

Lesson #9 Outline

“The New Birth”

Born of God: The Story of Nicodemus

John 3: 1 – 21

Principle Truth:

We are created by God for a person and a place – the Person is Christ Jesus and the Place is the Kingdom of God.

- I. Who is It For? (V. 3)**
- II. Where is It From**
- III. What Does It Do?**
- IV. How Does It Come?**
- V. How Can You Tell?**

Lesson #9
Series 2 - Story 3

Born of God: The Story of Nicodemus

John 3:1-21

TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD ONE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

Story Outline:

- I. Religious Status of Nicodemus
- II. Request of Nicodemus
- I. Revelation of Jesus
- II. Response of Nicodemus

Life Application Principles:

- 1. Our good works and our spiritual standing will not save us.
- 2. It is impossible to enter the kingdom of God on our own merits.
- 3. Traditions of man do not replace a relationship with God.
- 4. Only Jesus can fill the emptiness of the human heart.
- 5. Each heart longs for the missing relationship with God and searches for truth.
- 6. We are created by God for a person and a place: the Person is Jesus and the Place is the kingdom of God.
- 7. God's truth never changes and it never fails.
- 8. We cannot be born again and yet remain the same.
- 9. Being born again is a transfer of citizenship from this world into the kingdom of God.
- 10. Once we hear of Christ and His love, a response is demanded.
- 11. When the Spirit of God enters the heart, new life begins.
- 12. Response to Jesus is a life or death matter.

NAME OF JESUS
Devotional Reading
“JESUS SAVIOR”

*“No Greater love has the world ever known
No greater love was ever shown
Than when Christ died for me
On the Hill of Calvary
No Greater love will ever be.”*
--Unknown

These words, from a song that I learned long ago as a teenager, have brought much comfort and hope to me throughout years as I have journeyed through the various ups and downs and uncertainties of life. Without fail in the quiet of my early morning walks with the Lord, songs of worship and praise, such as this one, flood into my mind. Like a valley that fills quickly in the pouring rain, my heart is at once filled to overflowing with sweet reminders of God’s mercy, goodness and love. And I am comforted with the blessed assurance that no matter what is going on in the world or in my life, I am dearly loved, forgiven, accepted and eternally secure in Jesus Christ, my **SAVIOR**.

According to modern psychology, love and security are two of the greatest needs of the human heart and spirit. God, who is the author and source for both, placed these two longings, among others, in the heart of man from the very beginning. Scripture teaches that when God made man, He made him in His image, in His likeness, meaning that God’s very character and nature dwells within the heart and soul of all men. Different from every other thing in creation, God gave man a heart and a spirit so that we might be able to have a unique and personal relationship with Him. And in the beginning God declared all was good . . . in fact, He said it was “*very good*.” The entire creation was full of the light and purity of God. Love and intimacy between God and man was unhindered and enjoyable in every way. However, it was not long before sin entered the world through man’s rebellion and that sweet union was broken. Preferring to listen to the lies of Satan, man became a prisoner of the darkness and a lover of self and evil more than a lover of God and truth. As a result, God’s heart was broken, His anger was kindled and His just judgment was meted out. However, His **love** for His creation, including the entire human race, never changed, not even for one moment. Because of that great love, He immediately revealed a plan to recover all that was lost in the fall. Prophesied first by God immediately after Adam and Eve rebelled, and repeated by Moses and the Prophets, a **SAVIOR**, a man born of God, called His Seed, His Holy One, The Messiah, would

come and save (rescue and redeem) mankind from their sin and the darkness they chose to live in and love.

The beautiful name, **SAVIOR**, ascribed to Jesus at His birth by an angel of the Lord, tells us very clearly WHO He is and WHY He came to earth. Appearing first to humble shepherds on the night He was born, the angel declared: *“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a **SAVIOR**, who is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:10-11). Matthew adds to our understanding: *“You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:21). Jesus, “Yeshua” in Hebrew, literally means *“the Lord is Salvation.”* Taken all together, the angel’s announcement is: *“REJOICE! I have GOOD NEWS!!!! Jesus Christ the Lord, the promised Seed, the Messiah, the prophesied **SAVIOR** of the world is here!!! Your salvation is now at hand!”* Thus, Christ’s birth ushered in the beginning of God’s promised redemption and salvation of His people. The broken bond of love and intimacy with God was about to be restored. The final and sufficient payment for man’s sin had arrived. Truly, there was and never will be any better news delivered to the world.

