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June memory verse **Isaiah 26:3 (NKJV)**

You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.*

Commentary on John Chapter 3, by Chuck Smith

6/10/2020

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews ([Jhn 3:1](#)).

We know a few things about him; we know that he must have been very wealthy, for he came with Joseph of Arimathea to embalm the body of Jesus after the crucifixion. And he brought these costly spices, about a hundred pounds, that only a very wealthy person could afford. A ruler of the Jews means that he was one of the seventy Sanhedrin, and, according to Jesus, he was a teacher of the Jews. He said, "Art thou a teacher of the Jews and knowest not these things?"

Finally, he was a Pharisee. The Pharisees numbered about six thousand men who had dedicated their entire life to keeping the codified law. They recognized that the first five books of the Old Testament were God's inspired Word to man. Now, the scribes had sought to interpret those first five books and their codifying of the law, and this was called the Mishna. Now, for instance, the law said, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." But in the Mishna there were twenty-four chapters written to qualify what that meant. Now, God said it very simply, just, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. And in six days you should do your labor, and the seventh day you shall rest and not do any labor on that day." But it took them twenty-four chapters to constitute what it meant and what the limitations and all were, the Mishna.

Now, the Pharisees sought to keep the whole Mishna, the codified law, or the explanations in the writings in the codified law. Now, on top of the Mishna, they then wrote the Talmud, which was a commentary on the Mishna. And so, the things just continued to expand and expand. But the Pharisee was one who sought, and the primary purpose of his life was the keeping of the codified law.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews:

He came to Jesus at night ([Jhn 3:2](#)),

Now, if anyone had it made by works or by the law, it would have been Nicodemus. If anyone could present their righteous credentials before God, it would be a Pharisee. They spent their entire life endeavoring to keep every aspect of God's holy law. If there were righteousness through the law, then the Pharisees surely would have achieved it. If a man could be righteous before God by his works, then surely the Pharisees would be accounted righteous. If there was anybody who didn't need to be born again, it would have been the Pharisees.

But though he was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, a teacher, he was drawn to Jesus, much like perhaps that rich young ruler who came to Jesus and fell on his knees before Him and said, "Good Master, what must I do to have eternal life, or to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said, "Keep the commandments." And he said, "Which?" And as Jesus rattled off for him the first six commandments, or the second six actually, he said, "All of these have I kept for my youth, what lack I yet?" There was a realization that just the keeping of the law was not enough. There must be something more. Evidently, Nicodemus had this same awareness: there must be something more! Recognizing in Jesus a special quality, recognizing a special mission.

for he said to Jesus, Rabbi [Master], we know that thou art a teacher who has come from God ([Jhn 3:2](#)):

He recognized, though the other Pharisees did not recognize, he did recognize the divine authority by which Jesus spake. "We know that you are a teacher that has come from God,"

for no man can do these miracles which you do, except God be with him ([Jhn 3:2](#)).

So, he had made this acknowledgement and had this recognition that was not acknowledged by the other Pharisees. And yet was a tremendous witness and testimony to Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself called His disciples to believe because of the witness of His works. He said, "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake" ([John 14:11](#)). Again He said, "My works, they do testify of Me" ([John 5:36](#)). Nicodemus acknowledged this, "We know that You're a teacher come from God, because no man can do the miracles that You have done unless God was with him."

Now Jesus knew all things and He knew what was in the heart of Nicodemus and He knew foremost in the man's heart was, "How can I enter into this kingdom of God?" And so Jesus came directly to the issue that was upon the heart of Nicodemus, and He said unto him,

I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ([Jhn 3:3](#)).

Now Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said to His disciples, "Except your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" ([Matthew 5:20](#)).

