

SESSION 17

JESUS SAID THAT PEOPLE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

We will read more about God's story from what John wrote. This John is the fisherman, the brother of James, whom Jesus called to follow him. John wrote about something that happened to Jesus.



JOHN 3:1-19

¹ There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ² After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

³ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

⁴ "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

⁵ Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. ⁷ So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

⁹ "How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? ¹¹ I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. ¹² But if you don't believe me when

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I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸ “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹ And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.

John describes a time that Jesus talked with a man called Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee – a Jewish religious leader. Nicodemus came to talk to Jesus one night. He probably came at night so that the other Jewish religious leaders would not see him talking to Jesus.

The Jewish leaders did not like what Jesus was teaching the people. Large groups of people were coming to hear Jesus speak. Jesus told the people that God had given him the job of making a way back to God. The Jewish leaders had been telling the people to follow all of the Jewish religious laws. They told the people that if they followed all the laws, God would be happy with them. The Jewish leaders got power over the people by telling them to follow all of the Jewish laws. They learned all of the words of all of the laws. They were experts in what the laws said. They had power over the people because they were experts in the laws.

Jesus told the people that every person was a sinner. He told them that they needed God to rescue them. The Jewish leaders thought that if people listened to Jesus, they would stop listening to them. They thought that Jesus would make them lose their power over the people.

The Jewish leaders told lies about Jesus. They said that Satan was helping him to make the evil spirits obey him. They went to him and asked him about God’s laws. They wanted to try to get him to make a mistake and say the wrong thing. But Jesus knew all of God’s words and he could answer all of their questions. The people were starting to listen to Jesus and not to listen to the Jewish leaders.

So that is probably why Nicodemus came to talk to Jesus at night. He didn’t want the other Jewish religious leaders to know that he went to talk with Jesus. Nicodemus talked to Jesus and called him *Rabbi*. A Rabbi is a Jewish man who teaches people about God. Nicodemus said that Jesus had come from God and that God must be with him because of the amazing things that Jesus had done.

Jesus said that for Nicodemus to be one of God’s people, and under God’s rule, he had to be *born again*. But what did that mean? Nicodemus did not understand. He asked Jesus how someone could be born again.

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Jesus said that the only way to escape the rule of Satan and sin and death, and to be one of God's people, you have to be born again. He said it was not being born again in your body, but in your spirit. He said that being born again was something that God's Spirit would do. Jesus talked about the Spirit of God like a strong wind. He said that the wind can go wherever it wants to go. Jesus meant that being born again is something that only God's Spirit can do for people. It does not matter if a person is a religious expert or not. It only matters what a person really thinks. God knows what people really believe. He knows if people really think that only God can rescue them.

When a person is born the first time, they are born outside the garden, like Cain and Abel. They have sin with them and in them. They cannot escape it. Everyone who has only been born once is under the rule of God's Enemy. And that is the same for Abraham's descendants, like Nicodemus.

Nicodemus still did not understand. Jesus asked him why a Jewish teacher like Nicodemus did not understand things about God. Jesus said that he understood and could speak about all things about God. Jesus came from God, and so the things he said were true.

Jesus called himself the *Son of Man*. He called himself that because he is the Son of God who had become a man. He came to earth to do the work of God, but he was also a real man. And he told Nicodemus that he would be lifted up like the bronze snake that Moses had lifted up. Remember that when the Israelites were in the desert, some poisonous snakes came, and if they bit people, they would die. God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. When the Israelites looked at it they would not die. Jesus said that he was going to be lifted up just like that bronze snake. Nicodemus knew God's story very well, so he would have known this story very well. But what Jesus was telling him now was new. Jesus said that the bronze snake was an example of himself and his work.

Jesus said that when he is lifted up, everyone who believes in him will have eternal¹⁹⁰ life. The Israelites who had been bitten by the snakes had no way to save themselves from death. That is like all the people of the world who have no way to save themselves. They have been born into the world of sin and death and they are all sinners. Their sin will mean that when they die they will not be with God, but they will be in a place of punishment and death. But Jesus said that those who believe in him would be born again into God's family and be given eternal life.

Jesus then told Nicodemus that God loves the whole world. He said that because of his love he has sent his Son as the Messiah, the Rescuer – Jesus. God did this so that no one who believes in him will have to pay for his or her sins. They will not have to die and be separated from God. Jesus said that God will save them, rescue them, and give them life forever with him.

Mark wrote about something else that happened in the life and work of Jesus, God's Son. Jesus went to many towns in the countryside of Judea. Then he went back to the town of Capernaum. He stayed in that area for the next few years with some other men who were with him.

