



Unit .21

Session .03

Jesus Teaches About New Birth

Scripture

John 3:3-18



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? **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. **16** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** 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. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Option 1

years old, a little boy named Kendall showed signs of Kawasaki disease, a rare and [redacted] that causes inflammation in blood vessels and can damage the heart. On his second day in the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Kendall's eyes suddenly rolled to the side and he stopped breathing. He had a heart attack and an aneurysm as one of his swollen arteries burst and filled his chest cavity with blood. Since Kendall was at the hospital, he survived with immediate surgery, but his heart was damaged beyond repair. Yet within a week, Kendall received a donor heart and is alive and healthy today.¹

▪ **What thoughts and feelings might you have if you needed a new heart and then received one?**

Kendall's condition could not be solved by patching up his heart. His disease was so serious, his heart so damaged, that he needed a heart transplant; he needed an entirely new heart to replace the one that was broken. Like Kendall, our hearts are damaged beyond repair. The difference is our hearts are not plagued by a physical disease—they are rotted through and through with the disease of sin. Jesus taught that only through a completely new birth can we enter the kingdom of God. In this session, we will look at Jesus' teaching on new birth, which is necessary to be able to see and enter the kingdom of God.

[redacted] usually filled with action. They show kids having fun as they play with whatever [redacted]. They highlight the gadget's best features in a way that appeals to a child's sense of imagination. But at the end, a narrator usually comes on and makes a disclaimer: "Batteries not included."

▪ **Share of a time when you ever been given a gift that didn't contain batteries and no batteries were conveniently around?**

As Christians, we believe salvation is a gift. God our Father has shown us grace in giving us salvation. But unlike those disappointing toy commercials, this gift doesn't need a disclaimer that says "batteries are not included." The good news about God's gift is that, alongside forgiveness of sins, we receive the Holy Spirit. He is the One who empowers us to live according to God's Word and gives us strength to walk rightly before God and others (Rom. 8:9-13).

TEACHING PLAN

Read John 3:3-8.



When a dog gives birth to a puppy, no one exclaims in shock that it is a puppy. No one hangs around in anticipation, wondering what species a pregnant dog will produce. The headline “Dog Gives Birth to Puppy” won’t make the front-page news. Dogs make more dogs. Jesus taught that our spiritual new birth works the same way. By nature, flesh produces flesh; only the Spirit can birth something that is spirit.

Our flesh is fallen, diseased with sin. Since God is holy, He cannot have sin in His kingdom. This presents an obvious problem for us because we are sinful; thus, we cannot enter the kingdom of God as we are. Often we underestimate the weight of our sin and are ignorant of the dire consequences it has. Our very being is marred by sin, causing irreparable separation from God. No amount of sacrifices or religious efforts on our part will heal our spiritual disease.

▪ What evidence would you expect to see of a person who was born again?

Imagine you are in a class with a teacher who has told you she gives pop quizzes. All week she drops ridiculously obvious hints: “You know, I would have the sudden urge to study this for Friday, if I were you”; “Friday feels likely for Judgment Day!” On Friday, none of your classmates would give you much pity if you were completely unprepared for the so-called “pop” quiz. All the signs pointed to it. Even if you couldn’t know exactly what material would be on it, you should have had a general idea that it was coming.


The Old Testament foreshadowed the new birth that would one day come in the Spirit. That was why Jesus told Nicodemus he should not be surprised by what Jesus was teaching him. New birth in the Spirit had always been the plan, a permanent solution to the problem the law only temporarily addressed.

Nicodemus’ question was sincere. Because he did not understand what Jesus taught, he asked Him to clarify. Jesus did indeed clarify His initial statement. He revealed to Nicodemus that “new birth” is essential for entering into and experiencing the kingdom of God. People don’t come into this new relationship with God by simply being spiritual but by yielding to the Holy Spirit. Jesus connected the reality of being “born again” to the necessity of being born of the Spirit. Nicodemus didn’t need inside knowledge from Jesus; he needed new birth from the Spirit.

▪ How does Jesus’ interaction with Nicodemus provide a model for how we engage with those who are religious but not committed to Christ?

Read John 3:9-15.



The conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus continued, but now Jesus took the lead and began to explain further the “new birth” and its significance. Until that point the religious leaders had rejected Jesus’ testimony, which raised an important question: How could the religious leaders compliment Jesus for His teaching on any matter if they rejected His testimony about Himself? 

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
The new birth is God's supernatural transformation in the hearts of people.

