

True Faith and Regeneration **John 2:23-3:3**

Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, we ask that you would bless your word to us. We ask that you would help me as I speak. We ask that you would help us all as we hear, Lord, that we would be given hearing ears, seeing eyes, and obedient hearts. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Starting at John chapter 2, verse 23: “²³ Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.” Chapter 3: “¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.’ ³ Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”

Well my friends, where we're at in the gospel of John is that Jesus is now commencing, at least in John's gospel, He's commencing His public ministry. That public ministry really commenced, according to John, with the cleansing of the temple, remembering that turning the water into wine was kind of a public, but at the same time a hidden miracle. It was only known by a certain select few, and those certain select few, it says, His disciples, believed in Him, back in chapter 2, verse 11. Jesus then went to Jerusalem during the Passover week, and He cleansed the temple. In a great rage, in a furious rage, a righteous and holy rage, He drove the money changers and the traders out of the temple. It wasn't the right place for people to be profiteering from the religion of worshipping the living God.

The Jews demanded a sign, and the sign that Jesus offered them was, in some ways, a conundrum. It was in some ways a riddle. Jesus said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews were thinking of physical things, buildings, stone, mortar, bricks. And their reply was, “It has taken forty six years to build this temple. Will you raise it in three days?” Verse 21, “²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” It's actually an important little phrase there, “And they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” We're going to see that there are people who believe in certain things, and whilst that belief in itself is not necessarily bad, it's just simply not saving faith.

Read on, verse 23 of chapter 2: “²³ Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.” Many believed in His name. Now on the surface of it, that would sound good. You would like to hear that people believe in the name of Jesus, particularly in the light of John chapter 1. Just turn back to chapter 1 for a moment, and look at John chapter 1, verse 12, where it reads: “¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” There we have that phrase, “who believed in his name.”

Now just flick it back to John chapter 2. We can see there's a problem here. Reading on, verse 24 of chapter 2, "But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people." There's a little bit of a wordplay there. The word that's being translated in my Bible, the ESV, as "entrust"—Jesus did not entrust Himself to them—is exactly the same word that's being translated "believed" in the earlier verse. It's kind of literally saying that the people believed in His name, and Jesus did not believe in their belief. There's a wordplay. You see how one word's being played off against the other.

Jesus did not believe in their belief. And even though we pick up the phrase that says "they believed in his name" when they saw the signs that He was doing, we need to understand that it doesn't say—back to John chapter 1—it doesn't say that they've received Jesus. "But to all who did receive him." It doesn't say that they were those who were to become the children of God. It doesn't say that they were those "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." John is actually saying, where it says they believed in His name, that they had come to some kind of mental accommodation, some kind of thought process. They had seen the things that were happening and had reasoned, "Therefore, if this happening, God must be doing something." That's not saving faith. They even reasoned that God was doing something through Jesus Christ, and that's not saving faith.

Now if you're wondering why I took our reading through into the first three verses of John chapter 3 tonight, look at Nicodemus. Let's see what it says. John chapter 2, as we call it, verse 25 ends with "he himself knew what was in man." Now look at how John chapter 3, verse 1 begins: "Now there was a man." Jesus knew what was in man—"Now there was a man." We're meant to pick that little pointer up. "A man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do...'"

And so you see, Nicodemus is the living example of the mass of people that John was speaking about earlier. They saw the signs, they believed in His name. And so Nicodemus comes to Jesus. He's the living example of that mass of people. What does he say? "We know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." He puts together a conditional sentence, and we could express it this way: "You are doing signs; therefore, you are from God." I love the way Jesus replies. Jesus puts together a conditional sentence: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Once again, you've got that wordplay going on. Nicodemus makes a conditional statement; Jesus replies with a conditional statement. And Jesus' reply indicates to us that at this point in time, Nicodemus is not one of those who is born from above. He's not one of those who has become a son of God. He has not, at this point in time, received Jesus.

So just because John the apostle in this gospel uses the word "believed," we're already being told, don't automatically assume that "believed" means "saved." Don't automatically assume that "believed" means that person must be a disciple. Nicodemus believed something about Jesus. He wasn't wrong. What he said about Jesus was essentially correct. But he wasn't saved, he wasn't justified, he wasn't—as Jesus says—born again. He was still a man in the flesh.

