

THE SOURCE OF TRUE LIFE

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL, NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA

MARCH 8, 2020

SCRIPTURE READING JOHN 3:1-15 (ESV)

1 ¶ 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.”

4 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.”

9 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?”

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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.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (Joh 3:1-15 ESV)

THE SOURCE OF TRUE LIFE

**THESE ARE THE INSPIRING AND TRUE WORDS
OF JESUS**

**THANK YOU FATHER FOR GIVING YOUR SON
FOR THE WORLD!**

AMEN

This passage of Scripture is well-known by most Christians who regularly read their Bibles and who regularly really worship with other Christians.

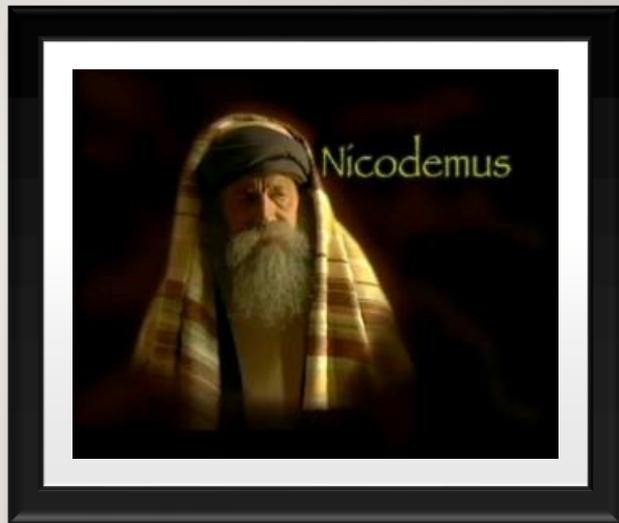
In my earlier years as a Christian, like Nicodemus I did not understand what Jesus was saying. I read this passage with preconceived ideas. I could not understand the tremendous and magnificent blessing that Jesus was talking about to Nicodemus.

The blessing spoken about by Jesus to Nicodemus has eternal consequences.

During today's sermon, we are going to probe a little deeper into the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

WHO WAS NICODEMUS?

- from <https://www.discoveryworld.us/bible-study/bible-characters/nicodemus/>



Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, Jewish religious and ruling council. He came to Jesus by night. In the Gospel of John, darkness is symbolic of living apart from God.

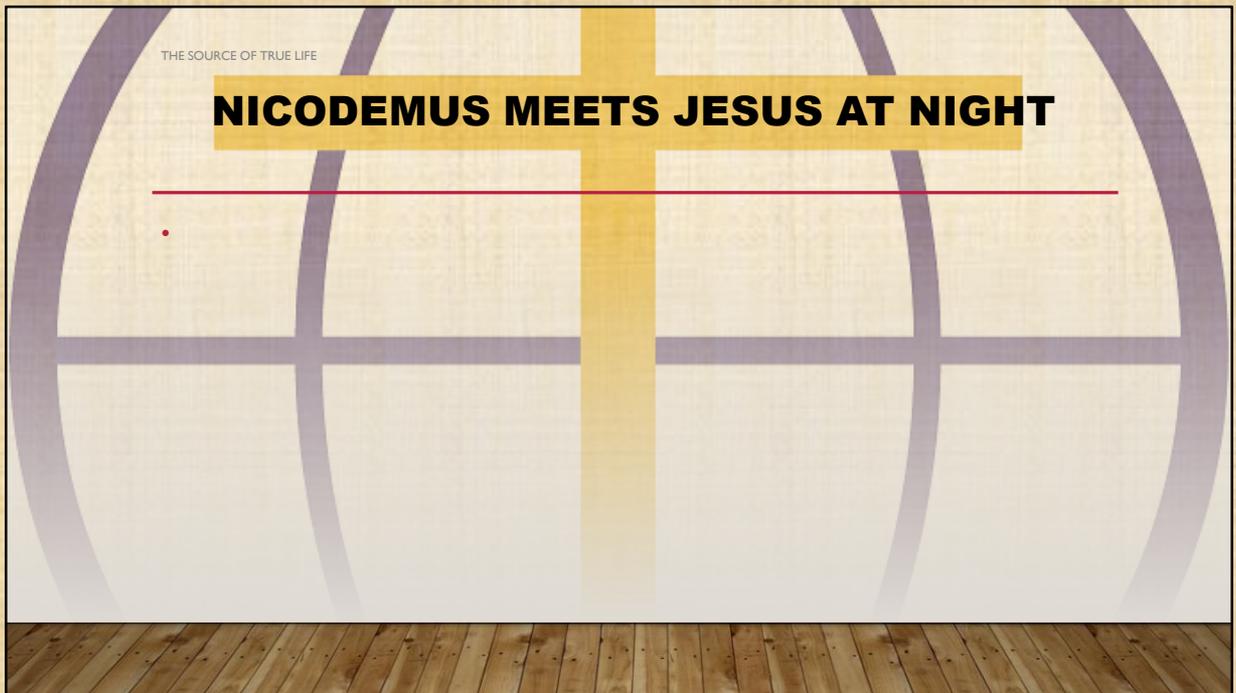
Nicodemus knew the Old Testament very well. He was a very well-respected man in society.

