

2023 Good Friday Service

“The 3 Great ‘Musts’ of Christianity”

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
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I believe that John 3 is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible.

You may not realize it, but the chapter is built around three great *‘must’* statements—all of which are connected to the Cross—

I. The ‘Must’ of the Sinner

II. The ‘Must’ of the Savior

III. The ‘Must’ of the Servant

The chapter opens with these words—

John 3:1 (NKJV)

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

The chapter begins with a man who wanted to speak with Jesus privately, so he comes to Him by night (verse 2)—the man’s name was Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was a ruler in Israel—which meant that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Council. We are also told that he was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were an ultra-conservative sect of Judaism whose members lived by the strictest possible religious rules. They numbered about 6,000 at the time of Christ and committed themselves to keeping the Law of God down to the smallest detail because in their minds—that was how they earned a place in God’s Kingdom.

Now even though the term ‘Pharisee’ has become synonymous with *hypocrisy*—not all of the Pharisees were hypocrites.

There were some Pharisees, like Nicodemus and Saul of Tarsus, who were very sincere in their desire to obey God and live a life of separation from the pollution of the world—in fact, the word *‘Pharisee’* means *‘one who is separated.’*

John 3:2 (NKJV)

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.”

So, Nicodemus came to Jesus by night (‘Nick at night’) probably to keep his interest in Jesus a secret from the other Pharisees who hated Jesus.

The fact that Nicodemus used the plural pronoun **“we”** (verse 2) and Jesus responded with the plural **“you”** (verse 7)—indicates that Nicodemus was representing a group of Pharisees who were open to Jesus and His message.

“Signs” is the same word used for miracles in the NEW TESTAMENT.

I believe Nicodemus was saying that he and some of the other Pharisees had come to believe (based on the miracles Jesus had done), that He could be the Messiah—and that meant the Kingdom of God was very near indeed. (Explain)

Isaiah 35:5–6 (NLT)

⁵ And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind and unplug the ears of the deaf. ⁶ The lame will leap like a deer, and those who cannot speak will sing for joy!...

Luke 7:18–22 (NLT)

¹⁸ The disciples of John the Baptist told John about everything Jesus was doing. So John called for two of his disciples, ¹⁹ and he sent them to the Lord to ask him, “Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?” ²⁰ John’s two disciples found Jesus and said to him, “John the Baptist sent us to ask, ‘Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?’ ” ²¹ At that very time, Jesus cured many people of their diseases, illnesses, and evil spirits, and he restored sight to many who were blind. ²² Then he told John’s disciples, “Go back to John and tell him what you have seen and heard—the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.”

This is why Nick and his friends believed Jesus could be the Messiah and that the Kingdom was about to be established.

And so, with all that as background, we come to our first **‘must’** statement—

I. The ‘Must’ of the Sinner—verse 7

Since the coming Kingdom was on Nicodemus’s mind, Jesus gets right to the point—

John 3:3 (NKJV)

³ Jesus answered and said to him, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**

It’s interesting that Jesus doesn’t even respond to the praise or flattery of Nicodemus, but simply responds with—**“Most assuredly, I say to you...”**

The **‘most assuredly’** (KJV—*“verily, verily”*) is meant to emphasize the importance of what Jesus is about to teach. The statement by Jesus that to enter God’s Kingdom a person has to be **‘born-again’**—really took Nicodemus back—

John 3:4 (NKJV)

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?”**

I don’t think Nicodemus was being sarcastic or flippanant—I think he sincerely wanted to grasp what Jesus was saying but was genuinely confused—that shouldn’t surprise us:

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

Seeing that Nick was confused, Jesus patiently tries to explain to him that He was talking about *another* kind of birth—

John 3:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

➤ *What did Jesus mean when He said, "...unless one is **born of water and the Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*

There are those who interpret '**born of water**' to be a reference to 'water baptism' which they believe Jesus is saying is essential for salvation. ('baptismal regeneration')

Many others believe that when Jesus speaks of being '**born of water**'—He is referring to the 'Word of God.'

In Ephesians 5:25-26 'water' is closely associated with the Word of God—

Ephesians 5:25–26 (NKJV)

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word.

Also, in 1 Peter 1:23 and James 1:18, the new birth is said to take place through the Word of God. So, what's the correct interpretation? —well, let's let the passage speak for itself.

