

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
Presbyterian Church

“NEW BIRTH”

For individual study or group discussion

When Jesus cleanses the temple at the close of John 2, the temple leadership demand a sign, “*What sign do you show us for doing these things?*” (v. 18). John carries that question directly into chapter 3. In John 3:1–15, Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, approaches Jesus with a similar concern. He acknowledges Jesus as a teacher sent from God, yet his confidence still rests on visible signs rather than spiritual sight. Nicodemus comes seeking confirmation, but Jesus confronts him with transformation. The signs are not enough; what is needed is **new birth**.

The requirement of new birth—you must (vv. 1–3)

Nicodemus comes in the dark because he is still in the dark. He sees the signs, but he cannot see the Kingdom. Instead of affirming Nicodemus’ theological credentials or engaging his curiosity about miracles, Jesus immediately redirects him to ultimate reality: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (v. 3). “*And with that answer,*” Herman Bavinck states, “*he abruptly cut off all human self-effort, all Pharisaic law observance, as the way to the kingdom.*”¹

- Read 1 Peter 2:9–10. Only God can rescue sinners “*out of darkness into his marvelous light.*” What does Jesus’ statement to Nicodemus reveal about the inadequacy of human religion and morality for salvation?

The impossibility of new birth—you can’t (vv. 4–8)

Nicodemus’ response exposes the heart of the problem. He interprets Jesus’ words in purely natural categories: “*How can a man be born when he is old?*” (v. 4). His confusion reveals his spiritual inability to comprehend divine realities. Bavinck clarifies: “*Jesus does not speak of being born a second time, literally anew, but of being born from above. He stresses, not that entry into the kingdom requires a second birth, but wants especially to bring out for Nicodemus that only a birth from above, of water and the Spirit, of the Spirit, admits a person to the kingdom.*”²

- Read John 1:12–13. How are we to understand Jesus’ reference to being born again?
- Read Hebrews 12:22–24 and Romans 6:4. How can believers simultaneously remain in our corporeal bodies yet be spiritually united to the heavenly Jerusalem and walk in newness of life? What does Ephesians 2:19–22 reveal about our present spiritual status?

The remedy for new birth—he must (vv. 9–15)

Nicodemus’ question, “*How can these things be?*” reveals that the new birth lies beyond human capacity or comprehension. The remedy for new birth does not arise from below but descends from the Son of Man above. Jesus anchors new birth with the Old Testament story of the bronze serpent (Numbers 21). The remedy for the Israelites came through looking: trusting God’s provision as the bronze serpent is lifted up. The cross is God’s appointed remedy for spiritual death. Those who look in faith to the crucified and risen Christ receive what they cannot produce themselves: eternal life (v. 15).

- Read Daniel 7:13–14. How does this Old Testament vision of the Son of Man help us understand who Jesus claims to be and the authority he possesses?
- Read Numbers 21:4–9. Discuss how the story of the bronze serpent illuminates the nature of saving faith.

DATE: February 8, 2026

SPEAKER: Brian/Aaron

SERIES: The Gospel of John

PASSAGE: John 3:1–15

Family Dinner Table

Born Again

In his *Confessions*, Augustine describes a life of knowing what is good yet failing to live it. His famous prayer reveals the tension of his divided will: “*Grant me chastity and continence—but not yet.*”³ Augustine demonstrates that knowledge and desire are not enough. He lacks the power to change. Transformation comes when he is acted upon, in a garden, through the *tolle lege* moment, when Scripture illuminates his heart and heals his divided will. Augustine undergoes a new birth.⁴

Like Augustine, Nicodemus seeks life through knowledge and effort. As a “*teacher of Israel,*” he comes to Jesus desiring to understand. But Jesus does not offer Nicodemus the answers he is seeking. Instead, he tells him the truth he needs to hear: “*Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (v. 3). Entrance into the Kingdom of God comes not by effort or insight, but through the Spirit who alone gives life.

- Read Ephesians 2:1–10. In what ways do we sometimes rely on our knowledge, effort, or even church attendance to make us right with God?
- Read 1 John 5:1–12. How do faith and love work together as evidence that the Spirit is at work in us?

PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

RUF International at UTK,
denominational partner ministry

PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Tim & Annette Gulick, *serve Christ’s church by training, mentoring, and developing resources for those who disciple youth and serve their families in the church and the community.*

^{1–2} Herman Bavinck. *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 4*. 2008, Grand Rapids. Baker Academic. 48
^{3–4} Augustine. *Confessions of St. Augustine* 8.7, 8.12., trans: R.S. Pine-Coffin (NY: Penguin Classics, 1961.)