You've got to understand and remember always that in James chapter 2, verse 19, James speaks about the faith of demons. He says, "So you believe that there's one God. Very good. Even the devils believe there is one God, and they tremble at the thought of it." Everyone can have a certain amount of knowledge. Scripture actually tells us that everyone *does* have a certain amount of knowledge. Whether a person's willing to acknowledge what they know or not is another question. An atheist is not a person who knows there's no God. An atheist is a person who is busy denying what he knows. Scripture tells us, you can't look at this world and not see the signature of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork." That's Psalm 19. Day to day reveals speech. Day to day reveals speech!

Even creation speaks to us of God who created. And for a person to be an atheist, what they're doing is they're suppressing the knowledge that is within them. They're holding back what they actually know. They're refusing to submit to the truth. Even though they know the truth, they won't accept it. So Nicodemus, as I've said, is a representative of the people, this great mass of people that John is referring to when he says, "Many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing."

Now we need to get down into the text, and let's just pick out a few specific points, and I'll see if we can't explain them and see what's being said here. "Many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing." That tells us something. Look at John chapter 2, verse 11, speaking of the water being made into wine. What does it say? "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

Now turn over to John chapter 4, and see what verse 54 says. This time it's speaking of the healing of an official's son, whom Jesus healed, if you like, from a distance. He said to the man, "Go home. He'll be better when you get there." But look at John chapter 4, verse 54: "This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee." The first sign was the water; the second sign was the healing of the son. But there in the middle of those two signs—sign one, sign two—we've got John saying "signs." "They saw the signs he was doing."

So what that's telling us is that John has deliberately chosen certain particular works that Jesus did to declare something about Jesus. Many people say there are seven signs in the gospel of John. We're going to have a look at a passage that tells us Jesus performed so many signs that if they were all recorded, it would fill all the books of all the libraries in the world. But apart from all the other many signs that Jesus performed, there are particular and certain signs that John has chosen because they teach and illustrate something particularly about Jesus. Let's get that before our eyes and see what I'm speaking of.

Turn to John chapter 20, looking at verses 30 to 31. ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples." As I've said, we've got to understand that when John numbers the signs, when John says this was the first sign, this was the second sign, what he's saying is that he's picking signs. He's choosing certain particular specific things to teach us certain particular specific things.

Turn over to John chapter 21, and look at the last verse: “²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” John is actually saying, Jesus did so much, there’s not enough paper to write it done.

So what you’re getting in every gospel—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—is not what we would call today an official biography, where the biographer goes back to a certain place, and he looks up the birth certificates, and he looks up the death certificates, and he tries to piece together a person’s whole life from day one to the day they die. That’s a biography. What we’ve got here is a synopsis. That’s why Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels. We’ve got a story, it’s 100% true, and it’s a true story of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each author of his gospel has chosen particular things in the life of Jesus to teach the things he wants to teach.

If I start to tell you things from my life, I’m hardly going to tell you every day of my life. Point one; I can’t remember it. But you’ve often heard in illustrations, things come up that illustrate the point I’m trying to make—things that have happened at certain times in my life. And it’s the same with you. You tell me parts of your life, I’m getting to know you, you’re getting to know me, but we don’t know every day of our lives. Nothing is untrue. I would hope we’re not lying to each other. John is not lying to us, but we’re being taught what he wants us to see.

So let’s turn back to John chapter 2. The signs are selected, and they’re selected to give us a particular understanding. And we’ll keep reading, verse 24: “. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people.” Well what does that mean, that Jesus knew all people? I’ll tell you what I don’t think it means. I don’t think it means He knew the name of every single person that came before Him. I don’t think it means that He, as a man, knew every thought that was specifically in every person’s head at every moment.

I think it means that Jesus knew the state of all humanity. He knew where mankind was. He knew what people were like. To be honest, if He is a true and faithful man, and we know that He is a true and faithful man, He almost doesn’t need any more than that, apart from the Scripture, because what does the Scripture tell us about humanity? You know, Jeremiah chapter 17, verse 9, tells us about the heart being deceitful, desperately wicked. Jesus uses that in Mark chapter 7. Turn quickly to Mark chapter 7, and we’ll look at verses 14 to 23.

