

# Heaven – there is only *one* way to enter.

## **Bible Reading - John chapter 3 verse 1 to 36 (NLT)**

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. <sup>2</sup>After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.”

<sup>3</sup>Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

<sup>4</sup>“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”

<sup>5</sup>Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. <sup>7</sup>So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup>The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”

<sup>9</sup>“How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked.

<sup>10</sup>Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? <sup>11</sup>I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. <sup>12</sup>But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup>No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. <sup>14</sup>And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

<sup>16</sup>“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

<sup>18</sup>“There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one

and only Son. <sup>19</sup> And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. <sup>20</sup> All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."

### John the Baptist Exalts Jesus

<sup>22</sup> Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.

<sup>23</sup> At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. <sup>24</sup> (This was before John was thrown into prison.) <sup>25</sup> A debate broke out between John's disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing. <sup>26</sup> So John's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us."

<sup>27</sup> John replied, "No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.' <sup>29</sup> It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom's friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. <sup>30</sup> He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

<sup>31</sup> "He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. <sup>32</sup> He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! <sup>33</sup> Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. <sup>34</sup> For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. <sup>35</sup> The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands. <sup>36</sup> And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment."

## SERMON

Last month I talked about Jesus - the only son of God - and today I believe God wants me to make it clear to you from His Word, that we can only enter into eternal life by being born again and by believing in His Son Jesus Christ.

I touched on this truth last month but today God wants me to go into more detail, so I feel that there may be people here today that God wants to speak to, specifically about this truth, the fact that eternal life is only available through His Son, Jesus Christ, and we can only understand the things of God by being born again. My role is to obey God, to be a messenger of His Word. What each of us decide to do with the truth of His Word is between each of us and God.

There are many people who believe that eternal life (of a kind that involves living forever in Heaven or a paradise-type-setting), is available to every 'religious' person, or everyone who does good things.

To put it another way, as long as we believe in what we call 'God' and provided we're nice, and help people then surely when we die we will go to Heaven. This is a popular notion, but is it the truth?

Many people I know believe all religions lead to God and everybody who believes in God believes in the same God, whether they are Jews, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists - or of whatever religious persuasion. Again, is this the truth?

I was one of those people - I believed this for many years.

Until, that is, I began to listen to Godly men who taught me what The Bible said, and not their own flawed interpretation of it, and they encouraged me to read it for myself.

I discovered that as I asked God to help me, He would open up to me the meaning of His scriptures provided I took the time to study them for myself.

God wants to show you from His word that there is only one way to receive eternal life. This means that the term 'all faiths lead to God' is untrue!

This means the gods of different religions are not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many religions deny that Jesus is the Messiah or do not acknowledge Him at all. Indeed, some defiantly proclaim 'God has no son.'

Being good and doing good things will not open the door to Heaven when we die. These 'statements' and opinions are lies. Lies, that the devil wants us to believe.

Before we see from God's Word that eternal life is only available through Jesus Christ, let us first of all be clear what the Bible means by 'eternal life'.

It is apparent from the many times that Jesus talks about eternal life that He is not just talking about something that we inherit after we have died, but right

now too. For those who believe in Him and repent of their sins, the Bible says eternal life begins right now - the moment we believe.

In John 5 v 24 Jesus says 'Those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me, **have** eternal life. And in John 6 v 47 Jesus says 'Anyone who believes in me **has** eternal life.'

Has and have are present tense verbs – they mean has now, have now. If we believe in Jesus Christ, he says we now have eternal life!

And, by the way, we need to do more than just believe in Jesus Christ to inherit eternal life.

In his book 'The Bait of Satan' John Bevere says that sometimes in the Bible, 'believe' really translates better as 'obey'.

**He says *'The Scriptures exhort 'that whoever believes in Him (Jesus Christ) should not perish but have eternal life.'* (John 3 v 16). As a result of the way we view the word 'believe', many think that all they are required to do is believe that Jesus existed and died on Calvary, and they are in good standing with God. If this were the only requirement, the demons would be in good standing with Him. The Scriptures also say in James 2 v 19, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble." Yet there is no salvation for them**

**He goes on *'The word 'believe' has more meaning in the Scriptures than acknowledging existence of, or just mentally assenting to a fact. We can say that the main element of believing is obedience.'***

This is interesting because John 3 v 36 says:

'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.'

And the NLT translation goes on to say:

'And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment.'

So we must recognise that in order to have eternal life we are called by Jesus to obey His teaching as well as not reject Him.

As John Bevere says, no demon will be going to Heaven. The Bible is very clear in many passages that demons will spend eternity in hell, along with all unbelievers.

