

Made Alive  
John 3:1-15

As I have been reading and studying through these verses of scripture given here in the beginning of John chapter 3, these truths have given me cause to consider more fully what the course of events might have been that has taken place to bring me, and others like me, to have received Christ Jesus as our Savior and Lord, to bring us out from our lost condition into the eternal salvation where we now abide.

As some of you may know, these are strongly debated issues, with denominational preferences that are strongly held too.

We know from these scriptures that we did not just wake up one morning deciding that we would like to have Jesus be our Savior. We are told clearly in Romans chapter 3 that we would never do that on our own. Listen to some of those words. Verse 10,

<sup>10</sup> "There is no one righteous, not even one;

<sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands,  
no one who seeks God.

<sup>12</sup> All have turned away,  
they have together become worthless;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one." (Romans 3:10-12)

Considering these words then, how and why did we who have given our hearts to Christ go about doing that, go about receiving Him as Savior and Lord.

For me, as I have studied through this question, my understanding has settled on a particular doctrine that comes from the words given to us in the Book of Romans chapter 8. There in verse 29 we read,

<sup>29</sup> For those whom He (God) foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

For us today, as we study through this Book of John, may we take a close and intimate look at how God brought this man Nicodemus to believe in and to

receive the Lord Jesus as His Savior and Lord. And perhaps this study will help us to know more about how our Lord also brought us, you and me, into the blessed salvation that we now enjoy.

Let's begin our study today by reading the first fifteen verses of chapter 3 of this Book of John. Listen with me as I read,

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? <sup>11</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:1-15)

Since beginning our studies of this Book of John, we have on several occasions discussed that special transition, that change that must take place within the heart and the soul of every person who enters into a salvation relationship with the Lord Jesus.

That transition, that change is described for us in these truths as our being "born again", "born from above", "born of the Spirit".

And yes, those are strange and mysterious words of description. And they are intended to be so by the Holy Spirit who wrote them, so mysterious that before

the meaning can be understood it requires the presence of the same Holy Spirit within our minds as we read them. And yes, even then only to the extent that God chooses to reveal their meaning.

And to be sure, the comprehension of the concept of being “born again” is not of an intellectual nature. It is not human rationale that will provide the understanding necessary to comprehend the new condition of soul that takes place within a person who is “born again”. Human rationale can never reach to those realms.

No, the transition and the condition of heart, soul and mind is of a deeply Spiritual nature, known only by the Spirit.

And yes, that “transition”, that “change” is absolutely necessary before any of this understanding can even begin to take place. And why would that be? Why would that be?

It’s because there is an irrefutable condition present within each person’s heart, soul and mind that prevents our being able to cause that transition to take place by our own efforts, a condition present from the first moment we are born.

What is that condition? As strange as it may sound to each of us, that condition is, we are “dead”, “dead”. Not physically dead, but in every other way, we are “dead”.

What do we mean as we say those words, “we are dead?”

May I pause here and read a portion of scripture given to us in Ephesians chapter 2. In this chapter we are very familiar with those favorite words that tell us how to receive the salvation of our souls that God gives to us, verses 8 and 9,

<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

And yes, we know these words well. But regrettably, we are often so caught up in quoting these words that we skip right over and miss the very important words from God that tell us why we need His salvation to begin with. Those truths are given to us in the beginning words of the same chapter. Listen to those words beginning in verse 1 of this chapter 2 of Ephesians,

<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Did you hear the emphatic nature of those words . . . continuing with verse 4, <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:1-7)

Dear friends . . . something that I need to continually remind myself about is that my twenty-first century mindset and manner of thinking is not the same as the mindset and manner of thinking that it might have been throughout the centuries past. And certainly not the same as our Lord's Mindset and Manner of Thinking.

By that I mean, as I read and attempt to comprehend these words given here in these verses of scripture, I very often do not interpret their meaning in the same way that they are given. Especially, my mind seems to want to minimize the impact of their meaning, assigning metaphorical and philosophical and allegorical meanings instead of simply accepting their literal meaning. And I fear that many other people do the same.

And that can easily be so with words like this one used here in verse 1 of Ephesians chapter 2, the word “dead”. “Dead”!

Yes, there is a sense in which a “less than literal” meaning must be applied within these words. This word dead is speaking about “spiritual death” and not “physical death”. But while that is so, the word still means “dead”. It is the very same Greek word “nekros” that is used to describe a person who is physically dead, “dead”, “lifeless”, a “corpse”.

And when God uses words like these, He does it for a purpose. He wants weak and small minds like yours and mine to understand them as they are intended.

Here, in verse 1 as we read, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked”, God fully intends us to understand that while our bodies which are temporary for a season were still upright and physically alive, our “spirit” which is eternal is actually dead.

And we are not just “dead” in our being, we are “dead” in every other way, especially “dead” in the things that we do, in our behaviors. Listen again to those words,

<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Notice carefully in these words that God does not cut us any slack. He describes our sinfulness clearly so that we can’t minimize its wretchedness. Verse 2 . . .

following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

It’s necessary for us to understand the nature of this “death” that we have been born into for many reasons. But especially so that we can see and understand that “death” such as this, and the wretchedness that exists within it can never enter into the Kingdom of God. There is no wretchedness and no death in the Kingdom of God, only “life”, “Eternal Life”.