“¹⁴ And he called the people to him again and said to them, ‘Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.’ ¹⁷ And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ And he said to them, ‘Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?’ (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.’”

From Scripture alone, Jesus knew the state of all humanity. All were sinners, no one could save themselves, no one could do the works required by God, all were under God's just and right condemnation. He knew the hearts of all humanity. But then, as we read on, Nicodemus comes before Him. Then with particular spiritual insight—and I would tell you, and I say that that spiritual insight comes through the work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus—through particular spiritual insight, He knows the heart of the person He's dealing with. He knows particular things about Nicodemus. He knows, for example, that Nicodemus is not born again.

Or think of the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus. “Master, good master, what good thing must I do to be saved?” Jesus knew his heart. He knew him. He knew him inside and out. And first of all, He gave him a general answer, just to see how proud this young man was. What did He say? “You know the commandments. Honour your father and your mother; do not murder; do not steal; do not covet; do not commit adultery.” And the young man said, “I've done all those things from my youth. Aren't I good?” And Jesus cut right to the heart of the matter, and said to him, “If you really are good, if you really want to inherit the kingdom of heaven, sell everything you own, give it to the poor, and follow me.” And it says the man went away sad, miserable. Why? Because he had much possessions. He loved his possessions.

A particular person came before Jesus, and with great spiritual insight, Jesus cut right to the heart—right to the heart of that person. Like a surgeon with a scalpel, He got right to the heart of the matter. That man was wedded to this world, and wedded to his possessions and comforts in this world. And Jesus exposed him on the spot. It took about thirty seconds.

That's what true discernment, that's what a sinless man, indwelt by the Holy Spirit does. Remember John the Baptist saying that the Spirit rested upon Him, and there it stayed. A sinless man, indwelt by the Holy Spirit discerns the hearts. Through the leading of the Spirit, He understands people. It might take us weeks, months, or even years to get to the heart of a matter. Jesus gets there in about thirty seconds. Three questions—bang, bang, bang—gotcha. He knew what was in the hearts of man.

Now let's read on into chapter 3, verse 1. “¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.” Once again, I make that point—“a man.” You see how John's setting this up. Really, if I could re-jig the way the chapters were set out in the gospel of John, I'd start John chapter 3 at chapter 2, verse 23, because I think they're so closely connected. A man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

Now you would think that this man is righteous, and you would think this man has nothing to worry about. He's a ruler, or a leader, among the Jews. Later on in the conversation, Jesus calls him “the teacher of Israel”—*The teacher* of Israel. It's as if to imply that at this moment in time, Nicodemus was the greatest of the Pharisees, the greatest of those who were studying the Scripture, and at this time in all of Israel, you might be able to say that Nicodemus was the most well-educated man among them. And you would think that this man Nicodemus would have nothing much to worry about. “This man came to Jesus,” verse 2, “by night.” He came by night. Now much is made of the point that it says he came by night. Why? Because in the Gospel of John, light and darkness is an important concept.

Stay in John chapter 3. Speaking about people and the judgment of God, verse 19: “¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”

Turn over to John chapter 9, and there we’re going to look at verses 4 and 5. Now this is in the context of Jesus healing a blind man. John chapter 9, verse 4: “⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Stay with the Gospel of John, and move over to John chapter 11, and there we’ll look at verses 9 and 10. “⁹ Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.’”

Move on to John chapter 12, verses 35 and 36. “³⁵ So Jesus said to them, ‘The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.’”

Last of all, let’s look at John chapter 13, verse 30. This is concerning Judas Iscariot. John 13, verse 30: “³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.” You see, I’m sure it was night. It was dark, the sun was down. But John, the author of this gospel, means a whole lot more than just the sun was down and it was getting dark outside. When it says Judas went out into the night, he’s saying Judas was lost. Judas was damned. Judas was finished. He was serving Satan. He’d gone out into, not the kingdom of God, but into the kingdom of darkness.