Now, as I said, the Pharisees spent their entire life endeavoring to keep the codified law of God, not just the Ten Commandments, but all of the Mishna, the codified law by which the Ten Commandments were explained and amplified and interpreted. And yet, Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you're not going to enter the kingdom of heaven." Now He is saying to this Pharisee, the ruler of the Jews, "Unless a man is born again, he cannot enter, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

So Nicodemus said, How can a man be born again when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? And Jesus answered, Verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. For that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of Spirit is spirit ([Jhn 3:4-6](#)).

Now Nicodemus was interested in being born again, but the process, "How can it happen? There's no way that I can return to my mother's womb and be born again." And I do not believe that he was being facetious, I think that he was just really curious as to, "What do you mean, born again?" And then Jesus said, "Unless a man is born of the water and of the Spirit." Now, what does He mean water and Spirit? We know what it is to be born of the Spirit. What is He referring to being born of the water? There are those who declare that He is talking about water baptism. Unless you have been baptized in water, you're not going to see the kingdom of heaven, and that born of the water refers to water baptism.

I do not believe that Jesus is referring to water baptism here, because I believe that there are people who have gone through the ritual of water baptism who are not going to see the kingdom of heaven. It was only a ritual.

There are those who say the water refers to the Word of God. As Peter in his first epistle, chapter I, verse 23, said that we've been "begotten unto this living hope through the Word of truth." And so, we've been born again through the Word of God. And Jesus said in John 15, "Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you." And so it is being born of the Word of God. And, the theological giants have taken their positions and there are those who say water baptism and those who say born through the Word God, and they write their commentaries and their ideas and thoughts and blast each other's ideas.

But, it would seem to me that being born of the water would be a reference to our natural birth, as the fetus is in that water sac being protected, and then there is the water bursting and the child is born. To be born of the water would refer to the natural birth, because in context then, Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, but that which born of the Spirit is spirit." And so, He's talking about the two births: born of

the water, and born of the Spirit. And that the born of the Spirit is referring to the new birth, the spiritual birth that we have, where born of the water would refer to the fleshly birth.

If you want to believe that it refers to water baptism, you're welcome. If you want to believe that it is referring to being born by the Word of God, you're welcome. And if you want to believe it is being born of the flesh, you're welcome. You can take whatever position you want and it's not going to alter your relationship with God one iota. But there are these positions that people take, and sometimes they get very argumentative with them, but I have no argument.

We do know that that which is born of the flesh is flesh. You were born once, naturally, of the flesh. You are not a child of God by natural birth, you are a child of God by the spiritual birth. Paul the apostle, talking about your life before Christ, said, "And you, hath He made alive, who were once dead in trespasses and sins; who in times past walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, that even now works in the children of disobedience: among whom you all once lived, according to the lust of your mind, and the lust of your flesh; and you were by nature the children of wrath" ([Ephesians 2:1-3](#)) Not the children of God, the children of wrath. It is only by a new birth that I become a child of God.

So that which is born of the flesh is flesh. A person apart from the new birth lives a life that is dominated by his fleshly desires. His body rules over his soul and spirit. In fact, his spirit is dead. That's what comes alive when a person is born again, the spiritual birth, that is when my spirit comes alive. Prior to that, I am living in the flesh and after the flesh, and my mind is dominated by the flesh, and thus, I have what the scripture terms *the mind of the flesh*, which is death. My chief concern is what I'm going to eat, what I'm going to drink, what I'm going to wear. My fleshly needs, my body needs. These are the things that occupy my mind.

But when a person is born of the Spirit, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Then, the spirit becomes alive and begins to rule within my life, and now my mind is occupied with the things of the Spirit, with how I might please God, in the worship of God, in the opening up of my life and my heart unto the things of God and of His Spirit, and these are the things that now dominate my mind. A mind dominated by the Spirit is called the mind of the Spirit, which is life and peace and joy.

So Jesus said,

Don't marvel when I said, you must be born again ([Jhn 3:7](#)).

