



John 3
By Chuck Smith

Shall we turn in our Bibles to the third chapter of the gospel according to John where he tells us,
There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, who was a ruler of the Jews (3:1):

We know from this verse two things about him. A Pharisee, a ruler or one of the spiritual leaders. He was a member of the Sanhedrin and thus a ruler of the Jews as far as religious matters went. A little further down, Jesus said, Are you a teacher? And so we know also that he was a teacher. And from the nineteenth chapter of the gospel of John, we assume that he was a very wealthy man because at the burial of Jesus, he stepped forward with Joseph of Arimathea and we are told that he brought myrrh and aloes of about a hundred pound weight. That would be extremely expensive. So he was no doubt also a wealthy man, a Pharisee.

Pharisees were men who had committed themselves to keeping the whole law. They would make a vow before three others that they vowed to keep the whole law. There were about 6,000 who were of the Pharisaic sect. They were the ones who spent their whole lives in endeavoring to keep the whole law.

The same came to Jesus by night (3:2),

There are some that have suggested cowardice but I don't think so. I think that Jesus was so crowded during the day. There were multitudes that followed Him. Multitudes that thronged about Him. I think his coming at night was that he might have some private time with Jesus. Away from the multitudes. That he might deal with Jesus more on a one-on-one basis.

and he said unto him, Rabbi [or Teacher], we know that you are a teacher who has come from God: for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with him (3:2).

So there is that acknowledgment of Jesus coming from God. Having observed the miracles that Jesus was doing, he became convinced of the divine origin of Jesus.

Jesus said unto him (3:3)

And here is the thing, He responds to him with words that are sort of a mystery to open up a whole line of thought and understanding. And He said unto him,

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (3:3).

Basically, I believe that Nicodemus recognizing that Jesus had come from God was looking for God's latest word to man. From the time of Malachi some four hundred years earlier, it was recognized that God had not spoken to His people. There was silence from heaven. And now Jesus comes on the scene, working miracles that attest that He must be from God. No man can do the things He is doing except through the power of God. God is with Him. So I believe that basically he is coming and he is sort of seeking God's word for this hour, for this time. And Jesus begins by saying that "unless you're born again, you can't see the kingdom of God." That is, you cannot understand it. You cannot really know it without being born again.

Paul the apostle in his first letter to the Corinthians says much the same thing. As Paul talks about how that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit: for they are foolishness unto him: and neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). There are things of God and the things of God that to the world are a mystery. They have absolutely no comprehension. It takes the enlightenment of our minds by the Holy Spirit to understand. And so Jesus is basically saying this to Nicodemus. There's got to be a spiritual birth. You've got to be born again if you are to understand or to see the things of the kingdom of God.

This idea of being born again is something that we read throughout the New Testament. In a figure, Paul speaks of it as "buried with Christ in the waters of baptism: but risen again in the newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Peter said, "Thanks be unto God who has [and it is] begotten us again, [but really who has born us again, but that's not good English]. But thanks be unto God who has begotten us again to this living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

Paul said, "If any man is in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation or new creature: the old things are passed away; and everything becomes new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). There is a work of God's Spirit within a person's life whereby that person comes into a totally new dimension of life, the dimension of the

Spirit. Originally when God created man, He created him a threefold being—spirit, soul, body.

God is a superior Trinity of Father, Son, Spirit. Man is an inferior trinity of spirit, soul and body. However, man as he was created by God, spirit, soul and body, the soul or the mind of man was controlled by the spirit which was uppermost. And thus, the thoughts and the mind of man were on the things of God because the spirit being uppermost. The body, it's there, it's necessary but it was subject unto the Spirit.

Paul tells us that there is a war that's going on between the body or the flesh and the spirit. These two are lusting against each other. And of course, the whole warfare is on supremacy of your life. Who is going to rule or what is going to rule your life? The flesh or the spirit. The fleshly desires or the spiritual desires. What are you going to allow to rule in your life? Whatever is ruling in your life will control your mind and thus you will have either the mind of the flesh or the mind of the Spirit. It all depends on what is uppermost.

When God created man, the inferior trinity—spirit, soul, and body; God, the superior Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit, it is in the realm of the spirit that man meets God; in the realm of the spirit that man knows God; the realm of the spirit where man fellowships with God. It's in the realm of the spirit where God and man touch. So that man with spirit uppermost lives in communion and fellowship with God. That's the way it was in the garden of Eden until the day that Adam disobeyed God as he followed after and allowed the desires of his flesh to master over the spirit.

