

# John 3:1-21

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## A Conversation with Jesus

### You Must Be Born Again

#### Set the scene

**Who:** Nicodemus, Jesus & you. (By His inspiration the Holy Spirit has let you in on this conversation. He's allowed you to be a fly on the wall for a reason).

Who is Nicodemus? (John 3-7-19)

A Jewish man (believed to be righteous by virtue of his natural birth as an Israelite), who was an upstanding citizen in the eyes of Israel, a member of the Pharisees (Jesus made a point in Matt 5:20, that our righteousness had to EXCEED that of the Pharisees to enter the Kingdom of Heaven). Not only that but Nic was a member of the Sanhedrin, The 70 elders who oversaw Israel. It was the Sanhedrin (not all of them) along with the High Priest that condemned Jesus to death. Not only that but it seems was one of the few of them that had integrity. It was Nic who stood up for Jesus in John 7:50-52, caring about the integrity of the law at minimum.

**What:** A private conversation. This isn't the only conversation like this that we have. In John 4 Jesus has a personal and pointed conversation as well.

In this Conversation Jesus spoke to a Jewish man, at night, with all the religious credentials.

In the John 4 conversation Jesus spoke to a Samaritan woman, at noon, who had a shady past.

Conclusion of both conversations, their need for Jesus and His righteousness. The woman may have found herself in Romans 1. While Nicodemus may have been more likely in Romans 2. Either way the end of themselves would've been Romans 3:23

You can't be good enough you can't be smart enough you can't do enough good things to inherit the kingdom of God. The opposite is true if that is you can't be so bad you can't be so stupid so dumb so unintelligent that you don't have the opportunity to inherit the kingdom of God. It has nothing to do with you and everything to do with you surrendering to him. You can't out sin God's grace and you cannot earn it either.

It was to this man who, if it was earnable, he would've earned righteousness, Jesus said "you must be born again."

**When:** At night, during Passover (see John 2)

**Where:** Jerusalem

I see Jesus often reaching people through conversations. He often operated in this conversational evangelism. Not only did He evangelize this way, but He disciplined this way as well. We should follow our Master's lead and just talk with people.

**3** Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

<sup>2</sup>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."

V1-2 From Matty Henry – Jesus wasn't looking for admirers. He seeks followers not fans. (John 14:6)

V2 Notice the word "we" here. Was Nicodemus making a confession for all of the Pharisees? Was there a general acknowledgment by the leadership at least partially that Jesus was a teacher come from God? If so, then it really demonstrates the difference between acknowledging things about Jesus, and having a relationship with Jesus. It would also show Pharisees need to find excuses not to believe in Jesus. There was something they didn't like about him. But it would seem, at least at first, but there was an acknowledgment of Jesus being a teacher that came from God. Remember the Pharisees and leaders of Israel couldn't refute the miracles of Christ and they couldn't defeat the words of Christ yet through hardness of heart were still able to reject the person of Christ. Don't we see this in our world today? Hardhearted people Full of objections and excuses to avoid coming to the proper conclusion of exactly who Jesus Christ is.

V2 Nicodemus was willing to acknowledge Jesus as a teacher. This was an honor in the eyes of Nicodemus, but truly he was selling Jesus short for Jesus is so much more than that. This reminds me of the C.S. Lewis quote:

***"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us***

***not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” — C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity***

V2 Jesus was also more than someone “come from God, He is God.

<sup>3</sup>Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

V3 It’s almost as if Jesus responds to Nicodemus saying “we know that you’re are a teacher come from God” with you acknowledge that I’ve come from God, let me tell you that you can’t see or enter this Kingdom that you’re referring to unless you are born again.”

V3 You are in need of a new nature. 2 Corinthians 5:17

V3 new birth = new creation

V3 “because Jewish teacher spoke of Gentile converts to Judaism as starting life anew like ‘newborn children,’ Nicodemus should’ve understood that Jesus meant conversion; but it never occurs to them that someone Jewish would need to convert to the true face of Israel.” IVP

V3 Being born again, not only refers to a new life, but also a new mind and a new nature.

