

Hello I am Jesus  
The obstetrician  
John 3:1 – 36

If you are new with us, we are at the beginning of a series through the Gospel of John and we are calling it “Hello I am Jesus”.

There are four Gospels in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote their gospels first. They give us a very similar reports of what Jesus said and did, they call them the synoptic gospels. They all wrote about 30 years or so after Jesus’ resurrection, they were eye witness to what happened or were report what eyewitnesses saw. Their primary purpose was to get an accurate account of what Jesus said and did so that future generations would have a reliable record to look back and rely upon.

John writes his gospel about another 30 years after Matthew, Mark, and Luke. A bit of time has passed, by now he’s a seasoned pastor and John thinks, “It’s time for me to write a gospel. But I don’t want to just regurgitate the things that the previous three guys have told you. They’ve all done a very fine job, but I want to tell you something different about Jesus.”

About 90 percent of John’s gospel is unique to John and he spends about two-thirds of his time focusing upon the last week of Jesus’ life. John is not just interested in telling us all of the things Jesus taught and did, John wants us to **know who Jesus is** and, more importantly, **why that matters**. As I mentioned in my opening message a few weeks back; John is the most theological of the four gospel writers, but interestingly enough, he’s the most accessible. I remember being told as a young Christian to read John.

### **A dip with John**

The analogy that is helpful is that the Gospel of John is kind of like a swimming pool. You have the shallow end, the middle, and deep end so that everybody can swim. Everybody can play.

So, if you’re new to this following Jesus business, or maybe you have been away from church a long time and you’re kind of coming back, but you’re not quite sure, you’re just sticking your toe in – well there’s a shallow end for you to kind of gradually get in and receive some things from the Gospel of John that will help you progress in your understanding of who Jesus is.

If you've been around the church for a while and you think you have been there and done that, John is the gospel for you, because John will say, "but wait there is more! You don't know it all, you actually need to go deeper, you need to grow in maturity." That's what we come to in John 3. In John chapter 3 and John chapter 4, John tells us about two extended conversations that Jesus has with a couple of people who couldn't have been more different.

Next week in John 4, we're going to look at a conversation Jesus has with a young lady who has had a bunch of broken relationships, she's sort of an outcast in society, and she's thirsting for something and she just can't seem to quench that emotional and spiritual thirst.

But today, Jesus sits down with an old, wealthy, religious man. These two in these two chapters are like chalk and cheese, yet their needs were both the same.

### **Nicodemus**

So today we look at a conversation that Jesus had with a bloke called Nicodemus. Nicodemus would have been a guy who said, "Yeah, I'm in the deep end. I'm doing somersaults off of the diving board. There isn't anything you can teach me. I've got this religion stuff sorted." But Jesus is going to stop him in his tracks and say, "Think again."

So let's start in verse 1 of John 3.

*There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. <sup>2</sup> After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."*

*<sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."*

*<sup>4</sup> "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"*

So, Nicodemus is a Pharisee which is a religious group. Not only was he a Pharisee, Nicodemus was a part of an elite group of Pharisees known as the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin was a significant power group in the culture, they weren't running the country, but they had significant influence. It probably meant that

he was older and well established financially. It also meant that he was a theologian. He would have been an expert in Judaism, an expert in the Old Testament law.

Those of us who grew up in the church – this is true for me – we’ve got it ingrained into our thinking that Pharisees were the bad guys. And I would say that a good amount of the time that’s probably the case. But I don’t know if that would be entirely fair to pin that on Nicodemus. I’m not sure that he was a bad guy.

### **Who is this Jesus?**

So he comes to Jesus. It’s hard to tell the tone of what Nicodemus says but he might have been a little bit condescending at first. He might be thinking, “Jesus is just a young man. He’s not going to teach me anything. I might be able to encourage him a bit, get him heading in the right direction, keep his feet on the ground.”

But we also notice what he calls Jesus when he first meets Him? He calls Him Rabbi. That’s a term of great honour, especially for an older man to say that to a younger man. But we know with hindsight Jesus has been identified the Word, the Logos, the Messiah, the Lamb of God – those are much more significant terms than Rabbi. So, while Rabbi is definitely a term of great honour, in other ways rabbi it is terribly insufficient.

