

Fix Your Eyes on Jesus the Evangelist: “You must be born again.”

Focus Passage: John 3:1-15

Larger Context:

Other Passages Referenced: Numbers 21:4–9; Ezekiel 36:22–28; 37:1–14; John 1:12; 19:38–42; 2 Corinthians 5:21

Comments to Leaders

- The first application question will hopefully be helpful in two ways. It should help you see if anyone in your group, like Nicodemus, does not understand what it means to be born again. Chances are that if they do not know what it means, they have not experienced the new spiritual birth. Secondly, the responses should indicate if there is a need to help them understand what the Bible teaches about the Christian’s new identity in Christ as a born-again new creation.
 - Here is a study resource on Identity in Christ – <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/bible-studies/thrive/who-am-i.html>. I have also added it as a PDF on the Resources tab in the Groups app of Planning Center Online
- There are many passages referred to in this message, because Jesus Himself was drawing from many passages. Even if you do not have time to look up every passage together as a group, encourage your group members to take the time to look them up. They will see the wonderful continuity of God’s word from beginning to end.

Sermon Recap

Nicodemus was a leader among the Pharisees who went to talk with Jesus at nighttime, possibly so that his fellow Pharisees would not know about his visit with Jesus. Nicodemus recognized Jesus as a teach who had come from God because of the signs he had seen Jesus perform. Jesus essentially said to Nicodemus, “I don’t want to be your teacher or helper, I want to be your Savior. I don’t want to just make your life better; I want to give you a new life. But to receive the new life, you must be born again.” Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying about new life or how to be born again.

Jesus proceeded to help Nicodemus and us understand what is involved in receiving new life. The idea of being born again, along with the teaching of John 1:12 which tells us that all who believe and receive Jesus become children of God. This is a new birth where people are “born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” The new life beginning with spiritual new birth, gives the person who is born again a **new identity**. Our default is to base our identity on things like our intelligence, skills, appearance, or at times on the affirmation or criticism of others. Sometimes we allow our worst acts and mistakes to define who we are. New birth gives the born-again Christian a new identity that is based on who God and His word says that we are. This identity is deeper and more enduring than the one based on superficial characteristics we default to without apart from Jesus.

Jesus speaks of truths from the prophet Ezekiel about water, spirit, and heart found in Ezekiel 36:22–28. The image of breathing new life into dry bones is depicted in Ezekiel 37:1–14. Jesus’ declaration that “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:5). Jesus gives the born-again Christian a **new heart** with affections and motivations that reflect the heart of God. The blood of Jesus washes as with water so that we shall be cleansed from the uncleanness of our sin and idols (Ezekiel 36:25). As Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to inhabit the born-again Christian, we are given a **new power** to overcome sin and live the new life God has recreated us to live. The same Spirit that hovered over the waters and participated in creation, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, lives in us.

Jesus also took Nicodemus back to imagery from Number 21:4–9, where the people of Israel were facing God’s judgment for having grumbled and distrusted Him. They had rebelled against Moses, the deliverer God had sent. As a result, God sent poisonous snakes that were biting the Israelites and causing many of them to die. “The LORD said, to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live’” (Num 21:8). The serpent on the stick did not prevent people from being bitten by the poisonous snakes but looking at the serpent raised up on the stick kept them from dying. It was with that background in mind that Jesus said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14).

Whereas the Israelites in the wilderness were dying from the bite of the serpent, Scripture teaches that we were actually dead, from the bite of sin, the figurative bite of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, Jesus actually became sin on the cross so that we might become righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). It was at the cross that we once again encounter Nicodemus (John 19:38–42). This time, Nicodemus, the law-abiding Pharisee who originally went to Jesus under the cover of darkness, is carrying spices and linens to prepare the body of Jesus for burial in broad daylight.

We needed more than a teacher; we needed a Savior. We needed more than an upgrade; we needed a completely new life in Christ. If you have not received that new life that brings a new identity, a new heart, and a new Spirit with power for living, you must be born again. Look to Jesus lifted up on the cross and surrender to Him in faith.

Interpretation Helps

- Pharisees — a highly respected party within Judaism at the time of Jesus. They prided themselves in knowing the Old Testament scriptures and keeping the commandments, along with many extra commandments they had developed to protect them from breaking the biblical law.

Group Gathering

Group Check-in — Care, Celebration, Encouragement (About 1/3 of meeting time)

1. Informal conversation to allow individuals to catch up with one another.
2. Ask if anyone would share how they’ve been hearing and obeying God’s direction.

Allow the Word to Speak — Be Hearers of the Word (About 1/3 of meeting time)

READ John 3:1–15

1. What from the passage or sermon was most impactful to you?
2. Were you left with any questions or confusion about the passage or sermon?
3. Read *Ezekiel 36:22–28; 37:1–14*. How do you see Ezekiel’s message about water and spirit relating to John 3:5–6?
4. Read *Numbers 21:4–9 and John 12:27–35*. How do you see these passages relating to John 3:14–15?

Put the Word into Practice — Be Doers of the Word (About 1/3 of meeting time)

1. If you have been born again spiritually, how has your sense of identity changed since you committed your life to Jesus in faith? ... Have you ever done a thorough study of what the Bible says about our new identity in Christ?
2. How has being born again affected your affections and your motivations for doing what you do?
3. Work to become so familiar with Ezekiel 36–37 and Numbers 21 that you can tell those passages in your own words to show others how they fit into the gospel message of Jesus.
4. If you have found yourself looking to Jesus as more of a teacher or to upgrade your current life, confess that to Him. Declare to Him in prayer that you still need Him as your Savior and commit to finding your identity, heart, and power in Him to live the new life He saved you to live.

The Big Question: What do you sense God's Spirit saying to you and what concrete action will you take in response? Share your answer with the group or another trusted Christian and ask them to pray for you.

What We Hope Members Glean from the Passage

1. No set answer.
2. No set answer.
3. God promised to cleanse from sin and put His Spirit within His people ... to remove their hearts of stone and replace them with soft hearts of flesh. He promised to make dry bones come alive with new life that came from “breathing” on them—the same word for putting His Spirit into them.
4. We cannot save ourselves from death. God has provided the only means of salvation and we must look to Jesus who took the sting of death upon Himself by becoming sin on our behalf that we might become righteous before God.

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES: Click [here](#) for some good opportunities.