“nothing else will take the place of the new birth. Education, morality, religion, orthodoxy, baptism, reform-none of these, nor all of them together, are sufficient.” – R A Torrey

V3 the example of the heartbreaking arrogance of a bumper sticker I once saw that said, “born right the first time.” How sad

**Romans 8:8–9 (ESV) — 8** Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. **9** You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. **Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**

His Spirit is what makes you His.

**Matthew 12:33 (ESV) — 33** “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.

You have to become a completely new tree of you expect your fruit to change.

Some translations say “Born from above.”

Romans 5 – Federal Headship, we’re either under Adam, our first father or born again through Jesus Christ the Last Adam into the family of God.

Born, under Adam (the flesh)

Born Again, under Christ (by the Spirit)

It is to become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Born of the Spirit, is just that. The Holy Spirit is doing the work to make your spirit alive. Before that you are dead in your trespasses and sins. Ephesians 2

It is the impartation of the Spirit of the Living God in a person.

It could be rendered “except any man be born of the Word of God and the Spirit of God.” R.A. Torrey (cleansing and quickening)

You are given a life that can now live in Heaven. In a weird way, I can’t live underwater because I’m not equipped with the necessary things (gills etc.) to live there. I too can’t dwell in the presence of God in Heaven without being Born Again. Being born of the Spirit equips me to live eternally with God in Heaven. (Super crude analogy)

<sup>4</sup> 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?”

V4 Nic’s question was about the possibility of it all. In V9 his question deals more with process, how does it happen.

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

V5 the passage the reduced to un-figurative language would read, “except any man be born of the word of God and the Spirit of God...” – R. A. Torrey

V5 water is a reference to the cleansing word. See also

**Ephesians 5:26 (ESV) — 26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

**James 1:18 (ESV) — 18** Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

**1 Peter 1:23 (ESV) — 23** since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

**John 15:3 (ESV)** — 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

**John 17:17 (ESV)** — 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

**Titus 3:5–6 (ESV)** — 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

**Romans 10:17 (ESV)** — 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

**Proverbs 25:25 (ESV)** — 25 Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.

V5 Also in this passage some may interpret “water” to also be Spirit, so as to point to different operations or works of the same Spirit. For example, His cleansing work and His quickening work. Either interpretation is fine. The one interpretation that it cannot be is that water cannot mean baptism.

V5 **Enter into.** This more than *see* (ver. 3). It is to become partaker of; to go in and possess, as the Israelites did Canaan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup>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.”

V8 According to the IVP Bible Background Commentary, the sound of the wind could be a pun, or play on words meaning the voice of the Spirit.

V8 the wind doesn’t have a visible source and neither does the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:11 Says the Spirit does as He wills. I think that fits here too.

V8 Far too often churches, in an effort to “make the air move” brings in man’s efforts, like electric fans, artificially creating wind stirring up a pseudo spirit with atmosphere, ambience, lighting, and religion. Why would any of us be okay with some form of imitation when the real living God through his Holy Spirit has been made available and desires to be with us. I think I

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent, M. R. (1887). [\*Word studies in the New Testament\*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 93). New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

know why. Because the imitation version avoids death to self. Biblically a move of the Holy Spirit is born out of humility, consecration, prayer, and the magnification of Jesus Christ.

**Luke 9:23–26 (ESV)** — **23** And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. **24** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. **25** For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? **26** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

I want to come back to verse 8

<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?”

V9’s question, the answer to the how came in a threefold response. First, verses 14-15; Second verse 16; Third verses 17-19. That’s how. As G. Campbell Morgan put it, “Jesus said, Life through my death; Love from the heart of God through His gift; Light through my mission in the world. That is how. Because God so loved, He gave; and life comes through that gift; and now the light is shining.”

<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?”

