

RELIGION ISN'T ENOUGH!

John 3:1-21

Throughout history there's never been a lack of religious people.

Fanatics enthusiastically take hold of religious practices, attempting to satisfy God's requirements for eternal life.

Religious leaders come and go, counting on their own efforts.

Flamboyant, impressive religious leaders arise, drawing attention to themselves. They do such wonderful things.

However impressive religious leaders may be, God is not impressed.

Many people, from sex symbols to football stars, from politicians to corporate mag-nates, from Hollywood stars to ex-cons, have laid claim to Jesus' label: "born again."

I often cringe when I hear yet another claim to be born again.

Religious fanaticism doesn't earn "extra credit" with God.

What did Jesus mean when he told Nicodemus, "You must be born again?"

For weeks we've considered signs John introduces to demonstrate that Jesus is God's Son and we should trust Him to receive eternal life.

Now we're going to look at discourses (teaching lessons) Jesus presents to people going along with the crowd, but who haven't made a commitment to trust Him.

1st of these is given privately to Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who's watching Jesus and considering the evidence.

Nicodemus is convinced that Jesus is God's representative, but hasn't realized that HE must trust Christ to receive eternal life.

When Jesus came, **He pre-sents Himself to Israel.**

His words & works witness concerning Him.

The evidence is sufficient.

Those who seek the truth are convinced.

John summarizes the evidence, pursuing a **three-fold purpose**:

To show that Jesus is God's Son, i.e., He's God.

=> so we might trust Jesus personally

=> so we might receive eternal life

John focuses his record of Christ's acts on **7 MAIN MIRACLES**, signs that demonstrate that Jesus is God's Son => **GOD**

1st sign: wedding in Cana (2:1-11).

He creates wine out of water.

Result 11 *This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.*

Jesus reveals His glory. His disciples trust Him!

JESUS' SIGNS ATTRACT A FOLLOWING 2:23-25

He performs other miracles in Jerusalem.

They catch the attention of many observers.

23-25 *Now while he was in Jeru. at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing & believed in his name. ²⁴But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. ²⁵He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.*

People see what He's doing & "believe in Him."

He knows something is wrong with this "faith of the crowds!"

He doesn't entrust Himself to them; He can read their hearts.

This isn't true faith in Him; They're sign chasers.

They're following the "miracle worker."

It takes more than a belief in miracles to impress God!

They believe He can do great things; they want to see more.

Jesus can see that they aren't really TRUSTING HIM!

Believing in the miracles is a great starting point, but unless we trust Him, we'll never receive the gift of life.

A FOLLOWER SEEKS AN ANSWER 3:1-21

Among those watching what Jesus is doing: Pharisee named **Nicodemus**.

He comes to Jesus at night, wanting to know more.

A leader among Jewish people, stands in contrast to miracle chasers who profess belief in Jesus.

DESCRIPTION OF NICODEMUS 3:1-2 *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night & said, "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."*

He's convinced by evidence that Jesus has come from God.

No other explanation explains what he's seen.

You'd be hard-pressed to find a better example of an impressive religious leader.

He's a Pharisee—the strictest legalistic group

They follow Jewish traditions faithfully.

They're respected by the people.

If they don't fulfill God's requirements, NOBODY does!

He's recognized as a ruler, a leader among God's people.

He would have been at top of people's "Most respected leader" list.

He's apparently recognized as foremost Jewish teacher of his day:

3:10 Jesus describes him as "THE teacher of Israel."

Nevertheless, Jesus speaks to him about his...

Need for New Birth 3:3-7

3:3 *Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

Jesus cuts through all the religious talk.

His religious garb, his spiritual talk, and his legalistic traditions don't impress God—they won't earn "extra credit" with God.

Jesus exposes his need:

It isn't enough to recognize Jesus' divine origin;

He must be born again.

Nicodemus assumes he's one religious leader dialoguing with another.

He's prepared to exchange religious thoughts with Jesus.

He's NOT prepared for what follows!

The marks of God's presence in Jesus are obvious to him.

Jesus interrupts his compliments, & informs him that **he has to start all over—with a new birth.**

He's born wrong—born in sin.

To enter God's kingdom he needs *a new start—a new birth.*

Jesus uses 4 illustrations to show our need to trust Christ:

Illustration from birth 3:3-7

He must be born again —born a second time.

Nicodemus doesn't understand His message, Jesus explains that what he needs is new birth.

To enter God's kingdom you must be born physically & spiritually.

3:4-6 *"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a 2nd time into his mother's womb to be born!"⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water & the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."*

Jesus picks up on Nicodemus' question: **3:4**

"Surely he can't enter a second time into his mother's womb, can he?"

His question is not really different than we would ask: "A new birth?

I'm suppose to start all over again? Change my nature?

How can I do that?

I might as well try to go back into my mother's womb!

How can I get a fresh start on life? How can I undo the past?

Jesus explains: **2 births are necessary: physical birth and spiritual birth.**

3:6 *"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."*

You must be born physically to have natural life.

You must be born spiritually to have spiritual life.

Nicodemus asks: *"How can I do that?"* **9**

Means of New Birth 3:8-17

Illustration from wind 3:8-13

⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." ⁹"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

Spiritual birth is a supernatural act of Holy Spirit. (8)

Only God's Spirit can produce new life.

Only He can give us a fresh start on life.

We could never start over on our own.

We might as well try to get back into our mother's womb.

We could never make it happen!

We can't explain HOW the Spirit does His work.

Like wind, we don't know where He comes from or where He's going.

But we can see the evidence of His work.

We can tell He's been there, because we see the evidence of new life.

Illustration of the Snake

14-17 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his one & only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Like the illustration of the serpent in the wilderness.

Moses describes the scene:

Num. 21:5-9 "They spoke against God & against Moses, & said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! & we detest this miserable food!" ⁶Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people & many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses & said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD & against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake & put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it & live." ⁹So Moses made a bronze snake & put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake & looked at the bronze snake, he lived."

Answer to the snake problem: NOT to kill snakes, discover an antidote, pretend they aren't real, pass anti-snake laws, or climb the pole!

They had to look to the serpent. They couldn't heal themselves.

That generation was under judgment, because of their sin.

They were destined to die.

God provides a way that, by looking to the snake, they might be healed and live.

All who looked to the serpent were saved (from physical death).

In the same way, WE have to trust Christ.

We can't save ourselves!

All who trust Jesus receive eternal life.

The Source: Don't miss the fact that GOD is the One who acts.

This isn't something Jesus does to placate the Father.

GOD loves the world & sends Jesus to die for sinful people.

The motive: love

The provision: God's one and only Son

The method: trust Him

The result: eternal life

What does it mean to trust Him?

The same thing it meant to look at that golden serpent.

They couldn't do a thing to save themselves.

Once bitten by a snake, they were "dead meat"

They were hopeless and helpless. They were DEAD.

It isn't enough just to know the truth!

Knowing about the snake didn't heal anybody!

They had to believe God and look to the snake.

So it is with us. Just knowing about Jesus' death isn't enough.

We must believe God & trust Jesus to take our sin for us.

We can't do ANYTHING!

That's why God gave His Son.

The serpent gave physical life to dying Jews.

Jesus gives eternal life to all who are dying in sin.

Those who stop trying to "do it themselves" and trust Him, receive eternal life.

When you trace Nicodemus' story to the end, you find him, identified as a believer in Jesus.

He comes to the cross with Joseph of Arimathea to bury Him.

Nicodemus trusts Jesus & receives the gift of life.

SO, HOW ABOUT YOU?

Jesus specializes in giving new life to people whose life is empty & meaning-less who trust HIM.

Will YOU trust Him?