

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • TV098B

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John 3:3

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Here’s my subject today: **“A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL”**

And my text is one that I suppose all of you could quote; you’ve heard it again and again but let me read it for you. It’s found in **John the 3:3**. It says; *“Jesus answered and said unto him verily, verily, I say unto thee (or truly I solemnly declare) except a man be born again (or born from above) he cannot see, (that is he cannot understand, he cannot comprehend, he cannot be acquainted with) the kingdom of God, except a man be born again.”*

Now, you would think that men who engage in the business of the kingdom of God would care enough for themselves and for their hearers and for their generation to give diligent study and concentrated study on the methods of our Master.

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

It looks like men who engage in this business of preaching the Gospel would study how our Lord Jesus Christ dealt with men, what He said to men, and how He dealt with each one. The Lord didn't deal with everybody alike.

Our Lord knew all men and He knew that while all men are sinners, yet all of them are not alike. Men are different. Our Lord met men where they were. He didn't deal with everyone the same way.

One old-time preacher use to say: "He didn't give every sick man the same pill" but He met men where they were and dealt with them according to their need. In other words, the Lord talked to the Samaritan woman about her vain attempts at worship. He said: *"You worship you know not what."*

And He dealt with her about her sinful life. He said: *"Go call your husband."* She said, *"I've had five and the man I'm living with now is not my husband."* And he said, *"In that you have spoken the truth; you have no husband."* He dealt with her about her vain attempts at worship and about her sinful life.

But He didn't deal that way with the rich young ruler. He talked to him about his idols. He talked to him about his covetousness, his selfishness. He knew that this young man had great possessions and he loved those possessions and he held to those possessions.

And our Lord told him: *"Go and sell your possessions and give them to the poor and then you come and take up your cross and follow me. And the young man went away sorrowful."*

Our Lord didn't deal with him about an outwardly wicked life; he had a wicked heart because a selfish heart is just as wicked as an adulteress heart. A covetous heart is just as evil as an idolatress heart because covetousness is idolatry.

But our Lord didn't deal with him about his vain attempts at worship or about his sinful practices; He dealt with him where his problem was, where his point of rebellion was. You've got a point of rebellion. And our Lord dealt with men in that particular area, where their point of rebellion was.

And then He dealt with the religious leaders about their self-righteousness. He didn't talk to them about selling what they had and giving it to the poor. They didn't have anything.

He didn't talk to them about their many husbands and wives; they didn't have many of them, some of them only one. They were religious, moral men and self-righteous men.

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

So, our Lord dealt with them about their self-righteousness and here's what He said to them, He said; "*The publicans and the harlots are going to enter heaven before you.*" Now you think about that! That's where He dealt with them.

And then when He dealt with the Centurion He talked to him about faith. He said to this man, "*If you can believe all things are possible to them that believe.*"

And I could go right on through the Word with Zacchaeus, Mary, the harlot, and all these different ones and point out how Christ dealt with each one where He was meeting his particular need.

But today; there are all the soul-winners, Bible teachers and preachers go forth just giving the same A B C and 1, 2, 3, and being with all people as if they were all the same. They are all sinners and they all need a Saviour but you will find them in different areas.

Our Lord talked about a farmer, he said: "*A sower went forth to sow.*" Now, we can learn from the farmer. The farmer just doesn't go out with a handful of seed on April the 1st and start slinging seed.

No sir; the farmer first of all plows the land and then the farmer discs the land and then he breaks it up then he lays it out in rows and then, after the ground is prepared, he begins to sow the seed.

There's a time for everything. There's a time to leave the ground alone. You don't put a plow in the ground in the middle of December, not around here. It is time to leave the ground alone.

There's a time to plow, to break it up and deal ruthlessly with it, to tear it up and disc it and break it all to pieces.

Then there's a time to lay it out in rows and then there's a time to sow your seed. And there's a time to stand back. And don't go dig a hole to see if the seed is sprouted yet. You know, dig a little hole, and pick it up and say, "well, it hasn't sprouted." So you put it back and you've lost it.

