



## TIME OF GRACE®

# *Fake News/Real Jesus: You Must Be Born Again*

## Study Notes

### *Summary*

Many Christians know the famous words of John 3:16. But when did Jesus speak them? And why? And to whom? This message teaches that powerful verse in the context of the powerful verses around it, reminding us of the new life that only the born again can find.

- **John 3:1-10:** <sup>1</sup>Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup>He came to Jesus at night and 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.” <sup>3</sup>Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” <sup>4</sup>“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup>You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup>The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” <sup>9</sup>“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. <sup>10</sup>“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?”
- Born Again = \_\_\_\_\_ into a new kind of \_\_\_\_\_.
- **John 3:11-21:** <sup>11</sup>“Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup>I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? <sup>13</sup>No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup>Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. <sup>19</sup>This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>Everyone

who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”

- **John 19:40-42:** <sup>40</sup> Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. <sup>41</sup> At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. <sup>42</sup> Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

### *Points to Ponder*

1. Compare 1 Peter 1:23 and James 1:18. What do these two passages have in common? What do they teach us about being born again?
2. Review John 1:12,13. How do these verses support the definition of “born again” from today’s message?
3. Are you born again? According to John chapter 3, how can a person know the answer to that question?

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read John 4:1-26.

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Fake News, Real Jesus: You Must Be Born Again**  
John 3:11-21  
May 17, 2020

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

You know this pastor trick? You tell a story that gets people interested in what you're about to say; that really motivates them to listen. And normally I do that and I thought about doing that today but I realize I ain't got time for that. Because today, I need literally every minute and every second of your attention to teach you this - what just might be the most important chapter in the entire Bible.

In this chapter, Jesus is going to tell us that in the entire planet, there are only two groups of people: Some who are part of God's family and some who aren't and he's going to ask all of us a very serious question - which group we are part of? So if I skip the intro story to save a few minutes to talk about that, would you still listen? I hope so because this, ladies and gentlemen, is the chapter that has changed the world; this is John chapter three.

"Now there is a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you're a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.'"

Nicodemus is a very religious man who had a very important position in the religious world of the first century. He comes to Jesus at night. Apparently, there was all this controversy about the identity of Jesus. Most of his fellow Pharisees didn't believe that Jesus was actually from God but he was curious and so under the cover and secrecy of darkness, he comes at night to hear the testimony from Jesus' lips. And it's really important to know that this man is a Pharisee.

Do you know about the Pharisees? They were probably the most religious, doctrinally detailed, rule making, rule keeping, serious about the rules kind of religious people that you can imagine. If you have a friend or a family member who's always opening the Bible, always saying "I'll pray about that," always inviting you to religious services, always giving generously to ministry, that's what the Pharisees were like. In fact, Pharisee actually comes from a word that means "separate ones" because the Pharisees tried to separate themselves from anything that was sinful or wrong or impure or unclean. So here was like a very moral, passionate, religious, spiritual man and he comes to Jesus apparently pretty humbly with some honest questions and compliments and do you know what Jesus does? Look at the shocking words that Jesus says to Nicodemus next: "Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' 'How can someone be born when they're old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely, they can't enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they're born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be

born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it's going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.' 'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked. 'You're Israel's teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things?'"

You must be born again, Jesus told the churchgoing guy. And it begs the question: What does that even mean? I mean, Nicodemus was baffled. Did you catch all his questions? He says, "How, how, how? A man can't climb up into his mother's womb when he's old," Nicodemus asked, and I wonder if Jesus grinned? I mean, it's hard enough for Nicodemus' mom when he was like eight pounds and 20 inches. Now his big Jewish beard was probably eight pounds and 20 inches. He's trying to do the math and figure it out in his head: "Jesus, what do you mean? How's it possible for a person to be born again?"

And I wonder if some of us would ask that same question? Jesus, we hear you, you're saying that this matters more than anything but what do you mean? And in our culture, that's a really good question because I bet you've at least heard of the phrase, "to be born again." But in kind of contemporary America, a born again Christian is like a kind of Christian, right? There's Catholics and there's Protestants and then there's born again Christians. Is that what Jesus meant? You have to be one certain kind of Christian or go to one certain kind of church to see the kingdom of God?

