

New Birth through Faith in Jesus Christ

John 3:1-21

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Good People Go to Heaven, Right?!?

John chapter 3 introduces the first of many extended dialogues that Jesus has with key characters in the gospel. In this particular encounter, Jesus speaks with one of Israel's teachers, a man named Nicodemus. John describes him as a man of the Pharisees and a leading member of the Jewish council. This meant that Nicodemus was very religious. A real goody two shoes! He came to Jesus with the best of credentials. In fact, there could be few Jews if any in the city whose religious credentials were more impressive as far as acceptance with God was concerned. Nicodemus was a good man. It would have never crossed his mind that he might be unqualified to spend eternity with the Lord. His meticulous attention to keeping the rules assured him of that. And besides, good people go to heaven, right? What kind of God would exclude a good person? What kind of God would exclude Nicodemus? What kind of God would exclude you?

Then again, is there really anyone who is truly good? And how good is good enough? What does the Bible teach about all of this? If the Bible teaches that something other than being good is required for eternal life in heaven, wouldn't you want to know about it?

You Must Be Born Again

We've learned that the purpose of John's Gospel is that people might have eternal life with the Lord (John 20:3). In the account of Nicodemus we find that Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter. "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again". Nicodemus, as an expert in the law, would have immediately understood "kingdom of God" language to mean eternal life under the perfect reign of the Lord as King. But the shocker for Nicodemus came in Jesus' statement of the terms of entry into the kingdom. *You must be born again*. Salvation has nothing to do with how good you are, how hard you try, how often you show up at church. You must experience a new birth, a spiritual re-creation. The dialogue with Nicodemus is a crucial section of the Bible because it expresses most clearly the truth of regeneration (new birth) by the Holy Spirit (see also Tit. 3:5, Ezk. 36:25-27; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). Regeneration involves the powerful operation of the Spirit of God in our lives to bring about a radical change of nature; a new heart with new attitudes and inclinations towards God. This and only this is the means by which one can experience salvation. You must be born again.

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John chapter 3 contains one of the most often quoted verses in the Bible and it is a verse that holds the key to understanding the new birth that Jesus is talking about. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (3:16). Salvation requires the receiving of a new spiritual life from God through personal faith in Jesus himself as the one who has come from God. Anyone who looks trustingly to the crucified and risen Christ will experience new birth and eternal life. It really is that simple...much more simple than trying to be good and blindly hoping that your efforts will earn you a ticket to heaven. Jesus Christ left the Father's side in order to be lifted up on a Cross, "that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (vs. 15). In this amazing act of love, we see in

God not a desire to exclude or condemn, but a desire to offer salvation through the Son. This salvation through Christ is available to everyone, but most importantly, it is available to you today. Will you put your faith in Christ this day? Will you let go of the things that you have been putting your hope in and grab a hold of the one true means of eternal life? I pray that you will.

For Further Reflection...

This week, spend time in John chapter 3. As you pray and journal, reflect on the following questions.

Why did Jesus find it necessary to drive home the importance of regeneration with Nicodemus?

Similarly, why is it important for Christians to understand the reality of their own new birth?

Look at David's prayer in Psalm 51:10-12. How does this prayer encourage us to regularly embrace and live out of our new hearts?