

The New Birth

John 3:1-17

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John 3 is the chapter that deals with the new birth. The new birth, called born again, we're going to see literally means born from above. The theological term—and I want to make this very clear—is called regeneration. It means that you are given new life—the life of God has come into your heart and life, and you have been born of the Spirit. You're born again. Now, if you're a Christian, you're a Christian because you've been born again. If you've been born again, you've been regenerated. If you've been born again, you've been saved. If you've been born again, you are a new creation in Christ. I want to say right up front that if you're not born again, you're not a Christian. Only a person who has been born again is truly a child of God. This isn't like some would say, "Well, I'm a Christian, but I'm not a born-again Christian." There is no such thing as Christian, "but not a born again Christian." If you're born again, you're a Christian; if you're not born again, you're not a Christian. If you're born again, you're saved, you're in Christ, you have become a Christian, and you have the hope of heaven. All of that is rolled into this important doctrine, so I would say John 3 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible. It's not the only place in the Bible that deals with the subject of regeneration or the new birth, but it's the classic passage that describes Nicodemus and Jesus and His telling Nicodemus, "You must be born again."

There are three things we're going to see as we go through this section. We're going to see the necessity for the new birth, the nature of the new birth, and the basis of the new birth, what is the foundation or basis for this new birth. Start with me beginning in John 3:1. It says,

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. 3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God, (so we have the necessity of the new birth). 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, (or truly, truly) I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into 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 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, (or will) and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. 9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11 Verily, verily, (truly, truly) I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15

That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

Man's greatest need is to be born again. If you're not born again, you don't have your sins forgiven and you don't have the hope of heaven. Why do we need to be born again? Well, the only way to enter into God's Kingdom, Jesus said, is to be born again.

I want you to go back with me to verse 1, "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." In these first five verses, we're going to see the necessity for the rebirth, but there's an interesting tie-in between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3. I alluded to it two weeks ago, but I want to back up and show you what I'm talking about. Go to John 2:23. It says, "Now when he was in Jerusalem," it's talking about Jesus. He's in Jerusalem, and it was "at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did." He's in Jerusalem. It's Passover time. He's doing miracles, and there are some who are believing in Him. "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man," and there are no breaks in the original writing, no chapters, no verses, so it just goes right into John 3:1, "There was a man."

There were those who were believing on Jesus, but the Bible says that "Jesus didn't commit," verse 24. The very same Greek word translated "believe" is the word commit, so it's a play on words. There were those who believed on Jesus, but Jesus didn't believe in them. Why? Because their belief was superficial. It was based on the miracles and not really the Person of Christ. It's a superficial faith when someone comes to Jesus because they see a miracle or some manifestation rather than realizing, I'm a sinner, Jesus is the Savior, and I must repent of my sins and trust Him for my salvation. It's a shallow commitment, and if you come to Christ because you see a miracle, what happens when you don't see a miracle or what happens when God doesn't heal or God doesn't deliver? You get discouraged and you fall away. This wasn't a genuine belief. This was a superficial profession, and "Jesus did not commit himself unto them...And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man," but, "There was a man," it's an intended contrast. There were the superficial believers, the shallow believers, those that weren't really genuine or authentic; but now comes a man, Nicodemus, to Jesus, and it seems as though he's sincere, he's open, he's hungry.

By the way, it doesn't really tell us in the passage, but we know from other Scriptures, that Nicodemus became a believer in Jesus Christ. You could read the whole story and say, "Is

Nicodemus born again?" It doesn't really tell us, but later on when Jesus is crucified, Nicodemus comes into the picture; and it's evident that he is a true disciple and follower of Jesus Christ. He was a man who came to Jesus, and it says there, "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi," a title of respect, "we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

Jesus tells Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," but I want to point out some things that Nicodemus kind of is a representative man. He's a real man, it was a real situation when he came to Jesus, but he represents the sinner who needs salvation. It's interesting that Nicodemus was religious. Notice it says, "...a man of the Pharisees," in verse one. The Pharisees were the strictest sect of the Jews. You cannot get more devout, more devoted, more committed, more, we would say, "hard core," than a Pharisee. Pharisees came into existence during the Maccabean Period, the intertestamental period, and there are some theories that even Nicodemus had an actual tie-in familywise with the Maccabean family.