As God said, "In the day that you eat of that fruit, you will surely die" (). And when Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, he died spiritually. The spirit died and he became flip; the flesh was now uppermost, the spirit dead. The awareness and consciousness of God broken. God came down to the garden to commune with Adam and Adam hid himself from the presence of God. Alienated from God because of the sin. So man born from Adam, the natural man, is body and mind. And now the mind controlled by the body appetite. And thus Jesus sort of describes that life as a person just interested primarily in the things of the flesh; what we're going to eat, what we're going to drink, what we're going to wear. Those are the things that occupy a person's mind. The things of the flesh.

The mind of the flesh is alienated from God. It cannot know God. It's at enmity with God. It cannot know or understand the things of God. In order for man to be restored into fellowship with God, in order for man to have an understanding of the things of the kingdom of God, there's got to be the rebirth of man's spirit. He's got to be born again.

So here comes Nicodemus, the natural man. Looking for the things of God, the word of God. God who has been silent, what's God's word now? And Jesus said, "Unless you are born again, you can't see it." You can't comprehend it. Here he is in a fleshly governed body, fleshly mind, trying to comprehend the things of the spirit, Jesus said it just doesn't happen. You've got to be born again if you're going to comprehend or understand the things of the Spirit. Nicodemus, because this is sort of a mysterious kind of a statement by Jesus, seeks clarification.

He asked, How can a man be born when he is old? [He shows the difficulty of it.] can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born (3:4)?

Naturally not. So how can a man be born again?

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven (3:5).

First was to see, now is to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is where God rules. Thus, if God rules in your life, you have entered into the kingdom of heaven. Wherever God rules, that's the kingdom of heaven. But you can't enter into it, Jesus said, unless you've been born of the water and of the Spirit.

What does Jesus mean by born of the water? Two possible interpretations. The one is water baptism. We know that water baptism does symbolize the death of the old life. As Paul said, "As many of us as were baptized were buried with Christ" (Romans 6:3). Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ is living in me" (Galatians 2:20). The old life buried. The life of the flesh we reckon it to be dead and through the water baptism, buried with Christ. but even so in the same likeness, we are risen in Christ as we come up out of the water. It's a symbolism of that new life risen together in Christ Jesus. There are those who say that the water here represents the water baptism whereby by this symbolism, I reckon the old life of the flesh to be dead and the new life of the Spirit to be operative in me.

The second interpretation is that water represents your fleshly birth. As we know that before a child is born, that water sac by which it is surrounded and protected in the womb bursts and there comes the water and then of course the birth of the child. And thus they say that the water represents your fleshly birth. And you need to be twice born. You've been born once of the flesh, the water, and of course that is necessary. But then the second birth is the birth of the Spirit. And so you have the idea of the two births. As someone said, You born once, you die twice. Born twice, you die once. And so the second birth being the spiritual birth.

In the next verse, Jesus said,

For that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (3:6).

In the context it would appear that Jesus is talking about the fleshly birth and the spiritual birth. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." There are the two ideas. Nobody can really be dogmatic. I sort of lean toward the second myself because of the fact that He does contrast being born of the flesh and being born of the Spirit in the very next verse. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Therefore,

Marvel not that I said unto you, You must be born again (3:7).

That brings up the issue tonight that all of us must squarely face and that is, Have I been born again? Have I been born of the Spirit? And that should be of primary concern to every one of you. Because if you have not been born again, you have no comprehension of the things of the Spirit and you have not entered into the kingdom of heaven. And you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven unless you have been born again. You cannot enter into that kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Don't marvel when I said, You must," that is, if you are to enter the kingdom of God. You must, if you are to understand the things of the Spirit. "You must be born again." Born of the Spirit.

Then Jesus sort of describes it. It is interesting that the word "spirit" in Hebrew is the word, "ruach" which is also the word for "breath." It is the word for "wind." In the Greek the word "pneuma" is the word for "air" or "spirit." Here Jesus said,

The wind [the Hebrew "ruach"] blows where it listeth, and you hear the sound thereof, but you can not tell from whence it comes, and whither it goes: so is every one that is born of the Spirit (3:8).

