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Triumphant Tuesday Bible Study
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The New Birth John 3

John 3 highlights Jesus' divine nature and mission, culminating the famous proclamation of God's love in John 3:16, which promises eternal life to all who believe. Additionally, John the Baptist reaffirms Jesus' supremacy, emphasizing that faith in Him brings salvation, while rejecting Him results in condemnation.

Also, John 3 provides a profound insight into the transformative power of faith in Jesus Christ and the overwhelming depth of God's love for humanity. It serves as a call to spiritual rebirth, to step out of darkness into God's marvelous light. This chapter prompts us to experience and share the incredible unconditional love that God offers us through His Son, encouraging a life illuminated by truth and dedicated to the glory of God.

As we delve into this chapter what we see is a late-night conversation between Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and Jesus, where Nicodemus acknowledges the divine nature of Jesus' works. Jesus' words introduce the concept of being "born again," explaining that entering God's kingdom requires a spiritual rebirth through water and the Spirit.

As the conversation unfolds, Jesus highlights the necessity of faith for salvation, drawing a parallel or analogy to Moses lifting the serpent in the wilderness.

A. Nicodemus and the new birth.

1. (John 3:1-3) Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 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." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus was one of those impressed by Jesus' signs (John 2:23), and a member of the ruling Sanhedrin. He was religious (of the Pharisees), educated (Nicodemus is a Greek name), influential (a ruler), and earnest enough to come by night. Nicodemus came to Jesus as a representative of all

men (John 2:23-25), and in a sense he represented what is highest and best in men.

Nicodemus came by night because he was timid, or perhaps he wanted an uninterrupted interview with Jesus.

It is difficult to know if Nicodemus spoke of himself, of the Sanhedrin, or of popular opinion. "It is possible, however, that *oidamen*, we know, signifies no more than, it is known, it is generally acknowledged and allowed, that thou art a teacher come from God." (Clarke)

No one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him: We understand the sense in which Nicodemus meant this, but his statement was not entirely true. The Bible tells us that deceivers and false prophets can sometimes perform remarkable signs (2 Thessalonians 2:9 and Revelation 13:13-14).

Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God: Jesus' reply to Nicodemus shattered the Jewish assumption that their racial identity — their old birth — assured them a place in God's Kingdom. Jesus made it plain that a man's first birth does not assure him of the kingdom; only being born again gives this assurance.

It was taught widely among the Jews at that time that since they descended from Abraham, they were automatically assured of heaven. In fact, some Rabbis taught that Abraham stood watch at the gate of hell, just to make sure that none of his descendants accidentally wandered in there.

Most Jews of that time looked for the Messiah to bring in a new world, in which Israel and the Jewish people would be pre-eminent. But Jesus came to bring new life, in which He would be preeminent.

Nicodemus addressed Jesus as a rabbi and teacher; Jesus responded to him as the one who announced new life. "Our Lord replies, It is not learning, but life that is wanted for in the Messiah's Kingdom; and life must begin by birth." (Alford)

Born again: The ancient Greek word translated again (*anōthen*) can be also translated "from above." This is the sense in which John used this word in John 3:31 and in John 19:11 and 19:23. Either way, the meaning is essentially the same. To be born from above is to be born again.

Jesus clearly said that without this — that unless one is born again — he cannot enter or be part of (see) the kingdom of God. Moral or religious reform isn't enough. One must be born again.

This isn't something that we can do to ourselves. If Jesus had said, "Unless you are washed, you cannot see the kingdom of God" then we might think, "I can wash myself." A man might wash himself; but he could never birth himself.

"All over the New Testament this idea of rebirth, re-creation occurs."
(Barclay)

- 1 Peter speaks of being born anew by God's great mercy (1 Peter 1:3).
- 1 Peter speaks of being born anew from an imperishable seed (1 Peter 1:22-23).
- James speaks of God bringing us forth by the word of truth (James 1:18).
- Titus speaks to us of the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5).
- Romans speaks of dying with Jesus and rising anew (Romans 6:1-11).
- 1 Corinthians speak of new believers as new-born babes (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).
- 2 Corinthians speaks of us being a new creation in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- Galatians says that in Jesus we are a new creation (Galatians 6:15).
- Ephesians says the new man is created after God in righteousness (Ephesians 4:22-24).
- Hebrews says that at the beginning of our Christian life we are like children (Hebrews 5:12-14).

