

## John 3:1-10

There are many significant chapters in scripture. Psalm 23, Psalm 55, 139, Romans 8, and 1 Corinthians 15 are examples.

There are a few in John that are significant to the understanding of the faith of a Christ follower. John 3 is one of them.

On the Sunday before Palm Sunday and last week at Easter, we looked all of the treasure nuggets found in the great verse of John 3:16.

Today, I want to go back to the earlier verses of the chapter to see if we can learn something of the teachings of Jesus in regard to our relationship with God through Him.

This passage is an interview Jesus had with Nicodemus. Looking at particulars of the chapter, we learn something of Nicodemus. He is a Pharisee, which was one group who were enemies of Jesus. Since he was a Pharisee, he was, as Jesus said, a hypocrite. Matthew 23, Jesus said that Pharisees were hypocrites. They were like whitewashed tombs. They looked good on the outside, but inside was nothing but death. Hypocrites know in their hearts that they are hypocrites. They know that what they do outwardly doesn't match who they were inwardly. Perhaps this conviction is what brought Nicodemus to Jesus.

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews. History tells us that he is one of three wealthiest men in Jerusalem in his time. He is "The" teacher in Israel. Jesus tells us this in verse 10.

Though Nicodemus is most respected teacher of Judaism, this man is empty spiritually. He knows it. He is full of fear, anxious over his own soul. Something is missing about his life. He comes to Jesus seeking peace, seeking satisfaction for his own soul, joy, and forgiveness. Notice that Nicodemus never asks any question. Yet, Jesus knows why he is there. He immediately addresses it. Eternal life and Kingdom of God are the subjects at hand. Jesus tells how to become part of the Kingdom of God. You must be born from above. I know your translation and my translation may say, "You must be born again." But the literal translation is, "You must be born from above."

This is known in theological circles by another name, regeneration, which simply means born again or born from above.

Regeneration - The radical spiritual change in which God brings an individual from a condition of spiritual defeat and death to a renewed condition of holiness and life.

So let's look at some truths taught by Jesus regarding being born again or born from above as it relates to the Kingdom of God.

### Regeneration is The Initiative and Work of God

That's going to bother some folks. Some think that humans make the choice to pursue God. They think that it is humans who decide to make the initiative to choose to follow God. They come to God

and say, "Okay, today I'm going to turn to You. You have to accept me in your Kingdom." That's an entitlement mentality that for some reason many Americans have developed toward God. Let me tell you something, we don't deserve anything that God has. In fact, the only thing we deserve is eternal death. The wages of sin is death. God doesn't owe us anything.

I think that Nicodemus came to Jesus expecting some magical formula that will give him a new religion. "Tell me, Jesus, what ritual, what steps do I have to take to get this thing that is of you? What Jesus told Him is that it is not a religion. It is a relationship to which we are born to by God through Jesus Christ.

Let's look at this further. The word Jesus uses is literally born again or better born from above. How many of you borned yourself into this world? No one. We are born into this world. You didn't cause yourself to come into existence. Use your senses to reason that out.

Let me show you two more verses that talk about this.

Ephesians 2:1 – *You were dead in your trespasses and sins.* Literally, the verse reads, "You were being dead in your trespasses and sins." The verses that follow tell you what that is about. Go to verse 4. *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead or being dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*

The main phrase is "But God made you alive together with Christ." What coerced God to make us alive? He is rich in mercy. He has great love with which He loved us. We were being dead. It is out of His mercy and grace and the character of Him being love that made Him act in love to bring spiritual life to you. That is regeneration.

There are two great truths presented in these verses that are like some brothers and sisters. Mercy is God not giving what we do deserve. Grace is God giving to us what we don't deserve.

Go to another passage. 1 Peter 1:3

*"Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."*

The main phrase of that verse God has caused us to be born again. Is it through our own initiative that we are born again? No. God caused it according to His great mercy or as determined by His great mercy. The living hope the certainty of new life in Christ that has our foundation and surety in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

At hearing these words and understanding what is being said, we should be on our faces before our Holy Father who is merciful to give us new life in Jesus Christ. It is through His grace that we have such.

If you can understand what I am saying, that is of God who is calling you right now into His kingdom. You must say yes. For you to say nothing is to say no.

You who are not believers should be crying out for mercy from God to cause you to be born again to have this eternal life.