The Pharisees were a sect of the Jews. The name Pharisee literally means separated ones or separate ones. Basically, what they did was devote every ounce of energy and time to keeping every jot and tittle of the law. Not all Pharisees were hypocrites, but they're kind of synonymous today with hypocrisy. Sadly, they started off good but became ritualistic. What happened was they began to create rules and man-made laws that began to supersede or take precedence over God's law—God's law got buried and man's law was elevated—and they became very hypocritical because they kept the law but many of them had hearts that weren't right with God, so they were very religious. The point I want to make is Jesus tells a religious individual, "You must be born again."

Have you ever asked somebody, "Are you born again?" They go, "Well, I'm a Catholic," or "I'm a Baptist." Billy Graham once asked a man if he was a Christian. He said, "No, thank God, I'm a Baptist." Or, "I'm a Presbyterian," or "I'm a Lutheran," or "I'm Episcopalian," whatever it might be, and the question is: Have you been born again? It doesn't matter if you're religious, you are lost. In representing sinners, you can be a religious individual, you can even believe in God and keep laws and regulations and maybe be baptized; but if you don't know Christ personally, then you are not saved.

Nicodemus was religious, and he was also respectable. Notice, as well, in verse one he was, "...a ruler of the Jews." This is a very important point, and Bible students kind of have a great time with this. It's an indication that Nicodemus was a member of what's called the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish Supreme High Court. It was made up of seventy men, and they were the Supreme Court of the Jews. It was a very prestigious position to be in. Some feel that Nicodemus might have come to Jesus (and I'll talk in a minute about coming at night) out of an official commission from the Sanhedrin. It would seem that that's not the case, but it's an interesting theory because Jesus was gaining popularity, He was performing miracles, people were starting to follow Him, so some theorize that the fact that John mentions he was "a ruler of

the Jews” indicates that He might have come on an official errand of the Sanhedrin to talk to Jesus. Mose likely, if that were the case, he wouldn’t have come at night and would’ve come during the daytime and openly confronted Jesus. He had religion, and he was respectable.

You can be religious and still be lost. You can be living a respectable life...another thing when you ask people, “Are you a Christian? Have you been born again?” “Well, I’m a good person. I belong to a church,” or “I’m a good person. I don’t kick my dog,” you know, all that kind of stuff. Yeah, they do say that. “I’m a member of a social club. I practice philanthropy, and I give to help poor people.”

Notice the third thing Nicodemus had was right race. He had right religion, he was respectable, and he was a ruler of the Jews. He was Jewish. None of those things will get you into the Kingdom of God. You must be born again. Some people think, Well, my parents were believers, or My parents were godly individuals, or My dad was the pastor. My grandfather was a pastor, therefore, God will let me into heaven. They think that by their family ties that they will get to go to heaven. That’s not the case. Nicodemus was religious, he had respectability, and he was a ruler of the Jews. He had the right race, he was Jewish.

Verse 2, “The same came to Jesus by night,” Bible students have a heyday talking about Nicodemus coming at night. It’s where we get the Nick at Nite title, by the way, too. Why did Nicodemus come at night? A lot of preachers like to bash old Nick. J. Vernon McGee used to call him lil old Nicky, I love that. Why did he come at night? We don’t know, so to say why he came at night would be folly because we don’t know why he came at night. I think the best theory of all of them is that he wanted Jesus’ undivided attention. During the day the crowds were thronging Him, and He was busy preaching, teaching, healing, and traveling. Maybe Nicodemus wanted to have His undivided attention. The popular view is that he was embarrassed. He didn’t want anyone to know and didn’t want anyone to see him talking to Jesus, so he came by night. Again, many people point out that it’s kind of a picture and reminder of the sinner living in darkness. Nicodemus coming by night is a reminder that we—before regeneration, before salvation—are children of the night, living in the darkness, and we have to come to the light (as we saw in the passage that we read tonight) and are set free. He came by night.

