

12/31/11

**OLD TESTAMENT LESSON** Jeremiah 31:31-34 (The Messiah will bring a new beginning.)

31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

**THE EPISTLE** Titus 3:1-8 (God gives new birth in baptism)

1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

**THE GOSPEL** John 3:1-17 (God gives new life through baptism and faith)

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

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

4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "**I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'** 8 **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.**"

9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not

believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven-- the Son of Man.

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (NIV)

1 +Hn de. a;nqrwpoj evk tw/n Farisai,wn( Niko,dhmoj o;noma auvtw/|( a;rcwn tw/n VIoudai,wn\

And there was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, a ruler / leader of the Jews.

2 ou-toj h=lqen pro.j auvto.n nukto.j kai. ei=pen auvtw/\ r`abbi,( oi;damen o[ti avpo. qeou/ evlh,luqaj dida,skaloj\ ouvdei.j ga.r du,natai tau/ta ta. shmei/a poiei/n a] su. poiei/j( eva.n mh. h=| o` qeo.j metV auvtou/Å

This one came to him by night and said to him, ðRabbi, we know that you are a teacher coe from God, for no one is able to do these signs which you do, except God is with him.ö

3 avpekri,qh VIhsou/j kai. ei=pen auvtw/\ avmh.n avmh.n le,gw soi( eva.n mh, tij gennhqh/| a;nwqen( ouv du,natai ivdei/n th.n basilei,an tou/ qeou/Å

Jesus answered and said to him, ðTruly, truly, I say to you, except someone / a man is born from above / again, he is not able to see the kingdom of God.ö

4 le,gei pro.j auvto.n Îo`Ð Niko,dhmoj\ pw/j du,natai a;nqrwpoj gennhqh/nai ge,rwn w;nÈ mh. du,natai eivj th.n koili,an th/j mhtro.j auvtou/ deu,teron eivselqei/n kai. gennhqh/naiÈ

Nicodemus said to him, ðHow is a man able to be born being old. He is not able to enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born, is he?

5 avpekri,qh VIhsou/j\ avmh.n avmh.n le,gw soi( eva.n mh, tij gennhqh/| evx u[datoj kai. pneu,matoj( ouv du,natai eivselqei/n eivj th.n basilei,an tou/ qeou/Å

Jesus answered him,ðTruly, truly I say to you, except someone is born from water and spirit he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God.ö

6 to. gegennhme,non evk th/j sarko.j sa,rx evstin( kai. to. gegennhme,non evk tou/ pneu,matoj pneu/ma, evstinÅ

What has been born from the flesh is flesh, and what has been born from the spirit is spirit.

7 mh. qauma,shlj o[ti ei=po,n soi\ dei/ u`ma/j gennhqh/nai a;nwqenÅ

Do you wonder that I said to you, ðIt is necessary for you to be born from above / again?

8 to. pneu/ma o[pou qe,lei pnei/ kai. th.n fwnh.n auvtou/ avkou,eij( avllV ouv k oi=daj po,qen e;rcetai kai. pou/ u`pa,gei\ ou[twj evsti.n pa/j o` gegennhme,noj evk tou/ pneu,matojÅ

The wind / spirit blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know from where it comes and where it goes. Thus it is for everyone who has been born of the Spirit.ö

9 avpekri,qh Niko,dhmoj kai. ei=pen auvtw/\ pw/j du,natai tau/ta gene,sqaiÈ

Nicodemus answered and said to him, ðHow is it possible for these things to be?ö

10 avpekri,qh VIhsou/j kai. ei=pen auvtw/\ su. ei= o` dida,skaloj tou/ VIshrah.l kai. tau/ta ouv ginw,skeijÈ

Jesus answered and said to him, ðYou are a teacher of Israel and you do not know these things?ö

11 avmh.n avmh.n le,gw soi o[ti o] oi;damen lalou/men kai. o] e`wra,kamen marturou/men( kai. th.n marturi,an h`mw/n ouv lamba,neteÅ

Truly, Truly I say to you, that what we know we speak, and what we have seen we have given witness to, and our witness you did not receive.

12 eiv ta. evpi,geia ei=pon u`mi/n kai. ouv pisteu,ete( pw/j eva.n ei;pw u`mi/n ta. evpoura,nia pisteu,seteÈ

If the things on the earth I said to you and you did not believe, how if I say to you the things of heaven will you believe?

13 kai. ouvdei.j avnabe,bhken eivj to.n ouvrano.n eiv mh. o` evk tou/ ouvranoj/ kataba,j( o` ui`o.j tou/ avnqrw,pouÅ

And no one is able to go up into heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the son of man.

14 Kai. kaqw.j Mwu?sh/j u[ywsen to.n o;fin evn th/| evrh,mw|( ou[twj u`ywqh/nai dei/ to.n ui`o.n tou/ avnqrw,pou(

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus it is necessary for the son of man to be lifted up.

15 i[na pa/j o` pisteu,wn evn auvtw/| e;ch| zwh.n aivw,nionÅ

In order that everyone who believes in him has eternal life.

