



**SERIES: September 2022 – February 2023 Believe**

**SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD**

**Tuesday, September 20, 2022**

**Scripture: John 3:1-3**

**TITLE: Religion Won't Save You**

Have you ever seen one of those personal makeover shows? They are pretty amazing to see people who look like Neanderthals but transform into James Bond or the next supermodel. It's incredible. But I've discovered that most of those transformations don't last. They are surface level because what really needs to make the change permanent is on the inside.

Jesus said something quite similar about entering the Kingdom of God. What did he say?

Turn with me to John 3:1-3 (ESV).

Now 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 him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Jesus has begun performing miracles. He cleansed the temple. He's stood up to the Jewish authorities. He's getting noticed. And one person who takes note is Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a Pharisee. A Pharisee was a conservative, Jewish zealot. The Pharisees were the ones who knew the law and followed it exactly. The problem was they thought religion and legalism were the way to heaven. Nicodemus was not just a Pharisee, but he was a ruler of the Jews. He wasn't the high priest, but he was part of the Sanhedrin. This was the governing council of Israel.

He has taken notice of Jesus, so he comes to Him by night. There's some discussion as to why John includes this here. I think it's clear that there would have been some protection from observation and distraction while meeting at night. It was safer. Some people think there's also an element of metaphor for Nicodemus' spiritual status. He was still in the dark. Maybe.

Nicodemus comes to him and says, "look, you are doing the miraculous. No one could do what you do, teacher, unless God is on your side." There's no doubt that Nicodemus knew about John the Baptist's testimony of who Jesus was. The signs were backing it up. So Nicodemus comes to meet Jesus. And Jesus knows his searching heart and answers the unasked question.

"Truly, no one can enter the kingdom of God, that is heaven, unless one is born again." This was a game changer and no doubt troubling for Nicodemus. He had joined the "salvation insurance club." He had done his part. He had the badge and the track record to prove it. But Jesus says, "Unless you are reborn" or made new, you can't get into heaven. That superficial, exterior makeover won't cut it with God. You need a complete overhaul, and it begins in the heart.

Troubling words for Nicodemus. These are troubling words for the world today. The world is full of religion and legalism. But it won't work. Salvation is a gift from God. You must be born again.

So here's my challenge for you today: take the rebirth check-up. How in the past did you play the game of religion, thinking it would save you? How have you let legalism – that salvation insurance creep back in? Get rid of it with your check-up, and trust Jesus' words here.

If you've never experienced rebirth in Christ, what is it that you think will bring you salvation? What is it that prevents you from believing Jesus?

Jesus offers everyone the chance to enter the Kingdom of God. Do you believe Him?

When we believe Jesus, we will win the day.