You can feel the effects of the wind. You can see the effects of the wind. But you can't see the wind. It's foolish to try to deny the fact that the wind exists because I can't see it. I don't believe anything I can't see. You can't see the wind. You do see the effects of the wind. You see the leaves blowing or the dust blowing or the leaves of the tree shaking. And you can feel the wind.

So with the Spirit. You can feel the presence of God's Spirit. You can see the results of God's Spirit though we don't see the Spirit Himself. Yet we know He is there. We feel His presence. We experience His power in our lives. And so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus answered Him and he said, How can these things be (3:9)?

This is a question that is asking for the process. By what process then can a man be born again? Recognizing the difficulty of the concept, he now is asking Jesus how this comes to pass. "How can these things be?"

Jesus answers him [first of all not directly, just sort of I think chiding him a bit] and He said unto him, Are you a master of Israel, and you don't know these things (3:10)?

I'm talking to you of basic fundamental rudiments of the spiritual life. You're supposed to be leading people in the things of the Spirit, in the things of God. Are you a master in Israel, and yet you don't understand these basic, fundamental rudiments of the spiritual life? He said,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, We speak that which we do know, and we testify of what we have seen; and you receive not our witness (3:11).

Jesus is saying, Look, I know what I'm talking about. I testify the things that I know about and I am witnessing to you of that which I have seen. The spirit life, the Spirit-filled life, the Spirit-led life. And Jesus was led by the Spirit. He knew the life of the Spirit. He knew that life of fellowship with God. He was talking about His own personal experiences of this Spirit-dominated life which is a life that is in fellowship with God. He said,

If I have told you earthly things, and you believe not, how shall you believe, if I tell you of heavenly things (3:12)?

If I really get into the deeper spiritual matters. If you don't understand that two and two equals four,

how are you ever going to do trigonometry? I'm trying to talk to you about basic fundamental things and you don't comprehend those. How can I take you deeper? Jesus said,

And no man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven (3:13).

Jesus here is speaking now again of His divine origin which Nicodemus recognized. We know that You are come from God, no man can do the things that You do except God is with Him. So Jesus here affirms that He has come from heaven. Knows the heavenly things.

We're dealing with things on the earthly level. We're dealing with man. Man whose spirit died because of sin. Man who became alienated from God because of the death of the spirit. As in Isaiah 59, he said, "God's hand is not short He cannot save; neither is His ear heavy, that He cannot hear: But your sins have separated you from God" (Isaiah 59:1,2). Man who was alienated from God because of sin which has killed the spirit, spiritual death. Jesus said, I'm trying to talk to you on an earthly level but you can't seem to grasp it. If I went into the things of heaven, I've come down from heaven, if I try and tell you about that, you'll be totally lost.

Paul the apostle had a trip to heaven. He writes about it in Second Corinthians chapter twelve where he speaks about a man in Christ, about fourteen years ago, and whether it was an in-body experience or out-of-the-body experience, Paul said I really don't know. But I do know that I was caught up to the third heaven, the dwelling place of God and there, he said, I heard things which were so glorious it would be a crime to try to describe them in human language.

Jesus is saying much the same thing. I've come down from heaven but I'm trying to talk to you on an earthly level. You can't grasp that. You'd be totally lost if I tried to talk to you about heavenly things. But now the question. Jesus isn't ignoring his question, just getting in a few sidelicks here, now He comes to the question, the process of being born again. How can these things be? And Jesus said,

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life (3:14,15).

He takes him back to familiar ground. He is a teacher in Israel, a master. He knows very well the account in Numbers chapter twenty-one. Of how when the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they complained and murmured against God and against Moses, saying they brought us out of Egypt that we might perish here in the wilderness. And we don't have any bread and we're sick of this manna. And the anger of God was kindled against them for their murmuring and God sent fiery serpents among the Israelites and as they were bitten by these fiery serpents, they began to die by the scores. And they repented and they came to Moses and they said, Pray for us that we might be healed from this plague.

It is interesting to me that when Moses prayed unto the Lord, rather than God directly healing them, God made provision for their healing. In the provision that God made for their healing, there was a responsibility given to them. If they would fulfill that responsibility, then God would respond and heal. But they weren't just healed apart from their responsibility. That to me was interesting.

