

John – Week 11 – Born Again – Bible Study Helps

Title: You Must Be Born Again: The Mandate for Salvation

Sermon Summary: This powerful exposition of John 3:1-15 presents Jesus Christ's encounter with Nicodemus, a religious leader and Pharisee who came to Jesus by night. Despite Nicodemus being one of the most religiously devoted and knowledgeable Jews of his time—a "master of Israel"—Jesus confronted him with a shocking truth: external religion and good works are insufficient for salvation. Jesus declared that every person, regardless of religious pedigree or moral achievement, must be born again to see the kingdom of God. This spiritual rebirth is not a physical event but a supernatural transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit when a person believes in Jesus Christ. The sermon emphasizes that salvation comes not through human effort or religious observance, but solely through faith in Christ, who became sin for us on the cross. Like the serpent lifted up by Moses in the wilderness that brought healing to dying Israelites who simply looked upon it, Jesus was lifted up on the cross so that all who look to Him in faith might have eternal life. The message challenges both the religiously self-righteous and the openly sinful with the same requirement: you must be born again.

Key Points:

- Nicodemus represented the best that external religion could offer—a Pharisee, ruler of the Jews, and master teacher of Scripture
- Jesus knew what was in man's heart and addressed Nicodemus's unasked question about salvation
- The requirement for heaven is absolute: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"
- Being born again is a spiritual birth, not a physical one—born of water (physical birth) and of the Spirit (spiritual birth)
- That which is born of flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit—each reproduces after its own kind
- No amount of religious knowledge, good works, or moral living can substitute for the new birth
- The spiritual birth is invisible like the wind but produces visible results in a transformed life
- Jesus rebuked Nicodemus for being a master teacher yet not understanding these spiritual truths
- Salvation requires belief—confessing with your mouth and believing in your heart that Jesus is Lord
- Jesus used the Old Testament account of Moses lifting up the bronze serpent to illustrate His coming crucifixion
- Just as dying Israelites only had to look at the serpent on the pole to live, sinners must look to Christ crucified to be saved

John – Week 11 – Born Again – Bible Study Helps

- Jesus became sin for us—the curse on the cross—so we might become the righteousness of God in Him
- If you are born twice (physically and spiritually), you die only once; if born only once, you face the second death in the lake of fire
- Being a new creature means old things pass away—true salvation produces transformation
- Many religious leaders knew Jesus performed miracles that proved He was from God, yet they refused to believe

Scripture Reference:

- John 3:1-15 (primary passage)
- Numbers 21:4-9 (the bronze serpent)
- Psalm 22 (prophetic psalm about Christ's crucifixion)
- John 1:38
- John 7:45-52
- John 19:38-40
- Matthew 19:16-26 (the rich young ruler)
- Matthew 22 and Mark 12
- John 9:16
- John 11:47-52
- John 12:37-43
- Acts 2:22
- Romans 3:23
- Romans 10:9-10
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Galatians 6:15
- Ephesians 2:1
- James 1 and 1 Peter (born again by the word of God)
- 1 John 2:28-29, 3:9
- Revelation 20:11-15 (the second death)

John – Week 11 – Born Again – Bible Study Helps

Stories:

- Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night (John 3:1-15)—a religious ruler seeking answers from Jesus, representing the inadequacy of external religion for salvation
- The bronze serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9)—Israelites bitten by fiery serpents as judgment for sin were healed by simply looking at the bronze serpent Moses lifted up on a pole, illustrating salvation by faith in Christ crucified
- The rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-26)—a morally upright man who claimed to have kept all the commandments yet went away sorrowful when confronted with his true condition, demonstrating that no one is good enough for heaven on their own
- Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus taking Jesus's body (John 19:38-40)—showing Nicodemus finally standing up for Christ after the crucifixion, bringing spices for burial
- Nicodemus defending Jesus before the Pharisees (John 7:50-52)—an earlier instance where Nicodemus spoke up cautiously among the religious leaders
- The Israelites later worshiping the bronze serpent as an idol (2 Kings 18)—illustrating how people pervert God's truth by worshiping created things rather than the Creator

John – Week 11 – Born Again – Bible Study Helps

Discipleship Questions

How does Jesus' statement that Nicodemus, a master teacher of Israel, should have understood spiritual rebirth challenge our own assumptions about religious knowledge versus genuine spiritual understanding?

In what ways might modern Christians be like Nicodemus, coming to Jesus with religious credentials but missing the fundamental requirement of being born again?

Why do you think Jesus chose the story of the bronze serpent from Numbers 21 specifically to explain salvation to Nicodemus, and what does this teach us about using Scripture to share the gospel?

The sermon emphasizes that 'you cannot reform your flesh' and must become a new creature. How does this truth confront the self-improvement and good works mentality prevalent in both religious and secular culture today?

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, possibly out of fear of his peers. What fears or concerns might prevent people today from openly confessing Christ, and how can believers encourage one another to boldly stand for Jesus?

