There's only One.*"

Now this passage goes on a lot farther than what I've put up here on the screen, and most of you know that. It goes on to carry on the conversation. However, what you read in the rest of that passage is a continued conversation predicated on the fact that the young man wasn't listening. Had he been listening, it would've stopped. The conversation would've stopped right here because he said, "*What good thing must I do?*"

And Jesus said, "It's not possible. Because you're not good." You see?

And if the man had been listening, he would've said, "Oh. Okay. Well thanks anyway." Or he might've followed it up by saying, "Well how do you get to Heaven?" Or something like that. But he wasn't listening, so they went on to have a conversation and Jesus ultimately had to prove to him that he wasn't good. Because He had— Jesus mentioned some of the commandments you'll remember: love your neighbor as yourself. Remember that was one of the commandments?

Jesus— said, "Well okay, if you want to, if you want to actually do it on the basis of being good, here's some commandments: da, da,da, da,da,da,da... there you go."

And you know what the young man said? "Oh, I've done all those. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I've done all those. Love your neighbors.... yourself. Yeah. *Easy.*"

Jesus said, "Really? *Take everything you have. Sell it to the poor. Come follow Me.*"

The guy goes, "No, wait just a minute."

What did Jesus do? He exposed the lie, *I'm good*. Right? And He had to get the man to see the reality of the situation, "*No, you're not*. And that's not how you are going to get to heaven. You don't get to heaven by being good. So don't ask Me about what is good. That's not the conversation we should be having."

So you know, but like I said, this is really a challenging conversation to have to someone because it is the bad news. But you know, you gotta get past it in order to get to the Good News.

If you give somebody the Good News and they don't believe the bad news, you've kind of wasted your time. If you come to somebody, you go, "Hey, Jesus loves you and He died on the cross for you to save you from your sin." But they haven't even gotten the bad news that they're a sinner; they haven't even gone through that yet. They haven't even assimilated that understanding.

And they're like, "What do I need to be forgiven for?" See, they don't— they didn't get it. You got to get past that first, "I am a sinner. I'm a wretched sinner, and there's no way that I can be saved apart from God's grace and mercy. No way. There's nothing I can do." Right?

So where do we get to the Good News? Look at verse 14 and 15 in your Bible, “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever,*” ooh, here we go, “*believes in Him, may have eternal life.*”

And He’s (Jesus) using a story that Nicodemus, of course, would've been very familiar with. It's that story that took place (in Numbers 21:4-9) during the wilderness wanderings when Moses and the people of Israel were going through that very difficult, challenging time and the people would often get frustrated. And you know, we all go through frustration, but they gave into grumbling because of their frustration.

And they began to grumble against Moses, “Yeah, this Moses guy, he's— I don't know, he's going to kill us. He's going to be the death of us all.” You know? And they're grumbling, “And we— and Moses...” and God heard they're grumbling. And it says He sent serpents among them and these poisonous snakes began to bite them. And people died to the point where the people began to cry out to Moses saying, “*Pray to the LORD that God would take away the serpents!*”

And God didn't take away the serpents, but what He did do, is He told Moses to take a snake, actually some bronze metal and form it in the image of a snake, put it on a pole and lift it up. And when the people looked at the serpent, they would be saved from a snake bite and they wouldn't die.

Now, kind of a weird example, I know. I probably wouldn't have picked a snake to look at, but that was God's decision. The point is, Jesus is making a connection to that Old Testament story. And He's saying just as the people would look up at this serpent and be healed *by faith*, because nothing touched them. It was through faith. They were simply told, “If you look at this thing, you'll be healed.” Well, what does that take? *Takes faith.*

And so Jesus said, “*Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,*” speaking of being lifted up or raised up on a cross, “*that whoever believes in Him,*” which means to put your *faith in Him* and *the work He accomplished on the cross*, that person is then given eternal life. That's the Good News!

We finally got to it. Praise the LORD! I love the Good News. But again, it doesn't mean anything without the bad news. And you got to get past it.

And what does it take to get past it? Humility. Don't you hate that word? Got to be humble and say, "I, there's no way I can do this on my own. I can't do it. Can't do it. Can't be saved. Can't be good enough. Can't be righteous enough. I can't do enough good deeds, say enough good things, think enough good thoughts, to possibly earn my way to Heaven. If I get there and I know that I am going to go there, it's going to be because of Him." And that's our confidence.

And we can be confident. You know, there's a lot of people out there that are not confident about their eternal destiny. I am confident. I know that I'm going to be in Heaven. And people look at you, you know, when you say that. And you go, "Well yeah, I know. I know I'm going to be there."

"They're like, oh yeah, you're so cool. You're so good." No, that has nothing to do with it. He's (Jesus) so good. *He saved me*. I was a wretch. I was helpless. I was like a baby that had been abandoned, with no one to take care of it. Literally determined, if— this baby will die. That was me! And He came and scooped me up and made me His own. And He gave me eternal life. And I don't deserve it. I don't deserve what He gave me. But He did it anyway.

Don't ever let the fact that you don't deserve it, ever stand in the way of anything God does for you because you don't deserve anything.

Well, that's not true; you deserve hell. But isn't it good how it says in the Old Testament, God does not treat us as our sins deserve? Isn't that a lovely idea? That's called mercy. That is called mercy.