Let's think about that for a second. How do you biblically define the phrase "born again?" Let me start with just the word "born." If I was going to give you like my pastor definition for what it means to be born, here's what I'd say: You were born when you were passively pushed into a new kind of life. Alright? Passively pushed. When you were born, I don't know why we get you gifts because you didn't do anything. Alright? You weren't active, you weren't passionate, you didn't count to three and get up the strength. You kind of went on the slip and slide and then you came out of the womb. Someone did the work but it was not you. And someone was active but it was not you. Someone went through a whole lot of pain for you to be born but guess what? It wasn't you. You were passively pushed and when that happened, you entered a whole new kind of life. Like, you had life before, life in the womb, but this kind of life would be radically different. The sights, the sounds, the experiences; when you were born, you were passively pushed into a new kind of life. And as we fill in this blank, we realize that to be born again is exactly the same. Sometime after your original birth from your mother, you were passively pushed into a new kind of life. I say "passively pushed" because it's not something you did. You weren't born again because of your effort, your decision, your performance, your morality. You don't become born again after 10 church services and 100 prayers and however many dollars in generosity. No, this was - this was God's work and not yours. This was the work of the Holy Spirit and not yours. This was the pain that Jesus suffered on the cross and not yours. You were passively given the gift of new life. It's why the Bible says in Ephesians 2 that we can't boast. Like if we're Christians, if we've been born again, we can't look at non-Christians and think we're so great and they're so foolish because anything we have, even faith itself, is a gift from God. And we're passively pushed into a new kind of life.

Before you're born again, you have life. You can wake up in your bed, eat breakfast with your family, you can go to work, you can watch Netflix, and you can come home. But when you're

born again, you have a whole new kind of life. You wake up thinking new things. You say different words before you take that first bite. You have a different attitude about your boss and your purpose; about your day and your entertainment. Everything - from yourself, your morality, your relationships, sex, marriage, work, social media - like, it might be the same stuff but we have a whole new view of it. When you're born again, you start to think about the rules of God and the will of God. You start to bow your knee and submit to the authority of God because you trust God. You live life compelled and guided by the love of God and the grace of God and the forgiveness of God. That's why you want to live for the glory of God. You might be the same person but you have a whole new kind of life; a life that's based on God, the one who actively gave you life in the first place.

Or if I could summarize the last five minutes in a sentence, to be born again means to be a Christian. Everyone who's actually a Christian is born again. You don't become born again by just being religious or stepping into a building but when you're passively pushed by God into a whole new kind of life. And do you know what I wish? I wish we had about an hour more in church and I wish I could pass the microphone around so that some of you could tell your stories of being born again but we ain't got time for that. I wish we did but then we'd run out of time for what has become the most important verse in the Bible; a verse that has been changing lives and summarizing this complicated big book in just a sentence.

So let me prepare your heart here for the context of John 3:16. Let's start in verse 11: "Very truly I tell you,' Jesus said to Nicodemus, 'we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen but still you people do not accept our testimony. I've spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven - the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. 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. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him."

Now you don't look right. I just read to you the greatest news in human history so I'm going to give your face one more try. Let me reread to you John 3:16 and I want even you longtime church people to let your face express what your heart believes about these words. Let's say it one more time: "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." Yes, Amen to that. Well done, you guys did way better than the last service. I'm pretty proud of you. That is simply stunning and I pray, I beg, that your heart would never get used to those words.

Let me break it down and show you the good news. Let's start with the word "God." Do you know the most incredible thing about God? He doesn't need you. No offense. Like, God is not lonely without you. He's not tossing and turning in his eternal bed because some people aren't going to go to heaven. Like, God never watched Jerry Maguire in that classic scene, "You complete me." He never said, "Oh, I get that." Like he's always been complete; he's always been okay. We might sing in church, "Lord, I need you," but he has never returned the lyric to us. He's completely satisfied, content, whole in and of himself. For all eternity, the Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit have been living in perfect unity and harmony and love and they've been good. Which is shocking because it means whatever God does, it's never for himself. It's never because he was lacking or missing or had an empty hole in his heart. Whatever that God would choose to do next would not be for himself but for the objects of his love. And what a love it is, huh? That God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. Shocking! You parents should be floored by that. Would you ever give up one of your children? If you had two or four or 10, would you ever give up one of your kids? And how about this - God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. The world.