Jesus told Nicodemus that being born again is like the wind—invisible but real and powerful. How have you experienced or witnessed the invisible work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about spiritual transformation?

The religious leaders knew Jesus performed miracles that only God could do, yet many still rejected Him. What does this reveal about the human heart's resistance to truth, and how can we guard against hardening our own hearts?

How does the simplicity of 'look and live' in the bronze serpent story challenge religious systems that add requirements, rituals, or works to the gospel of grace through faith alone?

The sermon states that if you are truly born again, everyone will know it because you become a new creature. What tangible evidences of new life in Christ should be visible in the life of a genuine believer?

Considering that Nicodemus eventually stood up for Jesus after the crucifixion, what does his journey teach us about God's patience with those who are seeking truth but struggling with fear and religious confusion?

Small Group Guide: Born Again

Based on John 3:1-15

Opening Prayer

Begin with prayer, asking God to open hearts and minds to understand the truth of His Word and what it means to be born again.

Ice Breaker (5-10 minutes)

Share a time when you received advice or instruction that completely changed your perspective on something you thought you understood well.

Sermon Review (5 minutes)

Key Passage: John 3:1-15

Main Point: Jesus told Nicodemus—one of the most religious and respected leaders in Israel—that he must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Salvation is not about religion or good works; it's about a spiritual rebirth through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Discussion Questions

1. Understanding Nicodemus (10-15 minutes)

- **Who was Nicodemus?** What made him significant in Jewish society?
- Why do you think Nicodemus came to Jesus "by night"? What might he have been afraid of?
- The sermon mentioned that Nicodemus represented "the absolute best that Israel had to offer" religiously. Why is it significant that Jesus told *him* he needed to be born again?
- How do you think Nicodemus felt when Jesus essentially told him his religion wasn't enough?

2. The Mandate: You Must Be Born Again (15-20 minutes)

John – Week 11 – Born Again – Bible Study Helps

- **Read John 3:3, 7.** Why did Jesus make being "born again" a requirement rather than a suggestion?
- What's the difference between being "born of water" (physical birth) and being "born of the Spirit" (spiritual birth)?
- Jesus said in verse 10, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" What was Jesus challenging in Nicodemus—and perhaps in us?
- Many people today, like Nicodemus, think they're "good enough" for heaven. How does this passage challenge that thinking?
- **Personal reflection:** Have you been born again? Can you identify a specific time when you trusted Christ alone for salvation?

3. The Lesson: The Serpent on the Pole (15-20 minutes)

- **Read Numbers 21:4-9.** What was happening to the Israelites, and what was God's remedy?
- Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Old Testament story to explain salvation to Nicodemus?
- What parallels do you see between the bronze serpent and Jesus on the cross?
- The remedy in Numbers 21 was simple: "look and live." How does this illustrate salvation by faith alone?
- **Read John 3:14-15.** What does it mean that Jesus "must be lifted up"? How does this connect to the cross?

4. Belief vs. Religion (10-15 minutes)

- The word "believe" appears 99 times in John's Gospel. What's the difference between intellectual belief (like the demons have) and saving faith?
- **Read Romans 10:9-10.** What does it mean to "confess with your mouth" and "believe in your heart"?
- Why do you think it's so hard for religious people to accept that salvation is by grace through faith alone, not works?
- How would you explain to someone that being a "good person" or going to church isn't enough to get to heaven?

5. Living as New Creatures (10-15 minutes)

- **Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.** If someone is born again, they become a "new creature." What should that look like practically?
- The sermon challenged: "If you're saying, 'I think I'm saved,' then you probably ain't saved." Why is certainty about salvation important?
- How has being born again changed your life? What "old things" have passed away?
- The sermon ended with a challenge about Christians getting "farther away from Jesus Christ" even as we approach the rapture. What are some ways we can guard against spiritual complacency?

Key Takeaways

1. **No one is good enough for heaven on their own**—not even the most religious person. We all need to be born again.
2. **Being born again is spiritual, not physical**—it's becoming a new creature through faith in Jesus Christ alone.
3. **The remedy for sin is simple: look and live**—just as the Israelites looked at the bronze serpent, we must look to Jesus on the cross and believe.
4. **Salvation requires belief and confession**—we must confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead.
5. **New creatures live differently**—if we're truly born again, our lives should reflect that transformation. Old things pass away; all things become new.

Practical Applications

This Week:

1. **Examine yourself:** Take time this week to reflect on your own salvation. Can you identify a specific time when you were born again? If not, or if you're uncertain, talk to God about it today.
2. **Share the gospel:** Think of someone in your life who, like Nicodemus, might be trusting in religion or good works. Pray for an opportunity to share the simple gospel message with them: look to Jesus and live.
3. **Live as a new creature:** Identify one "old thing" that needs to pass away in your life—a habit, attitude, or pattern that doesn't reflect your new identity in Christ. Take practical steps to change it.
4. **Memorize Scripture:** Commit John 3:3 or John 3:16 to memory this week. Use it as a conversation starter about spiritual things.
5. **Study the cross:** Read through Psalm 22 and note all the prophecies about Jesus' crucifixion. Let this deepen your appreciation for what Jesus did for you.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

- Pray for anyone in the group who may be questioning their salvation or who needs to be born again.
- Thank God for the gift of salvation and the simplicity of the gospel.
- Ask God to help each person live as a new creature this week.
- Pray for boldness to share the gospel with others who need to hear it.