So this kind of gives us an indication of how Nicodemus sees Jesus. He respects Him. I think this is what he is saying. He’s coming to Jesus and he’s saying, “Hey, Jesus. You’ve got the Sanhedrin’s attention. You’ve grabbed the attention of us older guys. And we agree you’ve got some skills. God is doing some stuff through you.” Maybe Nicodemus is thinking, “Hey, Why don’t you come play ball with us? Why don’t you come join our team and we’ll really take this raw skill and ability that you have and we’ll help develop it.”

### **Born Again**

Now I am sure this isn’t a record of the full conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus but eventually Jesus makes this deeply profound comment in v 3.

*Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.*

It’s passages like this that make me wish that we had video. It makes me wish that we could have seen the look on Nicodemus’ face and heard the tone of his voice in his reply. This would help us to understand what’s going on here.

I wonder if Nicodemus had a bit of a smirk on his face, “Oh, I know what you’re doing Mr ‘Skilled Teacher’, you’re speaking in riddles. I’ll play. I’ll go along with this. v4

*“How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”*

That’s just nonsense.”

Jesus doesn’t even crack a smile. Jesus looks right back at him, and says “Nick you’re not listening”.

*<sup>5</sup> Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. <sup>7</sup> So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”*

There is much debate about the specifics of what Jesus might be saying here. Maybe it is one of those “you had to be there” moments? But just because we can’t dot all the i’s and cross all the t’s doesn’t mean that we can’t grasp the overarching meaning.

Jesus uses metaphors like water and wind and our minds jump into action. What do you mean by water? Is that baptism? What do you mean by spirit? Are they two separate things? And we start having all of these debates.

And that is all well and good, but meanwhile if we are not careful we can analyse it so much we end up missing the simple meaning. The simple meaning of what Jesus said is that **in order for somebody to enter in the kingdom of God, a Christian, they have to experience spiritual birth.**

In verse 9, Nicodemus asks what some of us might want to ask,

*<sup>9</sup> “How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked.*

*<sup>10</sup> Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? <sup>11</sup> I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. <sup>12</sup> But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ever gone to*

*heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.*

That bit that Jesus just mentioned there at the end (v14-15) – this whole Moses and the snake thing – sounds very, very strange. But, Nicodemus would have known exactly what He was talking about because Nicodemus was an expert in the Old Testament Scripture.

Jesus is referring to a situation recorded in Numbers 21 where the Israelites are wandering around the wilderness, grumbling and complaining against God, “God, where are You? We are in the desert, we are thirsty and we are sick of that food you keep providing regularly for us, we were better off as slaves of Pharaoh” And in the midst of their whingeing there was this infestation of poisonous snakes that were killing the people. Eventually the people repented of their whingeing and cried out to God, so God told Moses “Make a snake out of Bronze and place it on top of a pole and anyone who is bitten can look at the snake on the pole and will be healed.

If you are thinking this sounds strange, you would be right, but you have to have faith to do it, faith in God. And so they lifted up their eyes and they were healed. Very, very strange and it doesn’t make any sense until you get to Jesus. And Jesus says, <sup>14</sup> *And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.* This is why you need to read the whole bible not just bits and pieces.

That leads us in to the most familiar passage in the Bible. John 3:16.

Even if you don’t know anything about the Bible you probably know this verse, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes in Him will have eternal life.”* It’s a great passage, but most of the time when we read it, it is divorced from what Jesus just said to Nicodemus. You can’t do that. These two things go together.

You may be thinking Brian this is all very technical, what does this mean for me?

What Jesus is doing in this passage is explaining to a very religious man what it means to have relationship with God. Don’t miss the irony of what I just said. Nicodemus was the religious elite. There were no more rungs on the ladder for

him to climb. There was no more knowledge for him to acquire. He was a teacher of teachers. He knew it all.

He had it all together, and Jesus sits down with him and says, “No, you don’t have it all together. To enter into the Kingdom of God, it’s not like you do 85 percent of the hard work and then God comes along and gives you a leg up of 15 percent and then you’re in! Nicodemus, you’ve actually got to start over, go back to zero, you have got to be born again.”

We are only looking at chapter 3 today but in some ways we need to look at chapter 4 too – Rory is doing that next week.