There's a time to leave it alone and back off and let the rain fall on it and let the dew of God fall on it, and let it germinate, and let it as God Himself gives it life; let it grow. Then there's a time for harvest. There's a time to reap.

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

But this generation in this day, this generation of preachers; I don't understand them. We haven't studied the methods of our Master. There's a time of harvest. He's the Lord of the harvest.

And you just don't go out and there's people listening to me and I'm trusting and praying that the Holy Spirit will take each separate message and meet each separate need according to God's will.

But, you meet men where they are. You deal with them as they are. There's a time to leave men alone. Some of you wives want your husbands to be saved and you keep nagging and nagging and keep sowing seed and sowing seed.

He might need a little conviction of the law work in his heart. He might need some preacher to cut his legs out from under him and strip him of his self-righteousness and point out his rebellion and commit him to the judgment of God almighty and show him that God's not obligated to save any man. God doesn't owe you anything.

Many times; there's a time to leave the ground alone. There's a time to leave them alone. That's what our Lord said of the Pharisees, the disciple said: "*They were offended.*" He said, "*Leave them alone.*" It's time to leave people alone.

And there's a time to plow. There's a time to take the Word of God and plow and dig and tear up the ground and ruthlessly deal with it. Some people feel like some of us preachers are too plain; we've got to be gentle, we've got to be kind, and we've got to be loving. There's a time to be gentle and a time to be loving and there's a time to be ruthless.

There's a time to yell "fire!" When a building's on fire you don't go around whispering and saying "now I love you and I don't want to disturb you and I wouldn't want to add to your woes. But if you find it convenient and it's not too much trouble to you if I were you I would get out of this building because it's on fire."

Now, that's not the way to warn men. The way to warn men is to scream "fire, to get out and get away from the judgment; the buildings falling down."

There's a time to deal with men with the law of God, to strip them and to break them and to knock their foundations out from under them and to whip them with the law of God.

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Then there's a time to lay the rows and to sow the seed of the Gospel. And when that seeds been sown; don't keep inquiring, digging, and pulling the seed up, and looking to see if it's doing any good and bearing any fruit; leave it alone.

God must make men live. God must reveal Christ to men's hearts. God almighty's got to do the saving. We are just sowing the seed. We are just planting the seed; that's the seed of the Word of God.

And God has got to make it live. And I'm not going to make it live by keeping on inquiring if it's doing any good. I plant it and leave it alone and pray that God will send the rain and pray that God will send His Spirit and quicken that seed and make it live in that sinner's heart.

And I will tell you this, if God almighty germinates the seed and makes it live it won't be long; you will see some evidences. You will see some fruit. It will bear fruit if it lives, it'll bear fruit and it will come up.

And that's the way our Lord dealt. I don't know a better illustration than **John chapter 3**, to study the methods of our Master with a real, diligent study. Let's just get our minds right on what Christ is doing here.

Now, I want you to watch this; it just pictures our generation. It's such a good picture of this day!

First of all: Nicodemus was a religious man, not a godly man by no means, a ruthless man, a self-righteous man, a religious man, not a godly man and not a saved man, and not a man who knew Christ but a religious man!

And that's what we've got today; we've got religion. We've got more religion per square inch than we use to have per square mile. This whole world's got religious indigestion. There's religion up to our ears all over the world, religion of every brand, sort, and contraption you can think of, religion, religion, religion, not godliness, not righteousness, not truth, but religion.

Secondly: And not only was Nicodemus a religious man but he was a man who felt he had a knowledge of spiritual things

He said, "*Master, we know.*" And you know; an empty vessel is hard to find today. A fellow that doesn't know everything is hard to find. It's hard to find somebody that doesn't know everything about God and about the Bible and about salvation.