But, not only obedience is important, confession and repentance too make up three important factors in walking on the narrow road that leads to Heaven, but I will come to that shortly.

Concerning the words 'eternal life', used in John's Gospel, the NIV Study Bible states in its notes, **'eternal life is an infinitely high quality of life in living fellowship with God – both now and forever.'**

Let me ask a rhetorical question.

Are you experiencing this infinitely high quality of life – irrespective of ill-health, disappointments, pain, sorrow, turmoil, and the like? Is your life full of peace and joy?

For this is what it means to know and follow Jesus Christ; problems may remain - but they no longer have the power to steal your joy....

Jesus said in John 10 v 10 'The thief (satan) comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I have come that (you) might have life, and have it to the full.'

We may be alive, but do we have life? Jesus gives us real, purposeful life. In John chapter 14 we read 'Jesus is **'the life'**, so be sure that the life He gives is more than a life of mere existence and drudgery.

Everybody living has 'life' but if you ask them, you will find that not everybody is living life to the full. Many don't even understand or believe that there is more to life than just 'life', that is the life they are living.

There **is** an infinitely higher quality of life available, but only through Christ. That is Jesus' promise.

But Jesus also said in John 16 v 33, 'In this life you will have trouble, BUT' he says, 'take heart! I have overcome the world.'

So expect trouble in your life.

A typical dictionary definition of the word 'trouble' is a **'state of distress, affliction or difficulty.'**

So Jesus says expect this, but dwell on Jesus and His promises, because He tells us we can experience an infinitely higher quality of life through Him. He has overcome any and every distress, affliction or difficulty that the world, the flesh or the devil can bring against you.

Jesus takes away the power of the enemy to steal your joy – but only if you ask Him and allow Him to. Only if you will yield to Him, trust him, believe in Him, and obey Him. Then He will give you this divine peace and joy by renewing your mind, by filling you with His Holy Spirit. The choice is ours – He will never force or coerce anyone to come to Him or follow Him.

As Jesus says in Revelation, chapter 3: ***‘I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and He with me’.***

Let’s see what truth God wants to reveal to each of us from the Bible reading for today about eternal life – ‘salvation’ in other words.

John chapter 3 is the first time in the Bible where we come across the term ***‘born again.’*** Some of us describe ourselves as ‘born-again’ Christians. What does it mean?

In the passage Jesus is talking with a devout Jewish leader who acknowledges that Jesus is a teacher who has come from God. He has come privately to talk with Jesus and he addresses Jesus as Rabbi, but as yet He has not discovered that Jesus is the Son of God. The reason for this is because he is not what we call ‘spirit-filled’.

Jesus says to this highly respected Pharisee, that, and I quote, ‘I tell you the truth, no-one can **see** the Kingdom of God unless he is born again!’

The man - named Nicodemus - not surprisingly, has absolutely no idea what Jesus is talking about, so if you are confused by the phrase ‘born-again’ you are in good company, take heart.

So Nicodemus asks Jesus for clarification.

I note here that Nicodemus is not like the ordinary man in the street. I think anybody who heard Jesus say ‘You must be born again’ would say something like, ‘I’ve never heard such a load of rubbish – it is impossible to be born again once you’ve already been born’ and I am sure they would turn round and walk away.

Nicodemus gives me the impression that he has heard Jesus talking over many months and has certainly come to respect Him. He has already got to the place where he believes Jesus only tells the truth; after all, he even acknowledges to Jesus that He has come from God. The issue is simply that Nicodemus isn’t able to understand Jesus, and we will see why in a minute.

So instead of saying 'what rubbish' he asks:

'How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!'

He had taken Jesus literally, which many of us do.

So to help Nicodemus understand, Jesus gives just a bit of clarification.

He says, 'I tell you the truth, no-one can **enter** the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying 'You must be born again.'

Ok so now we see a little more clearly what Jesus is saying.

We are all born of the flesh. In other words, we were conceived in our mother's womb, by an act of the flesh. The Bible says God knitted us together in our mother's womb, but the conception was fleshly, the union of a male and female, our earthly mother and father.

We are flesh. So what's the problem with being flesh? The problem with being flesh, says Jesus is that we cannot see the kingdom of God! Why?

Because there is a spiritual dimension. God *is* Spirit, and the flesh cannot understand the things of the spirit.

If we say, as many do, 'I do not believe in the supernatural', that is a fleshly response. It is because we have not been born-again of the Spirit.

When you have been born again and been filled with the Holy Spirit like the early believers in the Bible on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, you not only believe in the supernatural, you come to expect it, and so those who are born-again will see for example people being healed of disease as a result of prayer! We expect it and we believe it.

