

## John 3:1-17 – “Help for the Helpless”

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All our readings for today are good examples of why the Christian Church has so strongly confessed the fact that God is a triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This truth, while it's more clearly revealed in the NT, was certainly also revealed in the OT, even if only insinuated by such passages as Genesis 1:26 when God said: *“Let us make man in our image”*; or in our OT reading from Isaiah 6 when one angel called to another and said: *“Holy, holy, holy is the lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.”* Repeating something twice is often intended by God to emphasize something, but three times—this points to something else...the Holy Trinity.

In our text from John chapter 3, who would you say is the one we should thank for the gift of eternal life? Should we thank God the Father who *“so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”*? Or, should we thank the Son of God who was lifted up on the cross like the lifeless serpent in the wilderness, *“in order that the world might be saved through Him”*? Or, should we thank the Holy Spirit since *“unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”*

Surely we should thank all three since they are all involved in giving us eternal life. And since only an eternal God can give eternal life, they must all three be God. Yet the Scriptures teach that *“God is one”* (Galatians 3:20). Therefore the Scriptures teach that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, yet there are not three God's but one God—thus the tri-une or three-in-one God. If you could fully understand this triune nature of God, I'm guessing you would be God too. If you can't, like I can't, then I guess we'll just have to let God be God and pray for our continued faith in Him and His work as our Creator and Savior.

In answer to our prayers, our triune God (who has given us faith) strengthens our saving faith in Him through His Word. So let's consider God's Word from John chapter 3, about Nicodemus the Pharisee. It seems like Nicodemus comes to test Jesus, but Jesus quickly turns the tables and begins to test Nicodemus' faith, especially when it comes to the Pharisees' teaching that salvation depends on our good works. Jesus says to Nicodemus, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again (or “from above”) he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* Thinking in purely human terms, Nicodemus knows that such a thing is impossible. *“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?”*

Even though Nicodemus seems to miss the *“born from above”* sense of what Jesus said, he does pick up the impossible nature of what Jesus is saying. Then Jesus takes it to the next level. *“Truly, truly, 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 (or “from above”).’*

Why does Jesus tell Nicodemus about a life which is impossible for Nicodemus to accomplish on his own? Remember what the Pharisees taught, that you can save yourself by what you do? Jesus seeks to help Nicodemus recognize his need for God. We need to be reminded of the same thing.

Isn't it amazing that as soon as God gives us the ability to do something, we can start to think that we don't need God. Take making babies for example. Just because God may give us the ability to start the baby making process, how is it that we think we don't need God to finish the job? And what a blasphemous statement to tell the parents “good job” after the baby is born, as if they had anything to do with putting that baby together! It's like Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon who was walking on the roof of his royal palace one day and said, *“Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”* (Daniel 4:29). Talk about delusions of grandeur! God quickly worked to humble Nebuchadnezzar, and before his death God enabled him to see that he had God to thank for all things.

God, through His Word seeks to do the same for you and me this morning. When it comes to the things going on in our lives, both physical and spiritual, what can we take credit for? Nothing! If it were up to us we would most certainly bring everything to total destruction. My intension in pointing this out is not to lead you into total despair, but to lead you to despair of trusting in your own abilities (or taking pride in yourselves and your abilities) and to trust instead in the abilities of God. Both of these things, to despair of trusting in ourselves and to trust in God, are things which are also impossible for us to do but are things which God can enable us to do through His Word and Spirit when He explains both earthly and heavenly things.

Take for example when He says, *“the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”* Here again, God seeks to get it through our thick sinful heads that when it comes to our salvation we are not in control, God is! The word which our English translations usually translate as “wind” or “blows” or “breath” is all the same word in Greek and can also be translated Spirit. So you could translate the beginning of this verse as: *“The Spirit spirits or blows where He wishes.”*

Where does God wish to blow His life giving Spirit? Everywhere, especially on all people! *“And you hear His sound.”* The sound of the Spirit is the spoken Word of God. You’re hearing Him right now! *“But you do not know where He comes from or where He goes.”* You can’t see or control Him. But God assures us that the Gospel is *“the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”* (Romans 1:16), thus giving us what we need to make spiritual babies or children of God, but don’t go thinking that you are in control of the baby making or children of God making process. We don’t control the Spirit or determine whether or not He creates faith in the people we tell. The Spirit’s in charge of that.

Since God desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, the best thing we can do for someone else is to share with them the message of salvation through the message of the cross. That message includes not only the fact that we are helpless sinners, but also the good news that God loves us and sent His Son, the Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ, to be our substitute in perfectly obeying the whole will and Law of God, paying for our disobedience through His death on the cross, and then rising to eternal life again on the third day to assure us of His victory over our sins and death itself. Jesus Christ has already accomplished this—He has delivered us from sin, death and the devil. We are children of God now and forever!

It’s helpful to not only share this good news with others but to also keep it in mind for ourselves, especially when things in our lives or in the lives of our loved ones appeared in human terms to be totally hopeless. Remember, when Jesus hung dead on the cross things certainly looked hopeless, but He is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

In the almighty power of this good news we continue in great joy meeting together for worship, praying, and telling others about Jesus in all boldness and confidence—in the midst of suffering, persecution, and even death, trusting not in our abilities but in God—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’s.

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.