PASTOR'S SERMON NOTES · PULPIT COPY

You Must Be Born Again

The Gospel of John: Why Should I Believe? · Week 09 · November 8, 2026

Scripture:

John 3:1–15

Big idea: You can't fix yourself or earn your way to God. You must be born again: a new heart only God can give, received by looking to Jesus.

Memory verse (all ages): John 3:3 — "Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"

MOTIVATION (WHY YOU NEED THIS)

We use the word miracle for a lot of things: a last-second field goal, a parking spot close to the door when it's cold, a struggling student passing an exam. Favorable, maybe, but miracles?

A miracle is God acting beyond the normal workings of nature. John doesn't call them miracles. He calls them signs, because they point beyond themselves.

> **John 20:31 (ESV)** …but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Every sign points us to one question: Who is this man, and will you believe in Him?

And today Jesus asks one more: What if the greatest problem in your life isn't something you need to fix, but something only God can change?

INFORMATION (WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW)

Jesus and Nicodemus…

> Chapters (1200s) and verses (1551) were added later, so 2:23–25 belongs with chapter 3. It sets up Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the royal official, and the lame man.

- **Jesus knows our true self**

  John 2:23 (ESV) Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. **24** But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people **25** and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

  ✓ How different is the person sitting in church right now from the person you are when nobody is around?
    - o We all know how to present the version of ourselves we want people to see
    - o The private struggles, hidden resentments, the thoughts we'd never say out loud… Jesus already knows

  ✓ Are you more concerned about appearing right before people than actually being right with God?
    - o You might fool the people around you, even yourself, but you cannot fool Jesus
    - o The Savior who knows us completely is the very Savior who came to rescue sinners

  ✓ Jesus sees past our masks to our past, hurts, hang-ups, and true selves, and He addresses the real issue (further proof He is God in the flesh)

  Psalm 139:1 (ESV) O LORD, you have searched me and known me! **23** Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

- **Jesus goes to our main issue**

  John 3:1 (ESV) 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 him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

  ✓ Nicodemus was a man of the highest stature
  - *Pharisee* – one of about 6,000; known for strict, holy living, devoted to the Torah, and believed in the resurrection
  - *Ruler of the Jews* – sat on the Sanhedrin, the 70-member ruling council of Israel
  - *Teacher of Israel* (v. 10) – likely one of Israel's most respected teachers

  ✓ The Pharisees built "Pharisaical fences": man-made traditions to keep them from ever breaking God's 613 laws
  - *Hand washing* – priests washed before entering the tent of meeting (Ex. 30:17–21); Pharisees washed to the elbows and went after the disciples for not washing (Matt. 15; Mark 7)
  - *Drunkenness* – priests stayed sober to tell holy from common (Lev. 10:9); Pharisees said don't drink, don't be around those who do, don't even talk about it

    Crossing their fences became equal to breaking God's law. It became less about loving God and neighbor and more about protecting themselves.

  ✓ Nicodemus comes at night, when no one would notice; something is stirring in his heart
  - He calls Jesus "Rabbi" (teacher to teacher) and says "we," possibly speaking for others on the council
  - He opens with a statement, not a question: no one can do these signs unless God is with him (signs like those in Mark 1 and Matthew 8, 9, 12)

  ✓ Jesus cuts past the flattery to the core issue: "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God"
  - Nicodemus had done every work he could (they tithed out of their spice racks!) and still felt unsettled
  - If Jesus sat down with you, would you start listing your religious résumé? Church, baptism, serving, giving, praying… none of it can give you a new heart

    Are you trusting in what Jesus has done for you, or what you've done for Jesus? You can be deeply religious and still desperately need to be saved.

- **Jesus speaks directly to our greatest need**

  John 3:4 (ESV) 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."

  ✓ Nicodemus gets caught up in biology and misses that Jesus is drawing from the prophets

  Ezekiel 36:25 (ESV) I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. **26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. **27** And I will put my Spirit within you…

  ✓ "Water and the Spirit" is Ezekiel's promise, not baptism: God's cleansing and a new heart
  - Nicodemus had his physical birth, marked by brokenness and sin; he needs a spiritual birth, a heart transplant

- This is totally a work of God through the Holy Spirit; like the wind, you can't control it, but you can see what it does

  "You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that makes it necessary." – often attributed to Jonathan Edwards

✓ Your heart is failing and the doctor says you need a transplant. "What if I exercise more? Eat better? Take vitamins?" Good things, but they can't do what only a transplant can

- Nicodemus thinks in terms of religious improvement; Jesus speaks in terms of spiritual rebirth
- Are you trying to manage the symptoms of sin without recognizing your need for the Savior?
- Nicodemus doesn't get it yet, and that's OK; he's on a journey (7:45–52; 19:38–42)

▪ **Jesus closes with the choice before every person**

John 3:9 (ESV) 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.

✓ Jesus gives Nicodemus His favorite title for Himself from Daniel 7, "Son of Man": "That is Me!"

Daniel 7:13 (NLT) …I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven… **14** He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world… His rule is eternal—it will never end.

✓ Jesus closes with Numbers 21, a story Nicodemus knew well

- Israel complained against God and Moses, even about the daily manna; God sent fiery serpents and many died
- The people confessed their sin and begged Moses to pray

Numbers 21:8 (ESV) And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." **9** So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

✓ That's it? Just look?

- The power wasn't in the strength of the one looking but in the God who provided the remedy
- Some likely refused to look and fought the poison themselves until they perished

  You cannot save yourself. But God has provided a Savior. If God has provided the only cure for your sin, why would you keep trying to save yourself?

APPLICATION (WHAT YOU NEED TO DO)

Nicodemus knew the Law and the traditions, and none of it could give him what he needed most: a new heart and a Savior.

What are you trusting to make you right with God? Your goodness? Your church attendance? Your baptism? Or Jesus Christ?

You cannot make yourself new. But God can.

The Jesus who knew everything about Nicodemus knows everything about you, and today He calls you to look to Him. Look to Christ.