2. (John 3:4) Nicodemus answers: How can this be?

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

How can a man be born when he is old? Nicodemus' reply may not have been out of ignorance, but from thinking that Jesus meant a moral reformation. His question may be "How can you teach an old dog new tricks?" One way or another, Nicodemus clearly did not understand Jesus or the truth about the new birth.

"Had our Lord said: 'Every Gentile must be born again,' he would have understood." (Dods)

How can a man be born when he is old? In His description of new birth, Jesus recalled a familiar theme from Old Testament promises of the New Covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-6, Jeremiah 23:1-8, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Jeremiah 32:37-41, Ezekiel 11:16-20, Ezekiel 36:16-28, Ezekiel 37:11-14, 37:21-28).

These passages essentially made three promises in the New Covenant:

- The gathering of Israel.
- The cleansing and spiritual transformation of God's people.
- The reign of the Messiah over Israel and the whole world.

In Jesus' day, the common teaching among the Jewish people was that the first two aspects of the New Covenant had been fulfilled. They saw Israel gathered — at least in part — after the Babylonian exile. They saw strong spiritual movements like the Pharisees, which they believed fulfilled the promise of spiritual transformation. All they waited for was the reign of the Messiah.

That's why Jesus' statement about the new birth was so strange to Nicodemus. He thought that the Jewish people already had it; they certainly weren't looking for it. They only looked for a triumphant Messiah.

3. (John 3:5-8) Jesus explains the new birth.

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Jesus was emphatic in saying that man does not need reformation, but a radical conversion by the Spirit of God. We must be born of water and the Spirit.

"In verse 3 Jesus has spoken of 'seeing' the kingdom of God, whereas here He speaks of 'entering' it. There is probably no great difference of meaning." (Morris)

Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God: If a nation passed a law that said no one could live there except those who were born in that nation, and someone wanted to live there who was not born there.

It wouldn't matter if he took a name that was common in that nation.

It wouldn't matter if he spoke the language.

It wouldn't matter if he observed some of the customs.

It wouldn't matter if he dressed like those in that nation.

It wouldn't matter if he practiced some of the religious traditions of that nation.

It wouldn't matter if his parents were born in that nation.

It wouldn't matter if his children were born there.

It wouldn't matter if he had many friends in that nation.

All that would matter was if he was actually born there.

"A man may cast away many vices, forsake many lusts in which he indulged, and conquer evil habits, but no man in the world can make himself to be born of God; though he should struggle never so much, he could never accomplish what is beyond his power. And, mark you, if he could make himself to be born again, still he would not enter heaven, because there is another point in the condition which he would have violated -- 'unless a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" (Spurgeon)

You must be born of water: We know from John 3:10 that whatever being born of water was, it should have been familiar to Nicodemus from the Old Testament.

Some have thought born of water means to be baptized. Water here may represent baptism, but there is no real Old Testament foundation for this.

Some have thought that born of water refers to our physical birth, since we come forth from a sack of water. This approach is more attractive, but doesn't it simply state the obvious? However, it does make a good parallel with the idea of that which is born of the flesh in John 3:6.

Some have thought that born of water means to be born again by the Word of God. In other passages of Scripture, water represents the Word, as we are washed by the water of the word (Ephesians 5:26).

Some have thought that born of water means to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, the living water of John 7:38-39.

Some have thought that born of water means to receive the water of cleansing prophesied in Ezekiel 36:25-28 as part of the New Covenant. This is the approach has the most weight (though it is a tough call), because of its firm connections to Old Testament prophecy — which Jesus says Nicodemus should have know to understand these things.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh: Without the new birth of the Spirit, the flesh taints all works of righteousness. Yet, everything that a Spirit-led man does can be pleasing to God.

“In this flesh is included every part of that which is born after the ordinary method of generation: even the spirit of man, which, receptive as it is of the Spirit of God, is yet in the natural birth dead, sunk in trespasses and sins.” (Alford)

Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again”: Again, Nicodemus did marvel at this statement, because he — like most all Jews of his time — believed they already had the inner transformation promised in the New Covenant. Jesus wants him to take hold of the fact that he does not have it, and must be born again.

