

Slide	Sermon
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2	<p data-bbox="196 264 1498 730">Introduction – I was one that didn't want my football friends, and classmates to know I was going on this trip. I wanted it to be as secret as possible. I just didn't want to be label as a Christian freak! It wasn't at night but it was on Saturday afternoon out of town. A few of my High School youth leaders and others from our fellowship group met and took a van to a school auditorium somewhere around Winston Salem. We were going to a Pentecostal healing and worship service. We wondered what it would be like. This came out of our group discussions on what it meant to be reborn, born from above. Persons that were Pentecostal Holiness who were now our friends, felt we really were not born again because we didn't believe nor worship like they did.</p> <p data-bbox="196 779 1498 1115">The service was already going when we arrived. We all noticed that the women and girls wore dresses and the men all had short hair. My hair was pretty long back then. The preacher was preaching up a storm; loud and breathing heavily. Lots of amen's being shouted from the crowd and many were walking up and down the aisles waving their hands. Some were speaking in tongues I was told, because I had never heard tongue language before! This went on for quite a while. All I really remember is that he was preaching that we were all sinners and needed to repent and be born again.</p> <p data-bbox="196 1163 1498 1415">When the preaching finally finished the service turned to prayer and healing. All of sudden I recall many men standing around the sides of the stage and auditorium holding what looked like blankets about the size of our prayer covers. People who had needs were invited to come forward for the leaders to pray over them for healing. Everyone was praying aloud, still speaking in tongues!.</p> <p data-bbox="196 1463 1498 1965">Some shouted they had been healed! Then as the minster and lay leaders prayed over one man, he suddenly dropped to the floor. The leaders seemed not concerned. They stepped aside to pray for the next person. This time it was a woman. As they prayed over her, she dropped to the floor! In rushed a gentleman with one of those blankets and covered her legs. This went on for awhile. Our group was looking at each other trying to figure what was going on. Finally we gathered that this was a normal part of their worship, being "Slain in the Spirit". I thought to myself, these people are crazy. Anyone can just pretend to be slain. This was just for show to make people feel they were special and that the Holy Spirit was there much like on the day of Pentecost, that they had really been born again. The leaders began to circulate around the auditorium asking people if they wanted to receive healing. I decided that I</p>

	<p>was going to test this being slain in the Spirit. I went to the end of the aisle. My small group looked like I was crazy. When they came by us I stepped out. They didn't ask me any questions but just started praying for me some putting their hands on my head, others arm in arm. Suddenly, like to others, I dropped to the floor! Couldn't control myself although I tried. The prayers moved on and some in my group stood over me looking. Finally, after a few minutes I was able to get up. To this day I do not know what happened. I wasn't a spiritual experience, but definitely something beyond me made my body get weak and I fall. But, I had no desire to worship like that again. I did learn that their idea of being born again was different from mine in experience, but the same in that it has to be a spiritual experience of being at one with God in whatever way it is experienced.</p>
3	<p>In our scripture today, Jesus has a man coming to visit him at night, in secret. This man is Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Why at night. Recall in chapter two Jesus came to Jerusalem during Passover and cleansed the temple and word is out that Jesus is turning everything upside down. He didn't make any friends among the Jewish leadership. Nicodemus doesn't want to be seen talking to the man that the other leaders wanted to arrest and perhaps even kill. Yet it is clear that Jesus made an impact upon Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a respected Jewish leader, teacher and leader of the Law. Yet, it is Jesus who has to inform him of what it means to be born again. True religion is not the ritualism that Nicodemus has taught all his life. In fact, it becomes clear that he really misunderstood what the whole conversation with Jesus was about. Jesus is very frank with him saying, "Are you the ruler of the Jews and you don't understand these things. Then in verse 3 Jesus tells him what true religion is: Truly, Truly (For Real, For Real or Sure enough, Sure enough, the real truth, the real truth) I say to you unless one is born again he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.</p>
4	<p>All throughout the Old Testament history, the Jews longed for the kingdom of God. But problem of the people is that there were various ideas of what qualifies one to enter the Kingdom of God?</p> <p>Jesus says that new birth from above is what qualifies on the enter the Kingdom.</p> <p>In Greek the word translated to born again was a word that meant born from above. Jesus is talking about a spiritual rebirth, not a physical birth. This is what Nicodemus doesn't understand. The confusion is shown in verse 4 as he interprets Jesus literally. "How can a man be born again when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus say no! It must be spiritual rebirth.</p>