190. **eternal** - something that goes on forever and does not stop

HIS STORY: THE RESCUE



MARK 2:1-12

¹ When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. ² Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, ³ four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. ⁴ They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. ⁵ Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven."

⁶ But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, ⁷ "What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!"

⁸ Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts? ⁹ Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk'?" ¹⁰ So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, ¹¹ "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!"

¹² And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, "We've never seen anything like this before!"

The people of Capernaum had heard that Jesus was there. Many people came to the house where Jesus was. He sat and talked with them. He clearly explained the things that the prophets had written. He spoke with authority. Some Jewish religious leaders were there too. They were not happy about the things that Jesus was saying. They were not happy that many people wanted to hear what Jesus said. The house was full of people. Nobody else could come in the door because so many people were already in the house.

Some men carried a man to the house where Jesus was. This man was paralyzed. That means that he could not move or walk. The other men could not bring the paralyzed man into the house. So they took him up to the roof of the house. They made a hole in the roof and let the man down into the house through the hole. They believed that Jesus could heal the man, so they let him down through the roof. Jesus knew that the men believed that he could heal the man. They knew that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus said to the man, "*My child, your sins are forgiven.*"

The teachers of religious law in the house were very angry. They heard what Jesus had said. They knew that only God could forgive sins. Now, Jesus said that this man's sins were forgiven. These religious leaders did not believe that Jesus was God's Son. So they did not think that Jesus should say that this man's sins were forgiven.

Jesus told them that he did have the authority to forgive sins. Why? Because he is God's Son. Then Jesus told the man to get up. Jesus said that and then the man did get up. He got up and he walked out. Everyone who was there was amazed. Many of the people there thanked God for what he had done.

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Later, near the lake, Jesus saw a tax collector¹⁹¹ sitting near the road. His name was Levi. He was getting money from people to give to the Roman government. The Jewish people did not like men like this. They worked for the Romans and they took a lot of money from people. Jesus asked Levi to follow him.



MARK 2:13-17

¹³ Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that were coming to him. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵ Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus' followers.) ¹⁶ But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?"

¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

Levi left his work as a tax collector and he followed Jesus. Later, Levi was called Matthew. He was the man who wrote down all the things that Jesus did in his life. What he wrote is in the Book of Matthew in the Bible.

Jesus and his close followers¹⁹² went to eat at Levi's house. There were many other people there. God's story says these people were *tax collectors and sinners*. These were people that the Jewish leaders thought were bad people. Some of them worked for the Romans and they did not follow the Jewish laws. The Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees, saw that Jesus was eating with people like that. The Pharisees would never eat with people like that. It was against their Jewish laws to do that. They asked why Jesus would eat with bad people like that.

Jesus said to them, "*Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous¹⁹³, but those who know they are sinners.*" He said that only people who know that they are sick would go to the doctor. And he said only people who know that they are sinners would come to him. People who think that they can follow all of God's laws would not come to him. People like that would not come because they did not think that they needed God to rescue them.

The Jewish religious leaders were hoping that Jesus would break one of their laws. Then they could say he was a bad man because he had broken God's law.

191. **tax collector** - someone who has the work of getting money for the government from people

192. **followers** - people who follow someone else; to follow means to listen to them and to be with them and to believe what they say

193. **righteous** - to be right with God because you have followed all his laws

HIS STORY: THE RESCUE



MARK 3:1-6

¹ Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand.

² Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath.

³ Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." ⁴ Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him.

⁵ He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! ⁶ At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus.

Mark wrote about a time that Jesus was at the synagogue on the Sabbath day. There was a man there with a paralyzed hand. The religious leaders were watching carefully. They wanted Jesus to do something to break the Jewish laws. The Jews had many laws about the Sabbath day. Their laws said that people could not do any work at all on the Sabbath day. They wanted Jesus to heal the man so that they could say that Jesus had done some work on the Sabbath day. They wanted to accuse him of breaking God's law.

Jesus knew what the religious leaders were thinking. He knew that they were hoping he would break the Jewish law. So he asked them some questions. He asked if it was the law to do good things on the Sabbath or to do bad things. They did not answer him.

God's story says that Jesus was angry and very sad about what the Jewish leaders were thinking. They did not know the real meaning of the laws that God had given them. And they had added many laws that they had made up themselves. They did not know what God is really like. They thought that they could follow all of God's laws. But that was impossible.

Jesus asked the man to put out his hand. Jesus healed the man's hand. The religious leaders saw Jesus heal the man. But they still did not believe that Jesus was God's Son. Then the Pharisees went out to talk to the followers of King Herod about how they could kill Jesus.

