

Exalting Jesus Christ

"Being Born Again"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. If I were to ask you to identify the most misunderstood teaching in the Bible, what would you say?
 - A. If you said, "salvation from sin," you would be right.
 1. It seems almost incomprehensible that this most important teaching would be so badly misunderstood. And yet, it is.
 2. Why do you suppose this subject has been so clouded by misunderstanding, and so distorted by false, unbiblical teaching?
 3. I think the answer is obvious.
 - a. In all his efforts to destroy Jesus Christ, Satan failed utterly.
 - b. In all his efforts to persecute and destroy the Lord's church, Satan failed completely.
 - c. In all his efforts to abolish or corrupt the Bible – especially the New Testament – Satan failed totally.
 - d. But in his efforts to pollute the teachings of the Bible by the teachings and doctrines of men, and in his efforts to lead

people away from the truth into doctrinal error, Satan has been enormously successful.

B. Even during the first century, while the New Testament scriptures were still being written through inspiration, the apostle Paul warned the young evangelist Timothy to prepare for this Satanic assault.

1. **1 Timothy 4:1-3** – *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*
2. **2 Timothy 4:1-4** – *I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

- C. But of all the topics in the New Testament, why would Satan focus his efforts on the doctrinal teaching concerning salvation?
1. Again, I think the answer is rather obvious.
 - a. If the Enemy of our souls can convince mankind to believe in, and follow a false doctrine concerning salvation, then he is able to keep people from obtaining the free gift of salvation.
 - b. They will be trying to attain salvation based on a completely erroneous teaching – they will be following the doctrines and commandments of men concerning salvation rather than the doctrines and commandments of God.
 2. And so, this is why virtually every religious denomination, and even those who call themselves non-denominational, believe in and teach false doctrine concerning salvation from sin.
- II. As we continue our studies through the gospel of John we've entitled "Glorifying Jesus Christ," let's turn to the third chapter of John's gospel where we find Jesus speaking to a man by the name of Nicodemus.
- A. The focus of their conversation is the subject of salvation, which Jesus calls "Being Born Again."
1. But as we will see when we listen to this dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus, the Lord doesn't completely unveil the mystery of salvation.

2. At this point in His ministry, Jesus only allows us to take a peek at what lies ahead for those who will believe on Him and become His disciples.
- B. Even though Jesus didn't give Nicodemus all the details about salvation, just the mere comparison to being "born again" tells us something wonderful.
1. When we receive this salvation from sin, we will be just like a newborn baby – we will be just as pure and uncontaminated from sin as we were the day we were born into this world.
 2. So, let's turn to John chapter three and listen to this wonderful dialogue between a devout seeker of truth and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Body:

- I. In the first verse of John chapter three we're introduced to Nicodemus, whom John identifies as "*a man of the Pharisees*" and "*a ruler of the Jews.*"
(John 3:1) These two things tell us a lot about this man.
 - A. Pharisees were the most zealous and most devout sect among the Jews in the days of Jesus.
 1. They were not only zealous about keeping the Law of Moses, they had developed a whole system of man-made teachings and commandments concerning how the Law should be kept.

- a. For example, God simply commanded: **Exodus 20:8-10** –
Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work. . .
 - b. But the Pharisees weren't content with simply accepting this command as Moses gave it, they wanted to define what God meant by the word "work."
 - c. So, their best scholars spent endless hours arguing over what constitutes "work," and finally came up with a whole list of rules and regulations concerning what you could and could not do on the Sabbath.
3. Without realizing what they were doing, the Pharisees turned Judaism into a lifeless, mindless system of law-keeping – and Jesus condemned them for doing that.
 4. But this doesn't mean all Pharisees were evil men – most, like Nicodemus, were simply misguided.
- B. John also tells us Nicodemus was a *"ruler of the Jews"* – meaning he was a member of the Sanhedrin – the Supreme Court of the Jews.
1. The Sanhedrin was made up of 70 of the most prominent religious and political leaders among the Jews of their day.
 - a. They were held in high esteem by the people, and had the final say in all civil and criminal matters.

- b. In many ways, they were like the Supreme Court of the United States.
- C. However, there are two other things we learn about Nicodemus from the following verse.
- 1. **John 3:2** – *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."*
 - a. First, we're not told why Nicodemus chose to visit Jesus at night, but John apparently thought it was significant enough to mention it.
 - b. And secondly, Nicodemus recognized that Jesus was as "a teacher come from God," for he told Jesus, "no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."
 - c. Apparently Nicodemus had seen some of the signs Jesus had done in Jerusalem during Passover, and may have been among the "many" who "believed in Him when they saw the signs which He did" (**John 2:23**).
 - c. Whether Nicodemus was ready to accept Jesus as the Messiah is not stated.
 - d. But at the very least, he realized Jesus had been sent by God.