God said to Moses, Make a fiery serpent. He made it out of brass. Put it on a pole in the middle of the camp. And it shall come to pass when a person has been bitten by one of these fiery serpents, if they will look at this serpent that is on the pole, they will live and not die. So Moses made this serpent of brass and put it on the pole in the midst of the camp. And it came to pass that when a person was bitten, as they looked at that brass serpent on the pole they were healed and did not die.

A picture that is full of symbolism. Jesus makes reference to it here in the response to the question how to be born again. Brass in the scripture is always a symbol of God's judgment. The serpent is a symbol of sin. Being lifted up on the pole is a symbol of the cross. Jesus said, So must the Son of man be lifted up. In another place, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me" (John 12:32), signifying that He would die on a cross. What God is setting up is a picture. That brass serpent on the pole. You have been bitten by the fiery serpents. You are dying. You've been bitten by sin and sin is destroying you. You're dying as the result of it. But God, if you will just obey God, look at the serpent on the pole and see that your sins have been judged. The brass serpent, the judgment of God against sin and see that your sins are judged. You won't die from the bite of this fiery serpent. And of course, it's very easy to bring the picture over to Jesus and see how the symbolism fits.

Jesus on the cross took our sins. The Bible says, "And God laid on Him the iniquities of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Taking our sin on the cross, He also then received the judgment of God against sin. As Jesus died in our place, our sin was judged. And thus, as today I look at the cross and I see Jesus dying

there for me, I realize that God's judgment against my sin has been meted out against Jesus Christ who bore my sin. Thus my sins have been judged. I will no longer perish because of my sins. But by looking I live, I have now eternal life by looking at Jesus. But I don't have it apart from looking in faith to Jesus Christ.

So those that were bitten by the fiery serpents, they had a way of preserving life. All they had to look up was God's provision that He made for them. But they weren't just healed apart from looking in faith at God's provision that God had established there in the middle of the camp. Look and live.

And so with you. Your sins are not forgiven automatically. You are not healed from that deadly malady of sin apart from by faith looking at the finished work of Jesus Christ and realizing that He bore the judgment of God against sin, against your sin. That's how a person is born again. Looking in faith to Jesus Christ. You're born again.

Even as it's impossible to explain by what process, just looking at a brass serpent on a pole could save you from dying, how can you explain that? There's no explanation for that. So there is really no explanation that we can give for how by just looking in faith at Jesus Christ, we have everlasting life. But such is the case. Though we can't explain the process.

Interesting, just a little sidelight, and this is just thrown in. This brass serpent that Moses put on the pole later became sort of an icon for the people and they made an idol out of it. They began to worship it in later years. During the reign of Hezekiah, he took this brass serpent that the people had started to worship and he broke it in pieces and he ground it into just powder. He called it Nehushtan, which means a thing of brass. This is not a god, he says, this is just a thing of brass. Not to be worshipped. But you see, it was a reminder to the people of God's work in their past history. But whenever you begin to worship the relics that remind you of God's work in past history, it's a sign that you have lost an awful lot. You have lost the consciousness of the presence of God in your life today and you're reaching back to try to find something that will stir some kind of spiritual warmth. It's like a person finding a piece of the old canvas tent we used to have and saying, Remember the good old tent days? And framing it and setting it up because it reminds us of those days. You forget an awful lot how stinky those heaters were and how cold the nights could get in that kind of thing. It's just when people are pulling from the past, the relics of the past to remind them of what God had done.

I'm not interested in what God has done in your life twenty-five years ago. I'm interested in what He's doing tonight. Unless your past experiences have been translated into the present relationship, they are not valid. They're of no value. What God is doing tonight is what's vital and what's important. And what God is going to do for us this next week as we just open our hearts to Him and as we seek Him. As we follow after Him. It isn't looking back with fondness at the past, it's looking ahead to what God wants to do tonight if we will just but let Him. The work that God desires to do now in us.

As Paul the apostle said, "Those things which were gain to me, I counted loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ; for whom I suffered the loss of all things, but count them but refuse, that I may know Him." Notice, I counted them loss. He's talking about an experience he had thirty years ago. But then he brings it up-to-date, he said, I do count them, I still, tonight it's still true. "For I want to know Him," he said, "and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death [even the death of the cross]."