V10 Ezekiel 37 Dry Bones and Jeremiah 31:31-34 The New Covenant Ezekiel 36

I think Nicodemus understood the analogy, but not his need because of his position and heritage.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

I see here the Trinity showing through in the way Jesus is speaking. Plurality speaking of the Trinity

<sup>12</sup> If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

V12 **Heavenly things** (τὰ ἐπουράνια). Compounded with ἐπί, *upon* or *in*, and οὐρανός, *heaven*. **Not holy things as compared with sinful, nor spiritual things as compared with temporal; but**

things which are in heaven, mysteries of redemption, having their seat in the divine will, realized in the world through the work and death of Jesus Christ and the faith of mankind (v. 14–16).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

V13 Ascend – Go up, descend – come down. You can't work your way up, so I came down to you. Compare that to every other cult and religion. Man cannot work his way to God, therefore God came down as a man (Emmanuel) to do the work for us.

<sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

V14 Numbers 21. Look in faith.

V14 "lifted up" always refers to Jesus's death. See John 8:28; 12:32; 12:34.

<sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

### **For God So Loved the World**

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

V14-16 "As the dying Israelite, with a poison of the fiery serpents coursing through their veins, was saved by looking at the brazen serpent on the pole, and had new life coursing through his veins as soon as he looked, so we dying men, with the poison of sin coursing through our veins, are saved by looking at Christ made in the likeness of sinful flesh, lifted up on the cross, and have a new life coursing through our veins as soon as we look. All we have to do with our regeneration is to receive Christ." – R A Torrey

V16 God's love is a perfect love. Agape Love. Often, we loved people for what they can give us but that's not how Jesus loves. His love is a love that expects nothing in return. When we love to get something from someone else that's not really love but lust. God's love is never manipulative. Manipulation has been called a rape of the will. But God has a perfect love that respects our decisions, and even our rejection. That is why John 1:12 reads:

<sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

**2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)**

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<sup>2</sup> Vincent, M. R. (1887). [\*Word studies in the New Testament\*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 97). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

<sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

V16 Belief, of course, means far more than mere intellectual assent. Rather, it means placing one's life and trust in complete surrender to the one in whom you believe.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> 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."

V19-21 don't forget that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. No doubt as Jesus brought his teaching to a close the darkness of night surrounded them. Yet Jesus shared with Nicodemus the light of the gospel. This closing illustration would have come more alive because of the purposeful contrast that Jesus used between the surrounding darkness (the world we live in) and the living Light of the world, God incarnate, Jesus Christ. Not only did Jesus give this graphic picture, but he also left Nicodemus with a choice. He could either love the darkness and remain there, or love the Son and come to the light.

V19-21 When we come to Christ through the gospel there is an exposing that takes place between the individual and God. An overview of the book of Romans reveals this as well. When we come to God and reveal or confess our sins before him it isn't for the sake of embarrassment, but for healing. God loves you and wants to remove the darkness and place within you the light of the life of his Son Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

I once knew a person, this is a real person where I used to live, who started exhibiting signs of breast cancer. But they kept it hidden. They were the only one who knew about them. I don't know why they kept this hidden. Hidden from doctors. Hidden from family. Whether it was out of embarrassment, or fear, or some other motive, though the symptoms grew more severe, no

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<sup>3</sup> White, J. E. (1998). [John](#). In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman concise Bible commentary* (pp. 468–469). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

one knew about them until it was too late. The person eventually decided to do something, to tell someone, to get help, but it was too late. Eventually the cancer won and this person lost their mortal life. This was something that was originally detected early enough to do something about. But instead nothing could be done.

I have good news for you though. When it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ and drawing near to him for salvation it's not too late. In fact, the only way to wait too long for the good physician to do his work is to wait until you die. Even the thief on the cross was able to look to Christ in repentance and was granted the promise of being with Jesus in paradise. But why wait?