And so turning back to John chapter 3, we have to infer more from the idea that this man called Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night, other than just it was the only convenient time to get there. He came to Jesus by night so as not to be seen, perhaps; so as not to let it publicly be known that he’d gone to this one who was Himself not a rabbi nor a Pharisee. He came to Jesus by night.

It’s important that he came. Those of you who know the gospel of John well enough know that eventually Nicodemus goes public. Later on in the gospel, he actually argues with the Sanhedrin, or the ruling Jewish counsel who were speaking words of condemnation about Jesus, and he said, “Is it right? Is this the way we operate, that we condemn a man without first hearing what he has to say?”

Then later on, when Jesus is actually dead, He’s been crucified, we find Joseph of Arimathea goes to collect the body, we find there we have a man named Nicodemus, bringing with him apparently around about thirty kilos of spice to bury the body with. The Jews in that day and age wrapped the body. And it wasn’t embalming, they weren’t drying the body, but depending on the wealth and what you had available, they used copious amounts of spices to disguise the decay of death. Because the way a burial worked in that time among the Jews was, you took the body, put it in a tomb on a stone bench, sealed the tomb, and you let it literally decay. You let it

decay away until you had nothing left but the bones. Then you go back to the tomb, you open the tomb, you take the bones, and you put them in a large box, which was called an ossuary. So if you didn't want to open the tomb to a horrible stench of death, you covered the body in as much sweet-smelling spice as you could possibly find, so that you could open the tomb and walk in there without, as I said, that pervading stench.

So by the end of the gospel of John, Nicodemus goes public and he becomes, we would assume, a disciple. But at this point in time, he's come to Jesus by night. "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." That's a very measured and careful statement.

What's he saying? Did you know in the Old Testament that it says that prophets can come with lying signs and wonders? And God Himself is not afraid to say that He is the one who sends those prophets. God Himself is not afraid to say that He Himself is the one who sends a lying prophet to His people, just to test them.

Turn to Ezekiel chapter 14. The heading given to mine is, "Idolatrous Idols Condemned." Let's start reading from verse 6. Now the situation here is that Ezekiel is speaking of what will happen when unrepentant idolaters come to the Lord, pretending to be holy and pretending that they're seeking a word from the prophet. Here's what God says He will do to such hypocrites:

“⁶ ‘Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. ⁷ For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the LORD will answer him myself. ⁸ And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the LORD. ⁹ And if the prophet is deceived and speaks a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.’”

Hear what's being said: A hypocrite who has taken his idols to his heart, and who has no intention of repenting, but wishes to appear to be holy, goes to a prophet, pretending that he wants to hear a word from the Lord—God has said He will deceive that hypocrite. That's frightening. Those are frightening words. In Psalm chapter 18, verse 26, God says that with the crooked He shows Himself crooked. Let's turn to Psalm 18, verse 26: "With the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous." Tortuous—twisted. With the crooked, you make yourself seem twisted, writhing. It's kind of like the shape of snake, is what the word's getting at there.

What's he saying? He's saying that the judgment of God is that, should a man who is an utter hypocrite pretend to be a man of God, and not at all repent of his sins, God will treat that man as he deserves. I've said to you many times, and I say it again, the first thing you get after sin is more sin. The first thing you get after deception is more deception. You want to play in the dirt, you end up in the mud. You want to play in the mud, you end up in the swamp. You want to play in the swamp, you end up in the sewer, you end up in the grave. That's the way it works.

God hardens recalcitrant sinners. He hardens those who come in a hypocritical way, claiming to be His people, and yet the truth is, they're liars and pretenders.

Nicodemus spoke to Jesus in a very controlled and measured way. Notice that he said He came from God, but he didn't say, "We know that you are a good man came from God," or, "You are a righteous prophet come from God." As much as he was willing to say is, "We know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Nicodemus is saying that it's possible that the signs that he knows Jesus has performed and is performing, it's possible that those signs could be, in some way, deceptive. He's holding back. He's holding himself back a little.

Now as I've said, Jesus sees right to the heart of the man—right into the heart of the man. Jesus understands Nicodemus. He understands who he is and where he comes from. I've said to you, Nicodemus may well have been the best or the greatest of the Pharisees alive at that time. But he's not justified. He does not have peace with God. He is not righteous. He is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. How do we know this? Verse 3: "Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" It must've knocked Nicodemus for six. Well, we can tell that it did, if we read on a little further, Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" You know, how can a man be born when he is old?