If we were to think of him in modern thinking, we would probably say that he had a doctorate in theology.

He was a teacher of the law. Jesus refers to him in verse 10 not as **“a teacher”** but as **“the teacher of Israel”**.

We again see his name in John 7:50 where he stood up and defended Jesus when his colleagues the Pharisees accused officers who had gone to spy on Jesus as being gullible, naïve and incredulous.

In John 19, we again see his name as he helped Joseph of Arimathea take down the body of Jesus. He brought about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes to embalm Jesus.



Nicodemus is very respectful towards Jesus. He acknowledges that he is a teacher come from God.

He called him a Rabbi. He also acknowledges that Jesus is a teacher.

He acknowledges that Jesus is special and that God must be working in his life because no one could do the signs that Jesus did without coming from God.

The apostle John reports a continuation in the conversation where Jesus tells Nicodemus that to see the kingdom of God, a person must be born again.

Nicodemus heard the word but he did not understand what Jesus was speaking about. Maybe Nicodemus understood later but at that time, he simply did not understand Jesus.

There are many words that I do not understand unless I look them up.

One such word is “**Paleomagnetism**”. It means, “**Paleomagnetism (or palaeomagnetism in the United Kingdom) is the study of the record of the Earth’s magnetic field in rocks, sediment, or archeological materials**” (from bing.com/search).

I can find complicated words in the dictionary and I can somewhat understand their meaning.

There are certain things that we cannot understand from a simple dictionary. They can only be understood by revelation from God.

Such words are “**born again**”.

Why is it so important?

WHY IS NEW BIRTH SO IMPORTANT?

As Augustine once taught, the problem with humanity is not that we sin, *but that we are in a state of sin that needs a comprehensive solution.* Nicodemus, then, and everyone in Jerusalem (2:23)—as well as everyone in the world (2:25)—lives with this infirmity.

- Burge, Gary M.. John (The NIV Application Commentary Book 4) . Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

All of humanity has physical life because Jesus sustains it. However, physical life is tainted by sin. Unless we look to Jesus to give us eternal life, we cannot have life beyond this life. Without Jesus intervening for us, we are fallen and captive to sin. The consequence is death.

The only one who can give us a new life is Jesus. Nicodemus did not understand this truth.

At that time, the Pharisees and the Jewish people thought that we humans could get right with God through keeping the law. We understand now that the only way to qualify for the kingdom of God is for Jesus to qualify us.

Jesus meets Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, and tells him how to enter the kingdom.

Nicodemus strongly believes what he believes. At that time, it could not enter the horizon of his thinking that a new spiritual birth was needed.

Nicodemus came to Jesus with the preconceived ideas about with the kingdom of God was.

He came to Jesus with preconceived ideas of who God is. He understood that God is one but he did not understand that in the oneness of God, there are three distinct persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The concept of the new birth was completely foreign to Nicodemus like it is still today for most of the world.

We need to remember that Nicodemus was an expert of the old testament. Jesus connects with him by referring to what he knows – Old Testament Scriptures.

“25 ¶ 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. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

**27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”
(Eze 36:25-27 ESV)**

To enter the kingdom of God, we need a new heart and a new life. We need to receive a new spirit, God the Holy Spirit. He can only be given to us by God the Father through faith in Jesus. There is no other way.

The good news is that we actually enter the kingdom of God when we received this new life from Jesus. As we read in other places in the Bible, he becomes our life because he is “The Life”.

Receiving the Holy Spirit means that we have the mind of Christ living inside us. This is the new life that we receive from God. We are to accept, receive and put on this new self. It is all a gift of God.

Nicodemus had never heard of such a miracle.