Nicodemus starts with a compliment, “Rabbi, we know,” who’s the “we” there? Evidently, the other Jews, maybe the Sanhedrin. This is one of the reasons why some feel that he was on an official errand of the Sanhedrin because he didn’t say, “I know,” but said, “we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” It’s interesting in the Bible that even the enemies and nonbelievers of Jesus had to acknowledge that He was doing miracles. It only takes liberal scholars today, looking back almost two thousand years to say, “Those weren’t real miracles. They didn’t really happen,” but the people that were there then knew, saw, and understood—there was no question about it—these are miracles, and You’re a teacher that has come from God. Back in John 2:23, we read it, that He was doing miracles and “many believed in his name.” Remember that John’s gospel is written for that purpose, “...that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”

Jesus cuts right to the chase. He seems to know what's on Nicodemus' heart. At the end of chapter two, He didn't need anyone to tell Him about man, He knows what's in the heart of man, so Nicodemus comes and Jesus knows exactly what Nicodemus needs and answers and says, "Verily, verily," truly, truly, "I say unto thee..." in the King James Bible it's "Verily, verily," but perhaps a better translation would be, "Truly, truly." Whenever Jesus says, "Truly, truly," twice, it means listen up. He's going to say something very important. "I say unto thee, Except," now, here's one of the exceptions in the Bible. This is why it's necessary for a man or a woman to be born again. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." We are sinners, separated from God, and we need the rebirth; because man is a sinner, we must be born again to be children of God. Sin entered by Adam's disobedience. The Bible says all of us have sinned in Adam, and thus we all need to be born again.

The phrase "born again" literally is born from above. It doesn't matter if you say "born again" or "born from above," but "born from above" does seem to indicate more the source of this regeneration or this rebirth. It comes from God. It's not a physical birth or an earthly birth, it's a heavenly birth. We're born the first time physically, we're born the second time from heaven. It's a spiritual birth. It's a regeneration. If you don't have the rebirth, notice the end of verse 3, "...he cannot see the kingdom of God." A couple different times in this passage it's made very clear, "he cannot see," you cannot enter, "the kingdom of God."

The term "kingdom of God," is not real common in John's gospel. By the way, the story that we're reading in John 3, as most of the gospel of John, is not anywhere else in the Bible. Matthew, Mark, and Luke don't record this story. Ninety-plus percent of John's gospel is found nowhere else in the Bible. The "kingdom of God" has different categories. There is the kingdom of God in that He is sovereign and God sits on the throne and rules over the entire world. Do you know that? Do you know that the world isn't out of control? Do you know that God isn't sitting in heaven biting His fingernails, freaking out, or kind of worrying about the economy and war. God sits on the throne, and He is King over the entire earth.

There's another kingdom, that is, the spiritual kingdom that Jesus brought. When you are born again, you enter into this spiritual kingdom. The Bible says, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink;" it's not food and drink, "but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." When you are born again, you are actually transferred from Satan's kingdom into God's Kingdom, and you are the King's kids living in the Kingdom of God. When you study the Sermon on the Mount, you have Kingdom-living now. It starts with the Beatitudes and brings us into salvation.