As wonderful and powerful as proclamations by heavenly angels and prophecies of anointed men are, the best one to tell us the good news of WHO He is and WHY He came is the **SAVIOR** Himself. On the night Nicodemus sought Jesus to inquire of His true identity and the source of His power, Jesus shared with him the GOOD NEWS of salvation He alone brings:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:16-17)

No more beautiful or powerful words have ever been spoken by any human being in the history of the world. In them lies the remedy that has the power to heal the wayward human heart and to fulfill the longings of every man’s soul. In his booklet HE DID THIS JUST FOR YOU, Max Lucado writes *“the heart of the Christian message is that God became human. He was born in an ordinary stable to ordinary parents. But His was an extraordinary purpose. He came to save us (to be our **SAVIOR**) and to take us to heaven. His death was a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus was our substitute. He paid for our mistakes so we wouldn’t have to.”* **No greater love.....**

Of all the ways to die in this world, the ancient Roman cross is said to be the cruelest in all of history. So why would God choose such a horrendous fate for His Son? Why would the sinless Son of God have to die the vilest death? Paul makes it clear when he writes, *“For our sake He made Him to be sin, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Simply stated, Jesus was sent to die for our sin and make us right with God. On Him the sins of the whole world from the very beginning of time to the very end were laid, including mine and yours. EVERY SINGLE

SIN. . . . every lie, every evil thought, every dishonoring word, every covetous act, every crime ever committed against man and God forever, were heaped upon Him. No wonder the cruel cross fashioned for the vilest offenders was the tool of judgment and the blood of the innocent **SAVIOR** the only acceptable payment for redemption. What else would suffice to deal with the innumerable and utterly vile offenses towards a Holy God? And who else but the perfect Son could fulfill the righteous requirement of the Law and be made the **SAVIOR**, pouring out His precious blood as “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*”? Besides, who else in the world would even be willing??? A loving person might be willing to die for his own child or even a beloved friend, but to die for a stranger and even more for an enemy??? **No greater love.....**

Max Lucado continues: “*The cross is the intersection of God’s love and holiness. One beam horizontal, the other vertical. One reaches out like God’s love. The other reaches up as does God’s holiness. One represents the width of His love, the other reflects the height of His holiness. The cross is where God forgave His children without lowering His standard. Envision the moment. God on His throne. You on the earth. And between you and God, suspended between you and heaven, is Christ on His cross. Your sins have been placed on Jesus. God, who punishes sin, releases His rightful wrath on your mistakes. Jesus receives the blow. Since Christ is between you and God, you are spared. The sin is punished, but you are safe. Safe in the shadow of the cross.*” **No greater love.....**

But WHY??? Why does God and why would God go to such great extremes? What was it about His creation, and especially man, that prompted Him to promise to send a **SAVIOR** to the world in the first place? And why, after the multitude of hate and disrespect shown towards Him in spite of His extended hand of mercy throughout the ages, why would He make good on His promise??? Jesus said it clearly and best...**LOVE**. “*For God so loved the world that he sent His only Son...*” to be our **SAVIOR**. This is truly unfathomable love. It is a love so intense, so great, so vast that apart from Him we cannot even begin to grasp the power and magnitude of it. Ponder this truth: God released His Son into the darkness of this world and into the hands of the wolves of humanity to pay the high price for all our sin. And Jesus in turn lovingly came and willingly stretched Himself out on that cruel, rough-hewn cross and let evil men have their way. What a sacrifice! What a gift! What a **SAVIOR!** And He did all this so that you and I could have peace with God and eternal life and all the blessings that come with that life including love and forgiveness and security forevermore. He died for our sin, so we wouldn’t have to. **No greater love.....**

