

“Becoming a New Person.”

John 3:1-16

Have you ever heard someone say, “Well, I do the best I can.” Maybe you’ve said it. I know I have, but most of the time that’s not true. With just a little more work, a little more time, a little more patience we could have done more and we could have been better. But there are people who have accomplished quite a bit in their life and when we compare what we have done against what others have done in their lifetime we are humbled. So we are surprised when Nicodemus visited Jesus one night and was told “You need to start all over.”

Nicodemus had accomplished a lot.

He had excelled in ethical behavior. He was a Pharisee. To be elected to such a position a man had to take a solemn oath before three witnesses that they would spend every minute of the day to keep the 10 Commandments. Those Ten Commandments were amplified by the Scribes. So it was not just 10 “Big Words.” It was also the fine print applications that were contained in 24 chapters. Just the rules for obedience to the Sabbath had 156 pages in the book called the Mishnah. One example is, if a man could not tie a knot with one hand then he was forbidden to draw water from the well. To obtain water from the well would require the man to tie a rope to the bucket and this knot would take both hands to tie. Therefore that was listed as a “work” on the Sabbath. the bucket into the water. That would be called working on the Sabbath.

Nicodemus was not only very orthodox, but he also was one of the Seventy called the Sanhedrin. This group ruled the religious life of Jerusalem. They were powerful. He was also very wealthy (this is implied by the 100 pounds of burial ointment be brought to cover the body of Jesus.)

Another of his credits was he fame as a teacher. As the article before the word teacher is noticed he enjoyed the rank, "The Teacher" in Jerusalem." [The communicator would be wise to use additional adjectives to enhance what a special person Nicodemus was so that the next sentence really shows how sharp the remark of Jesus must have seemed to him.]

So we are surprised when Jesus said to such a man, "You're not good enough! You better start all over." In essence Nicodemus replied, "I'm too old to start all over." We might say, "You can't teach old dog new tricks."

Jesus did not back down from his diagnosis. In essence he said, "All that you have accomplished has been by your own effort, your religious, educational, political, economic success has come from your flesh, your mind, and your will power. You have used what you were born with to get things done. God looks upon your efforts as "fleshly achievements." To get into the Kingdom of God, you must have another power source, the "Spirit of the Living God." You don't have the right equipment to live the life God has called you to live. Your credentials so far are not acceptable currency in the kingdom of heaven. You need a second birth. "a new birth" A birth from heaven, i.e. from above. You must be born again. You have a physical record which has a lot of weight before others, but you have no spiritual birthright to the family of God.

Transition: HOW MANY OF YOU HAD ANY CONTROL OF YOUR PHYSICAL BIRTH? WHERE YOU WERE BORN? WHEN YOU WERE BORN? TO WHOM WERE YOU BORN? WHAT NATIONALITY YOU WERE? NONE OF US. WE WERE NOT IN CONTROL.

And it is also true of our spiritual birth...it is a mystery. Read John 1:13 and explain each word showing that the birthing into the kingdom is accomplished by the Divine Power.

There's a lot of folks using the words "born again" today. You might hear "General Motors has been born again and has made a profit for the first time in years. The deep debt they have goes unnoticed. Or you might read, The New York Knicks are a born again basketball team because of the sensational play of Jeremy Lin. And the 49ers was tagged as a football team that had a new birth this past season. Vanessa Williams sings a love song with words, "With I am with you I feel born again." They should be using other words, i.e. something like renewal, resuscitated or revived. Even folks speak about some evangelicals as being born again Christians. Can there really be a Christian without a born again experience? So what did Jesus mean when He said, "You must be born again." It is a mystery. 3:8 The event is orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. Jesus likened that movement upon a person is like the wind.

When I was a little boy in Arkansas and Oklahoma. We were in several tornados. I never saw the wind, but I could surely feel it and after climbing out of the storm cellars folks could see the mighty effects of the wind. Houses collapsed, holes were blown through brick walls, oil derricks were bent to the ground as though they were made of toothpicks and people were killed. It was the power of an invisible and uncontrollable force. So it is with the creation of a new person in God's family.

In my brief life I have seen prostitutes become evangelists, drunkards become loving fathers, drug addicts become saintly men.

The new birth experience comes as a revelation from the Holy Spirit, breaking down our unbelief, our stubborn pride, and a

certain dread of dying without being a child of God. Here the communicator will share Biblical support for the origin of the revelation of Jesus. See Matthew 16:16-17; John 6:44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” and Galatians 1:13-15 “But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles”

The grandest truth is that the sinner is made righteous by grace. The “new birth” is a Divine display of grace. Eph. 2:8-9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith---and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Jesus gave an illustration of how new birth takes place, It is a matter of saving faith. John 3:14 You can read about that ancient event from Numbers 21:4-9) Look and live. The people were healed when they believed the message and lived.

[The communicator would be wise to consult the life and ministry of George Whitfield. His favorite text was John 3:3. He preached this verse over hundreds of times. These words of his show how deeply he felt about the new birth, **“WHO HAS EVEN THE LEAST CONCERN FOR THE SALVATION OF HIS PRECIOUS SOUL SHOULD NEVER CEASE WATCHING AND PRAYING AND STRIVING TILL HE FIND A REAL, INWARD. SAVING CHANGE WROUGHT IN HIS HEART, AND THEREBY KNOW OF A TRUTH THAT HE HAS BEEN BORN AGAIN.**

Did Nicodemus accept this message? I believe so see John 7:50. And when Jesus was upon the cross, it was Nicodemus who stepped forward risking his reputation and perhaps his life to bury Jesus. He brought 100 lbs. of burial ointments. Those who truly are born again will be a witness of faith. For with the heart we believe and with the mouth confession is made. Ro. 10:10