16 ou[twj ga.r hvga,phsen o` qeo.j to.n ko,smon( w[ste to.n ui`o.n to.n monogenh/ e;dwken( i[na pa/j o` pisteu,wn eivj auvto.n mh. avpo,lhtai avllV e;ch| zwh.n aivw,nion

For thus God loved the world so that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 ouv ga.r avpe,steilen o` qeo.j to.n ui`o.n eivj to.n ko,smon i[na kri,nh| to.n ko,smon( avllV i[na swqh/| o` ko,smoj diV auvtou/

For God did not sent the son in to the world in order to judge / condemn the world, but in order to save the world through Him.

**THE SERMON**

**“Born Again . . . from Above”**

**John 3**

INTRO ó It is 7:30 p.m. in Alaska on December 31, New Year's Eve. But, in the commercial center of our country, in New York City, it is 11:30 p.m. Times Square is filled. About a million people are watching the ball on the top of the tower, waiting for it to fall. Now, this may just be an excuse for a party and a day off work. But we all know that people long for a new start, a new beginning. In each of our lives there are failures, losses, and disappointments. We long to put those behind us and have a new beginning.

- I. In tonight's Gospel lesson Jesus talks about a new beginning.
  - A. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, simply seeking some understanding of Jesus's miracles and His ministry. Consider the circumstances with Nicodemus.
    1. People love the new thing, the exciting experience.
    2. Jesus had been teaching in a new way, with authority, which caught the attention of the people, and the religious leaders.
    3. Jesus had been stirring up interest with the performance of miracles, many miracles.
    4. Nicodemus was interested himself in what was going on so He came to see Jesus.
  - B. In response to Nicodemus's inquiry, Jesus has a surprising answer.
    1. For Jesus, his ministry was about new life.
    2. **"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."**
  
- II. We had an interesting experience 20 years ago when we were driving to Alaska through Canada and stopped for gas. The attendant who was pumping our gas saw a sign my wife put on our vehicle that said, "Alaska or bust." He also saw the Florida license plate. He asked me if we were going to Alaska to visit and I told him we were moving there. Then he hesitated and looked at me and asked, "Are you running from the law?" People often try to find new start by putting the past behind them. The thing about people who move to a new location seeking a new life, often the problems they run from are problems they cause. When they get to the new location, guess what, the source of their problems, they themselves, are still there.
  - A. People often look in the wrong place for something new.
    1. People seek a new place to live, a new job, a new car.
    2. People look to change the world around themselves.
    3. Unfortunately, this world is a world of sin. This is a world created by the Lord, but a world in which His creation has rebelled, and we see the results.
    4. The sin of the world and the sin in our lives causes the grief and pain and loss we would love to put behind us.
  - B. So, Jesus doesn't tell Nicodemus to look for a new experience,
    1. **"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 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."**

2. Jesus tells Nicodemus that if he really wants to understand His ministry and the new thing Jesus is talking about he should look for a new Nicodemus.
3. The new Nicodemus, the new self begins with the Spirit, with a new heart.

III. At my mom's funeral we learned some things we didn't know. We learned good things, like how she had touched the lives of people we didn't know. We learned some bad too. It turns out, that even though I thought my mom and dad quit smoking together in the late 60's and early 70's, that she had never really quit. One vicar wrote that my mom was a closet smoker and used to step outside and smoke with him. This points to a problem. If what we need to change in this sinful world is ourselves, the problem is that people often do not want to change. They like the old self.

A. But, the good news here is that the change really does not come from ourselves. Ultimately it comes from God.

1. Jesus says, **"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."**
2. Another way to translate the word again, is "from above."
3. It is God who gives new life.
  - a. God so loved the world, the sinful world, that He sent His son to be raised up like the serpent in Moses' time. Only Jesus was raised on the cross to pay for our sins. The rebellion, the meanness, the greed, the selfishness that leads to disappointment and hurt, God has loved us, even when sinners, and forgives our sins for Jesus' sake. He puts it behind us.
  - b. God so loved the world that whoever believes in Jesus, not in themselves, but in Jesus, has eternal life. Instead of a future of sin and death and even hell, we have a future of God's love in the world and eternal life in heaven.
  - c. Forgiveness for the past and eternal life for the future is a new life, and a new self that comes from God above.

B. And, when the past is forgiven by the Creator of the world and the future is assured by the love of the Lord and ruler of the universe we can face life in a new way.

1. Our sins, we can admit because God forgives us.
2. The disappointments are not forever, they are forgiven by God himself. All we have to do is let God's forgiveness sink into our hearts.
3. The struggle is not all there is. We have the promise of eternal life.
4. Life is different when we know and trust Jesus. Life is new.

CONCLUSION ó Two months ago, about, a new life came into the world. Henry Rockey was born physically. Sometimes I worry about what life will be like for my children and grand children. I see how the world has changed and turned away from God in my day. What will the world be like for him? But, while this world remains sinful, tonight God has worked a miracle. By water and the Spirit Henry is made a new person, forgiven and with eternal life. That comes from above, from Jesus.