We should not forget whom Jesus said this to. Nicodemus was a religious leader, a Pharisee, an educated man, and an earnest man. By all outward appearance, he was already transformed unto God — yet he was not.

“These solemn words for ever exclude the possibility of salvation by human merit. Man’s nature is so gripped by sin that an activity of the very Spirit of God is a necessity of he is to be associated with God’s kingdom.” (Morris)

The wind blows where it wishes: Jesus’ idea to Nicodemus was “You don’t understand everything about the wind, but you see its effects. That is just how it is with the birth of the Spirit.” Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know that he didn’t have to understand everything about the new birth before he experienced it.

Since we can’t control the Spirit, “It should lead us to be very tender and jealous in our conduct towards the Holy Ghost, so that we do not grieve him and cause him to depart from us.” (Spurgeon)

4. (John 3:9-13) Jesus responds to the question “how can these things be?”

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”

How can these things be? Nicodemus was confused. He was so set in his thinking that the new birth has already happened to him and all of faithful

Israel, that he had a hard time thinking differently. Jesus had to keep explaining.

Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Jesus chided Nicodemus for not being aware of the need and the promise of the new birth, because these were plainly laid out in the Old Testament. Nicodemus knew these passages well, but believed that they had been fulfilled in regard to the new birth. He should have known better.

Are you the teacher of Israel: “Nicodemus’s exact position in the theological circles of Israel is not defined, but the language suggests that he was a very important person. Jesus implies that as the outstanding teacher of the nation, Nicodemus should have been familiar with the teaching of the new birth.” (Tenney)

If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? A simple look at earthly things — like the illustrations Jesus used, and even a look at his own life — should have made the point plain to Nicodemus. If he could not see that he needed this spiritual transformation, what more could Jesus tell him?

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven: Jesus “makes it clear that He can speak authoritatively about things in heaven, though no one else can.” (Morris)

“In short, we have here the basis in Christ’s own words of the statement in the prologue that the Word was in the beginning with God, and became flesh to be a light to men.” (Dods)

No one has ascended to heaven: “This seems a figurative expression for, No man hath known the mysteries of the kingdom of God; as in Deuteronomy 30:12; Psalm 73:17; Proverbs 30:4; Romans 11:34. And the expression is founded upon this generally received maxim: That to be perfectly acquainted with the concerns of a place, it is necessary for a person to be on the spot.” (Clarke)

5. (John 3:14-15) Jesus and the brazen serpent.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness: Jesus made a remarkable statement, explaining that the serpent of Numbers 21:4-9 was a picture of the Messiah and His work.

Serpents are often used as pictures of evil in the Bible (Genesis 3:1-5 and Revelation 12:9). However, Moses' serpent in Numbers 21 was made of bronze, and bronze is a metal associated with judgment in the Bible, because bronze is with fire, a picture of judgment.

So, a bronze serpent does speak of sin, but of sin judged. In the same way Jesus, who knew no sin became sin for us on the cross, and our sin was judged in Him. A bronze serpent is a picture of sin judged and dealt with.

We would have wanted to diminish our sense of sin, and put the image of a man up on the pole. Our image of man might represent "both good and bad" in man. But a serpent is more apparently sinful, and shows us our true nature and true need of salvation.

In addition, if the serpent lay horizontally on the vertical pole, it is easy to see how this also was a visual representation of the cross. However, many traditions show the serpent being wrapped around the pole, and this is the source for the ancient figure of healing and medicine — a serpent, wrapped around a pole.

In the Numbers 21:4-9 account, the people were saved not by doing anything, but by simply looking to the bronze serpent. They had to trust that something as seemingly foolish as looking at such a thing would be sufficient to save them, and surely, some perished because they thought it too foolish to do such a thing.

As it says in Isaiah 45:22: Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. We might be willing to do a hundred things to earn our salvation, but God commands us to only trust in Him — to look to Him.

Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: Even though Jesus bore our sins, He never became a sinner. Even His becoming sin for us was a holy, righteous, act of love. Jesus remained the Holy One throughout the entire ordeal of the cross.