Jesus was beginning to reveal to Nicodemus, to a Pharisee, an elite in Israel, that he was the fulfilment of the prophets and of the law.

Jesus did not come to make good people better or to make bad people good. He came to give people a new life.

These are heavenly revelation that can only be revealed by Jesus. We cannot understand these things by our earthly wisdom and discernment.

Jesus is very emphatic about the need for this new birth.

From
<https://www.heartlight.org/>



**[Jesus said,] "So don't be surprised
when I say, 'You must be born again.'"**

- John 3:7 NLT -

It is important to realize that being born again is not an intellectual exercise. It is a divine activity.

I was reading a story lately about someone who had gone to Jerusalem visiting holy sites. This author, Gary Burge, said one of the guides knew more about Jesus and the history of the holy land more than most pastors.

When asked why he had not become a believer in Jesus and why he had not become a Christ follower. His response was that he did not want to leave the Jewish religion. He understood intellectually and probably he lived a good life physically speaking but he was not ready to receive the new life given by Jesus. Consequently, he was still living in the flesh, thinking that his religion was good enough to be in relationship with Jesus. He did not understand yet the need to be born again, the need of the life that only Jesus can give. He had not yet understood what it meant to be united to Christ and to be in Jesus. Apart from a receiving his new life, we remain dead in our sins.

It is evident that biblical knowledge, being religious does not necessarily mean that one is being born again.

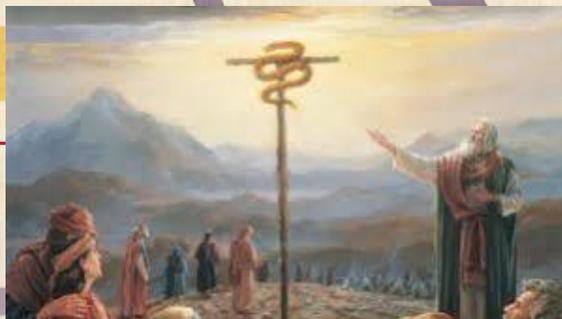
Unless one has faith in Jesus and accepts the gift of grace, what Jesus is saying is that

one is not born again. There is no other way to have eternal life other than Jesus Christ. This is important to realize.

Jesus is clear that no one had ascended to heaven apart from him. He has descended from heaven to come to earth to become a man while still being God.

Jesus reminded Nicodemus of the fact that being born again is a miracle. He gave the following example.

“7 And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. 8 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.” (Nu 21:7-9 ESV)



What happened to the Israelites was a miracle. The people had spoken against God and against Moses. They grumbled and murmured. They said that they were brought out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. They complained that there was no food and no water. They complained about the manna which they called worthless food. Consequently, God sent fiery serpents among the people. They bit the people. Many died.

Moses prayed to God to put an end to this plague. God told him something very unusual. According to God's instructions, Moses made a fiery serpent from bronze and put it on a pole.

People were to lift up their eyes to this pole. When they saw the serpent, they were instantly healed from the poison telling them. These Scriptures were prophecies of the coming and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Jesus was **lifted up on the cross** where he became sin for us. After the resurrection, he was **lifted up** to heaven to sit at God's throne as the perfect man representing all of us. The man Jesus is our high priest and the only mediator between God and man. Being a member of the Trinity, being God, he receives us. Being the Son of Man, the perfect man in heaven, he represents all of us.

Being born again is a miracle and a gift of grace from God given to us through faith.

The Israelites had sinned against God. That is why they were bitten by venomous snakes.

Miracles, we can say, are mysterious. We cannot fully understand. The Israelites trusted Moses who acted as God's ambassador to the Israelites. Their healing also came from faith. They had to trust God and his servant to look up to the poll. When they did, the venom love their body.

Something more amazing happens when we are born again, when we are given this new life. We look up to Jesus. We look up to the cross. We look up to the fact that he is resurrected from the dead on our behalf. In him, we receive forgiveness. We receive this new life.

Do we know exactly how all of this works?

No we don't.

This is what Jesus said, **"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."** (Joh 3:7-8 ESV)

Those who are being called now and accept their calling and put their trust in Jesus are given this new life in and by the Holy Spirit.

Being united to Christ in this new life, we are called to live in this rebirth and put away the sinful tendencies we have in our life.

The good news is that we are under grace. We participate with Christ. The fact is that when we received this new life is a gift, we do not make ourselves blameless, we do not make ourselves righteous but Jesus does.

God does the work in us.