"I don't count myself," he said, "to have apprehended, but this is what I'm doing, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before." And that should always be the case. Past is past. It's only valuable as it has an effect upon me now. The future is ahead of us. That's where we look. "Forgetting those things which are behind, and now reaching forth to those things which are before, I'm pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3: 7,8,10,12-14).

The process, looking by faith at the cross of Jesus, seeing that God there judged our sins, I am born again. Jesus goes on to say,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him (3:16)

"He gave his only begotten Son." He gave Him to die upon the cross. To be lifted up. To receive the judgment of our sins. "God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him,"

should not perish, but have everlasting life (3:16).

That is more than just a quantity of life. It is a quality of life. When the young ruler came to Jesus and said, "Good Master, what good thing must I do to inherit eternal life" (Mark 10:17)? This age-abiding life. He was looking at the quality of life what he saw in Jesus. That's the thing that attracted him.

Quantity of life without quality is hell. For a person to live in a comatose state month after month, year after year. Having to be fed intravenously, that's a living hell. It isn't the quantity of life that I'm concerned with. It's the quality of life. But it's glorious to realize that this quality of life I have in Jesus is also quantity, it's going to go on forever. That's glorious, too. But it's a quality of life that we have in Jesus. God's purpose, loving purpose for you is that you not perish because of your sin, but that you have everlasting life. And that comes by believing on Jesus. So simple, so simple, that my little grandchildren, four, five, six years old, can understand it and believe in Jesus. But so profound that I, even with all of my years of study, cannot comprehend or understand it. I just know it so. The beauty of it because of its simplicity and at the same time, so profound.

And then Jesus went on to say, and I think that this is extremely important,

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world (3:17);

So many times, we feel that Jesus is condemning us. Jesus said, "I didn't come to condemn the world,"

but that the world through him might be saved (3:17).

That was His purpose. Not to condemn but to save. You remember the woman taken in the very act of adultery, we're going to be getting that very quickly as we move through John, and the Pharisees brought her screaming hysterical to Jesus. And they said, We caught this woman in the very act of adultery and Moses said, We're to stone her. What do You say? Jesus just wrote on the ground as though He was ignoring them. And so they began to press the issue. Jesus stood up and He looked at them and He said, Let him who is without sin among you throw the first stone. He knelt down and began to write again until they all left. He stood up and He said, Woman, where are those who condemn you? She said, Well I guess they're not here. And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you (John 8:3-11). Beautiful words.

Jesus said I didn't come to condemn. But how is it that we are always thinking that Jesus is condemning us? How is it that we always, every time we do something wrong, we think, Oh boy, here it comes. That He is condemning us. Jesus said, No, I didn't come to condemn you, I came to save you. And He said,

He who believes (3:18)

And of course, that is born again. How am I born again? By believing. "He who believes,"

is not condemned (3:18):

What a beautiful passage of scripture. O that we would take it to heart. O that we would believe it. "He that believeth is not condemned." As Paul wrote to the Romans, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). No condemnation to those who believe in Jesus. He that believeth is not condemned.

Later on in the eighth chapter of Romans, Paul asked a question, "Who is he that condemneth?" And he answers his question by not saying, Who is he that condemns but he tells you who isn't condemning. "Who is he that condemneth?" And then he said, "It is Christ who died, yea rather, is risen again, and is even at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for you" (Romans 8:34). The opposite of condemning you, He's making intercession for you.

O how glorious it is to be born again. To have no condemnation. How glorious it is to be in Christ Jesus where there is no condemnation. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved. And he that believeth is not condemned."

However, he that believeth not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (3:18).

"God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son. And he that believeth not is condemned already." In other words, Jesus said it wasn't necessary for Me to condemn the world. I didn't come to condemn the world, the world was already condemned and is already condemned. I came to save those who are condemned to death. And all of us were condemned to death because of our sin. "The soul that sinneth shall surely die" (Ezekiel 18:20). "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We were all condemned to death. He didn't have to condemn us. We're already condemned. And "he that believeth not is condemned already, seeing he has not believed on the only begotten Son of God."