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

People always tell me: “Well; I’ll tell you what I think or I believe what I believe or I’ll tell you what I know.” Everybody knows something. They haven’t studied and they haven’t been taught but they know.

And that’s the way Nicodemus was; he knew: “Master; we know, we know, at least we think we know.” Everybody I’m trying to preach to knows; they know about all there is to know. There’s not many folks that are teachable.

Do you know what a disciple is? What is a disciple? It’s a learner; that’s what a disciple is, a learner. Are you are learner or are you a knower. Nicodemus was a knower; he said: “*We know, Master we know.*”

Thirdly: And then something else about him; he thought he knew God!

He said: “*We know that you are teacher come from God.*” Why, he didn’t know God. Christ said to those Pharisees; (they thought they knew God) our Lord said to those Pharisees; “*You neither know me nor my Father. You don’t know God.*” He told them that; “*you don’t know God.*”

Men know the God of their imagination. Men know the God of their denomination. Men know the God of their own thinking, the God of their own creed. That’s the God they know.

But the living God; to know the living God is to have eternal life: “*This is eternal life that they might know thee the only true God (and living God), Jesus Christ.*” Do you know the living God?

Men know the God of their fathers, they know the God of their imaginations, they know the God of their thoughts, they know the God of their denominations, and they know the God of their creeds. Not many people in their hearts know the living God. Christ said; “I know the Father but you don’t know Him.” Nicodemus thought he did.

I’ll tell you something else about Nicodemus. This is our day; it’s a beautiful parallel!

Fourthly: Nicodemus was impressed by what he saw, not by what he heard, not by what he felt, but he was impressed by what he saw!

He said; “*Master, we know that you are a teacher come from God for no man can do the miracles you do except God be with him.*” He was impressed by what he saw, not by what he heard, and not by what he felt, but he was impressed by what he saw.

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

What's our generation running after? They are running after the entertainers. They are running after the miracle workers. They are running after the folks that are putting on a good show, the things that appeal to their eyes, and the things that appeal to their flesh, the things that appeal to their sight; that's Nicodemus.

All right; let's see how our Lord dealt with him. Here is this religious man who thought that he knew spiritual truth, who thought that he knew God. He was a religious man who judged who came from God and who didn't come from God, who was saved and wasn't saved, who represented God and who didn't represent God.

And he was a man who was visibly moved and tremendously impressed by what he saw, not by what he felt, not by what he heard, but what he saw; it impressed him.

And that's what impresses men today: "We need to put a few more flowers around and have some more horns blowing and have some folks walking up and down a gangway you know and put on a good show and put a few folks up here and break their walking sticks and crush the wheels on their wheelchair to give people something to see, something to impress them." But that's Nicodemus.

And our Lord answered him. But you know; what's the answer that He gave? He said: "*Nicodemus; I assure you that except a man be born again, (born from above), he cannot see, (he cannot know, he cannot understand, and he cannot comprehend) the kingdom of God.*"

Now, that's a strange answer. Someone said to me one time: "What Christ said to Nicodemus is totally unrelated to what Nicodemus said to Him." No; it's not either! It's exactly what Nicodemus needed to hear, exactly, indeed.

The Lord brought him to the heart of the whole matter. He said; "Nicodemus; you profess to know about God. You profess to know about spiritual matters. You profess to know about a relationship with God but what you profess to know is based upon the darkness of human wisdom; it's based upon the darkness of human understanding, of human judgment, and of human knowledge, and this is the confusion from which most men speak. Nicodemus; you are speaking from darkness. You are speaking about things you do not understand."

And what our Lord is showing Nicodemus is that his natural, fleshly wisdom and understanding would not enable him either to discern or to understand or to enter into the kingdom of God. In order for any man to understand spiritual truth he must be born again.

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

He must have a totally new nature. There must be the begetting of a new nature. Nicodemus was talking about things that the natural mind understood, a man to see the kingdom of God, to understand the kingdom of God; he has to have a spiritual mind.