Here’s the fascinating thing. When Jesus speaks to the woman at the well next week, He uses the metaphor of water there as well; Jesus talks about living water and never thirsting. But the interesting thing is that He doesn’t tell her to be born again. It’s not that she doesn’t need to be born again. It’s just that He doesn’t choose to use that terminology with her.

But He does with an old, wealthy, religious man. Why do you think that is? It’s because it was his religious pride that was keeping him out of the Kingdom. His religiosity was keeping him separated from God. And Jesus said, “You have to deal with that. You have to humble yourself to the point that you let go of all of your religious accomplishments, let go of what you think you know, and be born again.”

Sadly the term ‘born again’ has been misused so much in Christian circles, in the states it has almost become a Christian political term, used to judge people of whether they are in or out. In NZ a meaningless label of spiritual elitism of a by gone era.

Yet, I can’t get away from the fact that Jesus is the one who originally used the term. And, if Jesus used the term, I have to be good with it. And so what we need to do is we need to remove the ‘baggage’ and get back to what Jesus meant by it.

So what did Jesus mean by it? Well, Jesus is saying to us – every single person in this room finds themselves on a scale between Nicodemus and the woman at the well.

On one side - you might look as though you have it all, you are secure in who you are, and you’ve been in church a long time. In fact when I mentioned that we were going to be looking at John 3 you may have thought, “I don’t think

there is anything new that you can teach me. I've heard this text a lot of times. I know what it means, yes I been born again back in 19 whenever, ticked that box." Just like Nicodemus.

And on the other side - some of you will identify with the woman at the well; hurt, broken, feeling like I'm not even sure I should be here.

And then everyone else is somewhere in between. And actually honestly we're all broken. We're all a mess.

And Jesus says to the guy who has it all together or who at least thinks he does, "Think again. You don't. I don't care what you know, Nicodemus. I don't care who you hang out with. I don't care about your position in the church. You have to be willing to humble yourself, take up your cross, follow me – which means for you, start over. Be born again."

### **The end of the story**

Here's the thing that drives me nuts about this passage. There doesn't seem to be any closure. The story leaves us hanging. I wish Nicodemus would have said, "Oh, You truly are the Son of God, I believe that you are the Christ the Son of the Living God. Let's go get baptized. I'm in." He doesn't do that – there's just silence.

I think that Jesus had knocked the spiritual wind out of this guy and he was humbled to the core. And I think he was just like, "I see." I think he walked away in silence. But here's the thing. John mentions him two more times in his gospel, in John 7 and John 19.

- In John 7 Nicodemus defends Jesus to his colleagues and the Pharisees mock him.
- In John 19 there were two men who took Jesus' lifeless body off of the cross, prepared it for burial, and put Him in a borrowed tomb, Joseph of Arimathea and our boy Nicodemus.

Salvation – being born again – is a process. Just like being born the first time from conception to birth.

Talk about my conversion experience

- Christian family
- Age 12
- Age 16 at school

- Age 19 baptism
- Age 24 at BCNZ
- Age....

### How do I know if I've been born again?

So here are two questions I just want to leave you with in answer to, "How do I know if I've been born again?"

1. Here's the first question to ask yourself: **Has the nature of my heart been changed?** Ever since the fall, (yes Adam and Eve) every single one of us has a natural tendency to run from the presence of God rather than to run to Him. Do you have affection for Jesus Christ or are you trying to run from Him? "Nature of your heart" is about attitude, it is about direction, it's about desires – not about rules or knowledge or ticking boxes.
2. Here's the second question, **"Am I growing?"**  
It's very simple. The only sign of life is growth. And religion says, "Go to church. Be patient. Be generous. Serve. You'll get saved." The gospel says you're saved by what Jesus has done for you therefore you'll grow less selfish, you'll grow more patient, you'll grow, simultaneously, more confident and humble. You're just very naturally becoming a generous person. These are the fruit. This is the fruit that you are bearing because you changed the root.

So, let me just leave you with this. Jesus is not interested at all in redecorating your heart. He wants to completely change it. Nobody has been saved through moral reformation – being good. You can't be reformed. You have to be transformed. And so today, wherever you are on that scale – Nicodemus, woman at the well, everywhere in between – will you be willing to just come and say, "I surrender. I'll start over. I'll get to the root. Would you change my heart so that there might be a different kind of fruit that will be yielded from it?"

Communion.