

# The Eyes of Faith

## John 3:1-17

### Introduction

For the first few days of my recovery from recent knee replacement surgery, I faithfully took the pain medication prescribed to me by the surgeon. "You will want this," he told me.

- But somewhere around day three or day four, I saw something that made me stop taking those pills immediately.

Some of you will remember the animated movie "Pete's Dragon." It starred Helen Reddy and Mickey Rooney and was released in 1977. Well, I saw the dragon from that movie climbing up the stairs from our basement.

- I kid you not. I saw him with these very eyes.
- No one else in the house saw him. Just me. And he was very big and very real.
- That was the day I stopped taking that pain medication. And coincidentally, I haven't seen the dragon since.

My favorite all-time comic strip is Calvin and Hobbes.

- Calvin is a highly intelligent, six-year-old boy with a vivid imagination and a knack for getting into trouble.
- Hobbes is stuffed tiger. At least that's what most people see.
- To Calvin, Hobbes is a real tiger. Calvin sees him, talks with him, goes on adventures with him.
- No one else can. Only Calvin's eyes can see the real Hobbes.

Those are meant to be humorous examples of a very important truth.

Some eyes can see things other eyes cannot see.

A mom standing in a courtroom where her son has just been convicted of a horrible crime sees the sweet little boy who used to snuggle in her arms whenever there was a thunderstorm.

- A loving teacher sees potential in a difficult student.
- An artist can see the degrees of hue in a sunset.
- A great writer can look at a blank sheet of paper and see a prize-winning novel.

Our Gospel gives another example.

- In it, we meet a very smart and highly respected man. His name was Nicodemus.
- In fact, this very smart and highly respected was also one of the most religious men of his day. He not only was a Pharisee but was also a member of the Jewish ruling council.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. (John 3:1)

- So he was no dummy when it came to religious stuff.

But there was something about Jesus that puzzled him. So one night he approached Jesus to get some answers. Here is what he said:

Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him. (John 3:2)

On the surface, that appears to be a pretty accurate statement. But Nicodemus makes a couple of major mistakes.

1. Nicodemus called Jesus "a teacher."

- Yes, Jesus was a teacher. He taught us many things.
- How many parables can you think? Those are teachings.
- The Beatitudes. Those are teachings.
- But was much more than a teacher. He is the Messiah. The one whose birth had been prophesied in those Old Testament Scriptures that Nicodemus knew very well. He should know better.
- Of all the people in the world, the ones who were experts in the Old Testament Scriptures should have been the first to rally around Jesus!

But Nicodemus couldn't see it.

2. Nicodemus thought God was "with" Jesus.

- "With" Jesus. Like God is "with" you and me. Like God was "with" Nicodemus.
- Jesus was God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory ... (John 1:1, 14)

- One of the unique features in John's Gospel are seven "I AM" statements made by Jesus. I AM the light of the world, the bread of life, the good shepherd.
- I AM is God's name. It is the name Moses was to use in order to free the Israelites from Egypt.
- Jesus wasn't with God. He was God.

But Nicodemus couldn't see it.

During this Lenten season my sermons are focused on a line in the Lord's Prayer:

THY KINGDOM COME

In this series we are asking ourselves "What does it mean when I pray that? What am I asking for?"

- On Thursday evening, I talked about how when I ask to do something good in my life, I can be guaranteed that the devil will try to undermine that. That is the teaching in the parable the weeds.
- But even when there are weeds, we keep praying “Thy Kingdom Come.”

So now we meet Nicodemus. He stands eyeball-to-eyeball with the Kingdom that has come in person ... and he can't see it. Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior of the World, is right there. But he just sees a teacher and a companion of God. Why?

Well, Jesus tells him that it's because he has an eye problem. He has the wrong kind of eyes.

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” (John 3:3)

Look all you want, Nicodemus. But until you are born again, you will only see a Teacher and a good man. A nice guy who does nice things. But until something changes with your eyes, you will never see the Kingdom.

If I want to keep seeing magical dragons in my basement, I could probably make that happen by refilling a prescription.

- But what does Nicodemus need to do to see the Kingdom? What do we need to do?
- Jesus gives the answer. It's in that third verse we just read.

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### **#1: WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?**

Despite being one of the world's most religiously-oriented people, Nicodemus needed a change of his heart—a spiritual transformation that could only come from above.

Jesus uses a term here that I think has been warped a bit by churches over the centuries – that phrase “born again.”

- There is nothing magical in those words.
- It simply means that person who does not trust in Jesus starts to trust in Jesus.
- God does the work here, but He does the work through our willingness to believe that Jesus is more than a teacher who hangs out with God. We need to believe that Jesus is God's Son – the Savior of the world.

Several years ago, Carrie Underwood popularized a song that was titled “Jesus Take the Wheel.” It's probably not a deep theological explanation, but in essence, that's what happens. I stop trusting me, and start trusting him.

## #2: WHY DOES THAT NEED TO HAPPEN?

The question logically comes, "Why does a person need to be born again?" "Why do I need to see the Kingdom?"

When the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, he described how from birth all people were:

... were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air...  
(Ephesians 2:1)

When he wrote to the church in Rome, he was more succinct:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)

Apart from a relationship of trust in Jesus, all of us are spiritually "dead." But when they start believing in Jesus as their Savior, they receive a new life through that faith in Christ. The Bible likens it to a rebirth. In other words, you are "born again."

- Once that happens, three very important things happen:
  1. Your sins are forgiven.
  2. You have a place in heaven.
  3. Your eyes are opened to matters of faith. The pieces start to fit.

## #3: HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?

How does the new birth come to be? Jesus will tell Nicodemus the simplest answer to that question later in our reading:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Back in Ephesians, we read:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)

Sometimes, I think, it is the simplicity of it all that complicates it for some people. We are kind of built to believe that important things are hard.

- There is an Old Testament story about a mighty general who had leprosy and not one could cure him.
- But he met the prophet Elisha, who told him to go dunk himself in the Jordan River seven times.
- That sounded like a pretty lame cure to Naaman refused to do ... until one of his aides said this:

If the prophet had asked you to do something hard and heroic, wouldn't you have done it? So why not do this simple "wash and be clean?" (2 Kings 5:13)

The devil wants us to think it that spiritual transformation is complicated, but it isn't. It really is that simple.

### **APPLICATION**

Every time you and I pray "THY KINGDOM COME," we are asking God to bring about a spiritual transformation in the lives of people.

- And that starts with me:

Change my heart, oh God  
Make it ever true  
Change my heart, oh God  
May I be like You

- But it is also a prayer for spiritual transformation in the lives of others.

If you have never trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, will you consider the prompting of the Holy Spirit as He speaks to your heart? You need to be born again. Will you pray a prayer of repentance and faith and become a new creation in Christ today?

Father, I come before you with a humble heart. I confess that I have fallen short of Your will for my life. Please forgive me, cleanse me and turn me away from anything that keeps me separated from You. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and give me the eyes of faith so that I see You and all You do in our world. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Our memory verse for this Lenten season:

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)

Amen