The word *must*, is one of those words you've got to pay careful attention to, because there, you're coming to the heart of the issue when a person says, "I must." When God said, "You must," it is something you need to pay careful heed to, and He said, "You must be born again." There is no one who will enter the kingdom of heaven who is not born again. He's talking about if you want to come into the kingdom of heaven, you must

be born again. You cannot come into the kingdom apart from being born again. God's divine imperative for any man who will come into the kingdom is that spiritual birth, you must be born the second time, born of the Spirit of God.

In the first chapter of the gospel of John we read, "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" ([John 1:12-13](#)). Born again by the Spirit of God.

Now, the wind bloweth where it listeth, and you hear the sound thereof, but you cannot tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit ([Jhn 3:8](#)).

There is that mysterious working of God's Spirit within our lives and we cannot fully comprehend it or understand it, we just know it. We can see the effects of it. My mother used to ask me when I was a child, "Can you see the wind?" And I said, "Oh, yes, I can see the wind." She said, "No, you can't." "Oh, yes, I can, I can see it out there. Look, it's blowing the dust." She said, "You're seeing the results of the wind. You don't see the wind." I can see the results of the Spirit. I believe it, I know that the Spirit exists. I have never seen Him, but I can feel His effect upon my life, it's very real. I can see His effects in the lives of those around me, it is very obvious. And so are they who are born of the Spirit, there is that mystic work of God's Spirit that I can recognize, I can feel, I can see that work of God's Spirit within me.

Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? ([Jhn 3:9](#))

Now, he has asked two questions. Number one: "How can a man be born again?" and then, "How can these things be?" Jesus doesn't immediately answer the question, but chides him now.

He said, Are you a teacher of Israel, and don't you know these things? Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am speaking of those things that I know, and I am testifying of those things that I have seen; and you do not receive my witness. If I have talked to you about earthly things, and you did not believe, how will you believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? ([Jhn 3:10-12](#))

"If I can't bring to your understanding a faith in these earthly things, how can I ever elevate you to a higher place? You're a teacher, you ought to know these things?" Now He then turned and answered the question, "How can these things be? How can I be born again?" Having chided him for his not believing, not receiving the witness that Jesus said I know is true.

He then said to him,

For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up ([Jhn 3:14](#)).

Here Jesus is talking about His cross. Notice again the word *must*. "Even so must the Son of man be lifted up." If there is to be the possibility of redemption, if there is to be an experience of being born again, it can only be by the Son of man being crucified, so must the Son of man be lifted up. He uses a very interesting example out of their history in the Old Testament found in Numbers 21, where the children of Israel, after their failure to enter into the land, and Moses began to take the route around towards Edom up through Moab and Ammon, coming into the land from the east, the people began to murmur and complain against Moses, saying, "Why did you bring us into this wilderness to die, where there is no bread or water, and our souls loathe this manna? We're sick of it."

And the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people of Israel, and God sent these little serpents into the camp, fiery serpents, deadly serpents. They began to bite the people and the people began to die as a result of the bites. And they came to Moses and they said, "We have sinned against you and against the Lord by our murmuring. Pray unto God for us that we might be delivered from this plague of serpents." And Moses prayed unto the Lord and the Lord told him to make a serpent out of brass and to put it on a pole, and to stand it up in the middle of the camp. And it shall come to pass that whenever a man is bitten by one of these fiery serpents, if he will just look at the pole in the middle of the camp, he will be healed, he will live. And so Moses made a serpent of brass, put it on a pole, set it up in the middle of the camp; and it came to pass that whosoever was bitten by this serpent, when they looked upon that serpent on the pole, they were healed, they did not die. Therein you find the basis for that little symbol that the doctors use, the serpent on the pole, for healing. But brass in the scripture is always a metal that is symbolic of judgment, and the serpent is always symbolic of sin. So, the brass serpent on the pole was a symbol that God had judged their sins. And by looking at that, they were healed. They did not die.