So, in light of this amazing truth, how should we respond? I can only think of one way...to fall on our knees in humility, repentance, gratitude and love. To weep and mourn and confess our sin and unbelief before our Holy God. To ask for His forgiveness. To believe by faith in Jesus Christ as **SAVIOR**. To ask Him to help us turn from our life of sin that separates us from Him. To plead daily for Him to take away our love for the darkness of this world and to replace it with a hunger and a thirst for Him and His light

and His truth. To ask Him to give us the power to walk every moment of every day in the newness of life that He died to give us. And to help us live a life of gratitude for all He has done to give us the eternal love, peace, forgiveness, security, hope and intimacy with God that we all long for. And finally, to go and share the GOOD NEWS of the **SAVIOR** with others. Oh friend, there is **no greater love ever shown in all the world than when Christ died for you and me on the hill of Calvary.** How will you respond to the **SAVIOR** today?

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

“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” Romans 10:9

THE DOCTRINE

SALVATION (REGENERATION)

A Definition

Salvation or regeneration is the work of God through the Holy Spirit. It is the placement of a new nature within one who has been given the gift of faith by God. This new nature enables the one receiving it to fulfill the will of God. The regenerated person has the desire and will to live a life that pleases God – a life that issues forth in deeds of righteousness along with a lifestyle that honors God. Regeneration results in far more than eternal life. It makes possible as well the believer's present sanctification – becoming conformed to the image of Christ Jesus. Regeneration is the result of that experience which the gospel writer, John, calls being *"born again"* and what the Apostle Paul calls becoming *"a new creature."* John 3:3 states: *"I assure you and most solemnly say to you (Nicodemus), unless a person is born again, he cannot see and experience the kingdom of God."* Likewise, according to Paul: *"Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Regeneration is an act of God. Only God can save a soul. Even Jonah recognized this reality when he said: *"Salvation is of the Lord"* (Jonah 2: 9). Salvation is called the *"gift of God."* No one but God is able to forgive sin and save a soul. God alone provides the new birth (Mark 2:7). It is not enough to think of salvation as only a legal act whereby God erases sin from the *"record."* Salvation results in a living dynamic lifestyle and experience. One of the greatest promises given by God is, *"Whosoever believeth on him . . . has everlasting life"* (John 2:36; 4:14).

Regeneration produces an awakened spiritual life. To be born again awakens the spirit of man to God. Every person has a living body and soul and at the moment of regeneration, the spirit is made alive. Ephesians 2:1 states, *"And you (He made alive when you) were spiritually dead and separated from Him because of your transgressions and sins"* (Amplified Bible). Jesus also said, *"I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

When a person is born again (born from above), the living, indwelling presence of Jesus Christ invades that life. Christ is the essence of the spiritual life of the new believer. Therefore, when a person is regenerated, he receives the very life of God as an indwelling presence. Simply put, it is *"the life of God in the soul of man awakening the spirit of man."*

The New Nature

When a person receives Jesus Christ, he becomes a new creation but this does not mean the sin nature is eliminated or is upgraded. Paul recognized the continuing nature of man's sinful flesh when he stated in Ephesians 4:22: *" . . . that regarding your previous way of life, you put off your old self (your former nature) which is being corrupted through deceitful desires . . ."* He wanted

the Ephesian believers to recognize that the act of crucifying the old nature (the “*old man*”) took place through Jesus’ death at Calvary (Romans 6:6). The sinful nature however, was not eliminated, only condemned. It is therefore, only as we live by the Spirit’s power that we can overcome the power of the flesh and the “*old man.*” Paul himself recognized the ongoing struggle with the flesh. He wrote, “*the evil which I would not do, that I do*” (Romans 7:19). He also recognized his continuing inability to perform righteousness, “*for the good I would do, that I do not do*” (Romans 7:19). Therefore while on earth, these verses written from the pen of one we admire as a great hero of the faith, state in no uncertain terms that a Christian will struggle with the desires of his old nature, but in the new birth or regeneration, he receives a new nature with new power and new attitudes. It is the duty of the Christian believer to allow his new nature to direct his life. To do this the Christian must seek to “*control*” his old nature, by allowing the power of the new nature to overcome the old life.

Paul used the expression (new creation) when he told the Corinthians: “*If any man be in Christ, he is new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). God works in the life of an individual not just to improve him but to totally transform him. Paul also described the results of regeneration as a “*new man.*” He notes, “*that you put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Ephesians 4:24).