Rather, Jesus claims, true religion is "vertical." It has to do not with the human spirit, but with God's Spirit. It is a foreign invasion, sabotage of the first order. True religion unites humanity with God's powerful Spirit, who overwhelms, transforms, and converts (in the full meaning of the word) its subject. Our role in this transformation is belief (3:16, 18), and yet it is a belief that is aided by God's work within us since we live in the darkness and have our spiritual capacities handicapped by sin. Burge, Gary M.. John (The NIV Application Commentary Book 4) .

Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

THE CROSS IS GOD'S WORK

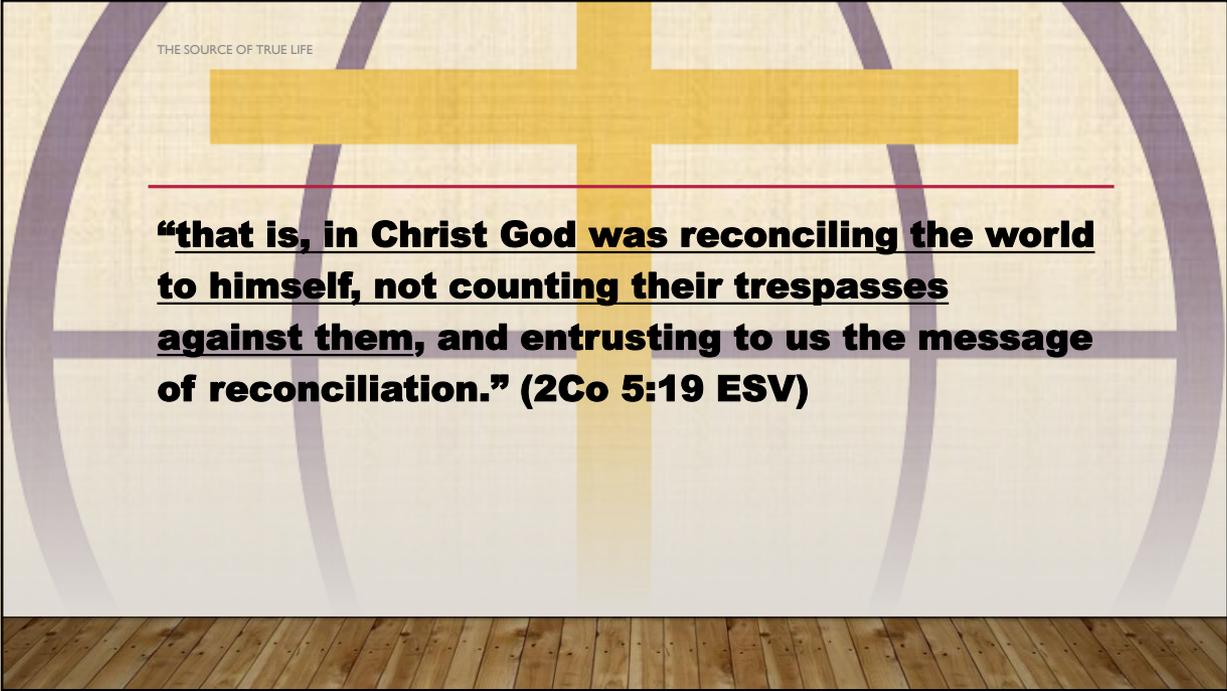
- **The work of Christ is God at work, God saving the world, God extending himself into the condition of our humanity and bringing about reconciliation.**
- Burge, Gary M.. John (The NIV Application Commentary Book 4) . Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

This means that God is completely for us. The work of the cross is the result of God's love for us.

Jesus was not sent to the earth to appease the wrath of God the Father. This is important to understand.

Jesus was never created. He is part of the one God, the Trinity. He is both fully God and fully man in his one nature.

He was sent to the earth by God the Father because we are loved! ***“So love the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”.***



“that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (2Co 5:19 ESV)

Why is this so important?

Because it means that God himself is on our side. God himself is at work on our behalf. He did not send a messenger (Jesus) to do the dirty work. God himself came to the cross and suffered in order to bring his beloved creation back to himself.

Burge, Gary M.. John (The NIV Application Commentary Book 4). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

We have been given this precious new life as a gift! Let's value it. Let us appreciate.

Let us always look to **Jesus** who will draw all men to himself **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (Joh 12:32 ESV)**! Let us encourage one another in the faith and let us help others lift up their eyes to Jesus the only source of true life!

Let us pray