

Message: The Best Birthday Ever

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John 3:1-8

The Best Ever Sermon Series

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The Pharisees were conservative and traditional men who tried to live out how the scribes interpreted the Torah. Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish council. They were deadly serious about their piety. That could be a good thing, or not. Jesus told Nicodemus his accomplishments didn't matter. To know God, he would have to start over. He would have to be born again. It seems we usually go the way of the prodigal son (outward sin – Romans 1:18-32) or the way of the elder brother (Romans 2:1ff). We sin with the flesh or with the spirit (actually, both). Many Pharisees became Jesus' enemies. They didn't like Him breaking the Sabbath and all the rules they strived to keep. They tended to be tough, judgmental, intolerant, and proud of their own righteousness. But Jesus did not label people. He called individuals by name. This man was more than just a Pharisee; he was Nicodemus. Jesus was always searching for people to give them light and new life. Followers of Jesus get to have two birthdays: First, we are born of the flesh. Second, we are born of the Spirit. To enter the kingdom of God, we need birth (flesh) and rebirth (the Spirit). To be born of the Spirit is to say "yes" to Jesus and to His gift of life.

APPLICATION: Advent is the Church's way of remembering Jesus' story of origin. During Advent we recall the past, celebrate in the present and hope in the future (His return). What were the circumstances surrounding your birth? If you have kids, have you told them theirs? Have you experienced a second "birth" day? What is that story? How does it affect your past, present and the future? Invite one or two others to tell you their birth stories by Sunday night.

Sometimes people say they don't know how to read the Bible. It can be a hard book to understand because the times, culture, and historical background are so different from ours. However, just a simple reading of the text and asking questions about "what does it say, what does it mean, and what does it mean to me?" is the best way to read it. Let's look at this text today.

John 3:1-8

Now there was a man of the Pharisees The Pharisees who questioned Jesus in public played the honor/shame game (& lost). named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Not just a Pharisee, but a "ruler." A "VIP" (very important Pharisee)

² **This man came to Jesus** 2 things about Nicodemus. 1st he was **proactive**. He came. He wasn't passive. He took initiative. He had questions to ask. He wanted resolution. Being proactive = Habit #1 of 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

2nd he was **humble**. He had confident humility. He was open-minded and free from prejudice. So many of his Pharisaical peers were prejudiced. They always waited Jesus to make a mistake so they could put Him in His place. The harm done by such prejudice is incalculable. It's based

on ignorance, fear, and arrogance. Prejudiced people are emotional, not rational, and clear-thinking. This was the start of an on-going relationship Nicodemus had with Jesus. He appears twice more in the Gospel of John. In addition to this private encounter, Jesus said in John 7:37-39 ***Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*** This didn't go over well with the Pharisees. Nic came to his defense. John 7:50-52 ***Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."*** The 3rd occasion (John 19:38-42) ***After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.***

by ***night*** Nic's initial meeting might appear to be cowardice, but I think it showed wisdom. Sometimes it pays to be cautious. He wanted to ask questions in a private setting. This was a time to test or examine.

and said to him, "Rabbi, "Rabbi" means "teacher." Though Jesus is just a carpenter's son, Nic calls him "rabbi." This reveals he knows Jesus is someone special. Jesus is exceptional. Nic had every reason to ignore or minimize Jesus. Nic was at the top of the social, political, and economic food ladder and Jesus was a "nobody" as far as credentialing, but Nic recognized something utterly unique was happening.

*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."* A "sign" is a miracle. While John points out that John the Baptist did not do any signs, ***Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*** (John 20:30-31) The very last line in John's Gospel says: ***"Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."*** (John 21:25) The moment you meet Him in the Bible, always towers over everything; He commands every situation. People and situations vary, but Jesus is always the same. He stands out.

³ *Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

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?"* It's interesting he didn't ask "WHY?" Nicodemus knew

“why.” This ruling Pharisee was working hard at doing but he knew something was missing and what he was doing wasn’t working.

⁵ *Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to **you**, Jesus already knew Nicodemus’ questions. Jesus knew Nathaniel before He met him. He knew Zacchaeus before He met him. He knew the woman at the well. He knew Saul before he became Paul. Nicodemus thought he knew himself, but he didn’t. In fact, none of us really knows ourselves. We’re always ready to draw up the balance sheet and try to justify our lives. But we cannot do so. There is only One who knows all about us. He does not need our help. We are helpless and hopeless. We are filled with anxiety and fear until we meet Jesus.*

*unless one is born of **water** “Water” could mean the natural human process (the first birth when a mother’s water breaks before she gives birth. Or Jesus could be speaking of a more spiritual aspect.*

*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. 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.” We can’t control the wind. It’s like it has a mind of its own. Yet, the Lord used the wind – using it to blow back the Red Sea as the **Israelites** crossed; **Elijah** found the wind when he went on his cave man retreat; **Jonah** brought trouble onboard the ship in the Mediterranean Sea – and a strong wind appeared that threatened the vessel. God is often shown in the Old Testament as being in control of the wind. Mark 4:35-41 **On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?”***

Jimmy Carter popularized the term “being born again,” when he ran for President in the 70’s. One of the best autobiographies I’ve ever read was by Charles Colson – the name of his book was “Born Again.”

When Steve’s mother died, he was asked if he had a preference as to who conducted his mom’s service. He said, “*I have no idea. Maybe the guy on the radio.*” He was referring to me sharing Perceptions on an FM station KMOD. They called. I eagerly agreed. That’s how Steve

and I got acquainted. Soon after the memorial service Steve told his teenage daughter SHE really need to attend church (because Steve really felt the urge to attend but didn't want to admit it). He began to bring her. One Sunday morning in 1998 when we were in our old location on Sheridan, Steve felt the sermon was directed specifically to him. He got up from his pew in the balcony and came to the altar after the service but didn't really know what to say. I asked him if would like to ask Jesus into his heart. He said, "Yes." Steve remembers the date Aug. 23, 1998. His life changed at that moment. Steve's been in my Tuesday morning covenant group for years now. Since "You must be born again" is our topic today, I asked what the other 3 guys to share their conversion experiences. Everyone had a different story. Some were specific events. ALL of them were processes. I've asked several others this week to tell me their faith entrance. Most all of them had childhood or adolescent experiences. Steve's would be the outlier in this. Many were brought to church at an early age but left the church after HS and often got in trouble. Dana's experience is far different than mine.

We all have different experiences but here's what the Gospel says:

1.) God loves us just as we are. 2.) There's none who are righteous, including the best of the Pharisees. There's also none so unrighteous that it can eliminate God's love. 3.) Jesus died for our sins that we might experience forgiveness, eternal life, and the Kingdom of God here and now. This gift is for you, if you will receive it. Rom 10:9-10 *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, & with the mouth one confesses and is saved...For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*