***“Die before you die, there is no chance after.” — C.S. Lewis, Till We Have Faces***

And Christian, you who have already given your life to Jesus, is there something that you need to bring in confession before his throne of grace? Don't hide in the corner, in the darkness for nothing is hidden from his eyes. The Bible says that there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. You don't need a pastor or a priest. You don't need a 12-step program. You need only come to Jesus in faith. 1 John 1:9 says “if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. There is no point in hiding from the loving eyes of Jesus.

V19-21 Repentance. To come to the light *is* to leave the darkness. John 1:1-5

By doing one you automatically do the other. Move from a dark room to a light room. What I'm saying is that, coming to Jesus truly, cannot be done without repentance. Coming to Him is repentance and to come to Him without repentance is not to come to Him at all.

### **Are you Born Again?**

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves. Paul said this in love to the Corinthian church and that's my heart in saying it to us.

I was working with a man who claimed to be a Christian, mostly in a nominal catholic sense and this verse was put on my heart, I believe by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said “you must be born again or you cannot see the kingdom of Heaven.” Those are Jesus' words, have you been born again? This cuts to the quick, trims away the “interpretations” and excuses. He responded with “well no, I haven't.” “does that bother you?” This led to a very long gospel conversation and an explanation of the Gospel and what it means to believe.

It's possible to be, “Intellectually Convinced, but Spiritually Uncommitted.”

It's popular now to teach that we are all automatically “God's children” in books and movies like “the Shack” this is taught, but in the Bible it is not. That's another reason why being born again is so vital. See Ephesians 2:3; 1 John 3:10; Ephesians 5:6

It would be better to find out now. Remember the text says examine yourselves. In this sense I can't test you and you can't test me. We only have one Mediator and His name is Jesus.

My purpose is not to create doubt but, rather to settle it. To give you a confidence in your walk. 1 John 3:21; 4:17; 5:13

It's exam time. Don't panic you're in the nail scarred hands of the Great Physician. Ready.

Romans 8:9; 16. We have the Spirit and He bears witness with our spirit

1 John 3:14. We love the brothers (and sisters).

John 17:3. We know Him.

Approach it like the Psalmist. Psalm 139:23-24. Search me and know me.

Remember as you do this text. John 6:35-37-40. Whoever comes to me I will not cast out. That's a promise!

### **So it IS with everyone who is born of the Spirit. Is it with you? V8**

Eimi – Verb, present active indicative (it's a reality). Means "to have the quality of being."

Believer, it's still supposed to be this way for you.

To be born of the Spirit is a beginning of life that is to continue the way it began, in the Spirit. Think of it the way you would an infant. When a baby is born his life has just begun.

Tim McCarver and Joe Buck. The wind can't be seen, but the affects can be seen. ALCS 2004

**V8 Acts 19:2 (ESV) — 2** And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

Paul seem to observe but there was something missing in the lives of these believers. Perhaps this ties into this verse more than we realize. The scripture say that they were disciples, but there was something missing. How many of us, believers, could be living outside of the influence of the Holy Spirit of God?

Does the Spirit still have an effect on you? As a born-again believer, He should.

V8 It's been said but the greatest ability, his availability. Have you made yourself available to the Holy Spirit? Available to his will? Available to his moving?

Think about a giant wind turbine. The giant propellers that dot the landscape in some places. The wind can be blowing, but if the brakes are on the propeller resists the wind no matter how it may blow. When the brake is on, no power is generated. So too as believers when we are

resistant to the moving of the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives, we are powerless. That's not the kind of life God has meant for us. When the wind is blowing, the power is available but the turbine that isn't yielded misses out on the power that it could be experiencing. Yield, surrender. (Romans 6:13; 16; 19 present yourself)

It's been said, without Him we can't, but without you He won't.

**Galatians 3:3 (ESV) — 3** Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Romans 8 ESV "Spirit" 22 x's, Romans 8 is all about our sanctification, this present life here on earth.