Verse eight says, "*The wind blows where it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it's going. So it is with everyone who's born of the Spirit.*" And He's just— Jesus is just giving more insights using the wind as an example to talk about Spiritual birth.

And He says, "You know, you can't control the wind. The wind's going to do what it's going to do. And the same thing with the ministry of the Spirit. He's going to come; He's going to touch people." And there are a lot of things that are in common with the wind and the Spirit.

And it's really interesting in the Greek, the word for spirit is the same word for wind. It's the exact same word and the only reason we know the difference is from the context. But it's interesting that there are all these things that are— that they have in common. You know, like I said, you can't control the wind, plus the wind is invisible, but you can see what it did. He (Jesus) says, "So it is with those who are born of the Spirit, you know."

I have never once watched someone get born again. I've prayed with lots of people, and I believe that at the moment of their prayer, they were born again. But there was nothing that I could see physically that told me they were being born. I couldn't see the Spirit coming in to indwell them. I couldn't see the regeneration process take place, you know? But I believe it did.

But just like the wind, like we saw with Hurricane Ian, you can't see the wind when it's coming, but boy you can see what it leaves behind. And it's the same thing with a Believer. You know? When the ministry of the Holy Spirit begins to take hold of the life of a Believer, you can see it. There's a result. There's a real true result.

So again... but for Nicodemus, this is all a big mystery. He says in verse nine, *"How can these things be?"* And Jesus says to him, "Gee, you know what? I think you ought to know since you're a teacher of Israel." He goes on to say, *"Truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, we bear witness to what we have seen, but you don't receive our testimony.* And if I'm going to sit here and talk to you about earthly things and you're going to stumble over 'em, what's going to happen when I start talking to you about Spiritual things?" Right?

And then Jesus adds this interesting statement in verse 13, *"No one has ascended into Heaven except He who descended from Heaven, the Son of Man."* You know what's interesting about that verse? All we hear is the first part, and we want to make some kind of a theological thing out of it, you know? *"No one has ever ascended into Heaven except He who descended...."* So people always want to know what that means.

The point of what Jesus was saying was this, "I have always been in Heaven. I descended as a man to live among you on the earth. I've been there. No one else has been there, but I've been there. And so I'm speaking to you from authority." That's the whole point of the statement. You know? And so [He's] saying, "You can trust Me."

No one has ever gone to Heaven and come back and said, "Here's how it works." I know there's a lot of people on the Internet who say they have....

But Jesus is saying, "You can trust Me because I've been there and I know." And that's— and you know what? It all comes down to that. It all comes down to Who Jesus is and whether you can trust Him. Do you know that? Do you know that it comes down to a Person?

Really? How do you know? People say, “How do you know? How do you know this or that, or the other thing?”

“I trust Jesus. I trust that what He said is true.”

“Wow.”

Comes down to faith, you guys, it really does. Let me kind of close with some thoughts from Peter. We're going to let Peter speak here at the end.

1 Peter 3-5 (ESV)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

He writes, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy,*” He's caused us, “*He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in Heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith.*” Look at that, “*guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*”

I want you to take note of just the first thing that he really says there. He (Peter) says, he speaks of this, “*Praise to God our Father, the LORD Jesus Christ!*” And I want you to notice the next statement, “*According to His great mercy.*”

Remember, mercy is *not getting* what you *do deserve*. What you deserve is condemnation. You don't get it. Why? Because of God's mercy. “*There is, therefore now, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” (Romans 8:1) That's God's mercy. And so, “*According to His great mercy,*” what has He done? He's caused us to be born again.

You say, “Well Pastor, I don't really feel born again.” Well, it's not about feelings. It's not about feelings; it's about faith. My question to somebody who says that is simple, “Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins according to His sacrifice on the cross?”

“Well, yes I have.”

“Then you are born again according to the promise of God, and I don't care whether you feel it or not. It's not about what you feel. It's about what you believe.” And so we put our faith, right, in Jesus, in His work. Guys, He's the Hero. He's the Hero and we're the recipients of His incredible goodness. Amen?

Let's stand together. If you need prayer this morning, we'd be happy to pray with you. Just come on up front after we're done, and we'll hang out up here and just pray with you about anything going on in your life or maybe even going on in somebody else's life, that you just want to have somebody intercede with you about. So....

Father, we are so thankful for Your Word and we're so thankful for the beauty and simplicity of the truth that you've laid out in the Scripture.

And LORD, we just, we confess to You right now, right here, that we are not worthy of Your love and there is no way that we can reach Heaven on our own. We confess to You in the Name of Jesus Christ, that we are sinners who are hopeless, with no way to get there on our own. But just like the apostle Paul and as Nicodemus had to come to the realization, we know, LORD, that whatever *we did think* might have been to our benefit, we cast that now aside so that we might trust completely in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Nothing that we can do, only what we have received, receiving what He has done, earning for us forgiveness of sins, by taking our punishment in our place. Thank You for the Good News! LORD, thank You for the bad news too, we needed that. But thank You for not leaving us carrying the bad news. But thank You for moving us on to the best news we could ever receive, and we receive it today. In the Name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. And all God's people said together, amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your day.