The second aspect of the Kingdom is the spiritual kingdom that we are part of as believers, but then there's a third category of the Kingdom of God, and we're touching on this Sunday morning right now. We'll be talking about the King's Return, and that is a literal Kingdom reign of Jesus Christ on the throne of David to fulfill the Davidic Covenant for one thousand years which will flow into the eternal state. That's why that time of His Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, "...and of his kingdom there shall be no end." There's the thousand-year reign, that's the Kingdom Age. That's called the Millennium—the thousand-year reign of Christ literally on

the earth. It starts after His Second Coming (He comes back in His Second Coming) and then He ushers in that Kingdom Age when there will be peace and righteousness on earth, and we as the church will be reigning with Him. My guess is that Jesus here is talking about entering into that spiritual kingdom which in the Jewish mind would also mean that you are going to be a part of the Davidic Kingdom, just as we will be as God's people, so right now it's not food and drink, "but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." That's why there's joy in the Lord because we're living in the Kingdom of God. It also means that we will share with the King when He comes to reign, and we will reign with Him for that thousand years and be with Him throughout all of eternity.

Nicodemus says to Jesus (verse 4), "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Nicodemus is a teacher of the Jews. Some feel that he is actually the premier teacher of the Jews. The phrase, "Art thou a master of Israel," would seem to indicate that he was actually one of the leading rabbis, leading teachers, in all of Israel, yet Jesus says, "You don't understand these things. You don't comprehend them." Nicodemus was thinking, as so many people today, in the natural realm. You know, "I'm old. How can I go back into my mother's womb and be born a second time?" Jesus makes it very clear that it's not a physical birth. Notice verse 5, "Jesus answered, Verily, verily," truly, truly, "I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." You have to be born of the water and of the Spirit or you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

I'm going to give you some points that you need to write down about the rebirth. The first one is, the new birth is a spiritual birth. Jesus said you must "...be born of the water and of the Spirit." I don't want to get bogged down, but again I want you to track with me. One of the big questions that Bible students, Bible scholars, theologians, pastors, Christians have is about this statement, "born of the water and of the Spirit." There's a lot of confusion, and I can understand that because right up front I'll actually confess that we can't be absolutely dogmatic or for sure what Jesus meant by the term "born of the water." I believe we can understand clearly what He meant by born of the Spirit, but there's not absolute clarity when it comes to "born of the water."

Let me tell you what it does not mean. Unequivocally, it doesn't mean you must be baptized in order to be saved. Jesus is not teaching here what's called baptismal regeneration. There are those who teach that, and I don't believe that's scriptural or biblical. They teach that unless you are baptized...there are some groups that say you must be baptized in the name of Jesus only, not Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in the name of Jesus only. I believe that we should follow the baptismal formula that Jesus gave to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They say that unless you're baptized, you can't go to heaven. Well, that would be a bummer for the thief on the cross, wouldn't it? He's hanging on the cross—he's never been baptized—he calls out, "Lord, remember me when You enter in Your Kingdom," and what did Jesus tell the thief? "Sorry, Charlie." "Dude, what a bummer. It's too bad you didn't get baptized." No. He said, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." What a great illustration that is of John 3 when Jesus said He must be lifted up and whoever believes on Him will be saved. That thief looked at Jesus and was saved. There were two thieves on each cross next to Jesus,

one rejected Him and one accepted Him, one died and was lost, and the other turned in faith and said, "Lord, remember me when You enter Your Kingdom," and Jesus said, "Today you're going to be with Me in paradise."

The clear teaching of the Bible is, "...by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works," which would include water baptism, "lest any man should boast," Ephesians 2:8-9. Nowhere does the Bible teach that you must be baptized in order to be saved. Paul said to the Corinthians, "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius...For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." Paul would never have said that if baptism was necessary for salvation.

Another view, I kind of taught this years ago, and it's a possible view. I don't lean this way much anymore, but the idea of born of the water is referring to a physical, natural birth. When you are born, there is the amniotic fluid, the water breaks, and you are born, that Jesus was talking about a natural birth. As some Bible students have pointed out, it would be kind of redundant and silly for Jesus to say, "Nic, you've gotta be born first before you can be born the second time." Well, that's already taken care of. I've already been born, and Nicodemus does say, "How can I go into my mother's womb and be born the second time?" Jesus says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," but it doesn't seem to be in context that Jesus is talking about being born physically and then you're born spiritually, which is true, but I don't know that that's what Jesus is talking about.