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light (3:19,20),

We meet people all the time who express a hatred towards Jesus Christ. The subject of Jesus Christ is a difficult subject to talk about with many people because they have such a hatred towards Jesus. For them it would be hard for them to explain why they feel this hatred and animosity towards Jesus. If you ask him to explain why it is that they hate Jesus so much, they would be hard pressed to explain it. It's just a spiritual thing. And they probably couldn't tell you and they surely wouldn't tell you the truth. Jesus tells you the truth. The reason why they hate Him is because they love evil. Jesus stands for that which is righteous and that which is holy and that which is pure. Thus because they love evil, they hate the light. "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light,"

neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved (3:20).

Lest he would be rebuked by the light, by the revealing of what he is doing. In other words, the light exposes. They don't want to come to Jesus because their evil will be exposed.

But [Jesus said] he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his deeds might be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (3:21).

The Bible tells us "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with the other, as the blood of Jesus Christ is just cleansing us from all of our sins" (1 John 1:7). Born again. Walking in the Spirit. Walking in the light. We have this whole new dimension of fellowship with God. When man is born again, what happens is that here he is in the natural state as you were born, body and mind. But when you're born again, the spirit comes alive and immediately there is that connection again with God. Communion with God. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. And God is seeking such to worship Him" (John 4:23,24). But you can't do it until the spirit is alive and that comes by believing in Jesus Christ.

He didn't come to condemn but to bring you spiritual life. To bring you light. We walk in Jesus and the works that we do, they're manifest that they are the works of God. They are that which God has done in us and that which God is doing through us. It becomes obvious that these glorious works are just God's working in and through our lives.

Now break. Verse twenty-two.

After these things (3:22)

We're through now with the conversation with Nicodemus. "After these things,"

Jesus came and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and they were baptizing (3:22).

In the next chapter it tells us that John heard that Jesus was baptizing more people than he was. Though John the beloved who wrote this said that Jesus really wasn't baptizing but His disciples were baptizing. Now He is carrying on a ministry that is similar to John the Baptist in that He is now with His disciples there in the area of Judaea, people are coming and are being baptized. At the same time,

John was also baptizing in Aenon which was near to Salim, because there was a lot of water there: and they came, and were baptized (3:23).

The fact that there was a lot of water no doubt indicates that the baptism was by full immersion rather than by sprinkling because if you sprinkled it wouldn't take a lot of water.

For John was not yet cast into prison (3:24).

It is obvious from the other gospels that Jesus really began His full on-public ministry after John was put in prison. But here they are now, not far from each other, both of them engaged in baptizing people. John, the end of the old economy. The last of the prophets yet the greatest. But he is the last of God's word through the prophets. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke to man through the prophets, Hath now spoken unto us by his only Son, whom he has made heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:1,2). So now you have the end of the old and the beginning of the new. Here's a little cross over here, they are both of them now ministering. John, the end of the old economy; Jesus, the beginning of the new. They are baptizing there in the area of the Jordan river there in Judaea.

Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying (3:25).

There were just an awful lot of laws in the Jews concerning purifying. How you were to wash your hands, how much water was to be used, the way you would hold your hands and the way you would rub your hands. They had all of these rules and regulations. Had to be running water and oodles of regulations. And so they were always bringing up issues over things like that.

And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi [or Teacher], he that was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bore witness, behold, the same is baptizing, and a lot of people are going to him (3:26).

Here are John's disciples. They're coming to him and they're reporting. The One that you baptized and you witnessed of Him, they're baptizing now and just an awful lot of people are going to Him.

John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven (3:27).

Paul the apostle asked the question, "What do you have but what you have received? And if you have received it, then why do you boast of it as though you hadn't received it" (1 Corinthians 4:7)? If there is any good work that is coming forth from your life, it's because God is doing it. And if God is doing it, then how can you boast as though God wasn't doing it. As though you're some special pumpkin. So no man can operate in the realm of the Spirit unless God is doing it. "Except it be given to him from heaven."

The whole idea is rejoice in the Lord and give glory to God for that which He has done. Don't magnify the instrument through which He has done His work but magnify God. And he said,

You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Messiah, but that I am sent before him (3:28).

These beautiful words of John now. What a true servant. How true he is to his ministry. He is not seeking glory for himself. He said, Look, I told you, I'm not the Messiah. But I am sent before Him.

