

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

THE RESCUE *begin*

GOD AMONG US

Nicodemus and the New Birth

God's Word tells us in **Hebrews 9:27 (ESV)** *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* In recent days in our state we have painfully seen men under the death sentence for their crimes. Each man was given notice in advance of the day of his execution. My stepfather who had cancer was given a death sentence of four months to live and he lived exactly four months after that death sentence was pronounced by the doctor. The truth is all of us are under the death sentence whether or not we know in advance the day of our death. God Himself came among us so that we can be born twice and just die once OR we can choose to be born once and die twice. Our lesson concerns being 'born twice.'

Our chronological study turns to the Gospel of John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the "Synoptic Gospels" from a Greek word that means "to see together." Matthew, Mark, and Luke all view the life of Christ in a similar way. Matthew pictures Christ as the King of the Jews. Mark shows Christ as the Servant and writes for the Romans. Luke views Christ as the Son of Man, writing for the Greeks. John, however, presents Christ as the Son of God, and writes for the entire world. The first three gospels deal primarily with the events in Christ's life. John deals with the spiritual meanings of these events. John recorded a conversation that Jesus had with a Pharisee named Nicodemus concerning what Jesus called the 'new birth'. New birth begins with the Spirit and results in transformation.

Read John 3:1-3 (ESV) ¹ *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.* ² *This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."* ³ *Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

The cleansing of the temple and the accompanying miracles had made both negative and positive impressions on the people. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin—a 'religious' man sought a private interview with Jesus. Rabbis often had long discussions with their disciples after dark. Seeking a private interview might be the reason that Nicodemus came to visit at night since Jesus was so often surrounded by crowds in the daytime. On the other hand, he might not have wanted the Sanhedrin to know that he was meeting with Jesus.

Nicodemus quickly admits that Jesus is a teacher from God but he did not realize that Jesus was God Himself in the flesh. Jesus did not respond to Nicodemus' comment, but instead says, "*unless one is*

born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Jesus was not interested in flattery. He was concerned with Nicodemus’ heart condition.

A person doesn’t need a new heart to be amazed at miracles. Anyone would likely be amazed by a blind man receiving sight or the lame walking. The devil himself knows that Jesus is the Son of God and works miracles. What happens in the new birth is not merely affirming the supernatural in Jesus but experiencing the supernatural in **yourself!**

Read John 3:4-6 (ESV) 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.*

Nicodemus most likely came to Jesus expecting to have a ‘religious’ discussion but Jesus made a point of going to the ‘heart’ of the matter – that was Nicodemus’ spiritual condition.

There are differences of opinion regarding what Jesus meant when He spoke of being *born of water*. Being born of water is sometimes wrongly interpreted as a reference to physical baptism with water for the purpose of entering heaven. Water baptism is certainly a part of our obedience to Christ and our witness for Christ. But it is not essential for salvation; otherwise, neither the Old Testament saints, nor the thief on the cross could have entered heaven. In every age, there has been but one way of salvation—faith in God’s promise.

Some try to explain being ‘born of water’ as a reference to physical birth. However, a better explanation is that being *born of water* is a reference to spiritual cleansing. Throughout the Old Testament, water is used figuratively for spiritual cleansing. For example, **Ezekiel 36:25 (ESV)** ²⁵ *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.* Nicodemus, a teacher of the law, would surely have been familiar with the concept of physical water representing spiritual purification.

Jesus said in **John 7:38 (ESV)** ³⁸ *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’*”

Read John 3:7-10 (ESV) 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?”*

The word *wind* in both Hebrew and Greek can also be translated “spirit.” One of the symbols of the Spirit of God in the Bible is the wind or breath. **Job 33:4 (ESV)** ⁴ *The Spirit of God has made me, and*

the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Like the wind, the Spirit is invisible but powerful. No one can see the wind – only its effects. Similarly, no one can see the new birth (second birth) happening but the results of the Spirit’s life-changing work are evident.

You might wonder why the Lord told Nicodemus that you must be born of the Spirit when the Holy Spirit was not yet given. Although the Holy Spirit was sent on the Day of Pentecost to indwell each believer in the body of Christ, God’s Spirit has always been active on the earth. The Holy Spirit is like Jesus. He was with God in the beginning. Old Testament believers were saved in the only way anyone is saved: "by grace." To those who believed the promise of a coming Redeemer, God the Spirit imparted life. Jesus expressed amazement that Nicodemus did not know this. Our Lord stated clearly that Nicodemus' knowledge of the Old Testament should have given him the light of understanding he needed. New birth comes through faith in God’s Son.

Read John 3:11-15 (ESV) 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.*

A prophet was a spokesman from God. Jesus in His role as Prophet spoke on God’s behalf. The Israelites continually rejected the Old Testament prophets and that same nation would reject Jesus even though they ‘knew’ the Bible. Knowledge is not salvation. A person who thinks he or she ‘knows everything’ and does not know Christ personally is making a fatal mistake. The religious leaders did not want to believe Jesus was who He said He was and submit to the authority of Christ's witness. Submitting to Him would be giving up their own ‘power.’ Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 12:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *... For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

We studied the story of the bronze serpent last year. When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God sent a plague of snakes to punish the people for their rebellious attitudes. Those doomed to die from snakebite could be healed by obeying God's command to look up at the elevated bronze snake and by believing that God would heal them if they did look. Similarly, our salvation happens when we look up to Jesus, believing He will save us. Jesus also spoke of being ‘lifted up’ later in His ministry. **John 12:32 (ESV)** ³² *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”* God has provided this way for us to be healed of sin's deadly bite. Those who looked to the bronze serpent in the wilderness escaped the first death for the time being. Those who look to Jesus escape the second death eternally. Jesus is the Gift from God who loves the world.

Read John 3:16-21 (ESV) 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.¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

David Jeremiah says of **John 3:16**, “this single verse tells more about God and His plan for this world than any other verse in the Bible.” My mother used to call it the ‘Bible in a nutshell.’

When Jesus came the first time, He did not come as a Judge. He came as Savior. **Romans 8:1 (ESV)**¹ *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* When He comes the second time, He will come as Judge. Paul said of God in **Acts 17:31 (ESV)**³¹ *because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”*

Why won't sinners come into the "light of life"? Because they love the darkness! Jesus explained that people love darkness because their deeds are evil. On a cloudy dark day when I have not ‘cleaned my house,’ I can convince myself that my house is ‘clean.’ Woe is me when the sun comes out! The dust – the cat hair – and all the spots are clearly visible for all to see. The sunlight reveals my house is not clean and I need to do something about it! Nicodemus was in the darkness physically and spiritually when he first came to Jesus but eventually he came into the Son's Light when he identified with Christ at Calvary. He realized that the uplifted Savior was indeed the Son of God.

We live in an age when we do not repair things like we used to. The cell phone messes up, we get a new one. The TV goes out, we buy a new one. We can buy something new cheaper than repairing something old and on top of that the new is going to have new features! When we reminisce about the "good old days" we may complain about our "throw away" society. However, we can see a picture of God's attitude towards the flesh in our modern trend to replace instead of repair. God has no plan for our old nature. He is not going to retrieve it, improve it, develop it or save it. God's plan is to replace our nature. Spiritual birth is how we receive that new nature. You may not understand the spiritual birth but you can know when it happens – just like you know when the wind hits you in the face on a cold morning. Many people have problems accepting Christ as Savior because salvation is something that they believe is not tangible. The Holy Spirit is as real as the wind. **Genesis 2:7** *And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. KJV* If you are a living soul, you can become a Living Spirit through the power of the Almighty God by accepting the Son of Man who is the Son of God.