Do you know who the world includes? Everybody. The people who make the headlines. Your best friends. Your worst enemies. The world includes me. The world includes you. The world is a big universal word. It's immense but it's also individual. The people you get along with at work and the ones you don't. This is the biblical foundation why racism and sexism and nationalism and any kind of ism just doesn't fit in Christianity because our God loves the whole world. It's why we're not proud or bitter or holier than thou because the God that we try to follow loves the entire world. And I want you to take that personally today because that must mean that God loves you.

I think of a story I once heard of an African man named Gamarambi. He lived in Zimbabwe and he sold cigarettes from a little cart. There were a bunch of Christian missionaries in Zimbabwe at the time because they were trying to translate the Bible into the local dialect. And one Christian in particular would walk from his apartment to his office every day and he'd see Gamarambi and desperately wanted to give him a Bible so that he could know about the God who loved the whole world but he was nervous. He was nervous that the cigarette vendor would rip out each page, roll up some tobacco, and smoke the Scriptures. So he cut him a deal. He said, "Gamarambi, I'm going to give you this Bible but before you smoke it, you have to read it." And he agreed. Years later, the Christian missionary came back for a special celebration of the Bible's translation and guess who stood up as one of the keynote speakers? Gamarambi. And he told the story of the Christian who had given him a Bible and he admitted to the church, "I smoked through Matthew. And then I smoked through Mark. I smoked through Luke and I started to smoke through John until I read these words: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.'" And he stopped smoking and he got saved. He was born again.

And that still happens today. The people that no one would expect. The people who are living life, the people who might use their Bibles as kindling in their household fire, they actually read it and something happens that no one saw coming. They find something so beautiful in Jesus that they'll follow him anywhere and they'll do anything.

So why doesn't everyone? I mean, come on, eternal life? Happiness that never ends? Peace? Joy? Escaping shame and guilt? Forgiveness of your sins? What? If God loves the world, if he loves all of us and everyone who will hear this message, why wouldn't everyone believe it? Well, Jesus has an answer to that question. The answer is the reason why there are empty seats in church today. Why some of you have invited your children and your friends and your neighbors to read the Bible and they don't want to. It's the reason why Jesus himself did signs and wonders

and miracles and there weren't a ton of people who followed him and believed in him and found eternal life. If you want to know why the Christian church will always be a minority in its culture, even among religious people, Jesus has the answer why. Verse 18: "Whoever believes in God's Son is not condemned but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God."

"This is the verdict," Jesus said. God so loved the world that he sent his Son. That Son was the light of the world and he loved everyone he met. But do you know what happened? People loved darkness. It might sound like a weird thing for Jesus to say but here's why it's true. When you were, let's say, 14 and you really didn't want to go to school or you wanted to sleep in on a Saturday and your mother had other plans, I bet I know what she did. She walked into your room, she flipped on the lights, she pulled open the curtains, and you hated it. Do you know why? Physically? When you spend a lot of time in the darkness, your pupils actually dilate; they get bigger so they can soak in any little bit of light so that you can see. But when someone flips on the lights really fast and your pupils are dilated, so much light floods in that your eye muscles start to spasm and it hurts. And so you squeeze your eyes shut and you try to pull the curtains and you hide under the covers and you want her to shut off the lights and close the door because light, when you're not used to it, it's painful.

And according to Jesus, it's the exact same way with God. If you have been living in darkness, if your life has not been shaped by the teachings of Jesus who is the light of the world, if you've been following your own heart, just obeying whatever you desire and feel, trusting your friends or that our culture has it right, believing that everything your parents taught you is true, you've gotten used to the darkness. And when you meet the real Jesus, who's full of truth, when you come to church and we open this book and it's not like Pharisee rules that I've added, it's the simple teaching of Jesus, some of you will hate it because it will hurt. It will expose you in a second as a husband or wife. It will call you out as too critical or proud. It will give you truth on sexuality, on gender, on money, on marriage, on everything. And if you're not used to it, Jesus will be so much light that it will hurt. He will expose you. You'll stop feeling like a good person. You'll feel so judged that your instinct will be to run back into the darkness; to close the book, to run away from church, to unfriend Christian people to avoid it because of how painful it feels.