And it is this “death” that God was speaking about when He spoke those words to Nicodemus here in chapter 3 of the Book of John. In those precious words, He was telling Nicodemus that he had come into this life “spiritually dead”, and that the heart, soul and spirit that he came into this life with would need to be born again, born from above, born of the Spirit before it would ever be able to “see” and to “enter into the Kingdom of God.

He went on further just a few verses later to explain it more fully. There in verse 18 Jesus said,

<sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him (in Jesus) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:18)

These words “condemned already” clearly mean that we come into this life literally “dead already”. And unless a change, a transition takes place, we will remain that way, dead, for an eternity.

And that was the intent of God's words given to us there in Ephesians chapter 2. Listen,

<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

And oh dear Christian, these words are unmistakable in their meaning. There is nothing that you or I can do to make this happen in our lives. It is God and God alone who will “make us alive”.

There is no decision on our part that causes God to love us and want to save us from our wretched sinfulness. There is no mention here or anywhere else that Jesus “looked down the corridors of time and saw that we would accept Him and then Him reward us for our decision”. No, it is just as these words tell us. It is “His Mercy and His Grace alone”! He and He alone “made us alive”! Listen,

<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)

And then He went on further in verses 8 and 9 to emphasize His Grace. Listen!

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Folks, He, God “made us alive together with Christ Jesus”. He made us “alive”, a condition of soul that is beyond our human comprehension.

Let's pause here for a moment and give some further consideration to these special words, “made us alive”, “made us alive”. It's easy for us just to quickly accept some of these truths and be done with it. But that's not always the best response.

Consider again some of the things that we mentioned a few moments ago when we spoke about being “dead in our trespasses and sins”.

And being a visual thinker as I am, my imagination goes immediately to a person who has died and is laying in a coffin.

Over these many years of my life I have attended many funerals. And as a preacher, I have preached at more than a few, each time being very aware of what has actually taken place.

I know that the person who is lying there in that coffin is just a “lifeless shell”, able to do nothing, hearing nothing and saying nothing, comprehending nothing.

And folks, here in these words of scripture, God is telling us that even while we are still alive in our bodies, there is a real sense in which though our heart, our soul and our mind is alive, our “spirit within us” is much like one of those dead people.

We are “spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins”. And just as a person who is physically dead and laying there in a coffin is not able to hear and understand and respond to their loved one as they cry over them. There is no life within them and they have no ability to hear and respond to the cries.

They are truly dead and unable to respond to anyone.

And so it is also with a person that is spoken about here in Ephesians chapter 2. They are dead, as dead as a person who is physically dead, unable to think a spiritual thought and unable to make a spiritual decision. Just as a dead person is not able to reach up to hold your hand as you touch them, neither can a spiritually dead person respond to and accept an invitation to salvation.

A spiritually dead person must first be as these words tell us, they must be “made alive”, given life from God. And once they are made alive they are then able to respond and to believe and to receive the Lord Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

It is just as those words of Ephesians tell us. None of it is of our own efforts, lest we would boast. That change that takes place within us, our being “born again”, is all by the “Grace” of our Lord after He makes us alive.

Why is it so important that we realize these truths? It's because so many, many people are confused about how and when they can or will receive the Salvation that our Lord provides to us. Many think that making the decision to receive Christ as Savior is purely a personal free-will “intellectually chosen” decision.

An example . . . recently, the news media published some comments given by Scott Adams, the well-known newspaper cartoonist of “Dilbert”. Adams was said to be suffering from an end-stage condition of cancer and expected to soon die. And according to the media reporter, Adams was debating whether or not it was worth his effort to convert to Christianity.

Mr. Adams, who had long identified as a non-believer or agnostic, described his decision as a logical “risk-reward calculation”. Perhaps wondering that if faith turned out to be false, he lost nothing, but if true, he gained everything.

After his death, it was reported that Scott Adams had made a death-bed profession of faith. He credited the persistence and prayers of his Christian friends for influencing him.

Folks, we don't know what really took place in the heart and soul of Scott Adams, if he was truly saved or not. And we should abstain from thinking judgmental thoughts about what might have taken place there in those last moments of his life.

Because folks, regardless of our private opinions about such things, these scriptures are absolute. As Jesus said in John chapter 6,

<sup>44</sup> “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.  
(John 6:44)

We can and we ought to have hope that all of his public debating about receiving or not receiving our Lord's salvation was simply the manner in which the Holy Spirit chose to draw Mr. Adams' soul to Himself and that yes, he was in his last moments saved.

One last thought . . . As I have shared with you in the past, I was 29 years old before I gave my heart to Christ in salvation. And I remember my lifestyle and behaviors before I was saved. And yes, as was evidenced by my behaviors, I was truly lost and I was "dead, really dead, in my trespasses and sins". And I was in desperate need of being "made alive" in Christ.

And being "dead" I would never have, of my own free will, "reach to Christ" for salvation. I needed the Holy Spirit to "draw me" to Him. And He did!

That is why those words in Romans chapter 8 bring me such great comfort. Left to my own efforts and free-will decision I would have never given my heart to the Lord.

Listen to these words again and we'll close for today.

<sup>29</sup> For those whom He (God) foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

Pray with me.