John 3

1-3. Nicodemus met with Jesus at night, maybe so his meeting wouldn't be noticed by other Pharisees, or maybe because this was the best time for this kind of conversation. Whatever his motivations, Nicodemus sought out Jesus and met with Him.

As their conversation began, Nicodemus affirmed Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing. He recognized that Jesus had the blessing of God on His ministry and complimented Jesus for the signs He performed.

Jesus' response was abrupt. He didn't accept the compliments Nicodemus gave. Instead, He simply said no one would see the kingdom of God without being born again. In other words, unless you are reborn and made new, you will not see God's salvation.

8. Jesus compared the spiritual work of the Spirit to the wind ("spirit" and "wind" are the same word in Greek). Although we can't comprehend the wind or see where it comes from, we see its effects plainly before us: the grass waves, the tree bends, the water swells. No one would suggest that because we can't see the wind it does not exist. In the same way, we cannot understand the Spirit or see where the Spirit comes from, nor can we control the Spirit or bend the Spirit to our will. But we can see the transforming effects of the Spirit all the same as those who have been born again bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). We cannot remain unchanged after undergoing so radical a renewal.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 104, DDG)

Regeneration

Regeneration takes place at the beginning of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is the divine side of conversion (a person turning to Christ in repentance and faith), being the work of God within a person's life that causes him or her to be born again, a work that human effort is unable to produce.

TEACHING PLAN

- **What are some reasons we should trust Jesus' teaching?**
- **What is the connection between a person's character and the value of their testimony?**

Jesus reminded Nicodemus of a story in the Old Testament, found in Numbers 21:4-9. The Israelites were grumbling about their circumstances, after God had brought them out of Egypt. They hated the food God gave them in the wilderness. They accused God of having bad intentions and claimed that God took them out there to die.


The Lord grew angry with the Israelites and punished them by sending serpents into the camp. The plague of serpents was fierce, and the people began to repent. To save the people from the effects of their sin, God told Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole. Anyone who looked at the snake—who gazed upon that symbol of evil—would be healed.

Jesus compared Himself (the Son of Man) to that snake. He pointed forward to the moment when He would take upon Himself the weight of our sin, guilt, and shame. Jesus, like the bronze snake, was lifted up on the cross, both physically and figuratively. He was physically raised up on the beams of wood of the cross, which played into his figurative elevation at the cross, being raised up by God for a time of suffering to accomplish our salvation. Just as the bronze snake was the conduit of God's love and grace to heal the Israelites, so Jesus is the demonstration of God's love and grace to save sinners.

Read John 3:16-18.



The doctrine of the Trinity is an important belief for the Christian, and all three Persons of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—are at work in the process of new birth. New birth only comes by the Spirit. We cannot accomplish new birth by our flesh; rather, it must flow from God. Also, new birth by the Spirit is only possible through the Son. Through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our debt is paid and we are put in a position to receive new birth in the Spirit.

This passage highlights that not only does new birth involve the Spirit and the Son but it originates as a gift from the Father. God the Father gave the gift of His Son for our salvation, and this gift came with a terrible, high price—the death of His one and only Son so that we would not perish in our sin. 

- **What are some ways we should respond to God for the gift of His Son?**

As believers, we have an urgent calling to share the good news of God's love that enables new birth unto eternal life for our neighbors. God's love is very great and creates an opportunity for the world to be saved from their condemnation. In seeing our deep need for the Father's love and having experienced it by faith in Christ, we are compelled outward—out of our churches and out of ourselves—toward a dying, broken, and hurting world desperately in need of the same love we have received. Since we have been loved with so great a love, we are enabled to love God and love others.

- **How does the loving God of the Bible compare with the ways the world views Him?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
The new birth is God's supernatural transformation in the hearts of people.

John 3

14. Our spiritual birth is impossible without the intervention of Jesus Christ. Jesus recalled the story of Moses and the bronze serpent (Num. 21:4-9), in which the disobedient Israelites were bitten by poisonous snakes and would die unless they looked at the image of a bronze snake mounted on a pole. New life was given to all who gazed upon the snake. It was lifted up that all may have the opportunity to see it.

Of course, the cross that Jesus would bear was a thing of shame, a publicly humiliating and excruciating way to die reserved for the most lowly of criminals. But Christ transformed His cross into a thing of glory and honor. He was obedient to the Father even unto death and stopped at nothing to free all those who believe in Him from the power of sin and death. The cross of Christ has become a symbol of victory. Instead of reminding us of death, it points us to new life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Christ's sacrifice, we may receive eternal life if we believe in Him. This is how, as Nicodemus inquired, "these things can be." What was once impossible on our own is now made possible in Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection grant us new birth and eternal life by faith.