2. No doubt, Nicodemus had come to Jesus to find out more about Him – perhaps to even ask if He were the Messiah. But he never got the chance.
- II. Many have suggested that the Lord knew what Nicodemus had come to ask Him.
- A. If that's true, then perhaps it explains why Jesus immediately launched into a discourse about His purpose for coming into the world.
 1. **John 3:3** – *Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*
 - a. Every devout Jew was waiting for a day when God would once again bless the kingdom of Israel with the respect and the grandeur it once enjoyed during the days of Saul, David and Solomon.
 - b. They believed this would happen when the Messiah came.
 - c. However, the Messianic kingdom anticipated by the Jews was not the kind of kingdom Jesus had come to establish – they believed God would glorify the physical kingdom of Israel, but Jesus came to establish a new spiritual kingdom.
 - d. Furthermore, Jesus said the only way they could see the kingdom He came to establish was to be *"born again."*

2. Obviously, Nicodemus was confused. So he said: **John 3:4** –
"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"
 - a. Jews entered the kingdom of Israel at birth – they were born into the kingdom as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, just as anyone born in this country is born an American citizen.
 - b. Nicodemus was obviously thinking of a physical birth when he asked *"How can a man be born when he is old."*
- B. However, Jesus wasn't speaking about a physical birth, He was speaking of a spiritual birth.
 1. **John 3:5-8** – *Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, 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 the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*
 - a. Jesus explained this new birth – being born in a spiritual way – involved two critical elements: water and the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Being born of water comes in the waters of baptism when our sins are washed away.

- c. Being born of the Spirit comes when we receive the spiritual salvation which the Holy Spirit gives to all who are baptized for the remission of sins.
 - d. Peter said the same thing at Pentecost to those who realized they had crucified the Son of God: **Acts 2:38-39** – *Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."*
 - e. We are baptized for the remission of sins.
 - f. And then we receive the gift of spiritual salvation which the Holy Spirit gives to all whose sins are washed away.
 - g. Spiritual salvation is the promise which God made to both Jew and Gentile.
2. Jesus also told Nicodemus that this *"new birth"* – being *"born again"* in a spiritual way – is not something you can see.
- a. Being *"born of the Spirit"* is like the wind – you can hear the wind, but you can't tell where it comes from or where it goes.
 - b. *"So is everyone who is born of the Spirit,"* Jesus said (**John 3:8**).
 - c. The spiritual birth of which Jesus speaks is unseen.

- d. It takes place in the heart of the believer when we obey the gospel, and it takes place in the mind of God when by His grace and mercy He grants remission of sins and spiritual salvation.
3. Nicodemus had obviously never heard of a spiritual birth – and so, he asks: **John 3:9** – *"How can these things be?"*
 4. And so, in a mild rebuke, Jesus reminds Nicodemus that he is thinking on the physical, earthly plane – and not on the spiritual, or heavenly.
 - a. **John 3:10-12** – *Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? 11 Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"*
 - b. Essentially, Jesus is telling Nicodemus, "If you don't believe the earthly things that testify of Me, how are you going to believe what I tell you about heavenly things?"
 - c. Nicodemus needed to shift his thinking from the earthly to the heavenly – from the temporal to the spiritual.
 - d. Only then would he begin to grasp the spiritual birth of which Jesus spoke; and only then would he truly begin to understand

what Jesus is about to say regarding His purpose for coming into this world.

5. Nicodemus needed to understand that the mission of Jesus as the Messiah was not to reign as king over the nation of Israel and bring them back to their former glory.
 6. He needed to understand that the mission of Jesus was to be raised up on a cross where He would give His life for the sins of the world.
- C. And so, Jesus explained to Nicodemus the true mission of "*the Son of Man*" – a term which Jesus is obviously applying to Himself.
1. **John 3:13-16** – *No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*
 - a. The term "son of man" appears throughout the Old Testament, but is used two different ways.
 - (1). In most instances, the term "son of man" is used to speak of human beings – we are all a "son of man" in the sense

that we all have earthly fathers, and we are all descendants from Adam, the first man.

(2). However, the term "Son of Man" is also used to speak of the Messiah who is both man and God – or God wrapped in humanity.

b. The most notable usage of the term "Son of Man" to describe the Messiah is in the book of Daniel: **Daniel 7:13-14** – *"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed."*

2. As Jesus continued to talk with Nicodemus, he used the term "Son of Man" the same way Daniel used it to tell Nicodemus some things about the Messiah he had apparently had not understood.
3. Applying the term "Son of Man" to Himself:
 - a. First, Jesus said *"the Son of Man"* came down from heaven so that He can eventually ascend back to heaven.

(1). This means the Messiah will not be just an ordinary man
– He will have come from heaven, and He will ascend
back there sometime in the future.

b. Second, "*the Son of Man*" will be "*lifted up*" in the same
manner "*as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.*"

(1). Jesus was referring to the time (Numbers 21) when God
sent deadly serpents into the camp of the Israelites to
punish them for their wickedness and rebellion.

(2). When they people cried out for deliverance, God
instructed Moses to make a serpent of Bronze and lift it
high up on a pole so that all the camp of Israel could see
it.

(3). Then, when anyone was bitten by a serpent, all they
needed to do was trust in that bronze serpent enough to
simply look upon it and they would be delivered from
death.