"Nicodemus had failed to grasp the teaching about the new birth when it was presented to him in terms drawn from Ezekiel's prophecy; now it is presented to him by means of an object-lesson, from a story with which he had been familiar since childhood." (Bruce)

Must be lifted up: “He must die because He would save, and He would save because He did love.” (Maclaren)

Lifted up: This is a term later used to describe both Jesus’ crucifixion (John 12:32) and His ascension (Acts 2:33). Both meanings are in view, His suffering and exaltation. Jesus was lifted up in both ways.

The Son of Man is to be lifted up. Yes, but not on a throne in Herod’s palace. He was to be conspicuous, but as the brazen serpent had been conspicuous, hanging on a pole for the healing of the people.” (Dods)

Should not perish but have eternal life: The idea behind eternal life means much more than a long or never ending life. Eternal life does not mean that this life goes on forever. Instead, eternal life also has the idea of a certain quality of life, of God’s kind of life. It is the kind of life enjoyed in eternity.

“The nature of the belief is implied in the illustration of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness. Belief consists of accepting something, not doing something.” (Tenney)

6. (John 3:16) God’s gift of salvation.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

For God so loved the world: John 3:16 has long been celebrated as a powerful, succinct, declaration of the gospel. Of the 31,102 verses in the Bible, it may be the most popular single verse used in evangelism.

We learn the object of God’s love: For God so loved the world. God did not wait for the world to turn to Him before He loved the world. He loved and gave His only begotten Son to the world when it was still the world!

What Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:7 (You must be born again) refuted the popular Jewish idea regarding the way to salvation. Now Jesus refuted the popular Jewish idea regarding the scope of salvation: for God so loved the world.

The Jews of that day rarely thought that God loved the world. Many of them thought that God only loved Israel. The universal offer of salvation and life in Jesus was revolutionary.

“The Jew was ready enough to think of God as loving Israel, but no passage appears to be cited in which any Jewish writer maintains that God loved the

world. It is a distinctively Christian idea that God's love is wide enough to embrace all mankind." (Morris)

Morrison suggested that there are three centers of love:

- **God so loved the world (John 3:16).**
- **Christ also loved the church (Ephesians 5:25).**
- **The Son of God, who loved me (Galatians 2:20).**

He gave His only begotten Son: This describes both the expression and the gift of God's love. God's love didn't just feel for the plight of a fallen world. God did something about it, and He gave the most precious thing to give: His only begotten Son.

He gave his only begotten Son: "These words seem to carry a reference to the offering of Isaac; and Nicodemus in that case would at once be reminded by them of the love there required, the substitution there made, and the prophecy there uttered to Abraham." (Alford)

Whoever believes in Him: This describes the recipient of God's love. God loves the world, but the world does not receive or benefit from that love until it believes in Jesus, the gift that the Father gave. Believes in means much more than intellectual awareness or agreement. It means to trust in, to rely on, and to cling to.

Should not perish: This describes the intention of God's love. God's love actually saves man from eternal destruction. God looks at fallen humanity, does not want it to perish, and so in His love He extends the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Everlasting life: This describes the duration of God's love. The love we receive among people may fade or turn, but God's love will never change. He will never stop loving His people, even unto the furthest distance of eternity.

There are Seven Wonders in John 3:16.

God	The Almighty Authority
So loved the world	The Mightiest Motive

That He gave His only begotten Son	The Greatest Gift
That whoever	The Widest Welcome
Believes in Him	The Easiest Escape
Should not perish	The Divine Deliverance
But have everlasting life	The Priceless Possession

“If there is one sentence more than another which sums up the message of the Fourth Gospel, it is this. The love of God is limitless; it embraces all mankind. No sacrifice was too great to bring its unmeasured intensity home to men and women: the best that God had to give, he gave — his only Son, his well-beloved.” (Bruce)

7. (John 3:17-21) Sin’s condemnation.

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world: Jesus revealed the heart of God the Father in sending God the Son; to bring salvation — rescue, hope, healing — to the world through Him.

“Some men will, in fact, be condemned, and that as the result of Christ’s coming into the world (John 3:19). But the purpose of His coming was not this.” (Morris)

He who does not believe is condemned already: John 3:16 is the most gracious, wonderful offer conceivable — eternal life for all who believe. Yet the offer has inherent consequences, for any who reject, who refuse to believe. Their refusal makes their condemnation certain.