That's why few people follow Jesus. It's not because he's not loving or forgiving. This is the verdict, Jesus said. People so desperately wanted to be their own boss and do what they wanted that they literally hated the light. But I hope you're different. Let me tell you why: Because there are beautiful things once you get out of bed. I know in the morning it's painful, your body doesn't want to open its eyes and leave that comfortable spot. But when you get out of your room, do you know what you see? Beautiful things! When your eyes can adjust to the light, you can see the sunset, you can see the smiling face of a baby. You can see the friends that you love, you can see the waves of the ocean. When you come into the light and you get used to it, it's a

glorious day and a beautiful world. And it's the same with Jesus and following him at first is going to hurt. As he judges and refines you, as he calls you to repentance and he draws a line in the middle of your heart and says, "This stuff is good and this stuff is not, I like this stuff and this stuff you need to fight like your eternal life depends on it," it will hurt. But once you get used to his light and his truth, it is the most beautiful place to be. To know that you live in the kingdom of light, that you follow a God who's running the show. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords but he's also your Father in heaven. To know that Jesus is so full of grace there's nothing that you struggle with, no darkness you're tempted to go back to that he hasn't already forgiven when he died on the cross and rose from the dead. That you can escape anxiety and fear and shame when you live in the light of the good news of Jesus Christ.

And so I'll be upfront with you. Following Jesus is free and it's the hardest thing any of us will ever do but it is the most worthwhile eternal thing that will ever happen. So don't be afraid. Even if it's hard, even if it hurts, come out of the womb. It's uncomfortable but there's a glorious day for you to embrace.

In John 19, Jesus is dead. He's given his life for the forgiveness of sins. It's the Passover weekend and Jewish people are trying to steer clear of dead bodies to not become unclean according to their religious rules. The Pharisees are trying to keep their streak and staying away from all disease, decay, and death, but there's one man who comes up to the cross and he touches the corpse of Jesus Christ. He takes it down, he wraps it up, and he and his friend lay it in a tomb. Do you know that man's name? Nicodemus. How is it possible that the guy whose whole life was about staying away from death would come close enough to touch it? Because after that conversation, he was passively pushed into a whole new kind of life. And he found in Jesus Christ something his Pharisee friends could never offer him: Life with God that never ends.

Brothers, sisters, there's nothing better in all the universe than to be born again. Seek Jesus. Turn from your sin and trust in him and you will find life with God.

Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, thank you so much that there are no strings attached to your love. Even right now for people hearing this message who don't believe it just yet, you still love them. Even for people who are running back into the darkness, you still died on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. And I pray powerfully, God, that you would do in our hearts what we cannot do ourselves; that you would change us. That you would actively give us a new kind of life. That you'd bless us with the gift of repentance and the gift of faith to follow Jesus.

I pray especially today, heavenly Father, for those who are scared. Who think that if they follow Jesus they're actually going to miss out on life. Who are so scared to follow that one command or repent of that one behavior in their life. Who think that somehow that it will like rob them of the life that is truly life. God, help them to remember that you're God and you are good and there is no darkness at all in your heart. That you can be trusted even if we don't understand it just yet.



I pray for compassion and patience among us as Christians, God. Help us to raise up your goodness to the people that we know that they wouldn't even think that Christianity's about a bunch of rules to follow but instead about the most amazing Jesus who's worth following. I pray today, God, for humility. That we as Christians and we as the church would become famous for humility. Make us the opposite of Pharisees because we believe everything we have is just a gift from you that we passively received eternal life through faith in Jesus.

Finally, God, I pray that you'd help us to worship. That we would remember with every song that we sing, including in this service that you are worth it no matter what we have to leave behind. No matter how uncomfortable it is to come out of the darkness, it is a glorious day to step into the light of Jesus Christ. It's in his name that we pray because we believe God that you are our Father in heaven and we are your sons and daughters because we have been born again through faith in Jesus. It's in his name that we pray, Amen.