Another view is that in the context of John's gospel, John the Baptist has been baptizing people who have just repented, turned from their sins, been baptized, and believed in Jesus. Those that hold this view believe that this "born of the water" is referring to John's baptism, in context, which involved repentance and believing in Jesus; so the emphasis is on repentance and belief. That's a good possibility that in the context Nicodemus was aware of John's baptism and people turning from their sin—even Jesus was baptized by John—and repenting and believing.

Here's the last one that I'll share. This is the one that I favor but can't be dogmatic. It is biblical and true, that is, the water represents the Word of God. Of course, some say Nicodemus wouldn't have understood that, but in the Old Testament, Ezekiel and other passages, it's God talking about washing them with water and putting His Spirit within them, so he would understand this kind of thing.

Did you know the Bible is likened unto water? The Holy Spirit is likened unto water that we drink; the Bible is likened unto water that washes and cleanses us. I love what Titus (it's my favorite) says, that we are saved "by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Jesus talked about sanctifying "them through thy truth: thy word is truth." I do believe that when salvation takes place that a person has to hear the Word of God, they have to believe in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit is what works in that heart to convict them, draw them, regenerate them, and to give them new life. There's the Word of God and then the Spirit of God coming together and producing new life. When you're born the first time, there's the seed, the egg, the two come together, and there's life. When you're born of the Spirit, there's the seed of

the Word of God washing us and the Spirit of God regenerating us. The regenerating part, which means to be given new life (and Ephesians 2 talks about that we have been regenerated) is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is one of the premier works of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit alone, that can come into the life of a sinner and create life—the life of God in the soul of man. The new birth is a spiritual birth.

Notice verse 6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” What Jesus is trying to say here is that flesh can only produce flesh, that a natural birth comes from flesh. It’s a natural thing, and it can’t be produced by the Spirit. There’s nothing that you can do in and of yourself to enter into the Kingdom of God. The only way to get into God’s Kingdom is to have God’s Spirit come inside of you and give you new life, “That which is...flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Then, notice verse 7. “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” You can try real hard, live a good life, be a moral person, try to reform yourself, try to go to church, get baptized, have rites and rituals; but if you’re not born again, you’ll never see the Kingdom of God. You’ll never enter into heaven. That’s the only way for a person to truly be saved, so it’s man’s greatest need.

Man’s greatest need is not religion, it’s a relationship with God. When we are first born, we’re born sinners separated from God and have not the life of God (Read Ephesians 2), we’re dead in trespasses and sins, we’re disobedient, we’re depraved, we’re walking according to the prince and power of the air, the spirit of disobedience. We need to be regenerated or need the life of God to come into our hearts and lives. If you’re here tonight, and you’re just coming to church, you’re just going through the motions, maybe your parents are Christians, maybe your husband’s a Christian, your wife’s a Christian, your friend’s a Christian, your co-worker’s a Christian, maybe somebody invited you that’s a Christian, but you’re not a Christian, you haven’t been born again, you must be born again. Amen? If you’re not born again, you’re not saved; if you’re not saved, you’re lost; and if you’re lost, you’re on your way to hell. You’re under the condemnation that already exists. We saw in the past that He didn’t come to condemn us, He came to save us. Christ coming into the world didn’t bring condemnation, it already existed. He came to rescue us from condemnation.

The second thing about the new birth is the new birth is a mysterious birth (verses 8-10). It says, “The wind bloweth where it listeth,” will, Jesus is speaking. It’s the same word used, *pneuma*, for Spirit is used for the wind. So, “The wind bloweth where it listeth,” will, “and thou hearest the sound thereof,” those who were on the east coast and in the Bahamas during that horrible hurricane a week or so ago, they heard the wind. I’ve never been in a strong wind like that, but you can hear it rushing like a freight train. You can see the effects of the wind. You can’t actually see the wind, but you can see its effects and can hear its sound. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof,” Jesus is using an analogy, “but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” There is a certain mystery about the work of the Spirit—why the Holy Spirit would convict a certain individual and not bring them to salvation, another person doesn’t get saved. It’s a mystery.