A significant issue regarding those who do not believe is, “What about those who never had the opportunity to believe because they never heard the good news of Jesus Christ?” This is an important but separate question,

addressed best by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1 and 2. Here, the focus seems to be on those who deliberately reject the message, as those who heard and encountered Jesus in the first century had opportunity to do.

“No explicit mention is made here of those who have never had the opportunity of believing in Christ, those on whom the light in its fullness has never shone. But John’s words probably unfold the principle of their judgment too. As the eternal Word came to men and women before becoming incarnate in Christ, so it is with the light of God. If men and women are judged by their response to the light, they are judged by their response to such light as is available to them.” (Bruce)

This is the condemnation: Jesus came to bring salvation, but those who reject that salvation condemn themselves. We never need to leave the reason for anyone’s condemnation at God’s door. The responsibility is theirs alone.

“Heaven is too hot to hold unregenerate persons; no such dirty dog ever trampled on that golden pavement, it is an undefiled inheritance.” (Trapp)

Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil: Jesus explained what keeps people from faith and rescue in Him. It is because they are drawn to darkness, and love it more than the light. There is a critical moral dimension to unbelief that is often denied or ignored.

Those who consciously reject Jesus often present themselves as heroic characters who bravely put away superstition and deal honestly with deep philosophical problems. It is far more often true that there is a moral compromise at the root of their rejection.

Many opponents of Christianity have a vested interest in fighting against the truth of Jesus, because they love their sin and don’t want to face it, or face a God who will judge their sin.

When we think of the love of sin that sends people to hell, we often think of notorious sin. But the simple demand to be lord of my own life is enough of a sin to deserve condemnation before God.

Everyone practicing evil hates the light: Some express their hatred of the truth by actively fighting against it, and others express their hatred by ignoring God’s truth — by saying to Jesus “You are not worth my time.” In contrast, he who does the truth comes to the light.

He who does the truth: “‘To do the truth’ is at any rate to live up to what one knows; to live an honest, conscientious life.” (Dods)

“They chose to walk in the darkness, that they might do the works of darkness—they broke the Divine law, refused the mercy offered to them, are arrested by Divine justice, convicted, condemned, and punished. Whence, then, does their damnation proceed? From THEMSELVES.” (Clarke)

B. John the Baptist’s final testimony about Jesus.

1. (John 3:22-24) Jesus baptizes in Judea as John continues his work of baptizing.

After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea: John continues his account of the life of Jesus with the emphasis on what He did in Judea. The other Gospels focus on the work of Jesus in the Galilee region.

He remained with them and baptized: Jesus, together with His disciples, did a work of baptizing apparently similar to the work of John the Baptist. This was Jesus’ humble way of recognizing the goodness and importance of John’s work.

Of the baptizing work of Jesus, Morris observed: “More probably it represents a continuation of the ‘baptism of repentance’ that was characteristic of John the Baptist.” We know that when Jesus began to preach, He began with John’s same message: repent (Matthew 3:2 and 4:17). It made sense for Jesus to also practice the symbol of repentance that John used with such great effect.

“The baptism now carried on by the disciples [of Jesus] appears to have stood very much in the same position as that of John.” (Alford)

“‘Tarrying’ [remained] is another word that is not very specific, but we get the impression of an unhurried period during which Jesus and His followers got to know each other better.” (Morris)

The location of Jesus’ work of baptizing is not reported. This may be because it happened in several places in the general area.

John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim: There is some dispute as to the exact location of this place. The best evidence is that it was a place some seven miles (12 kilometers) south of modern Bethshan.

“The name Aenon (Ainun means ‘springs’, which would provide the ‘much water’ (literally ‘many waters’) required by John for baptizing.” (Bruce)

“The exact location of Aenon is uncertain. Two sites are possible: one south of Bethshan, where there were numerous springs; another, a short distance from Shechem. Of the two, the former seems to be the better possibility.” (Tenney)

John’s work of baptizing was still showing itself effective; we read: And they came and were baptized. “The sense of the last two verbs is continuous and we might give it the force of it as ‘they kept coming and being baptized’.” (Morris)

2. (John 3:25-26) John learns of the baptizing work of Jesus.

Then there arose a dispute between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified — behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”

A dispute between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification: We don’t know the precise nature of this dispute. John’s baptism certainly had an element of personal purification, and perhaps some of the Jewish leaders objected to what he did or how he did it.

