

# Grace – And the New Birth

John 3:1-6

## Intro

Last Sunday I spoke on *Grace Personified in Jesus Christ*. Jesus not only is God incarnate but grace incarnate. He came full of grace and truth. The grace of Christ has been lavished on us, what a stupendous reality and what a blessing!

Grace is unmerited favour that God bestows on us that we do not deserve. To understand the grace of God as revealed in the Bible is to comprehend one of the most wonderful attributes of God; and it is the key to a deep, personal relationship between God the Father and every believer, through Jesus Christ.

The grace of God expresses the greatness of His love and the richness of His mercy. To live within and under the grace of God is to experience and appreciate the awesome love of God and His kindness.

The grace of God means life itself! Without grace there would be no salvation, no Christianity, no eternal life! Grace is the foundation of true Christianity and that grace is embodied in Jesus Christ. This is Christianity's unique contribution among all the world religions? GRACE! No other religion talks about a gracious and loving God and Saviour as Jesus Christ!

2 Tim. 1:9-10, *"This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ."*

Also in Titus 2:11 we read, *"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people."*

The grace of God appeared through Christ and He offers salvation. What is that salvation? It is through the new birth. Every human being needs to accept the grace of God, by accepting Christ. And when one accepts Christ he or she is regenerated or born again. That's salvation!

Today I would like to talk about the grace of God that brings about a new start on life. Actually it is the new birth or being born again.

Look with me in John 3:1-6.

## Historical Context – Jesus & Nicodemus

In the historical context of John chapter 3 we find Jesus being approached at night by a very religious man, Nicodemus. He was also wealthy and well educated. He was a respected member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin.

### Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin was a Jewish court. As such, they were the only ones who could try the king, extend the boundaries of the Temple and Jerusalem, and were the ones to whom all questions of law were finally put.

### Pharisee

Nicodemus was also a Pharisee. The Pharisees were very religious and orthodox in their belief and practice. They were the dominant religious group in Israel in Jesus' day and most popular with the masses. The Hebrew Talmud (writings containing the Jewish civil and religious laws) speaks of 7 kinds of Pharisees.

- 1) “The Shoulder Pharisee” — were so named because of their custom of displaying accounts of their good deeds on their shoulders for other people to see and admire. They would put ashes on their heads to show they were in humble prayer.
- 2) “The Wait a Little Pharisee” — was due to their clever ability to come up with a fabricated spiritual reasons for putting off doing something good. Pious excuses were their trademark.
- 3) “The Bruised and Bleeding Pharisee” — in order not to commit the sin of looking at a women lustfully, these Pharisees closed their eyes whenever women were around. Understandably they received many bruises and abrasions from bumping into walls, posts and other objects. They measured their piousness by the number of injuries.
- 4) “The Humpback Tumbling Pharisee” — they were the type to show off their supposed humility, they slouched over with bent backs and shuffled their feet instead of taking normal steps, leading to frequent stumbles and tumbles.
- 5) “The Ever-Seeking Pharisee” — they were named because of the meticulous record keeping of their good deeds in order to determine how much reward God owed them.
- 6) “The Fearing Pharisee” — they had terror over the prospect of hell thus motivating everything they did in order to avoid hell.
- 7) “The God Fearing Pharisee” — they were those whose lives were motivated out of genuine love for God and a desire to please Him.  
The Pharisees believed and taught that it was by righteous acts of works that one could attain heaven and salvation. Their doctrine hardly dealt with the grace of God.

The Pharisees were the Lord’s most strident critics and who wanted Him killed.  
But Nicodemus was most likely the “God Fearing” Pharisee, who warmed up to Jesus.

So Nicodemus goes to Jesus at night, perhaps for fear of been seen with this radical Rabbi Jesus.  
But Nicodemus sees Jesus as a teacher marked with extraordinary power.  
Nicodemus was the best kind of person that religion, education, and culture could produce and yet his spiritual state was empty and in dire need.

The ground is cut from beneath those who think that noble birth, moral and religious training; knowledge of biblical doctrines and faithful attendance to religious duties, can gain a person entrance into heaven. Nicodemus had all of that but Jesus challenges him in the most important area of his life.

Jesus says to him, “*Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again*” (John 3:3). The strangest thing happens after Jesus makes that declaration of truth to Nicodemus. Nicodemus doesn’t get it. He doesn’t understand what Jesus is telling him.

He asks, “*How can someone be born when they are old?*” ... “*Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!*” (John 3:4).

-Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying, even though he was a very religious man and well versed in the Old Testament. Actually there are some Old Testament references to the new birth or regeneration.

Ez. 36:26-27 “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

The problem with Nicodemus and other religious or non-religious people is that they are blind to spiritual truths and they cannot understand it.

1 Cor. 2:14 says, “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God...he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Nicodemus didn't discern because he didn't have the Spirit.

Jesus clarifies and says, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:5-6).

### **Water – Washing**

**1 Cor. 6:11** “...But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

**Titus 3:5-6** “He saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior...”

Baptism symbolizes this – the washing away of sin, the sanctification. Every human being needs to be cleansed and purified from sin.

**Sin is:** Humans asserting themselves against their Creator, God. It's missing God's standard and mark. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Our spirit is dead toward God. We are guilty of wrong doing and we have offended God by failing to live according to His standard and will.

Mark Twain said that the two most important words in the English language are: “NOT GUILTY.”

Example: It's like a thief who breaks into a bank and steals a significant amount of money stored in a container. When he opens the container a dye bomb explodes all over the money, his face and hands. Apparently this dye could only be removed with a certain solvent. Later the police will be able to catch him since he wore the evidence all over his face and hands.

We too have the stain of sin all over us and we are guilty. We need to be cleansed and the only way is through the new birth, the regeneration of our lives.

### **What the New Birth Does For Me:**

#### **1. Makes Me Right & Acceptable Before God**

-I have peace with God and reconciled to Him in a perfect relationship.

-I have direct access to God because I am made acceptable by Him, I'm justified, made right.

Rom. 5:1 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

#### **2. Saves Me from the Penalty of Death**

-Once death lived in me now it is taken away. I'm not going to hell!

-Rom. 8:1 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

### **3. I Have an Eternal Destiny**

-I'm going to live with God forever.

-Jesus said, "*I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*" (John 3:3)

### **4. I Have a New Conflict**

-A new struggle, spiritual warfare, the tug of war between the sinful nature and the Spirit.

-You begin to resist the devil, and your old life of sin

-You become aware that your old life needs to change: the swearing, cheating, dishonesty, evil desires

- You may lose worldly friends and even family.

Ephesians 6:12, "*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*"

### **5. Gives Me a New Start on Life**

I'm not under the burden and slavery of sin. I don't need to carry my sin no more. I'm free! A fresh start on life. "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come*" (2 Cor. 5:17)

The joy of sins forgiven! No more heavy guilty conscience. No more post-conviction no salvation blues!! I have meaning and purpose in life! My life is secure. I'm in God's hands! AND that folks all starts with God extending His GRACE to us through Christ.