Remember, verses 5-7 are a response by Jesus to Nicodemus's question in verse 4—and Nicodemus's question in verse 4 was in response to what Jesus said in verse 3 was necessary for a person to enter the Kingdom of God—let's read verses 3 and 4 again:

John 3:3-4 (NKJV)

³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, 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?"

You see at this point Nicodemus thinks that what Jesus is saying is—that to be a member of the Kingdom of God a person needs to be born twice physically. In response to Nicodemus's question in verse 4 Jesus says in verse 5—

John 3:5 (NKJV)

⁵ "...**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**

Now I believe that what's in view here are the *two* births necessary for salvation—one *physical* and the other *spiritual*.

When it comes to *physical* birth, we know that before a child is born, he or she lives in their mother's womb in a "*bag of waters*"—the membrane or sack that contains the amniotic fluid that surrounds and protects the baby in utero.

When the time is right the bag of waters breaks and the baby is born—this I believe is what Jesus meant when He talked about being "**born of water**"—i.e., physical birth.

➤ *But what does it mean to be "born of the Spirit"?*

Well, that is a truth that got started in the Garden of Eden when God said to Adam and Eve—"If you eat the fruit of this tree (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) you shall surely die."

Of course, they *did* eat that forbidden fruit and they did die—spiritually.

You see, man was originally made a 3 dimensional being. At the time of the fall, the family of Adam was cursed by God and doomed to eternal separation from Him. The Bible says that in Adam all die (both physically and spiritually)—but in Christ all shall be made alive (both physically (Rapture) and spiritually through the new birth).

Being born of the Spirit or 'born-again' means to believe in and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. When a person does that—they escape the judgment upon the family of Adam by being born into a new family—the family of God!

Because of it they are no longer children of wrath and cursed—but now are children of God and blessed—

John 3:36 (NKJV)

³⁶ **He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God [judgment] abides on him."**

There is no other way for a person to go to heaven—even as Jesus said that He was the only way to the Father and heaven (John 14:6).

The interpretation that Jesus is referring to both *physical* and *spiritual* births in verse 5—is bolstered by how Jesus qualifies verse 5 with verse 6—

John 3:5–6 (NKJV)

⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, 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.**

"**Born of the flesh**" is speaking of *physical* birth; and "**born of the Spirit**" is speaking of *spiritual* birth.

This then becomes the basis for the first great '**must**' statement that Jesus emphasized in verse 7—a statement we have called: "**The 'Must' of the Sinner**":

John 3:7 (NKJV)

⁷ **Do not marvel that I said to you [singular—Nicodemus], 'You [plural—Nicodemus and his friends and all of fallen humanity] **must be born again.**'**

Over the years, I have heard some people say—"I'm a Christian just not one of those 'born-again' Christians."

Now, on the one hand I get what they're saying—but hear me, the Bible stresses that there is only one kind of Christian—and that *is* a born-again Christian. To reinforce this, Jesus uses very definitive language in emphasizing this truth—

John 3:3 (NKJV)

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

John 3:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

John 3:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

No one, no matter how religious they are or how good they think they are will enter into heaven apart from believing in Jesus Christ and being born-again or '*born of the Spirit*.'

However, before we could be born of the Spirit and go to heaven Jesus had to die for our sins—which brings us to our second great '**must**' statement spoken by the Lord Jesus—

II. The 'Must' of the Savior—verse 13-14

John 3:13 (NKJV)

¹³ **No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.**

A. "No one has ascended to heaven..."

No one ever ascended into heaven by their own power—or in other words by his or her own human goodness and hard work as the Pharisees sought to do.

To ascend into heaven a person would have to be as perfect as Jesus (sinless)—for that is the only righteousness that God will receive up into heaven—the righteousness of Christ (i.e., 'sinless perfection'—John 16:10; Matthew 19:25-26).

Every religion on the earth apart from Christianity is based on human achievement where man endeavors to make a ladder of good works—one rung (one good work) at a time by which he can '*climb up into heaven*.'

Jesus said that no one has ever been able to reach heaven that way (thru religion)—because heaven isn't a reward for *deserving* people—it's a gift for *forgiven* people. And how does a person receive forgiveness for their sins? By repenting for their sin and then believing in and receiving Jesus as their Savior—which was something Nicodemus, the Pharisee, was having a hard time grasping.

