**John 3:1-17**

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. [2] 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." [3] Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." [4] 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?" [5] Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. [6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' [8] The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." [9] Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" [10] Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? [11] Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. [12] If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? [13] No one has ascended into heaven except him who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. [14] And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, [15] that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." [16] For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

**“New Birth By God’s Will”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. During Lent, we consider the darkness of this world. Some places are so dark they stick out like a sore thumb such as North Korea. The people there only know lies; suppression is a way of life, and it is one of the most isolated nations on earth. Of course, freedom in South Korea helps and Christians take advantage of that fact. A most common way is still using radio where Scriptures are read not merely for listening, but for those in North Korea to write down passages of God’s Word.[[1]](#footnote-1) Even our own Lutheran Hour Ministries has, “The Korea Lutheran Hour” that broadcasts over six stations.

Now this is one kind of darkness, but in our western world, darkness also can masquerade as light. If only it was that easy to broadcast Scripture on the radio with people eager to hear and write it down! At the same time, freedom has its own kind of problems. Everything floods the media, suppression comes now by self-interest, and spirituality is more like a “choose your own adventure.” Nicodemus was in this kind of darkness. Here was a man of success, a godly upright person, and a ruler of the Jews. Yet, he was in the dark. Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Our new birth by baptism is not of the flesh, but God’s will to work by His Spirit faith in Jesus.

1. **That which is born of the flesh is flesh.**
2. Man naturally does not know God rightly.

* Of course, Nicodemus thought he did something right by saying, “Rabbi, we know that you are teacher come from God…”
* He found the teaching and miracles of Jesus to be truthful only to hear, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
* Born again can also be translated, “born from above” which means man born into this world does not see God rightly.
* Since flesh gives birth to flesh, Jesus revealed how God sees the full depth of sinners whose will, knowledge, and acts are against Him.

1. What man knows seeks to move forward by works only it never works with God.

* You can sense how Nicodemus was beside himself over what Jesus had said, because being born a Jew was already supposed to carry some worth.
* It is like trying to understand the church based on human standards that purely are about what benefits this life.
* Yet, Jesus brings the confusion over works back around to His Word, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”
* Entrance was not about depending on actions, a decision or commitment, but the promise of baptism. Nicodemus had to repent and believe in the Gospel!

1. Man literally is helpless before God who alone saves sinners by His grace.

* Nicodemus did not scorn Jesus like other Pharisees, but his honesty and friendliness did not change anything either.
* The hard thing to accept, especially today, is that good people are no more justified before God than evil people!
* How can this be? St. Paul told us, “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring…did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.”
* Where we look to signs in life for answers, the answer is faith as a gift, God’s will is to save sinners, and the Spirit is who creates new life.

1. **That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**
2. What comes from above is how God wills for us to know only Jesus.

* As a teacher of Israel Nicodemus missed the greater promise, God told Abraham that in him, “all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
* Jesus was born a Jew, but He was also God who saw the needed salvation of all people.
* Rather than prophets and teachers in the Old Testament, everything rests on the fact of how God has spoken to us now by His Son.
* He is rightly God who knows, wills, and acts for us saying, “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:51).

1. By water and the Spirit God is at work to give and anchor faith in Christ.

* As Israel was dying by venoms snakes in the wilderness, so sin is our sign of death and judgment.
* Accept Jesus had the joy set before him to endure the cross and allow His shameful death to be the sign of life.
* Baptism is no symbol, but how Jesus’ pours out His salvation to us so entrance into His kingdom is a watery death that gives new life by His Word.
* Repentance then is nothing extra or strange, but simply returning to baptism to receive forgiveness, life, and salvation from Jesus lifted up for us.

1. Salvation is literally God helping us for Jesus is the gift to all of humanity.

* “Who killed Jesus?” always become a big question this time of the year, but the truth to confess is God offered up His Son out of love for us.
* Rather than trying to justify the good vs. bad, repent and believe this judgment. “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”
* Our Lutheran Fathers proclaim, “Worthiness does not depend on greatness or smallness, the weakness or strength of faith. Instead, it depends on Christ’s merit” (FC SD VII 70-710.
* To be saved through Christ is the will, work, and love of God. It is for the helpless to have forgiveness and eternal life by faith in His Son.

There is no way to control how the Spirit will work, but Lent promises God’s will is to save sinners by His Word. Maybe in our western world, to deal with the darkness that appears like light. It comes down to that one-on-one no less than Jesus had with Nicodemus. This is the light of love able truthfully to say, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Such a dividing line puts salvation in God’s grace alone for sinners. New birth by baptism is not of the flesh, but God’s will to work by His Spirit faith in Jesus. Amen. Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. VOM Email March ,7 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)