

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

FEBRUARY 26TH - 27TH, 2022 // BAPTISM WEEKEND

HEAVEN INVADE (JOHN 3:1-16)

During Jesus's earthly ministry, **He performed many signs, wonders, and healings in the presence of the Jewish people**, and many believed in Him.

- But the religious leaders of the day weren't quite sure what to make of Him.
- Was He a **blasphemer? Insane? A prophet? Or the Messiah?**
- John records that one religious leader, a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus, came to Jesus under the cover of night to see for himself.
- Nicodemus starts his conversation with Jesus in a respectful tone, calling him "**Rabbi**" (teacher) and admitting that He has come from God.
- But Jesus cuts right through Nicodemus's religious formalities **and gets to the heart of the matter**.
- Jesus "**answers**" **Nicodemus with a blunt statement** - "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (3:3)
- A response like this would've probably taken anyone off guard!
- It's almost as if Jesus is **perceiving the real intent behind this meeting** and Nicodemus's words.
- It's as if Jesus is really answering the question he doesn't know how to ask yet - "**How do we find God? How do we find reality, meaning, and redemption in this life?**"
- Many Jews believed that entering into the Kingdom of the Messiah was assured by their birth (**their racial identity or religious pedigree**) - but Jesus shattered that notion.
- Others believed that they must do a religious work to reform their life, cleanse their soul, or earn a place in the Kingdom - but being born isn't something we do, it's something that happens to us!
- Nicodemus is genuinely perplexed - **how can someone be born a 2nd time?**
- Jesus's answer - "**unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.**"
- Being "born of the Spirit" is easily interpreted—to enter into God's Kingdom **we must enter into a spiritual new life** that only the Holy Spirit can produce.
- But being, "**born of water**"? What's that all about?
- One interpretation is that "**born of water**" refers to physical birth.
- Unborn babies float in a sack of amniotic fluid for nine months.
- When the time for birth arrives, that sack of "**water**" bursts, and the baby is born in a rush of water, entering a new world and new family.
- Jesus is drawing a parallel between **a physical reality** and a spiritual truth.
- The other interpretation is that being "**born of water**" refers to spiritual cleansing.
- Nicodemus, as a Pharisee, would have naturally understood it that way (Ezekiel 36).
- Throughout the OT, **water is used figuratively** of spiritual cleansing.
- When **Jesus made this claim**, He was referring to humanity's need for spiritual cleansing.
- We all have the same spiritual problem.

HUMANITY'S BIGGEST PROBLEM IS CORRUPTION

We live in a world of **natural evil** (diseases, disasters, death) and of **moral evil** (war, slavery, murder/violence, terrorist attacks, genocide, fraud, theft, and abuse).

- But we also live with a sense of **internal evil** (selfishness/greed, deceit, gluttony/addiction, pride, hatred, lust/sexual immorality).
- Every one of us has **participated in this evil and corruption on some level** (Rom. 3:23).
- Many of us look to morality, religion, or even the law of God as a **set of rules** that, if followed, will guarantee entrance into heaven after death.
- The problem is that God requires perfection, He doesn't grade on a curve (James 2:10), and it's **IMPOSSIBLE** for any of us to follow the law of God perfectly.
- The purpose of God's Law is to open our eyes to the fact that we can't perfectly obey the Law, and **are therefore in need of God's mercy and grace**.
- Jesus's invitation to Nicodemus (and to all of us) is that if we want **citizenship** in the Kingdom of God and eternal life, we must experience **1)** a spiritual rebirth, **2)** a spiritual cleansing.
- So many of us come to Jesus like Nicodemus - politely and religiously looking for the work we must do to get from Him what we want .
- But Jesus turns everything upside down - **He says you must be reborn and your sins must be atoned for**. But how does that work?

"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD..." (VS.16)

God didn't wait for the world to turn to Him before **He loved the world by sending Jesus the Son** to die in the place of those who would believe in Him.

- Heaven invaded earth when **Jesus broke into our corrupted, sinful, painful existence to die the death** we deserved because of our sin.
- This is a love unlike **anything else** in the universe.

