

Sermon
All Saints Anglican Church Waitara
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John 3:1-8

Introduction

Two People. On the left hand side is Angelina Jolie. While she is best known for her acting career recently she has been heavily involved in humanitarian work. She has worked in areas such as Sierra Leone and Tanzania providing aid work to refugees in both countries. She has also recently been designated as the Goodwill Ambassador to refugee's world wide by the UN. A good person on any scale. On the right is a man named Dean Corrl. Between the years 1970 and 1973 Dean raped and killed 27 teenage boys before being shot by one of his accomplices. Out of these two people which one do you think holds more favor of God? Which one of these two do you think would go to heaven and which one to hell? In this passage Jesus tells us that it's not our actions which save us, but if we have be born again.

The story begins with a character named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was defined by the people of his time as a "good" man. He was a member of the Jewish ruling council and obeyed all the laws of his people. But while the people around him admired and looked up to him; Nicodemus came across a man, a teacher, who defined him in a vastly different way to everyone else. A man who defined people by their heart, not their appearance. This man was Jesus.

New Birth

When we first meet Nicodemus he's come to Jesus in the dead of night. To start the conversation Nicodemus throws a compliment at Jesus, recognising him as being sent by God as if to say "I can see you are part of God's kingdom because I am too, just look at my good works". Jesus sees straight through Nicodemus's façade and issues him with a challenge.

V 3 "In reply Jesus declared "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again"

But what does it mean to be born again? How, as Nicodemus points out, can we physically be re-born? The simple answer is - we can't! But that's not the re-birth that Jesus is talking about here as he goes onto explain

V. 6 "I tell you the truth no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit"

Jesus doesn't tell us to be physically reborn. What he's talking about is a Spiritual rebirth. Just as water is used to clean ourselves Jesus says that we need to be cleansed and renewed by the spirit of God before we can enter his kingdom **Make Point**

Illustration

I was born into a Christian family. I've been going to church just about all my life. I can say the Lord's Prayer off by heart. I go to bible study each week. I pray and read my bible and yet while these are all good things, by themselves they mean nothing

Without being born again everything "Christian" we do crumbles to dust in the eyes of God. Nicodemus, while DOING all the things a God-fearing man of his position should be doing, had not experienced a spiritual transformation, a spiritual change from within.

On the outside he appeared to be a God fearing man. He obeyed all the laws, gave money to the poor, knew all the right things to say but he had not allowed God's spirit to change him. He was relying on himself and what he did to achieve salvation. **Illustrate Point**

What Jesus is calling on us to do is not to rely on our own works, not to rely on our own goodness to be saved, but trust in God that HE will renew US by his Holy Spirit. It is through faith that God saves us, not through works. It is through his spirit that we are reborn. As Jesus explains

V6 "Flesh Gives birth to flesh but spirit gives birth to spirit"

By asking God to come into our lives and change us through his Holy Spirit we are asking to be spiritually reborn. We are asking God to change us from within. We are asking God to change the way we act, change the way we think, change the way we love, change the way we speak. We are asking God to completely renew us and create in us a new heart fit for his kingdom. We are no longer relying on our own works to save us. **Explain point**

Transition: We are relying on God to move us from the kingdom of the world to his kingdom.

Two Kingdoms

Once we are moved over to God's kingdom, all too often we can try to manipulate God's spirit to our own ends. We believe we can dictate our own terms for salvation by saying "We can save ourselves through doing good". We can believe that being "good" will gain us a spot in God's everlasting kingdom. We can push God completely out of the picture of salvation.

This is what Nicodemus believed - he made his own conditions for God so that he could be saved on his OWN terms, not GOD'S. By doing all the right things Nicodemus believed he could enter the kingdom of God without changing the man within. **Make Point**

Sometimes we can try and insert Jesus into certain areas of our life where we think we need him and yet leave others completely unaffected. Once we move over to God's kingdom we start to see what we enjoyed in the world and wish we could have a bit of both Kingdoms. While we live in the kingdom of God we keep jumping back to try and bring some of the kingdom of the world with us.

Illustration

Imagine you had been living in old shack most your life. Its 100 years old. The paints peeling. The walls aren't straight. There's no insulation. Holes in the roof. And one day you decide to knock it down and build a beautiful new house. A mansion. Air-conditioning, beautiful gourmet kitchen, ensuite, professionally painted throughout, designer decorating....But after a while you begin to miss the old place a bit. You miss the cracks in the walls. You miss the leaky roof. You begin to miss the toilet always clogging. Here you are in this beautiful masion, and you miss the old shack.

It's the same when we are born again. God has built a beautiful new heart, but there are times when we miss the old decrepit one. God has given us the very best. He's given us life, eternal life, in his kingdom. But there are times, because of our sinful hearts, we miss the old life. We feel the pull towards that old life that brought nothing but dissatisfaction and death

Illustrate point

What Jesus is telling Nicodemus is that he needs to stop looking at himself for salvation and begin looking at God. He needs to overturn everything he held dear in the kingdom of the world for the sake of God. His life needs a revolution where the governing body of the world is overthrown and replaced with God as his one true king. This challenge that Jesus lays out is for us too in today's world.

Does this mean that when we are born again, we won't sin? That sin disappears from our lives like magic? No. Satan will continue to look for weaknesses and exploit them to the nth degree. The difference for a Christian is that our sins have already been dealt with. When we sin, we are forgiven. But our heart, our desire, is to move away from sin. **Explain Point**

Transition: What causes this new desire is the work of the Holy Spirit changing our hearts.

The Work of the Spirit

Nicodemus however was trying to do the work himself; he wasn't allowing God to do the work. Jesus explains otherwise.

V8 "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."

Jesus tells Nicodemus here that the Spirit is like the wind. It cannot be controlled or manipulated. It cannot be contained or exploited. Just as Nicodemus could not control the wind, nor can we control the spirit.

But while we cannot control the spirit, just as we cannot control the wind, we can see the results of his actions. **Make Point**

Illustration

Just as we can see the wind swaying trees, see it pushing clouds through the sky, feel it on our skin as if going straight through us, so we can also see and feel the effects of the Spirit. While we cannot control or understand his actions the Spirit reveals himself through the aftermath of his work.

Think for instance of Hurricane Katrina. It laid waste to much of the Northern Coast of the USA in particular devastated the town of New Orleans. Mankind could not control it. Mankind could not stop it. The effects of the hurricane could be clearly witnessed, however, through the destruction it left behind.

The spirit works in much the same way. We cannot control him. We cannot stop him. The effects of the spirit however are as undeniable and as unmistakable as those of Hurricane Katrina. In contrast to hurricane Katrina though the Holy Spirit renews, rejuvenates and cleanses the lives of those he touches. **Illustrate**

It is only through his work that we can be changed. It is only through his work that we can be saved. We need to accept His terms of salvation, not create our own as Nicodemus tried to do. We need to simply accept the offer of salvation that God has given us. We need to release control of our lives and place it in the hands of God. **Explain point**

Conclusion

So back to our two people. Which of Angelina and Dean do you think God will save? Perhaps we've been asking the wrong questions of them. Perhaps we haven't been looking deep enough into both their lives. Maybe we should be asking what does God see in them? Does God see the "good deeds"? Does God look at what they've done with their life? or does God look at what HE'S done in their life?

Let me finish with three questions that I hope you will ask yourself and consider before God whether you consider yourself a Christian or not. Three questions that we can ask ourselves each day either as a challenge, or as a reminder:

(Ask slowly – time for each one to sink in)

1. Have I been born again?
2. Which Kingdom do I belong too?
3. Who is doing the work in my life?

Let me pray