Nicodemus was speaking from a natural heart. A man who understands and comprehends the kingdom of God must have a new heart. *“Eye hath not seen, (the natural eyes), ear hath not heard, (natural ears); neither hath entered the heart of a natural man the things that God has prepared for them that love him.”*

“But God hath revealed him unto us by his Spirit for the Spirit searcheth the deep things of God. No man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man that’s in him. Even so, the things of God knoweth no man but the spirit of God. And the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit; they are foolishness to him and he cannot discern and he cannot understand them.”

This is what Christ said to Nicodemus; here is this religious man, this man who thought he had spiritual knowledge, this man who thought he had an understanding of God, this man who was impressed by what he saw.

And our Lord said; “You’ve got to be born again to even comprehend, to even understand, to even in any way to enter into the things of the kingdom of God.” A new man must be begotten, a new nature, a new heart, and a new mind.

What was Nicodemus’ reaction to this? His reaction to this statement, *“You must be born again; you cannot understand the kingdom of God unless you are born again;”* his reaction was the same as we get today, he ridiculed him, he mocked, and he made fun.

You say, “I never noticed that before.” Yes he did; now you listen to him, our Lord said; “Nicodemus, truly I solemnly say unto you; except a man is born again he doesn’t have the mind to comprehend the kingdom of God, a heart to understand the kingdom of God, and ears to hear the Words of the kingdom of God.”

And Nicodemus said, *“How can a man be born when he’s old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”* He ridiculed and mocked the Lord.

Well my friend, remember this; you don’t destroy the truth by mocking me. You don’t do away with the truth by ridiculing me. That’s what a lot of people do in debates and arguments you know.

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

If they don't like the doctrine of election they'll ridicule it. If they don't like the doctrine of perseverance they will make fun of it. If they don't like the doctrine of God's power to heal they'll make fun of it.

If they don't like the power of God in ruling over the universe they will make fun of it. If they don't like the idea that God's sovereign in all things they will say something like: "Well, what if I run out in front of a truck and the truck hits me; that will mess up God's plan."

You can't do away with the truth by making fun of it. That's what Nicodemus' doing, he's mocking. He's saying: "*Well, how can a man be born when he's old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?*"

Well, mercifully the Lord answers and the Lord didn't cut him off. He didn't say: "Well, if you are going to ridicule and mock and make fun you can be gone." No, He said; "Nicodemus; if you could go back into your mother's womb and be born again you would still be flesh. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh.*"

Do you see that? If you could after he is full grown, be born a second, third, fourth, and fifth time; he would still be flesh. "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh*" and it comprehends fleshly things. It understands fleshly things; it moves in a fleshly kingdom.

But salvation, eternal life, and a relationship with God is not of the earth; it's of heaven. It's a spiritual kingdom. It's a kingdom of righteousness, peace, justice, mercy and truth.

We are not talking about earth, sand, sea, stars, water, and the elements of this world. We are talking about the things of God. "*That which is flesh is flesh* (and it understands flesh and comprehends flesh and it enters into the things of the flesh)."

"*But that which is born of the Spirit is spirit;*" it's from above. You are talking about two kingdoms, two separate worlds, a world of flesh and a world of Spirit. And that's the reason the Lord said, "*A man must be born again.*" That's the reason a man must be born again.

The natural flesh understands the things of the flesh and the things of this world. But the things of the kingdom of God; no man knows except that man has life from above, begotten of God, conceived of God, enlightened by God, illuminated by God, and born of God, a new nature.

All right, we are not through; Nicodemus; the Lord has dealt with him ruthlessly and whittled him down. He brought him to the place where he's just about got his mouth closed. He said, "*How can these things be?*"

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Do I detect the proud, religious man, who just got through saying: “*Master; we know, we know, we know.*” Do I hear this man saying “*How (and why) can these things be; (I don’t understand).*”

Oh, that’s the sweetest music in all the world when a man, when a sinner, when a guilty sinner is brought to the place where he asks somebody who knows something about it, “*How can a man be born again, how can these things be? How can God be just and justify the ungodly?*”

“*How can he be clean that is born of a woman?*” How can God in His righteousness and truth and holiness look upon me and love me? How can an ungodly person like me enter into the holy presence of the living God? How can a son of sin be made a son of God? How; isn’t that beautiful? Well, the Lord’s not through with him.