Now, this is an interesting provision that God made, and by what process looking upon the serpent could save a person's life. You know, there's no physical or scientific explanation for this. It was just God's covenant! God's provision. And He said, "All you have to do is look and you will live." Now, I can imagine that there were some hard heads there in Israel, lying on the ground convulsing as a result of the snakebite, about to die. And their friends say, "Hey, in the middle of the camp Moses set up that pole of the brass serpent. Just look at it and you'll be healed." "Don't tell me that, man, that's ridiculous. I can't make sense out of that. How can looking at that do anything for me? Don't you see, I'm dying, man! I need help!" "Yah, but just look!" "Ah, come on, how can that help?" And I can see him arguing and dying because he can't understand how looking would help.

People are foolish. Unless they can understand all the processes by which God is working, they won't accept it. I can't explain to you how that believing in Jesus Christ can cleanse you of your sin and cause you to be born again and become a child of God. All I can tell you is it will. It works. That's what God has ordained. Jesus, hanging on the cross, was bearing the judgment of God for your sins. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we turn, everyone of us, to our own ways. And God has laid on Him the iniquities

of us all" ([Isaiah 53:6](#)). "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up. " And Jesus, hanging there on the cross, was there taking the judgment of God for sin, dying for our sins, dying in our place. And even as those in the days of Israel looked at the serpent and lived, so we, by looking at the cross in faith and in trusting in Jesus, live. We have eternal life. And so, it was quite an interesting parallel, symbolism that God had established.

How can a man be born again? How can these things be? They are the result of simply believing in Jesus Christ.

That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life ([Jhn 3:15](#)).

God's provisions given to us through faith. Like the wind, you may see the effects, you may see the results and feel the effects; though it's a mystery, you can't tell whence it comes or where it's going, so is that man born of the Spirit. The process is of God's Spirit; we can't fully understand, we just know they exist.

How can a man be born again? How can these things be?

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ([Jhn 3:16](#)).

Again, the key is believing in Jesus. That's the provision that God has required for those to be born again. You are born again when you, by faith, believe in Jesus Christ, that He bore God's judgment for your sins in His death upon the cross, and you receive Him into your life. You are then born again by the Spirit of God and have become now a new creature in Jesus Christ, a son of God, a child of the King. Believing in Him, that is the key.

Then Jesus went on to declare to Nicodemus,

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved ([Jhn 3:17](#)).

I do not know why we always seem to picture Christ as condemning us. Well, I guess it's because we're so guilty all the time. But we always are thinking of Him in that posture of condemning. "You," you know, "you're doing it again!" And we're always thinking of Him in that posture of condemning. But Paul the apostle asked the rhetorical question in [Romans 8](#), "Who is he that condemneth?" And then he answers, "Not Jesus! For He died for us; ye, rather is risen again and is even at the right hand of the Father making intercession." God didn't send Him into the world to condemn the world. Jesus hasn't come to condemn you. Jesus has come to save you. "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." He didn't need to come to condemn, because the world is already condemned.

Now,

He that believeth in him is not condemned ([Jhn 3:18](#)):

Oh, did you hear that? Do you believe that? "He that believeth in Him is not condemned." What a glorious message of God's grace to us tonight! That ought to thrill your soul beyond measure! "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who believe in Jesus Christ" ([Romans 8:1](#)). Isn't that what it says? Do you believe it? Why is it that we are always going around condemning ourselves? Why is it that we are always going around feeling so defeated and so discouraged, when there is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus? For he that believeth in Him 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 ([Jhn 3:18](#)).

What is His name? Yeshua, the Lord is salvation. Jesus came to save. That's what His name implies. "Thou shalt call His name Yeshua, for He shall save His people from their sins" ([Matthew 1:21](#)). He didn't come to condemn, He came to save. His name implies His mission. Jesus declared it plainly. He said, "I have come to seek and to save that which was lost" ([Luke 19:10](#)). Now, "he that believeth not is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

And what is the condemnation?

that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be manifested. But he that doeth the truth comes to the light, that his deeds might be made manifested, that they are wrought in God ([Jhn 3:19-21](#)).