How important is the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer? Here's my list that I came up with from scripture:

- He gives life – John 6:63 ;2 Corinthians 3:6
- He teaches you and brings things to remembrance – John 14:26
- He bears witness about Jesus – John 15:26
- He will guide you into all truth – John 16:13
- By Him you will receive power – Acts 1:8
- He fills you to speak with boldness – Acts 4:31
- He speaks and sends – Acts 13:2-4
- He constrains – Acts 20:22
- He testifies – Acts 20:23 ;1 John 5:6
- He circumcises our hearts – Romans 2:29
- He pours God's love into our hearts – Romans 5:5
- He sets you free from the law of sin and death – Romans 8:2
- He leads – Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18
- He bears witness – Romans 8:16; 9:1
- He helps us in our weakness – Romans 8:26
- He intercedes for us – Romans 8:26

- He searches hearts – Romans 8:27
- He gives power to abound in hope – Romans 15:16
- He empowers us to love – Romans 15:30
- He reveals – 1 Corinthians 2:10; Ephesians 3:5
- He searches everything – 1 Corinthians 2:10
- He comprehends the thoughts of God – 1 Corinthians 2:11
- He gives understanding – 1 Corinthians 2:12
- He teaches – 1 Corinthians 2:13
- He dwells in you – 1 Corinthians 3:16 ; 6:19
- He washes, sanctifies and justifies – 1 Corinthians 6:11
- He gives gifts – 1 Corinthians 12 & 14
- He seals us – 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30
- He writes on our hearts – 2 Corinthians 3:3
- He brings freedom – 2 Corinthians 3:17
- He is our guarantee – 2 Corinthians 5:5
- We began in the Spirit – Galatians 3:3
- We walk in the Spirit – Galatians 5:16
- He gives us new desires – Galatians 5:17
- He produces fruit – Galatians 5:22
- We live by the Spirit – Galatians 6:8
- He gives wisdom – Ephesians 1:17
- He gives access to the Father – Ephesians 2:18
- He is building you up – Ephesians 2:22
- He strengthens with power – Ephesians 3:16
- He brings unity – Ephesians 4:3

- He can be grieved – Ephesians 4:30
- He can fill you – Ephesians 5:18
- We pray in the Spirit – Ephesians 6:18
- He is our helper – Philippians 1:19
- He enables worship – Philippians 3:3
- He enables love – Colossians 1:18
- He empowers the Gospel – 1 Thessalonians 1:5
- He produces joy – 1 Thessalonians 1:6
- He can be quenched – 1 Thessalonians 5:19
- He sanctifies – 2 Thessalonians 2:13 ;1 Peter 1:2
- He speaks and warns – 1 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:7
- He dwells within us – 2 Timothy 1:14
- He renews – Titus 3:5
- He does miracles and distributes gifts – Hebrews 2:4
- He bears witness to us – Hebrews 10:5
- He predicted the sufferings and glories of Christ – 1 Peter 1:11
- He carried along the prophets – 2 Peter 1:21
- He confesses Christ – 1 John 3:2
- He is truth – 1 John 5:6
- He helps you pray – Jude 20
- He speaks to His church – Revelation 2:7 ;11 ;17 ;29; 3:6 ;13 ;22
- He and the Bride say “Come!” – Revelation 22:17

Surrender and make yourself available. Have your sails up, let Him move you! A sail-driven ship at sea without it's sails raised is just drifting and tossed by the waves. out with its sails up it's available to have its sails filled and has the power to reach its destination.

You should be so filled with the Holy Spirit that after you get bit, mosquitoes fly away singing “nothing but the Blood of Jesus!”

Don’t get me wrong, Jesus is to get the glory but, it was Jesus who said He wouldn’t leave us as orphans but He gave us His Holy Spirit.

Based on what the Gospel has done for you, Is the Spirit free to have His effect on you?

Remember that the Born-Again life is a life in the Spirit.

May this inspire us to have our own conversations with Jesus.

***“If you wish men to see the truth about Christ, do not depend on your own powers of expression and persuasion, but cast yourself on the Holy Spirit, seek for them his testimony, and see to it that they put themselves in a place for the spirit can testify. This is the cure for both ignorance and skepticism concerning Christ.” R A Torrey***