

BORN AGAIN

JOHN 3:1-7

(Read John 3:1-7) I've never known anyone named Nicodemus. I read about a dog named Nicodemus, but never a person with that name. I'm sure his friends called him Nick.

It seems unusual to us, but was probably a good Jewish name of the time. More importantly was his character. Nicodemus was like many people in our world today—He was moral, religious, and believed something about Jesus.

He believed that Jesus was a special teacher. Look at v. 2, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

In other words, not only was Nicodemus a moral and religious man who believed in God, he also believed that Jesus was a great teacher and miracle worker, sent from God.

Something was missing in Nicodemus' life. He didn't know it, but it drove him to seek out Jesus at night when no one would see.

The last thing in the world that Nicodemus expected was Jesus' reply. "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (v. 3).

Because it wasn't what he expected, he blurted out in v. 4, "That's impossible! How can a grown man be born again when that person is already a grown person?"

Nicodemus came for some intellectual conversation, one professor to another. He called Jesus, Rabbi or teacher. He was curious about Jesus.

He didn't know that the missing part of his life was a personal relationship with God. No matter how religious you are, how busy in the church you are, or how many good things you do, if you don't have a personal relationship with God, something's missing.

As religious as he was there was a void in his life. His way wasn't working, and now Jesus tells

him a ridiculous thing, in fact the impossible—he had to be born again.

So Jesus spells it out for him: “Flesh gives birth to flesh” (v. 6a) is being born of water, the miracle of physical birth. “The Spirit gives birth to spirit” (v. 6b) is the miracle of the new birth, being born again.

1. What does it mean to be born again?

A person who is born again is more commonly called a “Christian.” But even that word has mixed meanings to people. Not everyone knows what a Christian is.

(1) To some it is political

You know, the Christian forces are fighting the Muslims or whoever. But that doesn’t have anything to do with Jesus Christ. It is a political designation to describe a political group. It is not a biblical Christian.

In the United States the word Christian is becoming more and more political. Remember the days of the moral majority? That was equated to Christians. There is Christians United for the Separation of Church and State; there’s the Christian Coalition who hand out voter guides during major elections.

Christians are accused with blowing up abortion clinics and killing doctors. (By the way, real Christians don’t kill abortion doctors)

I’ve noticed a phenomenon among some Christians. Many dyed-in-the-wool Democrats and Republicans are more active in their respective parties, than in serving Christ and His church.

They are more politically active than they are spiritually active. They think the nation can be made more Christian through the political process. We’ve stopped trusting God and decided to take things into our own hands.

If you are one of those, I have news for you: It ain’t going to work. The only thing that will bring our nation back to the fundamentals of truth, proper morals and ethics is a God-changed heart.

(2) To some it is a philosophy

When you hear someone say we should get back to a Judeo-Christian way of life in our country, they are talking about a philosophy of ethical principles and moral ideals.

To them Christianity is a religion of ethics and morals, and nothing more. They may even ad-

mire Christianity.

But they do not understand a life-changing, personal relationship with the living Savior. As a philosophy, it has nothing to do accepting Jesus Christ into their lives.

(3) To some it is nationalistic

We're a Christian nation, whatever that means, right? Since those of us born in the United States are American citizens, we must also be a Christian. Isn't this the way some see it?

It is very debatable whether we are or ever have been a Christian nation. Our nation was founded upon Christian principles, and our founders recognized the hand of God in the establishing of our republic, but whether or not we were ever really a Christian nation is doubtful.

2. It means to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The key word here is "personal." To have a personal relationship with God is just that—personal!

The greatest gift this world has ever received is the gift of Jesus Christ. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus came as a gift to us. He came because He loves us. He came humbly as a baby, as a child in Bethlehem, as a carpenter in Nazareth, as an itinerant teacher in Galilee, and as a sacrifice in Jerusalem. Jesus was a real person.

But He was also God incarnate—His personal gift to each of us. A gift is useless unless it is accepted and opened by the one it is given to. In the same way, Jesus must be believed in and accepted personally.