Today, I got a few calls from parents that have prodigal sons and daughters. Not a week goes by, hardly a day goes by, but what I get text or phone calls, "Pastor John, can you pray for my kids, or my son, or my daughter. They need Jesus so bad." It's a heartache for a parent. It's hard to know, "Why haven't You saved my son? Why haven't You saved my daughter?" We know the Spirit is mysterious in how it works and God's sovereign work in the life of an individual. I came to Christ right toward the end of my senior year of high school just a couple months before graduation. It was a most amazing thing that I just all of the sudden began to get real convicted for my sin and a sense of, I need God in my life. All my friends were partying and having a good time. It's a time when you're supposed to be really having a good time and kind of following that route, but all of the sudden the Spirit began to just convict me, I need God in my life. It was at that time that my life turned around, and I repented and I believed in Jesus. It was just so mysterious to me. It's like, "Wow! This is amazing that God would reach down in sovereign grace and save a wretch like me." It's like the wind, we don't know where it's coming from, we don't know where it's going, "so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Verse 9, "Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel," or the master of Israel, "and knowest not these things?" Jesus was saying, "Nic, you should understand these things and these concepts." Thirdly, write down that the new birth is real—it's not a fantasy, it is a reality. The new birth is real. Verses 11-13 is an interesting section. Jesus again says, "Verily, verily," truly, truly, "I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness." What Jesus is going to be doing in this little section here is explaining that what Nicodemus didn't understand and what is mysterious is something that He knows and understands and is explaining. He explains it because He came down from heaven. If you're going to be born from heaven, born from above, what better then to be instructed in this by Someone who came down from heaven. The Bible says, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Jesus is actually saying that, "I'm revealing this to you. I'm explaining this to you." He's talking about the subject of revelation. He said, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man," that last phrase in the King James Bible, "which is in heaven," is questionable in the Greek, so a lot of modern translations omit that statement, "which is in heaven." What Jesus is actually saying is that, "I've come down from heaven, and I'm revealing this to you."

I love the subject of revelation. You cannot know the things of God, you cannot know God, without revelation, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." If you want to understand spiritual things, then the Spirit must teach you; and He does it in the Bible. The Bible is given by inspiration of God, so we have to have revelation to understand these spiritual things. That's what Jesus is explaining, "I've come down from heaven and I'm explaining these things to you."

We move to a very interesting section (verses 14-17) where Jesus gives Nicodemus an answer, "How can these things be?" How can a man be born again? We have the necessity for the

rebirth, the nature of the rebirth—it's spiritual, it's a reality—and now we basically have the basis for the rebirth or how we experience the rebirth. Look at it with me (verses 14-16). It says, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." God didn't send Jesus to condemn the world, God sent Jesus to save the world.

We have the basis for the new birth. What is the basis? First, Jesus had to die (verse 14). "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must," another must, "the Son of man be lifted up." He's talking about the story found in the Old Testament book of Numbers 21. (You might want to write it down and check it out.) A little footnote, and it's fresh in my mind because we touched on it Sunday, Jesus believed in Moses. Remember Jesus believed in Noah, and Jesus believed in Adam and Eve, and Jesus believed in Lot and his wife, and Jesus believed in Jonah and the big fish? Well, Jesus also believed in Moses and the stories of the Old Testament, so we're in good company when we believe the Bible along with Jesus.

