

## Sermon John 3:1-36

- **The man from earth – Nicodemus**

- **He came to Jesus at night...**

Have you ever had someone knock on your door at night?

Once, a few years ago, our neighbour knocked on our door at 3am. And immediately we knew there was something wrong. As I opened the door, he started yelling at me because our dog had been barking all night and was keeping him awake. He was disturbed. In many ways...

People usually come at night when something's wrong. When something's troubling them. **Or...** if they don't want anyone else to see them.

We're not sure why Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Maybe he was troubled. Maybe he was being secretive and didn't want anyone to see him talking to Jesus. Or maybe both. We do know that John's gospel uses themes of darkness and light. Nicodemus comes in the dark to Jesus, who is the light of the world.

- **Nicodemus saw the signs, but not the kingdom.**

But at this night meeting, Nicodemus says to Jesus, verse 2:

- *"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."*

Nicodemus had seen Jesus perform signs. He knew that Jesus was doing significant things and that he must be from God. But Jesus says, verse 3:

- *"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."*

Jesus says: Nicodemus, you've seen the signs, but you haven't seen the kingdom.

There are a lot of people in our world like this. They see the signs of Jesus. They see the earthly side of Jesus. They believe he was important. A good teacher. A wise man. Even a prophet. Some even accept that he was a miracle worker. Nicodemus even goes so far as to say that Jesus has come from God.

And what does Jesus say to these people like Nicodemus? What does Jesus say to people who only see the earthly things, the signs? He says: "But you don't see the kingdom of God! You don't see what the signs are pointing to!"

In fact, Jesus says you CANNOT see the kingdom of God unless you are born again.

- **He was born, but not born again.**

Nicodemus was confused. Yes he had been born. But how can he be born *again*?

And Jesus says: flesh gives birth to flesh. You are a human, born from a human. So you are part of the earthly, human kingdom. But if you want to be part of the heavenly kingdom, God's kingdom, you need to be born again. Born of God. Born of water and the Spirit (verse 5). Water is the sign of washing, cleansing, repentance. Being born of the Spirit is to be born of God.

And Jesus goes on to explain in verse 8:

- *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."*

In other words, you don't understand the wind. You don't control it. That's what it means to be born of God. It's under **God's** control. It's an act of God. God does it. Like the wind, it's not from human hands. It's not able to be understood or controlled by humans.

You see, Nicodemus was born a Jew. He was a leader, a member of the Jewish ruling council, a teacher of Israel. He was born, he thought, with all the right credentials. As a Jew, he had followed the commands, the sacrificial system, he had fulfilled all the requirements of the law. He thought he was OK with God. And now Jesus is giving him this 'other' requirement – you must be **born again**. Born from above. Born of God. Born spiritually.

And again, for a lot of people today, this is hard to hear. Because a lot of people think they're OK with God: I'm a good person. I've never killed anyone. Surely I will be going to heaven. I don't deserve to go to hell. I'm OK with God because I've lived a pretty good life.

But here is Jesus' condition. You **must** be born again. Born of God. To **see** the heavenly kingdom, you must be **born** into the heavenly kingdom.

### **Illustration...**

A few years ago I had minor surgery for a hernia. It was the first of many signs that I was getting old! Let me tell you the best thing about that surgery – I didn't do anything. In fact, I was asleep. I said yes to the surgery. They booked me in. Put me to sleep. Cut me open. Put in some patch and gave me a new belly button! And I woke up and it was all done. I did nothing. I simply said yes. And there was a change in my life. There was a change that happened because of a surgery that someone else did.

To be born again means saying **yes** to God doing major surgery on us and giving us a new heart. It means allowing God to change us because we recognise that we cannot do that change ourselves.

Jesus says to Nicodemus, in verse 10,

- *10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"*

Jesus says: "Really Nicodemus?!" You should already understand this spiritual stuff. The Old Testament prophets spoke about God giving his people a new life, a new heart. God says through the prophet Ezekiel in 36:25-26 –

- *25I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

God says: "**I** will... **I** will." This is **God's** work of "**regeneration**". Becoming a Christian is not like turning over a new leaf. This is like becoming a new **tree**. It's *transformation*, not *alteration*. And Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, "You need to be transformed by God, born again, to enter the kingdom of God. The work of salvation has to be done by God himself. HE will cleanse us. HE will give us a new heart. HE will give us new birth by his Spirit.

And how will he do that? Lets look at the unforgettable words of John 3:16 –

- *16For 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.*

God has done the work by sending Jesus into the world. It comes down to belief in Jesus. Belief in the work Jesus has done on the cross. Belief in the work Jesus can do in our life. Not belief in our OWN work, but in HIS work. But the next verses are JUST as important:

- *17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

There are the two sides:

Whoever believes in Jesus will **not perish**, but have **eternal life**.

Whoever believes is not condemned. But whoever does not believe is condemned **already**.

What Jesus is saying to Nicodemus is that unless he recognises Jesus as the only one who can save, he remains condemned, no matter what his background is as a Jewish teacher and leader. That should surprise us too. Nicodemus is the definition of who should "get in" to heaven. He is so **qualified**. But it won't save him. Why not? Because he needs to depend on Jesus, and not himself.

What's really interesting now is how the rest of the chapter takes us back to John the Baptist. You see, people are wondering if John is now concerned that Jesus is getting all the attention. Verse 26:

- *26They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."*

And John the Baptist explains again: This is what his ministry was all about – pointing people to Jesus. John's ministry decreases and Jesus' ministry increases and takes over.

And **we** also need to point people to Jesus. It should all be about him. He is the light. He is the truth. He is where we want to lead people. It would have been very easy for John to make it all about himself. But he didn't. He pointed people to Jesus.

Because people need Jesus. And we need to point them to Jesus.

I often hear people define "good churches" by saying things like: "They're a very welcoming church". "That church has great music". "That church has a great youth group". "That church has a terrific senior's ministry".

I don't think we want to be **defined** by those things. They might be nice things to have. But I certainly don't want those things to define us.

I'd like us to be defined as "**the church who points people to Jesus**".

### **Do you agree?**

Jesus is the only one who can make the change in people's lives that they need – the change that leads to eternal life. Every week, all of us need to be pointed back to Jesus. This is what John's gospel is doing. Again and again. Back to Jesus. Point to Jesus. Follow Jesus. Disciples of Jesus. Every Sunday at Church, every day we read our bibles, every growth group meeting, we want one simple thing – to be pointed back to Jesus – the only one who can give us new, eternal life.

So here is our challenge for 2017. In everything we do, can we point people to Jesus? Can we commit to that in every ministry, every Church service, every youth group, every gathering, every event. Can we point people to Jesus – because we know he is the only one who can make that change in people's lives.

Let's pray.

1Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

4"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 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.

10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

16For 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. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

### **John Testifies Again About Jesus**

22After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. 23Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized. 24(This was before John was put in prison.) 25An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. 26They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

27To this John replied, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. 28You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.' 29The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30He must become greater; I must become less."

31The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. 33Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. 34For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. 35The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. 36Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.