B. "...but He who came down from heaven, the Son of Man..."

The Bible teaches that man is not basically good—it teaches that we are all sinners and as such could never reach heaven through our works of righteousness which God calls '*filthy rags*.' (Isaiah 64:6)

We could not go up to where God is, so He came down to where we were—He condescended to rescue man out of the pit we had fallen into through our sin and lift us up to heaven someday.

But before we could be lifted up into heaven—first *Jesus* had to be lifted up on the cross:

John 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up...[The ‘Must’ of the Savior]

Sin had to be judged and paid for before God could offer sinners forgiveness and salvation—this was illustrated in the O.T. story recorded in Numbers 21:4-9—which Jesus is alluding to in verse 14.

As the children of Israel wandered through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land—they became discouraged and impatient and as such—they complained against the LORD (*“You only brought us out of Egypt to kill us in the wilderness!”*)

This angered the LORD and to punish them, He sent ‘fiery-serpents’ into the camp of Israel to bite the people—causing those bitten to die. When the survivors cried to the Lord in repentance—the Lord told Moses to make a serpent of brass and put it on a pole and lift it up in the center of camp.

The idea was that anyone who had been bitten by one of these ‘fiery-serpents’, if they looked to the brass serpent on the pole by faith—they would be miraculously healed.

Jesus quoted this Old Testament incident to illustrate how the new birth takes place.

Mankind has been bitten by the ‘*serpent of sin*’ and as such is now dying from the *venom* that has been injected into humanity’s ‘bloodstream’ by the sin of Adam. If a person is not healed in *this* life—they will be condemned in the *next* life to *spiritual* death (eternal separation from God) in the Lake of Fire (Hell).

The *serpent of brass* (symbolizing sin) was a type or picture of Jesus, Who became sin for us—

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Brass, in the Bible, is used to speak of judgment (brass is the metal of judgment because it can be heated very hot).

The Lord Jesus was sinless and should never have been punished—but He willingly took our place and bore the judgment which we deserved—

Isaiah 53:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, everyone, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

The *pole* speaks of the cross of Calvary upon which the Lord Jesus was lifted up.

It’s important to understand that those who were bitten by the fiery serpents were provided only one way from God to be healed—they had to look upon the brass serpent lifted up on that pole by faith.

If anyone bitten refused to look upon that brass serpent by faith (*"What will that do!?"*) then they died needlessly—and the same is true for you and me. Our sins are not automatically forgiven because Jesus was lifted up on Calvary's Cross—we must look to Him by faith.

In other words, if we look to Him as the only One Who can heal us from the poison of sin as our Savior and receive Him into our hearts by faith—we will be saved. Those that refuse die needlessly in their sins and spend eternity separated from God—

John 3:15-16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

As we have said, Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins—we then look to the cross and what Jesus did to receive salvation.

After we are saved, we must take up the cross and follow Jesus which means we must die to self—to our goals, to living for ourselves and our desires—and primarily we must die to self-glory.

This was expressed by John the Baptist in our last point which we're calling:

III. The 'Must' of the Servant—verse 30

John 3:26-27, 30 (NKJV)

²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" ²⁷ John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven..." ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.

The statement by John in verse 30 that **"He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease"**—is the **'must'** of every servant of Jesus Christ.

John's whole ministry was introducing people to Jesus—and then disappearing into the background to let Jesus be their complete focus—their all in all.

This is what a servant of Christ should live for—introducing people to Jesus and then fading into the background so that Jesus is all they see—not the servant but only the Savior!

This involves a life of sacrifice and service—where, like John the Baptist, the joy is in knowing the Bridegroom and serving Him:

John 3:28–29 (NKJV)

²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' ²⁹ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

Today Christianity has been turned into a way to get blessings from God—instead of what it really is—dying to self in order to bring glory to God through my life.

❖ **Listen:** *"Words that Hurt, Words that Heal"* by Carole Mayhall (pages 11-14)

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

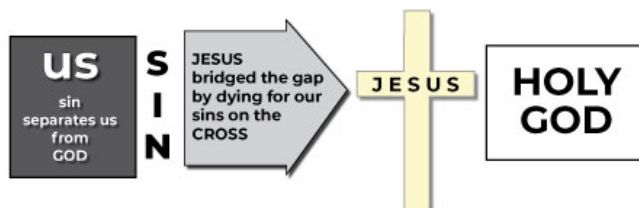
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THE WRONG WAY TO GOD



"I AM the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to The Father except through Me." *John 14:6*

THE ONLY WAY TO GOD



"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." *John 3:16*