Jesus makes it very clear and personal—whenever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. How does this happen? You must believe in Jesus Christ—who He was and is and what He did for you, and trust Him with everything you are. You don't just wander into it. You don't suddenly wake up some morning and you are a Christian.

You are not a Christian because you may have emotional feelings about God. Emotions are good and important, but they do not make you a Christian.

Just because your parents or husband or wife or grandparents are Christians doesn't mean you get

to ride into heaven on their coat tails. You are not a Christian because you were born in America.

If you want to go to Heaven, and you want Jesus Christ to be the Lord of your life, you must choose to accept Him. You must personally and definitely decide to give your life to Him.

It's just not enough to have a good feeling or to admire and consider it. You must personally choose for Jesus Christ to be the King of your life. When you make that choice, that's the new birth, you are born-again into the kingdom and family of God.

3. Excuses people make

(1) I'm a pretty good person

Nicodemus represents many of us. We hope and think we will go to heaven because we've lived a pretty good life, or because of our feelings. Let me tell you a little more about Nicodemus:

As a devout and well-taught Jew, Nicodemus looked forward to the arrival of the kingdom of God at the end of history. Also, as a devout, orthodox Jew, he presumed that his place in that kingdom was assured because he was a Jew and circumcised.

Nicodemus was a respected religious leader, a Pharisee. The Pharisees believed that keeping the law was their ticket to heaven. It's like us saying, "I live a good life so I'm going to heaven."

Here's how devout and sincere they were. Jewish scribes wrote a book, called the Mishna, to explain God's laws. These laws come out of the first five books of the O.T.—the Torah.

For example, a biggie was to remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. So, 24 chapters of the Mishna were devoted to explain what God meant and how to keep the Sabbath holy.

All of those 'how's' became as important as the original law—what they could and could not do on the Sabbath. They did the same thing for all God's laws.

Then they wrote another book, called the Talmud, to explain the Mishna. The Pharisees did everything they could to keep the law, to keep the Mishna, and all the other explanations. This was who Nicodemus was.

He believed he had every right to present his "righteousness credentials" to God. Yet Jesus says to this very righteous and sincere man, "You must be born again" (v. 7). Even you, Nicodemus, must be born again.

(2) God wouldn't send good people to hell

He doesn't! This is the whole point. Look at v. 17. Do you see what it says? "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Why do we think of God as condemning? Maybe it's because we are guilty all the time. Jesus didn't come to condemn you, Jesus came to save you.

We condemn ourselves when we refuse to accept Jesus as our Savior. Some day in the future the Bible says that every person will stand before God, naked and open.

The White Throne Judgment of God in Revelation 20:11-15 is judgment of unsaved people. Every lie, everything you may have stolen, every wrong thought, action or deed is recorded. But Jesus died to forgive those sins. There will be only one charge.

The one charge, the one indictment is failure to accept Jesus Christ as Savior (vv. 3 & 16). You see, the issue is not how good or bad you are. The whole issue is whether or not you accepted the gift of Jesus Christ.

Nicodemus was very moral. As a Pharisee he worked very hard to keep all the Law of Moses and the many oral laws.

He was religious—he believed in God, believed in the revelation of God in the Old Testament, and was religiously active.

Jesus still told him, "You must be born again." The issue at the White Throne Judgment is that you did not accept the gift of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins to be saved for all of eternity.

(3) One religion is as good as another

Christianity is unique among all religions. Other religions assume that we have the power within ourselves to serve God, correct wrong attitudes, and change our actions and our past. But Believers understand that we are sinners who are saved only by God's grace when we believe in Jesus for our salvation. We do not have the power within to save ourselves.

We all are sinners. Sin separates us from God. Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins. What damns people to hell is to not accept His forgiveness, and to let Him become their Savior.

Application:

Are you born again? Do you understand the necessity of being born again? To be born again you must allow Jesus into your heart. Then you are forgiven for the past and armed by the Holy Spirit for the future, ready and anxious to accept the will of God. When you are born again you become a citizen of God's kingdom, a member of His family, and enter into eternal life.