

To the worldly, the Christian life is drum and dull, but to the born-again man who knows Jesus Christ as Saviour, he's able to shout: "I've found the pearl of great price, and life is radiant with the realization of it all. Jesus, fairer than ten thousand, is the greatest treasure of them all. He's the incomparable Christ, philosophy's highest theme, theology's greatest pinnacle, man's greatest good. He's the saviour of the world, whose purity is

able to absorb your sin, whose blood is capable of washing out every stain from your soul, whose love is able to reach wherever you are and lift you up and make you whole.

There would never have been a sadder picture in all the world, if that merchant had seen that pearl, turned and walked away. Will you do that today—will you be guilty of that kind of crime against yourself?

## **The Lawyer**

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You must be born again.

The one to whom Jesus spoke these words was Nicodemus, who was undoubtedly not only a lawyer but also a member of the Sanhedran, the supreme court of the Jewish nation.

In your imagination follow with me for a while as we go into Joseph's lovely garden. Stand there behind one of the flowering shrubs, and watch as two men enter the gates, bearing as best they can the body of their dear friend. His body has already been wrapped and they carry it to a tomb where never one body did lie. The stone was rolled back from the door and a small rock placed under it to keep it from rolling back out of place, and the two men tenderly pick up their burden and carry it inside the darkened tomb, there they found the ledge over the side that had been hewn out of solid rock and there they laid the body of Jesus.

I do not know, but I think that as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimethea stood there and looked down upon His still form, there must have raced through their mind the picture of the first time they had seen him. We are not sure of Joseph of Arimethea, but we are fairly sure of the first experience of the man Nicodemus.

### **Nicodemus Knew**

Nicodemus had been in the city of Jerusalem and had been making great preparation for the Passover. Reading from John now: "The passover of the Jews was at hand and Jesus went up to Jerusalem and He found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep and doves and He made a scourge of cords and He cast all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen, and He poured out the changers' money, and He overthrew their tables,

and to those that sold the doves He said: 'take these things hence, make not My Father's house of merchandise, and His disciples remembered that it was written "Zeal for thy house hath eaten me up."'"

Now skip to the first verse of the next chapter: "Now there was a man named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, a Pharisee."

It's unfortunate to me that there's a chapter division there for I think John as he was writing was trying his best to carry through a thought that in the crowd that day in the temple here was one whose eyes were fastened on Jesus. His name was Nicodemus.

As he and Joseph walked out of the tomb that night and rolled the stone into place, I think they went out and sat on a bench out under the sky. They sat quietly for a moment and then Nicodemus began to remember out loud this first experience. He said to Joseph, "I watched him that day. At first he seemed to me to be nothing more than a peasant preacher. But the more I watched the more impressed I was with the things he did, because I too had become disgusted with the way the temple had become cluttered up with those stinking animals. I, too, was disgusted with the way men had taken the house of God and made it into a house of merchandise. But, I had never had the courage to do what this young man did. I saw him stoop down and pick up the pieces of cord and plait them into a whip, and then he turned and lashed those who were near him, and drove them and the animals from the temple. I shall never forget it.

"I began to watch him as he healed, as he performed his miracles, as he preached that day, and as I watched

him I had the most peculiar feeling that I too was being watched. I looked around, but no one was paying any particular attention to me. Now and then I saw this young preacher out of the corner of his eye looking at me and quickly glance away.

"I was unable to get away from the things I heard him say that day. As the crowd drew around him I knew it would not be well for me to seek an audience with him then so I waited until that night. He had gone up the side of Mt. Olivet with His disciples. They had chosen a cool spot there in an olive grove where they might recline and visit.

### Jesus Was Waiting

"I started up the side of the hill for I desperately wanted an interview with him, it was as I drew near that I saw his disciples suddenly stiffen and become alert. They recognized that I was dressed in the garments of a Pharisee and the Pharisees were enemies of Jesus, and they were ready to defend their friend, but when they saw that I was an old man, and when they heard the quiet words of their leader who said, 'Be seated, men. That's the reason we've been waiting here; I knew he was coming.'

"When I drew near enough to enter into the conversation, he said, 'Come over here, sir, and be seated, I've been waiting for you.' I was amazed when I heard him say these words and so I entered into the conversation with him, and I said, 'Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God for no man can do the signs that thou doest except God be with him,' and Jesus said unto him: 'Verily, verily I say unto thee.'

I want to do a bit of paraphrasing here . . .

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Nicodemus, you do not need a teacher—you need a regenerator; I say unto you, you need to be born again. For except one be born anew he cannot see the Kingdom of God." And Nicodemus said unto 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?" Jesus answered, saying to him: "Except one be born of the water and of the spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God; for that which is born of the flesh IS flesh, and that which is born of the spirit IS spirit; marvel not therefore, when I say

unto thee you must be born anew. The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof and knowest not when it cometh or whither it goeth, so it is with everyone born of the spirit, and Nicodemus said unto him, "How can these things be?" And Jesus answered and said unto him, "Art thou a teacher of Israel and understandest not these things?"