He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him! We don’t know the details of the dispute regarding purification, but in that discussion the disciples of John learned that Jesus was baptizing and drawing large crowds.

All men’ is an indignant exaggeration, very natural in the circumstances.” (Morris)

All are coming to Him! John’s disciples seemed alarmed, but it didn’t bother John one bit. John would not allow envy or the fickle crowds make him forget his mission: to announce that the Messiah had come, and then to step back and let the attention be focused upon the Messiah.

3. (John 3:27-30) John’s answer to his worried disciples.

John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.”

A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven: John first answered his worried disciples that everything he had — including those who responded to his ministry — were a gift from God. If they are God's gift, then they should be received gratefully.

I said, "I am not the Christ," but, "I have been sent before Him": John then reminded his disciples that he knew who he was, and he also knew who Jesus was. Understanding that, he could keep his proper place; not too high (thinking he was the Christ) and not too low (thinking he had no call or place in God's plan).

The friend of the bridegroom: John explained to his followers that he was like the best man at a wedding; he isn't the bridegroom. He isn't to be the focus of attention, but to supervise the bringing of two people together.

In the Jewish wedding customs of that day, the friend of the bridegroom arranged many of the details of the wedding and brought the bride to the groom. Nevertheless, the friend of the bridegroom was never the focus of attention and wanted it that way.

The fact that the bridegroom represents Jesus is another way the Bible says Jesus is God. In the Old Testament, it was only Yahweh who was the husband of Israel. "The Baptist would have been well aware that in the Old Testament Israel is regarded as the bride of Jehovah." (Morris)

Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled: John wanted his followers to know that all these arrangements fulfilled his joy. One might say that John the Baptist lost his congregation — and he was happy about it! John was happy because he lost his congregation to Jesus.

"It is not John's regret that men are attracted to Jesus: rather it is the fulfillment of his work and hope." (Dods)

"John betrays no sense of envy or rivalry. It is not easy to see another's influence growing at the expense of one's own; it is even less easy to rejoice at the sight. But John found his joy completed by the news which his disciples brought." (Bruce)

He must increase, but I must decrease: John the Baptist understood it was good for him to become less visible and known, for Jesus to become more visible and known. In even larger aspects, this should be the motto of every Christian, especially leaders among God's people. Jesus should become

greater and more visible, and the servant should become less and less visible.

Even though Jesus was baptizing men unto repentance and drawing large crowds, John understood that they did not have the same ministry, the same role. Jesus was uniquely the Messiah and His work must be continually exalted.

John the Baptist shows us that we may be very popular and outwardly successful, and still be humble. John the Baptist had fame and crowds that modern celebrity pastors could only dream of, yet he was an example of genuine humility.

John the Baptist also did not quit his work just because Jesus was doing a similar work and doing it for more people. He labored on, content to do what God called him to do even though Jesus gained more and more attention and John less and less.

“Here ministers may learn not to be wanting to their duties, though God may stir up others about them of greater parts and better success to obscure them.” (Trapp)

“If it is not due to your lethargy or sloth that the crowds have ebbed away, and that the tide of conversions has dropped below its former level, be at peace. These are things which the Holy Spirit worketh, dividing to each one severally even as He will.” (Meyer)

4. (John 3:31-33) John’s testimony about Jesus.

“He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.”

He who comes from above: John wanted everyone to know where Jesus came from. Jesus was different from everyone else because He came from heaven. He wasn’t an exceptionally spiritual or wise or good man; He was and is God, from heaven.

There is some debate as to if John 3:31 continues the words of John the Baptist or if it begins a section where John the Evangelist comments on themes suggested by the prior words of the Baptist.

He who comes from heaven is above all: Jesus is not only different from everyone else; Jesus is also greater than everyone else.

“If we want information about a family, we will get it at first hand only from a member of that family. If we want information about a town we will get it at first hand only from someone who comes from that town. So, then, if we want information about God, we will get it only from the Son of God; and if we want information about heaven and heaven’s life, we will get it only from him who comes from heaven.” (Barclay)

What He has seen and heard: “Seeing and hearing are equivalent to having direct knowledge.” (Dods)

No one receives His testimony: John prophetically anticipated the rejection Jesus would endure in His ministry. He came from heaven, He testified to the truth, but relatively no one received His testimony, even though witnesses certified it as the truth of God.