Back to John 3:7, Jesus said, "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"

## Regeneration is The Entry into the Kingdom of God

Notice verse 3. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless one is born from above he cannot see the Kingdom of God"

Notice also verse 5, Jesus said, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Jesus is connecting with the Pharisee side of Nicodemus. Evidently, the Pharisees thought that because they were natural born Jews and practicing the required external rituals, that would qualify them for entering and seeing the future Kingdom of God. So what Jesus did was burst that bubble. Your family line and what you try to do physically will not merit entry into the Kingdom of God.

Years ago, our youth group went to Opryland. Remember when that place was in existence? I'm telling my age. One our leaders got into a spiritual conversation with a well-known country singer. This singer's grandfather was a preacher. The singer had it in his mind that because he grandfather was a preacher, he could get into heaven on his shirttail. The leader kind of burst that bubble for him. I don't know what became of him afterwards, but I know the singer is no longer living.

To see the Kingdom of God is to experience it, to encounter it, to participate in it. How do we experience the Kingdom now? We do so through abundant living. We do so because we have been given a life that is Kingdom living. We discover and exercise our spiritual gifts to the benefit of ourselves but more for others. We find purpose for living. We find the ability to be influencers for those outside the Kingdom. We are able to know and share the peace and the comfort that comes because of Kingdom living.

Norma came to our church in Savannah through employment in our daycare center. In time, Norma heard, understood, and committed her life to Jesus Christ, becoming a born from above believer. The change that came to her life was obvious. It was more so for those in her family. About a year after Norma became a Christ follower, her mother passed away. The death was sudden and unexpected. Norma had three other sisters. The death of their mother sent them into a tailspin emotionally. It was Norma who became the strong one of the family. She shared words of comfort. She shared God's Word with her sisters. They were amazed and stood in wonder at the strength of Norma.

That is Kingdom living. That is living as citizen of the Kingdom. Enjoying this life, but knowing something better is ahead.

To experience the Kingdom is to know forgiveness of sin and the release of guilt that sin brings. To experience Kingdom is to have a sense of mission in life, purpose for living. To experience Kingdom is to know what eternal life is. It is God's life lived through us that never, ever ends.

Being born of above makes it possible to live a different kind of life. Jesus teaches that. That which is born of the flesh is of the flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. That to which you are born is that which will determine your way of living. Kind of what Paul says in Romans 8. One sign of having the Holy Spirit and being a believer is that that which we do will be that of the Holy Spirit.

## The Means by which we Are Born Again

Verse 5 gives clue to the means to this experience.

We are born of water and the Spirit.

Again Nicodemus should have known what Jesus was talking about.

Ezekiel 26:24-27

For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup> Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

In C.S. Lewis' *voyage of the Dawn Treader*, we are introduced to Eustace. He is an arrogant, gets under your skin kind of kid. As the story unfolds, we find Eustace on the edge of a clear pool that is filled with gold treasure. Being the greedy person he is, Eustace reaches in the pool and slips a gold arm band on his arm.

The pool is enchanted because his greed turns him into a dragon. That is what sin does for us, it turns us into something we really don't want to become. The armband is excruciatingly tight on his dragon foot. Eustace remains in this state in constant misery, wanting somehow to be transformed. One night, in the midst of his pain and frustration, Eustace encounters a huge lion who tells the boy to follow it to a high mountain well. Eustace longs to bathe his aching foot in the cool water, but the lion tells him he must undress first. It seems silly to Eustace because dragons don't wear clothes, but then he remembers that dragons, like snakes, cast their skins.

So Eustace scratches his skin, and the scales begin falling off—and soon his whole skin peels away. But when he puts his foot in the water, he sees that it is just as rough and scaly as before. He continues scratching at the second dragon skin and realizes there is yet another underneath.

Finally the lion says, "You will have to let me undress you."

Eustace is afraid of the lion's claws but desperate to get in the water. The first tear is painfully deep as the lion begins to peel away the skin. Surely death will follow, Eustace believes. With the gnarled mess of dragon skin now cut away, the lion holds Eustace and throws him into the water.

Initially, the water stings, but soon it is perfectly delicious. Eustace swims without pain, for he's a boy again.

From that point on, Eustace is not the arrogant, get under your skin kid. His nature and his character completely changed. Do you see the spiritual meaning of Lewis' story? That is regeneration. That is eternal life. That is the life God wants you to have through Jesus Christ.

Knowing that God makes the initiative to cause us to be born from above, knowing that is the work of God, and knowing that being born again or from above are wonderful truths Jesus taught Nicodemus. There was one thing that was needed—believe.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever BELIEVETH in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

Put your trust in Jesus so God will cause you to be born from above.