Now where it says "born again," possibly a better translation is "born from above." Born from above. And yet if that were the case, that would show us that Nicodemus is misunderstanding even more than we expect. Jesus said "from above." Nicodemus didn't even hear the bit about being born from above. All he heard was something of this world. He couldn't see what was above. He couldn't see what was over him. All he could see was this world—bricks, mortar, people, flesh. "How can I be born again?"—An even deeper misunderstanding than possibly our translations are giving us.

The thing is that believing in Jesus requires more than just a simple knowledge, more than just simple logic. My friends, there's a lot of evidence in the world. There's the evidence of creation itself; there's the Scriptures, with their own internal testimony that this is the very word of God; there's the evidence of the Holy Spirit, speaking to us through and from the word of God. There's a lot of evidence in the world. A person can know something about Jesus, and it's often not that hard to get somebody to say something about Jesus: Jesus was a great teacher. Jesus was a good man. Jesus was a religious reformer. They're all true-ish, they're all right, in a way. They all go a certain distance towards the truth, but it's not the full proclamation of the truth.

And a person can have very good theology. There's a person the Mannings and our family know, and he was a pastor for many years. And he was, as far as I'm concerned, a good preacher. For the years that I sat under this man's ministry, I never heard him teach one single falsehood. And I'm a pretty critical listener when it comes to sermons. I didn't hear him put one foot wrong behind the pulpit. And I've got no reason to believe today that he is even a Christian, so far has he strayed, so far has he wandered. If he is a Christian, I pray he repents. But I've got no reason to know, from when I last had any contact with this man, that he is even a Christian. Great learning, an intelligent man, a studied man—he had good theology. He was "reformed."

He and I, in terms of our theology, were as thick as thieves. And yet in terms of whether or not there was life in his heart, I can't say that I know there's any, or ever was.

There's more to it than just knowledge. Knowledge is good, but you've got to have more than knowledge. I'm saying you can't be a Christian, and you can't grow in Christ without a certain amount of knowledge. You must have knowledge, and you get that knowledge, that necessary knowledge, from the word of God. You must have certain facts. You must understand those certain facts: There is a God. God's only begotten Son is the Lord Jesus Christ. He took upon Himself flesh. He came into this world. He lived a perfect and righteous life in the sight of God His Father. He was born of the virgin Mary. He went to the cross, not for any crime He had committed. Upon the cross He bore our sins. He died for our sins, and on the third day He was raised again, and He has now ascended to heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father.

All that is knowledge. And everyone, to be a Christian, must have that knowledge. And there can be people who are Christians on very little knowledge. They know not much at all. But when they hear the truth taught, the test of a Christian is, Do they submit to the truth? Do they accept the word of God for what it is, or do they reject it? Do they turn back? Do they walk away? I'm not saying that a person might not struggle to understand the truth of God's word. Of course we do. I didn't come to you preaching this stuff that I just learnt yesterday. What you're getting is the result of being a Christian now nearly thirty years. And for thirty years, I've been a pretty serious bookworm and studier, and I've been growing in the Lord, praise God for that.

It's not *just* knowledge, but you've got to have that knowledge. You've got to have a certain amount of knowledge. But there's more to it than knowledge, isn't there? There's submission. You've actually got to submit to what's taught. You've got to submit to the consequences of that knowledge, because that knowledge, if you believe it is true, carries with it consequence.

If Christ had to come, if the Son of God had to take upon Himself flesh and die for the sins of all humanity, that knowledge tells you that you, a sinner, deserve to die; that you, a sinner, ought to be dead; that you, a sinner, cannot be saved. There's consequence to the knowledge, and you must submit to the consequence of that knowledge. Not only do you need to know the knowledge, you need to actually believe, and agree with, and submit to the knowledge.

But it goes even further than that. This is the classic Reformation teaching on faith. You know, you believe and submit, you trust. You actually trust in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. You rest upon Christ. You trust, you know that you are saved because Christ has done the things necessary for you to be saved. You trust, you rest.