(4). In the same manner, Jesus said He will be lifted up – an
obvious reference to His crucifixion on the cross.

(5). And likewise all who trust in the power of the cross and
believe in the Christ who died for them, "*will not perish,
but have eternal life.*"

5. And finally, Jesus explained why this is possible – it's because *"God so loved the world."*
 - a. God's love for you and me is so immense that it compelled the *"Son of Man"* to come down from heaven to earth.
 - b. God's love for you and me is so immense that it compelled the *"Son of Man"* to be *"lifted up"* on a cross.
 - c. God's love for you and me is so immense that it compelled Him to *"give His Only begotten Son."*
 - d. And God's love for you and me is so immense that whosoever comes to Christ in faith *"should not perish, but have everlasting life."*
- D. I can only imagine how much the mind of Nicodemus must have been spinning at this moment as he tried to grasp all this.
 1. You see, during the days of Jesus' Jewish theology had no concept of a kind, loving, compassionate, tender-hearted God.
 - a. The God they believed in was a God of wrath, vengeance, judgment, retribution, and punishment.
 - b. To imagine God loving *"the world"* was unthinkable – if He loved anyone it would be the nation of Israel, but not the whole world!

- c. The Jews of Jesus' day believed the Messiah would come to judge and condemn the world – not to save the world – not unless the world converted to Judaism!
2. But Jesus told Nicodemus that's not why God's *"only begotten Son"* has come into the world.
 - a. **John 3:17** – *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*
3. However, Jesus made it clear that the salvation He offers is conditional.
 - a. **John 3:18** – *"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."*
 - b. How many times have you heard someone say, "I can't love a God who would send people to hell!"
 - c. But Jesus says it's not God who sends us there – we send ourselves there through our own stubborn unbelief.
 - d. We condemn ourselves by turning our back on the only source of salvation available to us – Jesus Christ, *"the only begotten Son of God."*

- e. We choose to be saved, or we choose to be lost. God simply gives us whatever we choose.
- E. Finally, Jesus explained to Nicodemus why people will reject the gift of salvation Jesus offers to all who would believe on Him.
1. **John 3:19-21** – *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*
 2. It's sad, but true. The reason why people will be condemned is simply because they love the darkness that hides their evil deeds more than they love Jesus Christ.
 - a. In fact, they really don't want anyone telling them their deeds are evil – they prefer to remain in the darkness of self-delusion.
 3. By the way, this is the same reason why people turn away from Christ after becoming a Christian.
 - a. They prefer doing the evil deeds they want to do rather than coming to the light that all may see that their deeds *"have been done in God."*

4. You see, in the end, it all comes down to the choices we make.
 - a. We make the choice to remain in darkness and continue doing those things that displease God – and grow to resent anyone who tries to expose our evil deeds.
 - b. Or we make the choice to come to the light of Christ, putting away those evil deeds we've done in the past, and start doing deeds we don't have to hide so that everyone can see they've been done in keeping with God's will.
5. It's our choice.

CONCLUSION:

- I. I can only imagine Nicodemus was experiencing a little "spiritual overload" as he tried to work his mind around all Jesus had just said.
 - A. Nicodemus realized to become a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ will require being *"born again"* – because *"unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* (**John 3:5**)
 1. Did Nicodemus become a disciple of Christ? Was he eventually baptized into Christ for the remission of sins?
 - a. We're not told. None of the other gospel writers mention Nicodemus – John is the only one.
 - b. But there's no doubt that this encounter with Jesus had a tremendous impact of Nicodemus.

2. We will come across this man on two more occasions in our journey through the gospel of John.
 - a. One of those times will be when Jesus is standing before the Sanhedrin, and is about to be condemned to death for claiming He is the Son of God.
 - (1). Nicodemus will briefly come to Jesus' defense, only to be silenced by ridicule and scorn.
 - b. The last time we meet Nicodemus is following the crucifixion of Jesus.
 - (1). He joins with Joseph of Arimathea – another member of the Sanhedrin – to prepare the body of Jesus for burial.
 3. It wouldn't surprise me to someday meet both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus in heaven.
 - a. I tend to think they were both born again by water and the Spirit.
 - b. And I tend to think they both lived the rest of their lives as devoted disciples of Christ.
- B. However, it's not important to know what became of Nicodemus. What's important is to know what will become of you.
1. Will you simply let go of the evil you've done in the past, leave the darkness behind you, and come to Christ?

- a. Will you come to Christ in faith, believing on Him, and be born again through the waters of baptism, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit – spiritual salvation and the gift of eternal life?
2. And if you've been born again through the waters of baptism, but have slipped back into the darkness of this world, I ask you to do one simple thing.
 - a. I simply ask you to look at where you are now, and then remember where you once were – and tell me which one brings you true happiness and peace of mind.
 - b. If you're hiding in the darkness because you're too ashamed of having turned away from Jesus Christ, I can assure there is nothing He wants more than to lift you out of that darkness and bring you back into the light.
3. So, whether you need to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, or simply come back to your first love, do it now.