That is the story where the people of Israel, in short, were up to their sinning and God was going to punish them. Do you know what He did? This is a creepy story of the Bible. There's a lot of creepy stories of the Bible. This is the story where God sent into the camp of the Israelites snakes. I don't like snakes. I was going to say "hate" snakes, but there might be a snake lover out there. I don't like any kind of snake. There's no such thing as a friendly snake for me. I don't even want to look at a snake, let alone touch one. We were at the beach with our grandkids the other day. I didn't see it, but my wife was walking down the beach with them and this guy comes down the beach with this huge giant boa constrictor wrapped around his head and let the kids pet and look at it. I thought, Oh man! That's radical. What if it just ate the guy right on the beach in front of my grandkids? That would be traumatic, wouldn't it? These serpents, the Scripture calls them "fiery serpents" probably because the bite or the sting caused a burning. They were dying. If they were bitten by the snake, they were dying; so they cried out to Moses. They would sin, they'd be punished, they're bitten by these snakes, "Moses, pray to God. Help us! Save us!" Moses went to the Lord, and the Lord instructed him to do something. He said, "I want you to make a serpent out of brass. Carve the snake out of brass and put the snake on a pole. I want you to stand it up in the middle of the camp of the Israelites, and anyone who is bitten by the snake who would die, if they will just look at that serpent of brass up on that pole, they will be healed."

That seems kind of ludicrous, doesn't it? "All I have to do is look at the serpent of brass and I'm going to be healed?" Moses obeys God. He makes the serpent of brass (which is the symbol for medicine today), puts the snake on this pole, and erects it into the camp of Israel. Anyone who looked at that snake was healed of their bite! Now, the picture is that Jesus must be lifted up on the cross and take our sins and that by looking to Him in faith, we can be born again. We can be forgiven of our sins.

It's interesting that brass is the symbol of judgment. There was the brazen altar in the tabernacle where the lamb was slain. Brass is the metal of judgment. The serpent of brass is a picture of the cross where Jesus would die and experience the wrath of God, the judgment of God, and in the Old Testament, just by looking in faith at the serpent of brass, they would be healed; so as Jesus would be lifted up on the cross, and we look to Him by faith, our sins will be forgiven and we will be healed from the bite of sin, so to speak. Notice verse 15. "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Just like Moses putting that brass serpent up on the pole and whoever looked was healed, "even so must the Son of man be lifted up," and whoever looks in faith and believes will be healed of their sin, will not perish, but have everlasting life. "For God so loved the world," this is the first time in the dialogue where He brings in the love of God.

Timewise, I've gotta wrap this up. I wanted to stop about verse 16, 17, but I want you to listen to me as we conclude. We're going to go back and start at verse 16 next Wednesday and spend some time just unpacking every phrase in John 3:16. What I want you to understand here is, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." How are we born again? By believing. Believing in what? Believing in Jesus Christ who died on the cross and was lifted up, bore our sin, took our punishment, paid the penalty for our sins, defeated the devil, and when we look to Him by faith, we trust in Him, our sins are forgiven. You don't have to work to be saved. You don't have to be good to be saved. You can't be good enough to be saved. Our works are like filthy rags before a holy God. "There is none righteous, no, not one," but "whosoever," and we'll talk about that on Wednesday in John 3:16, means whosoever. There is no one too sinful, no one too wicked, no one too bad, and no one too good to be saved. We all need salvation. How are we saved? By believing (verse 15). This is what the New Testament teaches about saved by faith, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." We're saved by the grace of God.

I'll talk about it next week, but a lot of people say that from verses 16-21 it is John, the writer of the gospel, speaking and no longer Jesus speaking. Now, your Bible might continue in red letter to verse 21, but we can't be dogmatic or sure, but there's a lot of reasons to believe that John then goes in and gives us verses 16-21.

How are we born again? We're born again by believing, trusting, and receiving Jesus Christ. You must realize that only God can forgive you and give you life. You must realize you're a sinner, that your sins have separated you from God. You must realize that your sins bring condemnation, that you're on your way to hell, and that you must turn in faith to Jesus Christ, believe, trust, and receive Him in order to be saved. We learned in the first chapter of John, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." So, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." If you reject the Son, you will perish. If you haven't received the Son, you do not have eternal life. Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.