

# Take Me In

12 - The Mystery of God: The Gospel of John  
Church on the Park | Sunday, 06 April 2014

**Text:** John 3:1-14

**Theme:** Jesus wants to take us into the Most Holy Place but it all begins by coming through the door like a little child.

**Intro:** The Gospel of John can be likened to a walk through the temple. John begins by taking us into the outer court; there we observe the sacrificial Lamb and the laver for our cleansing. Next, he takes us into the Holy Place, where we see the light, the bread and the intercession of Christ. Lastly, we enter into the Most Holy Place, the heart of the temple. In the Most Holy Place, we see Jesus crucified as he makes atonement for our sins and the sins of the world. In this Most Holy Place we also see the resurrection of Christ, where God breaks out of the tomb and begins to gather people to himself (cf. John 20:11-12).

Last week we read about Jesus cleansing the temple and declaring that his very body and life was the real temple. This week Jesus will show us the way into that temple. Today, we stand at the entrance, the gate into the Kingdom. I'm reminded of this song by Dave Browning:

Take me past the outer courts  
Into the Holy Place  
Past the brazen altar  
Lord I want to see your face  
Pass me by the crowds of people  
And the Priests who sing your praise  
I hunger and thirst for your righteousness  
But it's only found in one place

Take me into the holy of holies  
Take me in by the blood of the lamb  
Take me into the holy of holies  
Take the coal, touch my lips, here I am

## 1) Jesus makes the way into the Kingdom so simple that a child can enter in, and yet so unusual that the greatest minds are baffled (John 3:4, 9).

- Here John is graphically portraying what he said in his introduction in John 1:5
- **Matthew 11:25-26**
- Last week **Allison** amazed me
  - Story of **Allison**: “Dad, I wish you never stopped preaching today.” Really? “Yes, I could see everything you were saying. I love to hear about the Bible; I could have listened all day.” What do you remember? “Jesus in the temple, clearing out the market. The lady who did not understand godly jealousy.” Did you understand? “Yes, I understood everything you said.”

- My daughter is only **ten years old** and she **understood** the whole message and **saw** the Kingdom of God.
- Yet, over the years I have had many **older** and educated people fight with me and tell me they could **not understand** what I was saying.
- **Gideon** was like this too. He could understand everything I said at a very young age.
- Tell the story of **Nicodemus and Jesus**
  - Nicodemus came at night. He was one of the **top teachers** in Israel and most likely a member of the **Sanhedrin** (the top seventy officials). Nicodemus **respected** Jesus and knew he was from God, and yet he was still in the **dark**.
- Nicodemus did **not understand** Jesus, even though he was one of the most **elite** and **educated** Bible teachers in Israel. He was a **moral** and **devout** man.
- Even though he was the epitome of righteousness and education Jesus said, **“Nicodemus, you need to start over, you need to become a child”**
- This is what it means to become **born again**—it means becoming a **child**. And not just any **child**, but a **child of God**
- What is our biggest obstacle to coming to Jesus? **PRIDE**
  - Our biggest obstacle to our own **pride** and **intellect**, our own thoughts about God, rather than **learning** from God himself
  - **Humble yourself to enter into the God’s Kingdom.** (cf. John 3:13). Listen to Jesus who knows.
  - We think we know how to **run** things, but he is the King
- **Matthew 11:25-30** - God hides from some, and reveals himself to others.
- Seeing and entering the Kingdom of God and God’s holy temple begins with **humility**—we need to take off our **“shoes”**

## 2) Jesus makes it clear that there is no other way into the Kingdom except being born again (John 3:3, 5, 7)

- **Listen** to Jesus’ words
  - John 3:3, 5, 7
    - Notice his words. Jesus is **not** saying there are **many** ways, just **one** way. It’s **not** like the statement, **“All roads lead to Rome...All road lead to Heaven.”**
    - **“unless...he cannot...unless...he cannot...you must be born again.”**
- You must be born again. This is not an **option**.
- **“Unless you become like a little child” (Matt. 18:3)**
- **Accept that you need to be born again to see and enter into the God’s Kingdom.**
- ‘Born again’ is **not** a certain **sect** of Christian, not a **denomination**. *If a Christian is a real Christian he must be born again.*
- Jesus describes what it means to be born again, or it may be translated as born from **above**:
  - Born again means being born of the **Spirit of God** who is from **heaven**.
  - The **Spirit of God** is like **wind** or **breath** that breathes new life into us. Through sin we lost the breath of God
  - See **Genesis 2:7**
- **How** is being born again possible? Through **faith** in Jesus as Messiah (John 3:14-15).
  - Not just faith in **anything**, but **specific faith** in Jesus Christ as **Lord and Saviour**, the only way
    - **Believe and receive Jesus and you will be become a child of God (John 1:12-13)**
- Our **purpose** is to **lead** everybody we can through the gate into God’s temple, his house.
- The gate is **narrow**, but **clear** (Matt. 7:13-14)

**3) When you are born again you will show clear signs of life. But, you also need to be patient—you are like child in the Kingdom that needs to grow.**

- Valerie. The signs of being born again. Hunger. A Cry. Growth. Dependence. Life. Joy.
- Explain the two births. Similar but different.
- Growth takes time. Eva wants to be as big as Alli, but it's going to take her five years to get there.
- Please be patient with those born again. It takes them time to grow.
- 1 Peter 2:1-2: **To grow crave the milk of God's Word**
  - Valerie likes to put everything in her mouth, but its milk, not cat food, that will make her grow.

