



THE COMMUNITY

No One Is So Good | THE GOSPEL

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

John 3:1-18

This passage contains probably the most quoted and best known statement in the Bible. “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” (John 3:16). Jesus made that statement to Nicodemus, a religious leader who had come to see Jesus. Jesus used the opportunity to explain the essence of the gospel to him, and to call him to faith. In their conversation, we see that Jesus makes His forgiveness available to everyone.

In verse 1, we are introduced to Nicodemus, a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a group of Jewish leaders who taught in the synagogues. They were often legalistic and hypocritical. Though they went to great lengths to obey the letter of the law, they often ignored the spirit of the law. In the gospels, we see that Jesus reserved His harshest words for the Pharisees. (See Luke 11:37ff)

Though we can't be certain about the motivation of Nicodemus, it's likely he visited Jesus at night because he wanted to speak to Him in secret. The Pharisees already had a building sense of animosity toward Jesus that would culminate in their plot to have Him crucified. Nicodemus, however, saw that Jesus was a righteous man and sought to speak with Him when he couldn't be spotted by the other Pharisees.

The Need To Be Born Again

Nicodemus begins with what seems to be a polite comment commending Jesus for His teachings and miracles. Jesus' response seems to come out of left field, apparently ignoring the commendation and declaring, “No one can see the kingdom of heaven unless he is born again.” This puts Nicodemus back on his heels as Jesus probably intended. Nicodemus is used to being the dispenser of approval and disapproval. You need to picture him in his flowing robe putting his arm around Jesus' shoulder saying, “Jesus, you're doing a great job. Fine job really. I'm very impressed.” Jesus, who doesn't seek or need his approval basically shrugs him off and says, “You can't even see the kingdom of Heaven, much less determine the value of its King. You need to be born again.”

This flustered and confused Nicodemus who assumed Jesus was being literal. Jesus

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What's the Big Idea?

In this text, we have a detailed account of Jesus sharing the gospel. He's having a conversation with a man who possesses an impressive religious resume. Despite the man's credentials, Jesus tells him that in order to enter the kingdom of God, he must be born again. No one is beyond the need of Jesus forgiveness. We all need a spiritual rebirth.

What's the Problem?

Our pride and self righteousness can make us think we don't need God's offer of love and forgiveness through Christ.

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clarifies Nicodemus' confusion in the next couple of verses. The new birth He was referring to wasn't physical, but spiritual. Our primary problem is spiritual, and so our spirit needs a new start, or a new birth.

The key verse in this passage is verse 7. Jesus says again, "You must be born again." The you is plural and refers to all of us. It even includes people like Nicodemus, who have impressive religious resumes and others who think they are good enough to deserve heaven on their own. Being born again is what we all must do if we are to see the kingdom of God and spend eternity with Him.

The Spirit: The Means By Which We Are Born Again

in verse 8, Jesus uses another difficult analogy. He says, "The wind blows where 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." He is showing us that God (the Spirit) is as uncontrollable and unpredictable as the wind. He is the one who, in His time, produces new life.

The Son: The Reason We Can Be Born Again

In verse 14, Jesus makes the radical claim that faith in Him is the key to experiencing this new life. He uses another illustration – this one from the Old Testament. In Numbers 21, Moses was leading the Israelites through the wilderness. The people rebelled and complained, so God sent poisonous snakes among them, and many of the Israelites died. God showed them the consequence of sin, and He wanted to teach them about His power to forgive and heal. So He instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and place it on a pole where all the people could see it. When anyone who had been bitten would look at the snake, trusting God, he would be healed. (Incidentally, this is why hospitals and ambulances use the image of a snake wrapped around a pole to symbolize healing.)

Jesus claimed He was like the bronze snake. He would be lifted up (on the cross) like the snake. When anyone would look to Him, they would be healed, and receive eternal life.

Notice that Jesus isn't identifying Himself with the snakes in the sand, who judge, but with the snake on the pole, who saves. He has the authority to judge but that's not why He came. He makes that plain when He says, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."

How We Receive This New Birth

With the snake image in mind, Jesus uttered His most quoted promise: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). That "so" is not emphatic, but connective. He is saying, "This is how God loved the world: by sending the world's judge to be its savior. Just like the snake in the desert."