Mark wrote about how people from very far away started to come to see Jesus. People came from all over Palestine and from other places. They came from as far north as modern-day Lebanon. Very large numbers of people came to see Jesus. They had heard about the amazing things he had done. They wanted to be healed from their sicknesses. They wanted to hear what Jesus was saying about God.



MARK 3:7-12

⁷ Jesus went out to the lake with his disciples, and a large crowd followed him.

They came from all over Galilee, Judea, ⁸ Jerusalem, Idumea, from east of the Jordan River, and even from as far north as Tyre and Sidon. The news about his miracles had spread far and wide, and vast numbers of people came to see him.

⁹ Jesus instructed his disciples to have a boat ready so the crowd would not

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crush him.¹⁰ He had healed many people that day, so all the sick people eagerly pushed forward to touch him.¹¹ And whenever those possessed by evil spirits caught sight of him, the spirits would throw them to the ground in front of him shrieking, “You are the Son of God!”¹² But Jesus sternly commanded the spirits not to reveal who he was.

The evil spirits knew who Jesus really was. They said that Jesus was the Son of God. But Jesus did not want the evil spirits to tell the people who he really was.

Jesus had many followers. But he chose twelve men to be his very close companions.



MARK 3:13-19

¹³ Afterward Jesus went up on a mountain and called out the ones he wanted to go with him. And they came to him.¹⁴ Then he appointed twelve of them and called them his apostles. They were to accompany him, and he would send them out to preach,¹⁵ giving them authority to cast out demons.¹⁶ These are the twelve he chose:

Simon (whom he named Peter),

¹⁷ James and John (the sons of Zebedee, but Jesus nicknamed them “Sons of Thunder”),

¹⁸ Andrew,

Philip,

Bartholomew,

Matthew,

Thomas,

James (son of Alphaeus),

Thaddaeus,

Simon (the zealot),

¹⁹ Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him).

Jesus named these twelve men *apostles*. An apostle is someone chosen by God to do special work. Jesus said these apostles would be with him. He said that they would be sent out to preach. And that they would have the authority to tell Satan’s evil spirits to leave people.

Jesus had come into the world to defeat God’s Enemy. He had already begun his work. But God always wants people to work with him. He wants people to fight with him against Satan and to work with him on his rescue plan. So Jesus chose these twelve apostles to work with him.

One of the twelve apostles was Judas Iscariot. Jesus is God so he knows everything that people are thinking. He knows everything that is going to happen. He knew that later Judas Iscariot would betray¹⁹⁴ him. But God had a rescue plan and Judas was going to be part of God’s plan. So even though Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, he chose him as one of the apostles. Jesus knew that it was part of God’s plan.

194. **betray** - to help someone’s enemies to catch or hurt them

HIS STORY: THE RESCUE

Mark and the other apostles went everywhere with Jesus. Mark wrote about one evening¹⁹⁵ when they were going over the Sea of Galilee in a boat.



MARK 4:35-41

³⁵ As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” ³⁶ So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). ³⁷ But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water.

³⁸ Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?”

³⁹ When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!” Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ Then he asked them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

⁴¹ The disciples were absolutely terrified. “Who is this man?” they asked each other. “Even the wind and waves obey him!”

That day, Jesus had been teaching large groups of people. He had been teaching them all day on the shore of the lake. Late in the afternoon, Jesus told his apostles that they should go over to the other side of the lake. So Jesus and the apostles started to cross the lake in a boat. There were other boats near them too. Jesus went to the back of the boat and went to sleep.

The Sea of Galilee is a very big lake. Very bad storms¹⁹⁶ can happen quickly on the lake. That evening, when Jesus was on the boat, a huge storm started. The wind was very strong. Big waves were coming into the boat. The apostles were afraid that the boat would sink.¹⁹⁷ Some of these men were fishermen and they had been on the lake many times. They were very afraid of this storm so it must have been a very, very big storm. They woke up Jesus and said to him, “*Teacher! Don’t you care that we’re going to drown?*”

Jesus got up and spoke to the wind and to the sea. He told the wind and the sea to be quiet and to be still. When Jesus said that, the wind and the sea were very calm.¹⁹⁸ Then Jesus asked the men in the boat why they were afraid. He said, “*Do you still have no faith?*” Jesus wanted them to believe that he was really who he said he was – God’s Son.

195. **evening** - the time at the end of the day, from about 6 pm until bedtime

196. **storms** – dangerous or bad weather

197. **sink** - fill up with water and go down under the water

198. **calm** - quiet and peaceful and still

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1. What did the Pharisees think about God's laws?
2. What did Jesus mean when he said that Nicodemus must be born again?
3. Why did Jesus say he was like the bronze snake that Moses lifted up?
4. What is an 'apostle'?
5. Why did Jesus choose Judas even though he knew that Judas would betray him?



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