### Born Anew

There never was a more unusual conversation held. The Holy Spirit here drops the curtain on the scene and we cannot see more of it that night. Suffice to say that later events will prove to us beyond any shadow of a doubt that Nicodemus was born anew that night, that as he listened to what Jesus had to say he found the answer to all his needs.

But when he came that night to Jesus, Nicodemus had his own religion he had a religion that said that man must be morally good, if he's morally good then he's perfectly all right and he has nothing to fear.

And that sort of religion actually makes the world a better place in which to live. I would be glad to live in a world where everybody strove to be good, wouldn't you? That kind of religion will almost always win the respect and the admiration of a crowd.

### Goodness Not Enough

For Nicodemus it had almost succeeded in smothering the voice down inside of him that kept on repeating: "Nicodemus, something is missing, something is missing. Goodness is not enough—something is missing."

In my ministry I've had the joy of leading many so-called moral men to Christ, and do you know that I have yet to find a single one of them, after he was born again, who did not say to me, "Pastor, I knew something was missing. I knew something was lacking in my heart. I didn't want to admit it and I tried to make it up by being a little better every day, but I never was able to satisfy that hunger and aching in my heart."

Nicodemus sat there and listened to the Master and I think his mouth fell open in amazement, for Jesus was saying this: "I know of your intellectual attainments, I know of your many friends, and your powers of influence. I know who you are and of your great wealth, but, Nicodemus, these material

things mean absolutely nothing. As a man's heart is outside of Christ he can never expect to enter into the presence of Almighty God. Every lost man who will be perfectly honest will say: 'I know that some sort of change is absolutely necessary. Before I can expect to enter into the presence of a holy and pure God forever, for I'm not fit now to be in His presence.'

### **Straight and Simple**

**YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN . . .** Those words are straight and simple. Plain words that cannot be argued away. One cannot deny what the Bible says about men that have not been born again. The Bible says they're dead in their trespasses and their sin. The Bible says they must be quickened or raised up. The Bible says that they are sold under sin, that they are in bondage, that they're blind, that they're diseased, and the Bible is completely honest as it uses these descriptive terms concerning the lost man.

I want to say to you in all candor and all frankness, if you ever get to the place where you can be as honest in admitting the condition of your heart as the Bible is honest in pointing it out, then you'll be very, very close to the Kingdom of God.

See a man standing here before Jesus without any love, without any peace, without any hope, without any pardon—a man at war with himself, his loved ones, the Holy Spirit, at war with His God; a man who looked back on his past with regret.

The great and terrible mystery of it all is not that men must be born again, but why they refuse to be born again. Is there any man or woman who can answer that question satisfactorily? Why will men who know that something is missing, why will men whose future rests under a dark cloud, why will men whose past is scarred with ugly thoughts and deeds, why will they reject the Lord Jesus Christ who said you must be born again?

### **The New Birth**

Scriptural regeneration is a requirement, and that is the **NEW BIRTH**. It's an old life that has been melted by the power of God and poured into a new mold, which is Christ Jesus and we live like Him and we walk like Him, and talk like Him. We are the replicas

of the Lord Jesus in our world today, and that's why Paul used the term so many times . . . "In Christ Jesus" . . . poured into the image of him so that we reflect him in the way in which we live.

What is regeneration? What is the new birth? It is a complete change. II Cor. 5:17: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." I would not give a snap of my fingers for a man's religion who does not show a definite positive change in his vocabulary, in his attitude toward his neighbors, in the honesty of his business.

What is the new birth? It is a change, not only complete, it's a change forever. John 5:24: "He that heareth my words and believeth on Him that sent me hath everlasting life." . . . when he was lifted up on the cross, **HATH** everlasting life. It is a present possession, he has it now, he will have it through all of eternity. Again, Eph. 1:7, "in whom we have redemption, thru his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace." And I can never forget Romans 8:38.

I see Nicodemus and Joseph again in the garden. Nicodemus is looking down into the face of Jesus, the dead body of our Lord for the last time and as he visits with Joseph I hear Him say these words: "Joseph, that night He said to me, 'if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.' Joseph I know now what He meant. He meant when he was lifted up on the cross, when He gave his life for all men, when he was to pour out his last drop of blood in your behalf and mine; that's what he meant. Then he laid down his life for us because it would make possible for us to take up life for him and to live with him forever."

He and Joseph rose and walked out of the garden that night, not sorrowing men with heads bowed and backs bent, but instead they walked out resolutely, they walked out having gotten a grip on the greatest knowledge a man will ever know; that Jesus Christ is Saviour of all mankind and His death on the cross makes it possible for us to enter into a relationship with God that will never be broken. You must be born again . . .