**Conclusion:** Jesus wants to take us into his Kingdom and Most Holy Place, but it all begins with humility and a new birth. Humble yourself, accept what Jesus is saying, believe and receive him and you will enter in. Then crave the milk of God's Word so you can grow. If you have already done this, then its your turn to lead others through the gate.

## ENDNOTES

Nicodemus is in the darkness—he does not understand. He is seeking Jesus, but not accepting Jesus.

You need to become a child, a child that is wholly dependent on the Father. A child that knows no other reality than his or her parents.

Being born again is not a certain sect of Christians, it's the only kind of Christian according to Jesus' words. You cannot accept a person unless you accept their words.

Listen to Jesus' words: "You cannot...You must"

### **Jewish teachers spoke of Gentile converts to Judaism as starting life anew like "newborn children"**

Ezekiel 36:26 - Being born again in the Old Testament Scriptures

## **3:1–8**

### **Conversion as Birth from Above**

Jesus explains to Nicodemus that religious knowledge and ethnicity are not a sufficient basis for a relationship with God; one must be born into his family by the Spirit. John often contrasts water rituals and the Spirit (3:5; see comment on 4:7–26).

**3:1.** A wealthy and prominent Nicodemus is known in Jerusalem in this period, though we cannot be sure that John means the same one. As a highly educated "ruler" or leader in the Jewish community, John's Nicodemus was surely well-to-do.

**3:2.** One might come by night to avoid being seen, or because Jewish teachers who worked during the day could study only at night (cf. Ps 119:148; the latter was

undoubtedly not the case with Nicodemus, who would not need to work—v. 1). But John includes the detail because it serves the theme of light and darkness (11:10; 13:30) that brackets this narrative (3:19–21).

**3:3–4.** Jesus speaks literally of being born “from above,” which means “from God” (“above” was a Jewish circumlocution, or roundabout expression, for God). One could also construe the phrase as meaning “reborn,” which Nicodemus takes literally. (Ancient writers, including those of the Old Testament—Jer 1:11–12; Mic 1:10–15—often used plays on words, and John includes quite a few other puns; they also sometimes used other characters as less intelligent foils for a narrative’s main spokesperson.) Because **Jewish teachers spoke of Gentile converts to Judaism as starting life anew like “newborn children”** (just as adopted sons under Roman law relinquished all legal status in their former family when they became part of a new one), Nicodemus should have understood that Jesus meant conversion; but it never occurs to him that someone Jewish would need to convert to the true faith of Israel.

**3:5. Converts to Judaism were said to become “as newborn children” when they were baptized to remove Gentile impurity.** “Born of water” thus clarifies for Nicodemus that “born from above” means conversion, not a second physical birth.

**The Greek wording of 3:5 can mean either “water and the Spirit” or “water, that is, the Spirit.” Ezekiel 36:24–27 used water symbolically for the cleansing of the Spirit (cf. especially the Dead Sea Scrolls), so here Jesus could mean “converted by the Spirit” (cf. 7:37–39)—a *spiritual* proselyte baptism.** Whereas Jewish teachers generally spoke of converts to Judaism as “newborn” only in the sense that they were legally severed from old relationships, **an actual rebirth by the Spirit would produce a new heart (Ezek 36:26).**

**3:6–7. The “spirit” that is born from God’s Spirit may reflect the “new spirit” of Ezekiel 36:26.**

**3:8. One could also translate “sound of the wind” as “voice of the Spirit” (for plays on words, see comment on 3:3–4).** The wind is unpredictable and uncontrollable (see Eccles 8:8; cf. Eccles 1:6, 8, 14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9).

**The Spirit was symbolized as wind in Ezekiel 37, which some Jewish interpreters linked with Genesis 2:7 (cf. Jn 20:22).**

## **3:9–21**

### **The Revealer from Above**

Jesus as incarnate Wisdom (see comment on 1:1–18) is the only one fully qualified to reveal God and reconcile the world to him.

**3:9–10.** Nicodemus’s denseness makes him a foil for Jesus the revealer. For this theme in some ancient literature, see the discussion of Mark’s message in the introduction to Mark.

**3:11–13.** Only an eyewitness of heaven could fully testify about heaven. Jewish literature provides other parallels to John 3:11–13, but the closest are Jewish texts that speak of divine Wisdom coming down from God, seeking to reveal the ways of heaven (God) to people. Jesus may imply a contrast with the Jewish tradition that Moses

ascended not only Mount Sinai but up into heaven to receive God's law; now Wisdom/ Word/Law has come down from heaven in the flesh (see comment on 1:14–18).

**3:14–15.** “Lifting up” is another play on words (3:3–4): Jesus returns to heaven by way of the cross, “lifted up” like the serpent Moses lifted up to bring healing (Num 21:4–9; for “lifting up” see comment on Jn 12:32–33).