	<p>There must be something from heaven that enters into your life that brings you into a relationship with a holy God. This will not come through rituals, religion, nor rule keeping! It will come through a spiritual relationship established between the person and God.</p>
5	<p>vs. 10 Jesus asks, Are you the teacher of Israel and you do not understand these things? Then Jesus gives an illustration from the OT that is still valid today. In Numbers 21:7-9, Jesus tells about the people of God has complained to God and to Moses about being in the wilderness with now water nor food to eat. God punishes them by sending poisonous snakes which begin to bite and kill them. They repent to Moses and God, asking God to do something to save them, again. God instructs Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole and hold it up. Anyone who looks upon the bronze snake will be saved from the poisonous bites. They must trust God's provision to deliver them so they can live.</p>
6	<p>For the people of Jesus' day and into the future, they must look upon Jesus "lifted up on the cross" for God to provide provision for them to live eternally.</p> <p>To get eternal life you have to look at the only provision God has given for you and me to live. That provision is Jesus Christ . As the snake was on the pole, Christ would be on the cross and everyone who looks to Christ, who believes that the promise of eternal life will come through Jesus Christ will live eternally.</p>
7	<p>Now we come to the most precious verse for many people in all of the Bible, one that most of you have memorized, John 3:16 -</p> <p>For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Begotten means unique, one of a kind, the only son of God. Jesus is God incarnate, God in human form, God in flesh. Why?</p> <p><b>Because a perfect God can only accept a perfect sacrifice. And the only perfect person that qualifies to be that sacrifice is Jesus Christ. He is the only one that lived a perfect life thus becoming the Lamb of God.</b></p> <p>Recall II Corinthians 5:21 - He who knew no sin, became sin for us that we might know the righteousness of God</p>
8	<p>The great transfer of the new birth, being born again - God takes our sin and exchanges it for righteousness, thus making us acceptable to a holy, perfect</p>

	<p>God. It is not that we are perfect but we are made perfect by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Anyone who believes is credited with this righteousness and receives eternal life.</p>
9	<p>Now in verse 17 -Jesus wants to make it clear that he didn't come to condemn the world but came to save it! The world is condemned by its own sin but Jesus came to bring salvation to a sinful world. He gives us a free offer. To receive it, you must believe in Jesus by faith and stop trying to earn it through works of obeying rules and obeying the laws of religion. We cannot do it ourselves!</p> <p>Suppose you were born into the church because your parents and grandparents belonged. They brought you to church since you were just a few weeks old. You were baptized as an infant. You were brought to Sunday School. When old enough you came to the altar each Sunday to the children's time. You grew up as an active member of the youth group. The only time you didn't attend was when you were in the military or off at college. So all your life you have been at Center when the doors opened.</p> <p>While being a part of the church certainly helped you be a better person, it cannot save you. No matter how close you are to the church, to religion, it will not bring you any closer to God because God only has one substitute that is acceptable in place of your sin and my sin. That is the Lord, Jesus Christ.</p>
10	<p>In verse 31 and following there is a debate about who John the Baptist is. The religious leader is trying to get John to say he is the Messiah. but John doesn't get drawn into thinking he is better than who he really is. He is clear that he is the one sent by God to announce the coming of the Messiah and the one to present the Messiah. he knows his role, he introduces Jesus.</p> <p>Today is a time we can move away from religion, rule keeping and rituals as one's understanding of faith, and realize you cannot in any way, shape or form can earn God's approval. God has already earned it for you In Jesus. All you have to do is accept it through Jesus Christ.</p> <p>Suppose you and I decided to swim from here to England. Who would win? Who would swim the fastest or the greater distance? The answer to these question do not matter because it is too far for neither of us to get there. In the end both of us will drown.</p> <p>Or take basketball. After all we are in the week of the ACC tournament and then on to the NCAA tournament. If I shoot the ball to the basket and bounce it off the backboard and it falls to the floor I didn't score. But isn't it better that</p>

	<p>you shoot it, hitting the backboard, it falls to the rim and goes around the rim but finally lips out of the rim falls to the floor. Neither shot goes in. Is either one better than the other. No we are not because they both missed the mark. No points were scored and that is the purpose of shooting. No matter how close we got to putting through the net, neither of us hit the mark.</p> <p>God sets a mark or a standard that is non-negotiable in terms of what it takes to get to heaven. We have to be perfect to live eternally with a perfect God. So you can't earn it yourself.</p> <p>The distance between us and God is too far because God is Holy. Perfect God is too precise and requires too much, that if we do our best it will never be enough.</p>
11	<p>To gain eternal life we have to put our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ alone,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>we can't trust ritual</li> <li>we can't trust religion</li> <li>we can't trust good works or our good looks!</li> </ul> <p>You never get there by yourself! But if you believe in Jesus Christ that he became the only perfect sacrifice as your substitute on the cross, then God will forgive your sins and give the awesome gift of eternal life that will never be taken back unless you choose to go your own way! This way of salvation comes out of God's love for us. And being born again from above will mean that you will want to love God and obey Him. Therefore, you will not want to go your own way. If your salvation is genuine and real, then you will want to live a life following Jesus' example. The writer of James says that faith without works is dead. If our salvation, being born again, comes from above then our lives will show it in how we live Christ-like lives</p>
12	<p>Conclusion- Some say there are just two types of religion. One type religion you carry and tells you what you must do to make yourself acceptable to God. The other type is one that carries you and tells you what God has already done to make sure you will be acceptable to God and thus inherit eternal life.</p> <p>Being a follower of Christ is of the second type. He has done the heavy lifting by dying on the cross for us and gives us his righteousness! Thus, you can live like Christ, sharing that experience with those still separated from God. Praise be to God, that this perfect, all knowing God loves us that much!</p> <p>Are not you glad Nicodemus had that secret meeting with Jesus? In that time he and therefore all of us know exactly what God is doing for us in Jesus Christ. Amen and Amen</p>