I heard of a Bible translator who was trying to translate the Bible into a native language, and he couldn't come up with the right word for "trusting" Christ. As much as he knew the language that he was trying to translate the Scripture into, he just couldn't quite get there. And one day one of the head men of the tribe came into his little hut and took a seat, and relaxed into it, "Awwhh." And the translator said to the man, "What did you just do?" And the man gave him the native word for what he just did. Now I don't know that word, not even pretending I even know the word or the language. But the man gave him the native word for what it is that he

did—that taking a seat and relaxing into it, and letting the seat take your weight so that you can relax in the seat.

And that’s the word that the translator used to translate “faith in the works of Christ.” You rest in Christ. You almost recline in Him, trusting in His good works. That doesn’t mean you become entirely passive. It actually means that you are now indwelt by the Spirit of God, and you can’t be passive any longer. The word of God is like burning fire in your heart. You’ve got to speak the truth, you’ve got to hear the truth, you’re drawn to prayer, you’re drawn into fellowship, you’re drawn into the love of God’s people and the service of God’s church.

Why? Because, my friends, if you’ve got the necessary knowledge, if you’ve submitted to and accepted the consequences of that knowledge, if you’ve rested in and upon Christ, you’re what Jesus said to Nicodemus—You’re born again. You’re one of those born not of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but born of God. You have the life of God within you.

I can tell you that my plan at this time in coming weeks is to slow down quite a bit in John chapter 3. We’ve got to make sure that we get a clear and detailed understanding of exactly what Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” It’s not something that happens because you decide it’s going to happen. It’s the work of God. God makes it happen. God calls His people. It’s called the “effectual calling.” He calls His people into His kingdom, and He grants life.

You know, I’ve used the illustration before of when my children were younger and they bought me a Father’s Day present, I liked what they bought. I liked the gift they gave me, even though they bought it with my own money. We would give them the money, they would go and buy the gift and bring it back to us. We would supply them the thing that they needed to give us the thing that pleased us.

That’s the way God works. He supplies His people with the things that He wants His people to have. You’re dead, He wants you to live. He gives you life. You’re faithless and unbelieving, He wants you to believe. He gives you the gift of faith. You’re hardened in heart and ignorant. He gives you the gift of repentance. You are prayerless, you do not commune with God, you do not know the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. By His Spirit, He teaches you to pray.

What God wants from you, He gives to you, because salvation is all of grace. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, with all of his Pharisaical hair-splitting. And you’ve got no idea how many hairs the Pharisees were prepared to split in the name of righteousness. What the Pharisees did was take the law of God, for example, the Ten Commandments, and they wrote around those laws a whole lot of other laws to protect the Ten Commandments.

So for example, let’s think of one concerning the Sabbath Day. If you were a Pharisee, you didn’t collect your eggs on the Sabbath Day. If you did collect an egg that was laid on the Sabbath Day, you had to kill the chook, because she had done a work on the Sabbath Day. So I could imagine in a Pharisee’s home on the Sabbath, the chooks start to cluck. She’s just laid an egg. And the little kid says, “Dad, the chooks have laid!” “No they haven’t.” “But, Dad—” “Nope. Didn’t lay, Son. Didn’t hear a thing.” “But, wha—” “Listen Son, if our chook lays on

the Sabbath Day, we've got to kill her. She hasn't laid. We've only got two chooks left. We can't have too many more Sabbaths...."

You get the picture. They're hair-splitting. The hair-splitting that goes on. They had rules concerning how far a person could walk on the Sabbath Day—how many steps you could take. A certain number of steps on the Sabbath, and no more. But then because—let's say for example you lived more than that number of steps from the synagogue, and you wanted to get to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day—they came up with a hair-splitting excuse. If something that is normally inside your house is within that walking distance, your house is now stretched.

So let's say you lived almost twice as far from the synagogue as you're allowed to walk. What you could do on the day before the Sabbath was pick up, let's say it was a basket or a coffee table, or some such item of furniture, and carry it right up to the very end. You could walk, I think it was 1,999 steps, not 2,000. So you count off your 1,999 steps, you sit your coffee table by the road. And now they'll say your house stretches 2,000 paces towards the synagogue. And then you could walk from your house to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day.