What is the condemnation? That men won't come to the light.

Now, God forbid, but if you will in the future, if you are standing with that throng in [Revelation 20](#) before the great white throne judgment of God, and the books are open, and you are to be judged out of the things written in the books; and when your name is finally called and you have to stand before God naked, open, and God opens the books and the indictment is made against you, there will only be one charge. There's not going to be going down the list of every lie you told or everything you stole or every wrong thought or action or deed you ever had. There's only going to be one indictment: your failure to come to Jesus Christ. He said, "I am the light of the world." Light has come into the world, but men won't come into the light, and that's why they are condemned. "He that believeth not is condemned already." You don't need that Jesus should condemn you, you're already condemned. He didn't come to condemn you. He didn't need to. You already are condemned. But now, the issue is not so much the evil that you have done, but your rejection of the provision, the only provision that God has made whereby men might come to Him. Whereby men might have the forgiveness of their sins. So, there will only be one indictment against man.

Jesus said when the Holy Spirit is come, He's going to reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and judgment. Of sin, because they didn't believe in Me. You see, that's the only sin that's going to damn your soul. Any other thing you may have done is forgiven. Christ died for the sins of the world. God laid upon Him the iniquities of us all. His death satisfied God completely for the sin of all humanity. There's only one charge and indictment that God will make against a man, his failure to come to the light, his failure to receive God's provision.

Now after these things came Jesus and his disciples to the land of Judea ([Jhn 3:22](#));

So, they had come down to the area around Jerusalem.

and he tarried there with his disciples, and baptized ([Jhn 3:22](#)).

So it would seem that the disciples of Jesus were at this time beginning to baptize people.

And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was a lot of water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison. Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and they said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bore witness, behold, the same is baptizing, and all men are coming to him ([Jhn 3:23-26](#)).

So they came to John, and they said, "That one that you bore witness to, you said 'the Lamb of God and all.' He's baptizing now and everyone is going to Him."

And John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it is given to him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Messiah, but that I was sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: and this my joy therefore is fulfilled. For He must increase, and I must decrease ([Jhn 3:27-30](#)).

Beautiful humility of John in taking his rightful place. He said, "You bear witness that I testified of him. Now, look, He's the bridegroom and I'm just the best man. It's the bridegroom that takes the bride. But His best man rejoices when he hears Him. And herein, I rejoice because of the bridegroom's voice, and my joy, therefore, is fulfilled." How? In bringing honor and glory to Jesus. "For He must increase and I must decrease." So say we all!

He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: but he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that is what he testified; and no man received his testimony ([Jhn 3:31-32](#)).

This is pretty much what Jesus said to Nicodemus. "No man has descended into heaven but he which came down from heaven, even the Son of man which was in heaven. And I've told you earthly things and you believe not. How would you believe if I've told you of heavenly things?" So, he speaks of Jesus coming down from heaven, but no man receiving His testimony.

And he that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true ([Jhn 3:33](#)).

When you receive the testimony of Jesus Christ, there is sort of a seal, a stamp in your heart you know that is true. The Spirit of God has born witness to my own heart of the truth of God. There are things I just know are true. You say, "How do you know they are true?" I just know they're true. There is that seal, the Spirit just bears witness to the truth. And you just know it! The oetus, the... just intuitive knowledge.

For he whom God hath sent speaks the words of God: for God did not give to him the Spirit by measure [or just apportioned out] to him ([Jhn 3:34](#)).

But the fullness of the Spirit dwells in Jesus Christ, not just measured out, but that fullness.

And the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son has everlasting life: and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him ([Jhn 3:35-36](#)).

So, this is the final witness of John the Baptist concerning Jesus Christ. He that believeth on the Son has everlasting life. But if you believe not, you have not life. You'll not even see life, but conversely, the wrath of God abides upon you.