“He meant that comparatively none received it. Compared with the crowds who came to him, compared with the nation of Israel, compared with the human race, those who received Christ’s testimony were so few that his sadness made him call them none.” (Spurgeon)

“To accept His teaching is therefore to testify that God is true; on the other hand, to reject it, is in effect to make God a liar (John 3:33; cf. 1 John 1:10, 5:10).” (Tasker)

Certified: “When you believe in Jesus, you have set your seal to the testimony of Jesus, which is the revelation of the Lord. You have certified that you believe in God as true.” (Spurgeon)

5. (John 3:34-36) The price for rejecting the true testimony regarding Jesus.

“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

He whom God has sent speaks the words of God: Jesus is a uniquely reliable revelation, because He has the Holy Spirit without measure, in contrast to the previous prophets.

For God does not give the Spirit by measure: John spoke both of Jesus (who had the Holy Spirit without measure) and prophetically of the New Covenant

(which featured a true outpouring of the Holy Spirit). For those joined to the Messiah through the New Covenant, there is as much of the Spirit as needed, given without measure.

“The Rabbinical books say that the Holy Spirit was only given to the prophets by measure. This unmeasured pouring of the Spirit on Him accounts for his speaking the words of God.” (Alford)

The Father loves the Son: “Twice in this Gospel we read that ‘the Father loves the Son’ — here (John 3:35) and in John 5:20. The verb here is *agapao*; in the other place it is *phileo*. The alternation of those two verbs in identical statements illustrates the Evangelist’s propensity for varying his choice of synonyms.” (Bruce)

The Son: “This absolute use of ‘the Son’ as a designation of Christ certainly suggests, if it does not prove, the proper Divinity of Christ. It is the favourite designation in this Gospel.” (Dods)

He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him: John explained that because Jesus is the man from heaven, there is a heavy price to pay for rejecting Him. If you reject the Son, then you receive the wrath.

He who does not believe: “He may think that his not believing is a very small business, but, indeed, it is a barbed shaft shot against the Deity.” (Spurgeon)

The wrath of God: “The word does not mean a sudden gust of passion or a burst of temper. Rather, it is the settled displeasure of God against sin. It is the divine allergy to moral evil, the reaction of righteousness to unrighteousness.” (Tenney)

To reject the Son is to reject His gift — eternal life. You can’t tell Him, “I’ll take the gift but reject You.”

“‘The wrath of God’ is a concept which is uncongenial to many modern students, and various devices are adopted to soften the expression or explain it away. This cannot be done, however, without doing great violence to many passages of Scripture and without distracting from God’s moral character.” (Morris)

“It is not that God sends wrath upon him; it is that he brings that wrath upon himself.” (Barclay)

The wrath of God abides: It abides in this world, because sin’s evil abides until the wrong of it is perfectly satisfied. It abides into the next world, because those who reject Jesus cannot offer a perfect sacrifice acceptable to

God. The wrath of God abides until the perfect payment Jesus made on the cross satisfies the debt of evil and guilt.

“We may not like it but we should not ignore it. John tells us that this wrath ‘abideth’. We should not expect it to fade away with the passage of time.” (Morris)

“Holy Whitfield, when he was preaching, would often hold up his hands, and, with tears streaming down his eyes, would exclaim, ‘Oh, the wrath to come! the wrath to come!’ Then would he pause because his emotions checked his utterance.” (Spurgeon)

In summary, as we look back on John 3, there are four prominent must or key takeaways:

- The Sinner’s must: you must be born again (John 3:7).
- The Savior’s must: so, must the Son of Man be lifted up (John 3:14).
- The Sovereign’s must: He must increase (John 3:30).
- The Servant’s must: I must decrease (John 3:30).

John 3 paints a vivid picture of spiritual transformation, divine love, and eternal life through Jesus' enlightening conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin. Jesus introduces the concept of being "born again" spiritually to inherit the Kingdom of God. The chapter also contains one of the most quoted verses in the Bible, John 3:16, presenting God's incredible love for the world. Furthermore, it highlights John the Baptist's testimony affirming Jesus' divinity and superior role.

References:

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