The Power and Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The distinctive, constant and basic ministry of the Holy Spirit under the new covenant is to mediate Christ’s presence to the lives of believers – that is, to give the believer such a knowledge of the Spirit’s presence as Savior – that three things continuously happen.

1. Fellowship with Jesus

The Spirit presents the living Lord Jesus to us as our Creator and Friend so that we may choose the path of sacrificial response and unselfish devotion to His love and His call.

2. Personal transformation of character into the likeness of Jesus

This transforming process takes place as the believer looks to Jesus, our model, for strength. This process imparts to the believer the devotion and desire to lay down one’s life for Him and in the service of others. The changed believer is enabled by the Spirit’s power and guidance to move beyond natural selfishness into the Christ - like path of righteousness, service, and the overcoming of evil.

3. Assurance of the certainty of the Father’s love, redemption and adoption into the Father’s family, so as to be “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17)

In a word, new birth brings ASSURANCE – which blossoms forth in the believer’s heart. The inward coming of the Son and the Father that Jesus promised in John 15: 21 – 23 takes place through the Spirit and its effect is to intensify the assurance of salvation.

Certain truths about the Christian life are common knowledge in regard to the effects of the new birth. Everyone who believes “receives” the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, thus given, is a “seal” that is a mark of Christ’s ownership, indicating that the believer belongs now to God (2 Corinthians 1: 22; Ephesians 1:13-14). Thereafter the Spirit “indwells” him or her. That is to say, the Spirit is like a houseguest, involved in everything that happens in the “house” of that heart and life. As “a gracious willing houseguest” the Spirit acts as a change agent, transforming the new born believer into Jesus’ likeness . . . from one degree of glory to another. To know that God is your Father who loves you as his adopted child no less than he loves his only begotten Son, and to experience the enjoyment of God’s love and glory for all eternity – all this and more is pledged to you. This is the believer’s inheritance bringing inward delight that is oftentimes overwhelming: It is the Spirit’s witness to the mercy, grace and love of God for us that brings forth an overwhelming joy.

The Spirit’s New Covenant Ministry

Scripture points to a recurring process whereby God himself acts sovereignly by means of the following set of events.

1. **God Comes Down.** He makes known his inescapable presence as the Holy One. God awakens faith, arises in power, visits us, and draws near us. God’s presence forces us to realize, like Isaiah in the temple, the intimacy and personal nature of our all-knowing and living God.
2. **God’s Word Comes Home.** The Bible and its central character, Christ, reestablish a corrective control over the life that is theirs by divine right and ownership. The divine authority and power of the Bible are felt afresh, and believers find that this collection of Hebrew treasure is the means whereby God speaks, clears out the lies, and changes the mind while searching the heart.
3. **God’s Purity Comes Through.** As God uses his Word to quicken the conscience, the ugliness, impurity, and guilt of sin are clearly seen and felt with new clarity, and the depth of each person’s own sinfulness is realized as never before. Believers are deeply humbled, unbelievers are made to feel that living as they do with sin and guilt and without God is no longer tolerable, and the forgiveness of sins becomes the most precious truth in the word of God.

4. **God's People Come Alive.** Repentance, restitution, faith, hope and love, joy and peace, praise and prayer, conscious communion with Christ, confident certainty of salvation, uninhibited boldness of testimony, readiness to share, and a spontaneous reaching out to all in need become the characteristic marks of the one who is born again. There is a new boldness of utterance, expressing clarity of vision with respect to good and evil. Outsiders are drawn in by the moral and spiritual magnetism of what goes on in the church through those who are genuinely born again believers living out their faith.

The Will of Man

God created man with a will to choose either to respond or reject the work of God in that life. In order to be converted, a person must respond. This does not mean we save ourselves, “for by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). While “*salvation is of the Lord*” (Jonah 2:9) and we do not earn our salvation, God does tell us however to receive it (John 1:12).