For Next Week

Read John 3:16-21 in preparation for next week's discussion. Reflect on what it means that "God so loved the world."

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." - John 3:7

5-Day Devotional: Born Again - Understanding the New Birth

Day 1: The Meeting That Changes Everything

Reading: John 3:1-3; Psalm 139:1-6

Devotional: Nicodemus came to Jesus by night—a religious expert seeking truth from the Truth Himself. Like Nicodemus, we often approach God with our credentials, achievements, and religious résumés. Yet Jesus cuts through all pretense: "You must be born again." God knows what is in every person. He sees past our external religion to our desperate need for spiritual transformation. Today, recognize that no amount of religious activity, moral goodness, or biblical knowledge can substitute for a genuine spiritual birth. Jesus doesn't want your performance; He wants your heart. Are you coming to Him on your terms or His? Surrender your self-sufficiency and acknowledge your need for the Savior who knows you completely and loves you unconditionally.

Reflection: What religious credentials or good works have you been trusting in instead of Christ alone?

Day 2: The Mandate - You Must Be Born Again

Reading: John 3:4-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Devotional: Jesus' words to Nicodemus weren't a suggestion but a mandate: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This isn't about physical birth but spiritual transformation. Just as the wind is invisible yet powerful and real, so is the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. You cannot reform your flesh or rehabilitate your sinful nature. God requires a complete rebirth—becoming a new creature entirely. This truth offends our pride because it declares our best efforts insufficient. Yet it's also gloriously liberating: salvation doesn't depend on your strength but on God's grace. The question isn't whether you're good enough, but whether you've been born of the Spirit through faith in Christ.

Reflection: Have you experienced this spiritual birth, or are you still trying to earn God's acceptance through your own efforts?

Day 3: Look and Live - The Serpent Lifted Up

Reading: Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-15

John – Week 11 – Born Again – Bible Study Helps

Devotional: God's remedy for Israel's snake bites was shockingly simple: look at the bronze serpent and live. No medicine, no ritual, no works—just look and believe. This Old Testament miracle foreshadowed Christ on the cross. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent, Jesus was lifted up to become sin for us. The Israelites couldn't heal themselves; neither can we save ourselves from sin's deadly bite. God provided the remedy Himself. Salvation requires only that we look to Jesus in faith, believing He took our curse upon Himself. Many perish not because the remedy is insufficient, but because they refuse to simply look and trust. The cure for your sin isn't complicated religious duty—it's childlike faith in the crucified Savior.

Reflection: Are you looking to Jesus alone for salvation, or are you still trying to add your own efforts to His finished work?

Day 4: New Creatures Living New Lives

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10; Galatians 6:15

Devotional: Being born again isn't just a ticket to heaven—it's a transformation for earth. Paul declares that in Christ Jesus, we are new creatures; old things pass away. If you've truly been born of the Spirit, you are fundamentally different. You were dead in sin; now you're alive in Christ. You were enslaved to your flesh; now you're free to walk in the Spirit. This new birth should produce visible fruit—not to earn salvation, but because salvation has already been given. Too many Christians live as though nothing has changed, clinging to old patterns and old identities. But you are not who you used to be! You've been quickened, made alive, seated in heavenly places. Live like the new creature you are.

Reflection: What old things in your life need to pass away so you can fully embrace your new identity in Christ?

Day 5: Born Once or Born Twice?

Reading: Revelation 20:11-15; Psalm 22:27-31

Devotional: The stakes couldn't be higher: if you're born twice (physically and spiritually), you'll die once. But if you're born only once, you'll die twice—physical death followed by the second death in the lake of fire. This isn't religious scare tactics; it's God's revealed truth. The great white throne judgment awaits all who reject Christ, where works will be weighed and found wanting. But for those born again, there's no condemnation—only eternal life. Psalm 22, which prophesied Christ's crucifixion, ends with a promise: a people "that shall be born" will declare His righteousness. That's us—the born-again generation proclaiming the gospel. Don't let another day pass without certainty of your salvation. Trust Christ today. And if you're already saved, share this life-giving message with those still perishing.

John – Week 11 – Born Again – Bible Study Helps

Reflection: Can you identify the specific moment you were born again? If not, will you cry out to Jesus for salvation today? If yes, who needs to hear this gospel from you?

Closing Prayer: Father, thank You for the gift of new birth through Jesus Christ. Help me to live as the new creature I am, walking in the freedom and power of the Spirit. Give me boldness to share this life-changing truth with others before it's too late. In Jesus' name, Amen.