He that hath the bride is the bridegroom (3:29):

I'm not the bridegroom. They were very familiar with this analogy as God through the prophets declared Himself the husband of Israel. They were His bride. God as being sort of the husband and the nation of Israel the bride. And so the church, the bride of Christ. Jesus, the bridegroom. And John says that, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom." They're not mine, they're His.

but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled (3:29).

The fulfillment of joy in bringing the bride to the bridegroom. That was the place of the friend of the bridegroom. He would bring the bride to the groom. And the groom would not speak until he accepted the bride. He was silent until he accepted the bride. When he spoke, it meant his acceptance of the bride. So John is saying, "the friend of the bridegroom, which stands and hears him." That is, hears him in the accepting of the bride, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. "This my joy therefore is fulfilled."

I've accomplished my job. And then these fabulous words and oh God, help us to all just to have this attitude.

He must increase, but I must decrease (3:30).

How true. He must increase. John's not looking for a place for himself. His mission is fulfilled. His joy is fulfilled when Christ is honored. When Christ is glorified. And that should be true in each of our lives especially those who are serving the Lord. The great joy comes when Jesus is honored. When Jesus is glorified. For "He must increase, and I must decrease."

That is the witness of John the Baptist concerning Jesus. As we pointed out, John in this gospel is seeking to prove that Jesus is the Messiah. That by proving that to you, you will come to believe that truth and thus have the eternal life that comes through Jesus Christ. And thus he is picking out certain witnesses to bear witness of the truth of Jesus Christ. John being one of those witnesses. He is picking out incidents from the life of Christ. Miracles and all that again prove that Jesus is the Messiah. And throughout this book, he will presenting proofs by the works of Jesus and proofs by the various witnesses that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. We have the witness now of John the Baptist.

Beginning with verse thirty-one, there are two fields of thought as to the authorship. There are some that believe that John the Baptist is still talking and that John the beloved is recording the words of John the Baptist. But there are others who believe that John's last words were, "He must increase and I must decrease." If those were his last words, what beautiful last words to come forth from a person's ministry. I've accomplished my purpose. I've brought the bride to the groom. I've heard His voice. My joy is complete. I've accomplished that call of God and now, He must increase, I must decrease. So that John, the author of the book, then records these things.

He that cometh from above is above all (3:31):

Jesus, remember, talked to Nicodemus about that no man ascends up to heaven but He that came

down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. So “He that cometh from above.” Notice it’s a present tense, it isn’t a past tense; He who came. With Jesus, the eternal God, He’s always coming from above. “Is above all.”

he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaks of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receives his testimony (3:31,32).

Basically, Jesus said this to Nicodemus. That you have not believed. I’ve told you of heavenly things and you believe not.

He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true (3:33).

Having received the witness of Jesus, having believed the testimony of Jesus, we attest to it that God is true.

For he whom God hath sent speaks the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him (3:34).

In other words, He had the fullness of the Spirit. It wasn’t given to Jesus by measure. It wasn’t just sort of measured out but the fullness of the Spirit. And thus, He speaks God’s word to us. Jesus said, “The words that I speak, they are life.”

The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand (3:35).

In Psalm 2, we have the Father speaking to the Son saying, “Ask of me, and I will give to you the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psalm 2:8). In Philippians, “God has highly exalted Him, given Him a name that is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow; and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). God has given all things unto His Son. He loves His Son.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life (3:36):

That’s just straight, plain as you can get. If you believe on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, you have everlasting life.

and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life (3:36);

You’ll never know what spiritual life is. You are dead in your trespasses and sins. You’ll never see life.

But [tragically] the wrath of God abides on him (3:36).

As we read in the book of Hebrews, there awaits that “certain fearful, fiery indignation of the wrath of God whereby He will devour His adversaries” (Hebrews 10:27). How am I born again? Believing on Jesus Christ. “God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him would not perish.” “He that believeth hath everlasting life.”

Has passed from condemnation into life. How glorious! Our relationship with God tonight made possible through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Father, we give thanks to You for these glorious, eternal truths. May we live by them. May we hold on to them. May we receive them tonight. Lord, You came from heaven. You told us the truth concerning the Father. We receive that truth. We believe tonight in the love of God for us and in the provision of God whereby our sins are forgiven because of the judgment of God meted against Jesus as He was there on the cross, lifted up for us. Lord, may we walk in the glorious light of Your truth, doing Your work in such a way that men will recognize that yes, the hand of God is upon our lives. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.