

August 31 & September 1, 2024

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## Will You Go to Homecoming with Me?

### Seekers Welcome

John 3:1-15

Pastor Dan Nordin

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A very proper lady began planning a week's camping vacation for her and her Baptist Church group. She wrote to a campground for reservations. She wanted to make sure that the campground was fully equipped and modern, but couldn't bring herself to write the word "toilet" in her letter. So, she decided on the old-fashioned term "Bathroom Commode." Once written down she still was not comfortable. Finally, she decided on the abbreviation "B.C." and wrote, "does your campground have its own "B.C.?"

When the campground owner received the letter, he couldn't figure out what she meant by "B.C." He showed it to several of the campers, one of whom suggested the lady was obviously referring to a Baptist Church since there was a letterhead on the paper which referred to a Baptist Church.

So, he sent this reply:

Dear Madam:

The B.C. is located nine miles from the campground in a beautiful grove of trees. I admit it is quite a distance if you are in the habit of going regularly. No doubt you will be pleased to know that it will seat 350 people at one time, and it is open on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday of each week. Some folks like to take their lunch and make a day of it. The acoustics are very good, so everyone can hear even the quietest passages.

It may interest you to know that my daughter met her husband there. We are also having a fundraiser to purchase new seats, as the old ones have holes in them. Unfortunately, my wife is ill and has not been able to attend regularly. It has been a good six months since she last went. It pains her

very much not to be able to go more often. As we grow older, it seems to be more of an effort, especially in cold weather.

Perhaps I could accompany you the first time you go, sit with you, and introduce you to all the other folks who will be there.

Sincerely Yours,  
John Higgenbottom

### It was like they were speaking two different languages.

We continue our series, "Will you come with me to Homecoming?" How we communicate the invitation is very important.

### Nicodemus and his Nocturnal Visit

He was more than curious. There was something about the message Jesus was proclaiming that appealed to him. But would he dare approach Jesus publicly with his questions? Listen as we hear the writer of John's Gospel describe how Nicodemus approached Jesus with his questions:

*3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." 3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."<sup>[b]</sup> 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.<sup>[c]</sup> 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You<sup>[d]</sup> must be born from above.'<sup>[e]</sup> 8 The wind<sup>[f]</sup> blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, 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?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

<sup>11</sup> "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you<sup>[a]</sup> do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.<sup>[c]</sup> (John 3:1-15)

Nicodemus was a pharisee. His role was to interpret what the law given by Moses in the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) was saying and then remind the people of his day how to live it out in their everyday life.

Nicodemus was a "rule keeper". Life was lived by keeping a "score card" ... and when you didn't do it right, you were given a demotion, or condemnation.

Nicodemus lived a life speaking the Language of "do's and don'ts", Gooding things right and when not done properly, you are judged.

"Rule keepers" define our spiritual life by what we do, our behavior, and in so doing "rule keepers" are very clear about the way others are doing it right or wrong. In other words, when we define our faith by the "Score card method" of our behavior (what we do or don't do), we tend to be rather judgmental... of our selves and others as well. That seems to be the way Score-Card believers live out their lives.

Maybe some of us have been raised with this kind of thinking and spiritual life?

But This "Rule Keeping" way of understanding our faith in God leaves us lacking. In fact it leaves us empty and unhappy.

That leads us to Nicodemus and his visit of Jesus. HE wanted to understand more about what he was hearing Jesus say about this New Language of Spiritual life.

### Visit at Night?

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Wonder why? Maybe he was too busy with his day jobs. He was also on the Sanhedrin, The highest Jewish Court. Nick was a busy guy.

But most likely it wasn't his schedule; it was his fear of being seen by others when he went to hear more about Jesus and his teachings.

Remember Nicodemus was surrounded with Scorecard, judgmental thinkers. What would they think of a pharisee, a member of the High Jewish court asking Jesus more about what he has heard him say?

Nicodemus could be said to be "seeker" of what Jesus offered his followers.

### Born Again, from Born Above or Born Anew

Nicodemus acknowledged that there is something divine about the work and message Jesus was sharing. But Jesus said, the only way you will truly understand the life I have come to share is for you to be "Born Again."

Now that sent Nicodemus for a spin. Born Again? Physically going back into my mother's womb?

So what is this "Born Again Business" anyway? Three ways to understand this Greek phrase, "Anagennao" **1. Born again, 2. Born from above or 3. Born a new.**

Some have understood this as **an event**. A specific time and event when a person comes to faith. But the scriptures speak of being being "Born again" as a lifestyle or a "way of life" that **continually** unwraps the **ongoing gifts of God in Christ**.

**This "New Birth" is not Something you Can Understand on your Own**

Jesus Said to Nicodemus:

The wind<sup>[f]</sup> blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Jesus hits Nicodemus with another radical claim. “Nicodemus, do you know where the wind comes from or where it goes? Nic, can you understand and in any way give guidance to the wind? **No you cannot.**

The word “Wind” in Greek (pneuma) is also used for “the spirit”. In other Words, Nicodemus this may be very hard concept for you to grasp.

