

Sermon – John 3.1-15 (Trinity Sunday - 2024)

**Not By Human Understanding or Ability**

Let us pray: O Lord God, heavenly Father: We poor sinners confess that in our flesh dwells no good thing, and that, left to ourselves, we die and perish in sin, since that which is born of flesh is flesh and cannot see the kingdom of God. But we pray that You would grant us Your grace and mercy, and for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts, that being regenerate we may firmly believe the forgiveness of sins according to Your promise in baptism, and that we may daily increase in Christian love and in other good works, until we at last obtain eternal salvation; through the same Your beloved Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? <sup>11</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven. <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

These are Your words heavenly Father. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed,

Naaman was the Commander of the army of Syria. He was highly regarded in Syria, and was very mighty. However, he had leprosy. Naaman had a wife, who had an Israelite servant girl that had been captured in a raid of Israel. Of all the people you could think of that could possibly help Naaman, it was this servant girl that helped him. She told Naaman's wife that there is a prophet in Samaria that could help Naaman. This prophet was Elisha.

Naaman left to find Elisha, bringing with him much riches to give to Elisha for the healing. Naaman eventually arrived at Elisha's home, and Elisha didn't even come to the door. Elisha sent his servant to meet with Naaman, which really pushed Naaman's buttons, since Naaman thought that his might and high status would get him a meeting with this great prophet who could heal him.

And then what the servant said made Naaman furious. The servant told Naaman, "**Go wash in the Jordan seven times!**" Naaman wanted to see this prophet perform some grand spectacle. Instead, the servant tells Naaman to go wash himself in this dirty river. The rivers of Syria were much cleaner.

Those who accompanied Naaman, knew that if the prophet said that he ought to do something great and difficult, he would have done it, but they argued, just do this simple thing, as lowly as it is.

Naaman was convinced by the word, and washed and was cleansed of his leprosy.

Naaman thought that he could get healing because of his power, because of his status, because of the riches that he brought with him. He thought that he deserved the right to be seen by the prophet of the Lord. The things and ways of God were foolish to him. His pride and self-righteousness got in the way.

Naaman and Nicodemus in our text shows us how far man has fallen from the knowledge of God.

Nicodemus, himself, was a prominent man. As a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, we can assume that he was a wise man, a powerful man. He would have known the Old Testament

Scripture very well, and lived outwardly, a very upright life. And it goes without saying, he was a Jew, a descendant of God's Old Testament people.

Nicodemus was able to get much farther than others were able to conclude about Jesus, but still he fell far short. Nicodemus said, "**we know that You are teacher come from God.**" Nicodemus maybe was entertaining the idea that Jesus was like one of the Old Testament prophets, through whom God would perform miracles. However, his human reasoning could never come to know Jesus to be the eternal, almighty Son of God--the Word, through whom all things created were created.

Now Jesus does not right away assert that He is God. He will eventually, but what Jesus does at first is to challenge how Nicodemus thought of his status before God. "**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**"

Born again! What is that? As far as man is able to reason, Nicodemus seems to be the model of a man who would belong to the kingdom of God! A Jew, full of good works, so much going for him. But no, none of this will do, Jesus says, you must be born again. Nicodemus could not understand it. It sounded preposterous.

But Jesus says, "**Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**" Flesh cannot save. Your reason, your strength, your birth into the world, your success, your works, none of this does anything for you before God. These things may give you much in the way of worldly things, but the flesh will die, and such a person will inherit nothing of God, except His eternal wrath because of unbelief. That which you have and do in the flesh does not bring you close to God. It does not bring you to the knowledge of God. It does not give you a right to be in God's kingdom.

You must be born again. You had to become something different than you were before. For before, you were only born of flesh, which is to be born in sin and death, unbelieving, alienated from God, and incapable of knowing Him. But there is another birth, a birth of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. We do nothing in this. We can't bring anything into this birth, and this new life, and this life in the kingdom of God. Our riches, our power, ability, reason, or strength do nothing here. Rather God grants us this new birth by grace, and He performs it in an unusual and lowly way, through water and the Spirit, that is the washing of holy baptism.

This is why infant baptism is such a great example of entrance into the kingdom of God. What riches does an infant have to offer? What wisdom, reason, and strength can he use to come to know God and enter into His favor? What works can he claim to have the right to enter God's kingdom. Rather, it is clear that the Holy Spirit must perform this work.

And by His grace, the Holy Spirit has caused us to be born of the Spirit! He has caused us to know the Triune God. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three Persons, yet one God. He has caused us to know that Jesus is true God!

Jesus teaches as much in His words to Nicodemus. **“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”** Jesus is true God and true man. As true God He came down from heaven to become man. Yet, also as true God He was simultaneously in heaven. He then teaches the reason for His coming.

**“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”** Who could know God's ways! If we were not born again of the Spirit, we would have become furious like Naaman, or at the very least confused like Nicodemus. If I am to be saved, nothing that I have or can do will be of any benefit! But I am to believe this man dying among criminals? Believing in Him, I shall then have eternal life!

Yes, you are born again that you may not be offended by Jesus, but know Him as your Savior! This is not by the birth of the flesh, but by the birth of the Spirit. And so we confess our sins. We confess our fallenness, our doubt, our weakness, our helplessness, for we daily sin much. We admit that our birth of the flesh, our works, our reason, our strength, our determination can do nothing to save us from our sin, death, and condemnation. But we look to the cross. And there, you find Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity made flesh, there is your salvation, your forgiveness, and your righteousness. Through this new birth of the Spirit in baptism, by which you have faith in Jesus, you are made partakers of His salvation! You are given life in the kingdom of God!

How blessed is this birth! Some may wish that they were born into royalty. Born with riches. Born into great circumstances. But by the birth of the flesh, all of us are in the same situation, alienated from God, steeped in sin and death. But you have received the most blessed second birth, the birth of the Spirit in baptism, by which you have faith in Jesus, and are children of God's eternal and glorious kingdom. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.