

# YOU

Bible Study

**Sermon Series: How to Share Christ**  
**To be used with: The Message**  
**Sermon Title Possibilities: A New Kind of Birth**  
**Scripture: John 3:1-16**

**Connection with Unit Theme:** To complement the small group study “How to Share Christ, these sermon outlines will follow the same theme as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

**Introduction:** Newspaper columnist Cal Thomas once talked about a time he was being interviewed by a reporter on the role of religion in politics. At one point, she asked him, “By the way, are you born again?” He asked, “What do you mean by that?” The reporter stammered, “Well, um ... um ... you know!” He said, “Yes, I know, but do you know?” She admitted, “No, I guess I don’t.” He said, “Why would you use a phrase like that in an article if you don’t know what it means?” The reporter said, “Well, would you explain it to me?” Thomas said, “I’d be delighted. Now the first thing you have to understand is that phrase was not invented by Jimmy Carter, although His initials are the same!”

Jesus said, “Ye must be born again”—not “you can be born again” or “you should be born again”—but “you must be born again.” He said, “Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In other words, your whole eternal future depends on whether or not you’ve been born again. What does it mean to be “born again”?

## **The necessity of a new birth.**

A. Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night.

1. Who was Nicodemus?
  - a. He was a Pharisee, a Jewish sect that demanded strict obedience to the law of Moses.
  - b. He was a member of the Sanhedrin.
2. Different theories have been offered as to why he met Jesus at night.
  - a. Their busy schedules did not permit them to meet in the daytime.
  - b. Nicodemus was afraid of being seen by others.
  - c. New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce gave as good a reason as any. He contended that John only included this as a point of information, and he probably didn’t care why they met at night.<sup>1</sup>
3. He acknowledged Jesus was a teacher sent from God.
  - a. Some argue this was empty flattery on Nicodemus’ part, but that is unfair. Personally, I believe his words were sincere.
  - b. He was correct as far as he went. Jesus was a teacher sent from God, but He was much more than that.

B. Why did Jesus give such a direct and abrupt reply?

1. Jesus knew what Nicodemus really needed.

- a. The preceding chapter ends with the words “He knew what was in man” (John 2:25).
- b. Nicodemus was a devoutly religious man, and he was outwardly righteous, but that did not change the fact that he was a sinner.
2. Many people today are just like Nicodemus.
  - a. They think they can earn their way into the Kingdom of God.
    - When I was a seminary student years ago, I had an interesting conversation with a fellow at Mid-America Mall in Memphis. I was trying to witness to him, but he would have none of it. He said, “Listen, preacher, you see all these people walking around here? They’re just as good as you!” I laughed and said, “Mister, if they’re only as good as I am, then they’re in a lot of trouble!”
  - b. God has already announced His verdict (Romans 3:23), so our only hope is in His mercy.

### **The mystery of a new birth.**

- A. Nicodemus found it difficult to understand the new birth.
  1. “Can a man be born when he is old?” – Some try to read a hidden spiritual meaning into this question, but it’s best to take it at face value.
    - a. Most people have regrets about they have lived, but what can they do? They can’t go back and do it over.
    - b. Physical rebirth is not possible, but spiritual rebirth is!
  2. What did Jesus mean by “born of water”?
    - a. Some believe He was referring to the Holy Spirit.
    - b. Others believe He was referring to natural birth.
    - c. Still others believe He was referring to baptism.
      - I don’t believe in baptismal regeneration, but I do believe Jesus was referring to baptism in this verse. Nicodemus likely heard John the Baptist preach, and he may have heard his famous declaration: “I indeed baptize you with water, but He that cometh after me...shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 3:11). Jesus was telling Nicodemus, “Water baptism is fine, but it’s not enough. You must be born of the Spirit.” As a former pastor of mine once said, “If you haven’t been born again, the only thing baptism will do is change you from a dry sinner to a wet sinner!”
- B. This world is filled with mysteries that no one truly understands.
  1. Jesus used the wind as an illustration.
    - a. No one has ever seen the wind, but they know it’s real.
    - b. Scientists don’t fully understand gravity, but it’s nonetheless real.
      - Vance Havner used to say, “I don’t understand how a brown cow can eat green grass and give white milk, but I still like ice cream!”
  2. You may not understand everything about the new birth, but that doesn’t make it any less real.
    - A few years ago, I read a biography of John Newton, who wrote “Amazing Grace”. I knew he was a sailor and a slave trader in his earlier years, but I didn’t realize just how rough a character he really was. How was this man changed into a preacher of the gospel and an abolitionist? He was born again!

### **The assurance of a new birth.**

- A. Nicodemus was still puzzled (v. 9).
  1. Jesus gave Him some mild words of rebuke.

- a. The new birth is an “earthly thing” in the sense that it must take place on earth. There is no chance for salvation after one is dead.
- b. If Nicodemus was unwilling to believe in the new birth, how could he believe in something as magnificent as heaven?
  - If Nicodemus had been a Sadducee, he would have considered heaven a moot subject. Being a Pharisee, however, he believed in life after death.
- 2. He likely got Nicodemus’ attention when He spoke of the “Son of Man”.
  - a. The prophet Daniel spoke of a “Son of Man” who would establish an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14).
  - b. Jesus was telling Nicodemus, “The Son of Man has come, and you’re looking at Him right now!”
- B. He used the illustration of Moses and the brazen serpent (Num. 21:4-9).
  - 1. The brazen serpent was an act of God’s mercy.
    - a. God had sent venomous serpents among the people as punishment for their constant complaining.
    - b. Anyone who looked to the bronze serpent in faith would live.
  - 2. Like the brazen serpent, Jesus would be “lifted up”.
    - a. He was lifted up not on a pole, but on a cross.
    - b. He rose again, winning the final victory over death.
    - c. Those who believe on Him will receive eternal life.

**Conclusion:** Dr. Tony Evans, the pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas, likes to talk about the night his father “brought Jesus home.” He attended a revival meeting at a nearby church, and when he came home that night, his children noticed a difference in him. Unfortunately, Dr. Evans’ mother was skeptical. She said it was all a pretense, and he’d get over it soon enough. Dr. Evans’ father was a longshoreman, so he had to get up early in the morning to go to work. After he came to know Christ, he started getting up a half-hour earlier, so he could pray for his wife and his children. His mother would sometimes catch him during these prayer times, and she would ridicule him. Dr. Evans said this continued for quite a while (I don’t remember the exact time frame, but I think he said a year.) Finally, one morning his mother approached her husband during his morning prayer time, and she spoke to him. She said, “For the last year, I’ve done all I could to discourage you. I’ve criticized you and mocked you, but to no avail. I don’t know what’s happened to you, but whatever it is, I want it!” That morning, she came to know Jesus as her Savior.

Dr. Evans’ parents were born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I don’t care who you are or what your past has been; you can receive that same new life in Jesus. As Adrian Rogers used to say, “No one is so bad that he cannot be saved, and no one is good that he need not be saved.” Through Jesus, you can be forgiven of your sins and receive eternal life in heaven. Will you receive Him into life today?

*Ken Jones is the pastor of Worsham Baptist Church in Farmville, Virginia. He holds a B.S. in history from the University of Tennessee at Martin and an MDiv. from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. His wife, Celia Carroll Jones, is an associate professor of government at Hampden-Sydney College.*

1 F.F. Bruce, The Gospel of and Epistles of John, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002, p. 81.