One of the verses read to us last month was John 4 v 24 where Jesus, this time talking to a Samaritan woman, said 'God is spirit and His worshippers must worship him in spirit and truth.'

Jesus also said to the woman 'these are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks, those who will worship Him in spirit and truth'. We cannot please the Father unless we are born again because if we are not born again, the Spirit is not in us and therefore we cannot worship the Father in spirit.

So, coming back to the passage, Jesus says to Nicodemus, 'no one can enter the kingdom of God and no one can see the kingdom of God unless he or she is born of water and the Spirit'.

Now what does Jesus mean – 'born of water and the Spirit'? I don't find the answer to this question obvious. Personally, I think Jesus means we have to be born not only of a natural father and mother – His reference to water - after all, a human being is about 95% water if I remember my biology education correctly - but we also have to be born of the Holy Spirit.

Having said that I also believe water here refers to baptism, and this is a more commonly accepted view amongst theologians. The thinking is that although the concept of baptism and its effects remain a mystery, nevertheless baptism is a clear statement of repentance – turning from our fleshly ways – and alludes to a re-birth in the sense that it signifies a dying to self and a visible declaration that the baptised person has turned from his sinful ways and is now a follower of Jesus Christ.

So to be clear, a key part of what Jesus is saying is that we need to re-born (as it were), of the Holy Spirit. When you accept Jesus into your life and go through the waters of baptism, His Holy Spirit will, if you ask Him, come into you and by so doing, transform your life.

We also see this in Romans 8 v 11. Talking to born again Christians, Paul says: ***'The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.'***

Your own spirit then becomes like God's Spirit (pure and holy) and you begin to understand the truth of His Word and see and discern supernatural things you will never see in the flesh.

The doorway to the Kingdom will be open for you to see and receive God's truths by the amazing indwelling Holy Spirit of Almighty God!

If you, like Nicodemus, believe in God and revere His Son Jesus Christ, but have not been born again, and you really want to be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit coming into your life, please consider speaking with one of us afterwards and we will gladly pray for God's Holy Spirit to enter your life.

Now the second half of the reading concerning John the Baptist doesn't seem connected to the first half at all – or is it?? The first half is entitled in the NIV

version, 'Jesus Teaches Nicodemus' and the second half is entitled 'John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus'.

I clearly felt God say to me that today we were to read out all the chapter not just the first half.

Why I wondered - what's the connection?

I read both halves while I was preparing for today and summarised each half here on this page of my book and what I found startled me.

Over the years, I have read this chapter many times but I have learned from experience, the more we study a passage of Scripture, the more God wants to reveal new truths to us. We just need to wait upon Him...

Here is what I found

I read through the first half of the chapter and condensed it into 7 summary points. I then wrote down the key points of the second half and what did I find – I had also written down 7 summary points.

Believe it or not, the 7 points I found in the first passage were repeated in the second passage, in a different order but nonetheless each of them was there!

This is what I wrote down:

1. Jesus is God – and He is Spirit and truth.
2. Flesh doesn't understand and cannot believe the things of God.
3. In order to understand, we must have the Spirit in us. Only when we have the Spirit can we understand and believe the things of God.
4. Only Jesus brings Salvation for our sins and only the Spirit enables us to believe and comprehend this truth.
5. Unbelief, the result of not having God's Spirit in us, brings condemnation.
6. The flesh (our natural self) can only bring forth sin. Whereas the Spirit brings: life – light – Godliness. I can only do God's work when I am operating in the Spirit, not the flesh.
7. The last point is, we must be baptised.

It may be that those 7 points have spoken to you as listed. Some people, like me, may find it more helpful to have a summary and so I am going to close by combining those important 7 points into a summary paragraph as follows:

Only one faith, one God, leads to everlasting life. Jesus alone is the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father, the one true God, the God of the Jews and the God of the Christians, except through Him. In order to see and enter the Kingdom of God we must be baptised for the repentance of our sins, be born again of the Holy Spirit, and believe and trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation. Only when we are re-born of the Holy Spirit can we understand the ways of God and the Word of God, and only when we are re-born of the Holy Spirit can we believe that Jesus Christ is God.

Jesus said in Matthew chapter 7:

***'Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it'.***

If you are not born again of the Spirit, Jesus is desperate to come into your life and give you a new birth, a spiritual re-birth. It's never too late to say 'Yes' to 'Yeshua' – Jesus – the Saviour of the World.

So, please, if you are not already born again but want to be, then ask Jesus today to come by His Spirit into your life today, or ask one of us to pray with you, here or in the privacy of your home...

Amen