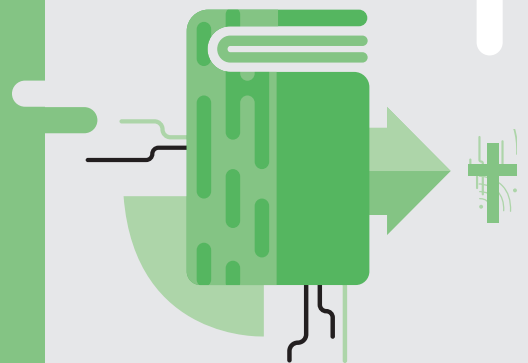
16-21. The focus here is on how God loved the world, and the love described here is self-sacrificing. Romans 5:8 tells us that God demonstrated His love for us by sending His Son, Jesus, to seek and save the lost by dying for us—while we were still in sin, separated from Him. John 3:16 reminds us that God gave Himself, in the person of His Son, to take the place of sinners like you and me.

John claims that those who reject Jesus already stand condemned before God. It's similar to a criminal who has been arrested for murder, pleaded not guilty, went to trial and was found guilty, received sentencing, and is now living on death row awaiting the execution sentence that's been delivered. That time from the convicting and sentencing until the time that the execution takes place is similar to the state of nonbelieving humanity. We've been condemned by our sin; all we wait for now is our execution.

The good news is that Christ came to be executed in our place. When we trust in Jesus, we are accepting God's plea bargain, which expresses the truth that Jesus has already taken the execution sentence in our place. By grace through faith, we can be set free from the prison of sin and be given a new life in Christ because the sentence has been carried out.

(p. 105, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus taught that new birth, not religious activity, was how a person enters the kingdom of God and receives eternal life. New birth is given from God the Father through faith in God the Son as a work of God the Spirit. Because of God's love, we are no longer condemned because of our sin, but we have been given eternal life in Christ.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



What can we learn from Nicodemus being a religious person who didn't know the truth when it came to having a relationship with God?

Why is it important that we realize God sets the terms and conditions of how we come to Him, and not the other way around?

Heart



Why is it important to first understand the sin in our hearts in order to fully appreciate God's gift of grace?

How would you explain to someone what it means to have "faith" and "believe" using this account between Jesus and Nicodemus?

Hands



What should be our response to God's love toward us in Jesus?

What steps will you take toward sharing the gospel of Christ with others this week?

Main Point: The new birth is God's supernatural transformation in the hearts of people.



Head

Nicodemus wasn't all that different from many religious people today. Maybe he assumed that since he was a religious leader, he automatically had a right standing with God or already knew God's plan for bringing His kingdom. Maybe he assumed that his religious observance gave him a better position from which to interpret and experience God's mighty works. Like him, it's easy for people who have been raised in church, or who have some sort of faith in God, to believe that they have an inside track to God and His ways. But if this account teaches us anything, it teaches us about the necessity of coming to God on His terms, and not our own.



Heart

John tells us that the reason God sent His one and only Son to die a terrible death and pay the price for our sins was because He loved the world. God loves the world not because the world is lovable but because love is His nature. John tells us explicitly in his first epistle, or letter, that God is love (1 John 4:8,16). The posture of His heart is not away from us or against us but rather turned toward us. We have a God who willingly and continually has His arms open wide ready to receive us.

Yet our relationship with God is broken by our sin. Apart from His grace, we already stand in a position of condemnation. The miraculous thing, however, is that believing in Jesus, the Son whom God sent, gives us the way out of our impending peril. We don't have the choice to earn our salvation, but we are given the choice of whether or not we will accept God's gift of love. God will not force us to receive the gift, but He has paid the high price for those who will believe in His Son and receive His Spirit for the new birth we all need.



Hands

The work of regeneration is a supernatural work of God, not the natural work of man. Yet the responsibility of getting the message of the gospel out is the work God has called every believer to participate in. We should never assume that because people are familiar with church, Christianity, or even religion, that they know Jesus as their Savior. Understanding God's great love for us as sinners ought to motivate us to share that love with others. We get to be about the Father's business of carrying His love and administering the gospel wherever we go. By His Spirit within us, we carry the treasure—the best news there is—that God so loved the world that He sacrificed His Son to save it. It is to this mission that we have been called so others may believe in Jesus and be born again.