Some churches baptize, teaching that baptism saves a person. But baptism should not be equated with salvation. Baptism could be defined as “*salvation symbolized.*” When a Christian is baptized, he is illustrating a twofold symbol. First, it is a symbol and a picture of redemption - how Christ died for his sins, was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead. Secondly, baptism is a symbol of regeneration. The candidate being baptized is declaring through this act of obedience that he has personally trusted Christ as Savior and a supernatural change has taken place in his life (Galatians 2:20).

The following verses show the progression of the Spirit’s work in bringing a soul to new birth.

Man’s Will and Conversion

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Man Trusts : | Proverbs 3: 5 |
| 2. Man Repents: | Acts 2:28 |
| 3. Man Confesses: | Romans 10:9 |
| 4. Man Believes: | Acts 16:31 |
| 5. Man Receives: | John 1:12 |
| 6. Man is born again: | John 3:7 |
| 7. God Calls man to share good news: | Romans 10:13 |

The Basis of Regeneration

1. ***The Instrument of Salvation.*** It is the Bible that plays a significant role in an individual's salvation. God uses the Bible as a tool to deposit spiritual life into a new believer. Isaiah 55: 11: “. . . so shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”
2. ***The Agent of Salvation.*** The Holy Spirit is the Person who grants eternal life to the repentant sinner. He is the divine workman who regenerates the individual. He works in the heart to convict the sinner of sin, then draws the sinner to the Savior. “*The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God*” (Romans 8: 16).

Conclusion

God is in the life changing business. He takes the broken pieces of our lives and makes us into new vessels. Someone has said God takes the canvas of our lives when the colors are running and blurring, then repaints it as a masterpiece. As powerful as God is, he chooses to limit His power to what the person will allow him to do.

God could save everyone today, but he will not save anyone who will not allow him to have ownership over that life. We need to come to Christ by faith and allow God in His grace to perform the supernatural work of regeneration in us. We then need to continue to cooperate with God's will and purpose as he perfects this life altering change in us.

Questions for Reflection

Read John 3:1-8

1. Who is Nicodemus? Why do you think he came to Jesus at night?
2. What about Jesus did he not yet understand? Does this surprise you considering His position of power and status among the Jewish people?
3. In vs. 5 & 7, what did Jesus say was the only way to enter the Kingdom of God? What do you think it means to be "*born again?*"
4. Read John 3:6 along with Romans 7:18 and 8:9-10. What does Jesus mean by the word "*flesh?*"
5. How does the illustration Christ used in v.8 help you understand the result of being "*born of the Spirit?*"
6. Are you truly a "*born again?*" follower of Jesus Christ or merely a devoutly religious one like Nicodemus at this point in his life? How can you be certain you are truly born again?

7. In this passage, Nicodemus is seeking a human solution to fill a spiritual need leaving him empty, unsatisfied and confused. Have you ever tried to use a human solution for a spiritual problem? What were---or are--- the results?

Read John 3:9-18.

8. Who do you think the “we” is in v.11? Who is the “you” in v.12?
9. Read Numbers 21:4-9 along with vs.14-15. Why do you think Jesus chose this Old Testament event to teach Nicodemus about who He is and why He came?
10. From v. 16, what prompted God to send Jesus into the world?
11. Jesus uses the word “believe” 7 times in this passage. What is fate of those who believe in Him? How about for those who choose not to believe?
12. To whom is eternal life offered (see v. 16 & 18)? How does this encourage you?

Read John 3:19-21.

13. What is the main reason people reject Jesus Christ and His free gift of salvation and eternal life?

14. What does the darkness represent? Why do people love it so much? Where are you living today, in the light or the darkness?

15. From Jesus's example in this entire passage, what practical insights about evangelism do you learn that you can apply to your own calling and ministry?

SAVIOR

What insights into the meaning of Jesus Christ as **SAVIOR** were either “*born*” or rekindled in your heart as you studied the name this week? How has this impacted your life or changed your perspective of Who He is and WHY He came? With whom is God calling you to share the GOOD NEWS?

SALVATION CHALLENGE:

Have you realized your desperate need of a **SAVIOR**? Have you come into the light of His presence, acknowledged your sin and repented? Have you believed by faith in Jesus, accepted His salvation and received the gift of eternal life? If so, you are now “**BORN AGAIN!**” If not, will ask Him today to bring you out of the darkness and by faith receive His salvation?