And I will tell you this, if you will study how our Lord dealt with men, He dealt plainly with them.

He said: “I thought you were a master in Israel. Are you a master, are you a teacher? You’ve got a degree in theology, don’t you understand these things, don’t you?”

“Nicodemus, if I told you things of this earth and you don’t understand; how could you understand if I told you things about the counsels of God, of the mysteries of God, of the kingdom of God? How could you comprehend it?”

The Lord said: “There’s one thing about it; no man is going to go to heaven and listen in to the counsels of God and find out what it’s all about. The only way a man is going to learn is for the Son of man who came from heaven to teach him.” And Christ said: “*That’s me.*”

Are you ready to listen to the Son of man? Are you ready to shut your mouth? Are you ready to unlearn all of your natural wisdom? Are you willing to bring empty hands? “In my hands no price I bring.”

Are you willing to bring an empty, broken heart? Are you willing to come and sit at the feet of the Master and listen and learn of Him?

The walls of pride must be leveled. The traditions of men must be laid down. The wisdom of men must be forgotten. The heart, mind, ears and eyes of natural flesh, must be dismissed and God almighty must give us a new nature, a new heart, and a new mind, to hear Him speak who speaks through His Word.

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Then our Lord after He had brought this man down and stripped him and broke him; He preached the Gospel to him. The Gospel is presented now by our Lord in a picture.

Now Nicodemus was familiar with the history of Israel. So our Lord said in **John 3:14**, “Nicodemus; as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; now you know about that Nicodemus? Do you know the sin of Israel, the rebellion, murmuring, and finding fault with God?”

“Do you know the curse of the fiery serpent? The fiery serpents came down to the camp and they had bitten the people and the people were dying, the curse of God and the wrath of God was upon them.”

And Moses prayed to God for deliverance and God said; “Moses; make a serpent of brass, just like the serpents that had bitten the people in the same likeness lifted upon a pole and whosoever looketh shall live.”

Now he said; “As Moses lifted up that serpent in the wilderness for a bitten, dying, rebellious people to be healed, even so must the Son of man. Christ is the Son of man, the Son of God, the Son of man; even so must he be lifted up.”

What was our sin? It was rebellion against God. We rebelled against God in our father Adam. We rebelled against God in our hearts, in our thoughts, in our deeds, and in our words. And God has sent the curse of the broken law; we are dying in our sins and we’re dead in our sins and we are headed for eternal condemnation.

But God made Christ in the likeness of sinful flesh. What was it that bit us? It was the serpent of sin and Christ was made in the likeness of our human flesh and lifted up on a cross between heaven and earth just like that brazen serpent was lifted up that God might be just and justify, that God might be righteous and merciful, that God might be Holy in love, that God might have man’s sins paid for and be reconciled to man.

What’s the remedy? Whosoever looketh on Christ shall live!

Well, the cause of all this: “*For God so loved the world.*” Christ didn’t come down here to get God in a good humor. He didn’t come down here to make God love us; He came because God did love us.

A HEART PREPARED FOR THE GOSPEL

JOHN 3:3 • HENRY T. MAHAN

“For God so loved the world (of sinners) that he gave; he sent his only begotten Son that whosoever; (that’s a big word, a wide word), believeth, (not worketh), believeth on him, (not on their faith or on their works) but on him should never perish but have everlasting life.”

Are you ready for that message that God sufficiently brought you down to where you say “Lord; save me or I perish? If you will you can make me whole.” Men have got to be ready for that; for when they are ready they can rejoice in it!