That's the sort of nonsense that the Pharisees carried on with, all in the name of supposedly working their way to righteousness, all in the name of supposedly doing good works and maintaining their own holiness. And what does Jesus say to Nicodemus? "You cannot even see the kingdom of heaven unless you be born again." You cannot even see it!

My friends, people who are not in the kingdom do not even understand that there is a kingdom and that they need to be there. They don't even see that much, they don't even perceive nor understand that much. They think we're fools. You know, you've all heard it said, "Oh, those Christians—drop their brains in a box as they walk through the church door. And there they just believe whatever nonsense and drivel is poured into their head." I've heard it a hundred times, and I'm sure you have.

No. You see, they cannot even see or perceive that there is such a thing as the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? Well, we can understand that. That's not terribly difficult. What's a kingdom? It's the place where a king rules. And there's a King ruling. Who rules? Jesus, who has ascended and is seated at the right hand of the Father on high. Jesus the King rules. And we who are His people live under the rule of that King. We acknowledge that He is our King, we obey our King—not any other king. We obey our King. We submit to the rule of our King, and we do all that we can do, as His servants, to expand His kingdom. He's using us. He doesn't need to, but He does. That's kind of evidence of our adoption into the family of God.

How does a person know they're part of a household? When they've got something to do in that household. He doesn't need to use us, He doesn't have to use us. But He chooses to use us, because we've been made His people through being born again. We've been given new life in Christ. We were dead in our sins. Ephesians chapter 2: "You were dead in your sins." But we've been given the gift of life in Jesus Christ, and therefore, we have a place in God's household. We have work to do in His kingdom. We are now His servants, willingly, actively, growing in Christ, doing as we should do. That's the blessing of being born again.

If a person can see the kingdom of God, the life of God is working within them. They are being called into a relationship with God. They can see, they can perceive, they can understand. That whole picture of darkness and light comes in here, because the concept of darkness and light in Scripture is another picture or metaphor for knowing and understanding. If you're in the darkness, you don't know, you don't understand. If you're in the light, you do know, you do understand.

We still talk that way today. "The light went on. I was driving down the road, I was thinking about something, I couldn't work it out, and then—snap—the light went on." You've said that, and we understand. "The thought has occurred to me, I now understand. I now know. Someone switched the light on for me." That someone, my friend, is always God. That someone who reveals Himself to us is God. God uses people, the preached word, He uses the written word, He uses the spoken word, He uses people, He sends forth words.

You know, we're a strange lot, the church. We've got a King and He says He wants His kingdom to be expanded. He says He wants to conquer the earth. He wants to rule over all, and He wants all to know that He's ruling over them. Very good. "What weapons do I have?" "You have my word, you have love, you have prayer. Go forth and conquer." You don't get guns, you don't get weapons, you don't get any of the things that you might expect. You don't get a great army with drawn sword marching along behind you—well, unless you want to try and picture that in some kind of metaphor, of course you do.

But you get what I'm saying. His kingdom is a kingdom that conquers through the work and the power of the Holy Spirit, through the obedience of His people, sending us forth into the world, going out conquering and to conquer, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Who does that? Those who are born again, those who have received life from God, those who can see and understand the kingdom—and not only see and understand, but notice Jesus says there's more to it than just seeing the kingdom. Just quickly jump down to verse 5: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

You see it, you enter it, all by the work and the power of the Holy Spirit; all by the work and the power of God, calling you to salvation; and through you, calling others. We're part of the household now. We're part of the kingdom. We're part of the nation. You're in the army now—the old song by Status Quo. You're in the army now. You're born again. You've got an identity in Christ. You belong in God's kingdom, and you're here as God's people to serve in His kingdom. Go forth, my friends. Conquer. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do thank you indeed that you have given the gift of life through Jesus Christ your Son by the power of your Holy Spirit. We thank you that we, sinners though we are, can have life in you and reconciliation and joy and peace. We pray, Father, that we would indeed be your obedient servants, soldiers for Christ, conquering, sent forth into this world. Father, help us to do this. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.