That verse summarizes the essence of the gospel. In that brief statement, Jesus identifies the two possible destinies all of us face – perishing and eternal life. Second, He describes God's solution to our problem – His Son. Third, He declares our need to believe in Him in order to receive eternal life. Finally, He reveals God's love, His motive for going to the cross on our behalf.

There are two main ideas that you want to communicate through this study: 1) anyone can experience new birth and have eternal life by believing in Jesus, and 2) everyone must place their faith in Christ and be born again, even people who are good or religious. Everyone needs what only Jesus can offer.

What's Our Response?

You may have people in your group who need to trust Christ themselves. If so, take some time to explain the gospel. You may want to share the Knowing God Personally booklet with individuals either during the study or privately afterwards.

The second application of this study is to teach your group to share the gospel. The last question invites the group to think through how they would summarize the gospel. After everyone has had a chance to do this exercise, have a few people share what they wrote. Then give each member a copy of the Knowing God Personally booklet. Briefly walk them through it.

You might ask the group to think of one or two people they could simply give the booklet to and ask them to read it over. Consider taking your group members with you to share the gospel with someone.

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What Are the Questions?

John 3:1-18

Launch

If you were to die tonight and stand before God and He were to ask you, “Why should I let you into my Heaven?” what would you say?

Explore

Read John 3:1-8.

1. What is a Pharisee?
2. Why do you think Nicodemus came to Jesus at night?
3. Why did Jesus brush off Nicodemus’s complement and respond as He did?
4. If someone were to ask you what it means to be “born again,” what would you say?
5. Given his religious credentials, how do you think Nicodemus felt when Jesus said he wasn’t able to enter the kingdom of God based on his deeds?
6. In John 3:4, Nicodemus understands Jesus’ words only at a surface level. This happens several times in the Book of John. Look up these other examples of misunderstanding and summarize your findings.

John 2:19-20 | John 4:1-15 | John 11:11-14

7. What point is John making by recording these misunderstandings?

8. In John 3:5, Jesus says you must be born of “water and Spirit.” This is most likely a reference to Ezekiel 36:24-27, which was a well known verse to all Jews, and why Jesus is somewhat stunned that Israel’s leading teacher is baffled. Look up ezeziel 36:24-27 and summarize what it says.

9. What does Jesus mean in verse 8 by the analogy about the wind and the Spirit?

Read John 3:8-18.

10. In verse 16 what two possible destinies does Jesus mention?

11. What did God do so we could have eternal life and not perish?

12. Jesus compares His crucifixion with Moses lifting up “the snake in the desert.” What is He talking about?

13. Why did God make a way for us to receive eternal life and not perish? What must we do to receive it?

Apply

14. How are we all like Nicodemus?
15. What do you think makes you commendable to God?
16. Have you experienced the new birth Jesus is talking about?
17. In your own words how would you summarize the gospel message?
18. Who do you know that you need to share this message with?

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. The Pharisees were a group of religious leaders who were often at odds with Jesus. They were often legalistic and felt threatened by Jesus' influence.
2. He wanted to speak to Jesus privately without drawing the attention of his peers who would likely disapprove.
3. He wanted to challenge Nicodemus's presumption that he was in a position to grant or withhold approval of the Son of God. It was one step in helping him see that he needs a new birth.
4. Jesus uses that phrase to describe the new life the Spirit begins in us when we receive Christ.
5. Allow the group to discuss.
6. Allow time for the group to look up the verses.
7. People often misunderstood Jesus and failed to see the spiritual message. In John's gospel, it is those to whom the Father reveals it who are able to discern its true meaning and respond.
8. Allow the group time to look up the verse and summarize.
9. Just as the wind is uncontrollable and unpredictable, so is the Spirit of God. He works how He pleases to produce new life.
10. Perishing, and eternal life.
11. He gave His Son.
12. Read Numbers 21 and see "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?"
13. Because He loves us. Believe in Jesus.
14. We are all prone to self-righteousness.
- 15.-16 Allow the group to discuss.
17. Allow the group to write out a brief summary of the gospel and have a few people share what they wrote.
18. Encourage the people in your group to commit to talking about Jesus with someone this week.

Memorize

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.

John 3:16



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