

Sermon Notes, April 9, 2017 The Passion of Jesus—Born Again, John 19:38-42, 3:1-8

Only the gospel of John tells us that along with Joseph of Arimathea, another member of the Sanhedrin buried Jesus, and his name was Nicodemus. Only John tells us about Nicodemus because John, earlier in chapter 3 of the book, has given us the record of a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

In John 19, we learn the result of the conversation in John 3. You can't understand John 19 unless you understand John 3 and read them together. When we read them together, we'll realize the point of Jesus is "You must be born again." The new birth, born again, Christianity.

We learn four things about the new birth: *Who it's for, what it means, why it comes, and what* (once we receive it) *it looks like.*

1. Who it's for

John 3:7, "You must be born again." Many people, when they think of the born-again experience or the born-again person, they think of a type—emotional and very broken people or disoriented people that need a lot of moral structure in their lives. When Jesus says to Nicodemus, "You must be born again," he's smashing all of these ideas and preconceptions. Nicodemus was a religious leader. He was extremely educated. He was highly successful. He was as moral as a person could be. Nicodemus was already religious, yet he had to be born again. Everything about his life was fine, and Jesus says, "You must be born again." Do you know what that means? That means we all have to be born again. There's nobody that can be left out. Religious and irreligious people need to be born again.

2. What it means

What does the new birth mean? The new birth means two things.

1) The first one: *Radical spiritual equality.*

Nicodemus knew the Scriptures and tried to obey God in every way. Do you know what Jesus is saying? "It counts for nothing. You have to start all over. You have to be born again." Think of the homeless, the streetwalker, the drug-dealer. Or the multi-millionaire with all the trappings of privilege and power. He says to both, "You have to be born again, too. Nothing you have done counts. Nothing. You have to start all over, no matter who you are. If you want to get into the kingdom of God, you must be born again. "This is a statement of radical spiritual equality. There are two ways for you to be your own savior, two ways for you to have everything in the universe center on you, two ways for you to be your own god, two ways to be self-centered. One is by being very bad, breaking all the rules. The other way is to be very, very good and moral and keep all the rules so that God has to bless you. Both kinds of self-centeredness destroy the soul and alienate you from God, and others, and everybody has to be born again. Everybody's the same before God.

2) The second thing it means is *death and resurrection.*

Think of the implication of born again. To be born again means a rebirth. Rebirth happens after death. Something has to die for it to be reborn. The new birth is not, "I'm going to try harder to live a better life." Absolutely not. The new birth is saying, "I'm a failure, and this way of even going about it is making it worse. I have to do something to stop centering everything on me, on my achievement, and my performance. I need the grace of God."

3. Why it comes

Why can God give us this kind of grace? Why is the new birth available to us? What Jesus Christ was saying when he said you must be born again, your salvation, your connection to God has to be a birth. It's by the blood, by the labor, and by the pain of someone else.

Now, who would that be? We don't have to speculate, because in John 16:19 Jesus makes this amazing statement. He says, "In a little while you will see me no more ..." In John 12, he says, "When my hour is come, I'll be lifted up and I will draw everyone to myself." Do you know what he's saying?

He's saying, "It's through me your birth will happen. It's not through the *risk* of my life, but through the *cost* of my life you can be born into the world. Through my pain, through my labor, through my blood, and through my death you are given birth, because I'm taking your penalty for sins."

4. What does it look like

What does this look like when it comes into your life? How do you know you're born again?

The message of the gospel is this. The gospel is you're more loved than you ever dared believe, and at the same time you're more sinful than you ever dared believe. At the same time.

And Joseph and Nicodemus get it. Joseph and Nicodemus love the One who did this for them. They are filled with boldness and confidence, and at the same time, humility. Here's Joseph and here's Nicodemus, and they're serving, and they're loving, and they're doing the most courageous and the most tender thing they've ever done in their lives. Why? The answer is because they know this one whose death brings life—new life—so that they are born again.

That's why John 19 is there. To tell us what Jesus said in John 3 worked.