**But you will never fully understand or be able to come to a meaningful faith on your own.** Only by God’s work, the Wind of the Spirit, will you come to a faith that unwraps this New Birth in Christ.

### **The New Birth is like learning a New Language**

Jesus is really saying to Nicodemus, **Understanding the kingdom of God requires a new language;** Not the Old way of religious language that is based on the **Scorebook means of measuring being good or bad.**

This new birth is discovered not in the old language of the law and rules of right behavior. No Nic, It is discovered in the new and radical **language of GIFT and LOVE. And you will never understand it on your own.**

### **The Old Language vs the New Language**

WE know how to work for what we get. **WE study hard...** we get good grades. **We Work Hard...** and we earn an income. The default button for most of life is “It is up to you”. Grades and an income are not given to you.... In the words of an old-time Smith Barney Ad, **We make money the old fashioned way, we earn it.”**

Jesus said to Nicodemus, you will NEVER understand the new Kingdom I have brought to earth by earning it..... It is discovered only as a gift

(Grace) as the Spirit blows into your life without any of your doing.

The New Birth of Jesus is not our doing... it is total gift of Grace. The Good News is that this New Birth of faith comes as a gift even to rascals and “little dickens”, people who are Like Pastor Dan.

Story of the pastor walking downtown when a person who approached him and said, Pastor, I could never be a member of your church. I know what your members do from Monday-Saturday. No, your church is “FULL OF HYPOCRYTES”. Pastor Responds, No you are so wrong, Our church is not FULL of hypocrites, there is always room for one more.”

Nicodemus, The new language of Faith is a gift we call grace. God Welcomes you just as you are!!!!

### **The Language of LOVE**

Nicodemus was nurtured with the perception of a God who was a harsh disciplinarian, who will always hold you to account for your misdoings.

But Jesus said, “Nicodemus, it is only when you have discovered the **syntax and grammar of the Radical language of “Love”** that you will understand the new birth.

Raised on a farm in Lake Lillian. WE baled hay and filled silo with our neighbors, the Hopmans. Jerry Hopman was a kind man. Could fix anything. But no one could swear more often per sentence than Jerry. I wanted to count the times he would let out a cuss word.

Dad did not swear often except for an occasional explicative. I asked Dad one time, “Doesn’t Jerry foul mouth bother you”. He said, “No it doesn’t. You see Jerry is my friend.”

Dad’s love and appreciation of Jerry as a friend, overlooked his behavior.

That is the grammar and syntax of the **language of Love.** The language of a God who knows us as we are, imperfect though me may be and this God call

us his “Beloved”, “The Apple of his Eye”, and through the prophet Isaiah says, “You are precious, honored and I love you.” In this Language of Love we are Born Again!

**AA members are welcome here!**

**This New Language of Love is what we desire Others to discover. That is why we invite them to join us in this homecoming at Prince of Peace.”**

I have many friends who are in AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). Some of them don't feel comfortable in many churches. They feel judged. My friends, in recovery, Will you come with me to Homecoming at Prince of Peace? We will Not judge you. Invite you to hear the radical new language of Grace and Love we have discovered in Jesus.

**Seekers are Welcome Here!**

There are many in our community who like Nicodemus who are seeking.... Seeking the Grace and Love of Christ. Seeking the New language of the Re-Birth we know as Grace and Love.

Seekers are always Welcome here at Prince of Peace. Seeking the New Birth that is found not in what you do or don't do .... But in the mind-blowing Promise of Christ.

Tom Bodet said it best in advertising for Motel 6... 35 years ago... **WE will leave the light on for ya.”**

If you are a “seeker” like Nicodemus, you have many questions, and you are not sure if there is a place for you or not at this place called “Prince of Peace“ .... **Well there is a light on here for you! Whoever you are!**

Whether you have never been to church, or you have been hurt by a church years ago, or you are just plain seeking something new in your life , You are ALWAYS welcomed to Prince of Peace. Welcomed as if you are coming back home.

Whether you come to Prince of Peace in the brightness of day or like Nicodemus, with many questions through the back door in the dark of

night... the Invitation is the same or all... Welcome Home and here we will together **learn this language of the New Birth called Love and Grace.**

The Lady got a terribly confusing reply to her question about the camp grounds “Bathroom Commode”. Well here at Prince of peace, We are learning to live into this New Language of Grace and Love. And together we celebrate the New Birth we are given in this Good news that comes from above for us all.

This New birth is celebrated here all year long. Everyone is welcome. **Hypocrites, those of us wounded by memories of the past, Those who like Jerry have a colorful vocabulary,** there is always room for one more here at Prince of Peace.

Every Sunday is Homecoming at Prince of Peace. “Will you come with me? Who can we invite? Together we will bath in the waters of promise in the new birth and together learn the radically new language of Grace and Love. Amen.