"...WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE." (VS.17)

- To "**believe**" in Him is much more than an intellectual agreement or awareness - it means to "trust in", "rely on", or "cling to".
- To be, "**born again**" into this Kingdom of Heaven and everlasting life is simply a matter of faith in God's Son, Jesus.
- It's to receive Him into our lives as **rightful King**.
- **(2 Corinthians 5:17), (1 John 1:7), (Acts 3:19)**

REPENTANCE IS...

- Turning from sin (**Matt. 4:17, Acts 3:19**), Turning from self (**Luke 9:23, Mark 8:35**), Changing of the mind and heart (**Isaiah 55:6-7**), a personal decision to make a clean break from lifestyles and patterns of sin.
- A submission to the Word of God and ways of God and what it says about us, our sin, life, and who God is (**Psalm 51:4**).

FAITH IN CHRIST NECESSARY FOR SALVATION.

Saving faith in Christ is **personal trust in Jesus as a living person** that offers forgiveness of sins, eternal life with God, and a life in the Kingdom of God here and now.

- **Acts 16:30-31**
- An active **trust** in the power, promise, and person of Christ for salvation (John 6:37).
- An **absolute surrender** to the Lordship and authority of Christ (Romans 10:9).

WATER BAPTISM.

Baptism is simply our **public, symbolic profession of faith** in our allegiance to Jesus as savior & Lord.

- It's our way as disciples of Jesus of publicly declaring before the people of God...
- "I've repented of my sins." (**burial by water**), "I've been cleansed of my sins." (**washing by water**), "I am a new creation in Christ." (**rising from the water**), "I intend to follow Him with my life." (**identifying with Christ**)
- (**Acts 2:38-39,41**), (**Matthew 28:19-20**), (**Matthew 3:16-17**)
- Baptism is something we do physically that symbolizes what God has done in us spiritually.
- Baptism is how we as disciples of Jesus profess the change that has occurred in us through **active faith in Jesus Christ**.
- Baptism symbolizes the **washing** and cleansing of sin we experience in salvation (Titus 3:5, Acts 22:16) Baptism shows that we've been **forgiven, covered, and given a new life and purpose**. Baptism **symbolizes** the union we share with Christ as we find in Him salvation and embrace His call to discipleship (Rom. 6:3-4, Col. 2:12). Baptism shows that we've been changed and given a **new identity!** (2 Cor. 5:17). Baptism is a symbol of beginning the Christian life, so it's given only to those who have already **begun the Christian life** (Acts 2:41) - it shows outwardly what's already happened inwardly.

"WHAT ARE WE SAYING WHEN WE'RE BAPTIZED?"

1. I'm a sinner unable to make myself right before God.
2. **Jesus died for me the death I deserved b/c of my sin and rose again.**
3. **I've repented of my sin.**
4. I'm trusting in Christ to be made right before God.
5. **I now want all the world to know it.**

MR. FORMALIST & MR. HYPOCRISY

- Mr. Formalist is a religious performer (**external religion**) and Mr. Hypocrisy is a religious pretender (**counterfeit religion**). **Both men wanted a shortcut around the path** of conversion and repentance- so they satisfied themselves with a "form of godliness" (2 Tim. 3:5).
- **Regardless of their confident assurance in their "shortcut"**, both end up getting lost and perishing.

THE "SHORTCUTS" OF EXTERNAL AND COUNTERFEIT RELIGION.

- Moralism, trying to be a "**good**" person.
- Creating our **own versions of God**, salvation, and **the afterlife**.
- Growing up in a "**Christian home**", church attendance or membership, religious activities.
- Walking an aisle, **repeating the sinner's prayer**, confirmation, or baptism without true repentance or faith.

WHAT RELIGION CAN DO...

- Make you an expert at **judging and condemning everyone** but yourself.
- Create in you **entitlement, self-righteousness, and a casual attitude** towards your sin.
- It can make you **smug, overly-sensitive, critical, hypocritical**, and insecure.
- It can blind you to your need for God and **Christian community/accountability**.
- **Religion** can't fix you, transform you, **change you, or save your soul from judgment**.
- What the Gospel is inviting you into is NOT outward conformity to a set of rules, laws, and morals- **you're being offered new heart** (Ezekiel 36:26), a new life (John 3:3), and a new identity (2 Cor. 5:17).
- **The only way** to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven **is to be born again. Have you professed this in baptism?**