

Sermon

April 1, 2026

John 3:1-17

Imagine you are sitting at your kitchen table tonight. Everything you love is around you — your family, your home, the smell of supper still in the air. Your finances are stable. Your neighbors know your name. Life makes sense. Then the phone rings. And the voice on the other end says: "*Leave. Now. Go to a place I will show you later.*" Would you go?

The Man Who Went

Abram was 75 years old when God called him. Seventy-five. He wasn't a young man with nothing to lose. He had land, flocks, servants, and deep roots in a city called Haran. And God said, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1).

Notice what God *didn't* say. He didn't say, "Here is a map." He didn't say, "Here is a five-year plan." He said, *I will show you*. Future tense. Trust me first, details later.

And Abram went.

That's it. That's the whole thing. He packed up everything, and he went.

Now here's a question worth sitting with: *What gave Abram the courage to do that?*

He wasn't brave because he was fearless. He wasn't brave because he could see the destination. He was brave because he believed the One who called him. Faith wasn't Abram's achievement. It was his response to a God who had already decided to bless him.

The Man Who Came at Night

Across the centuries, in a different city, a different man was wrestling with a different kind of question.

His name was Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee — one of the most respected religious teachers in all of Israel. He knew the Law of Moses like you know

your own address. He had studied, prayed, fasted, and served for decades. If anyone had *earned* their way to God, it should have been Nicodemus.

But something about Jesus kept pulling at him. So he came to Jesus at night — probably because he didn't want to be seen — and he said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God" (John 3:2).

He was being polite. He was feeling his way around in the dark. Jesus cut straight through the politeness. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nicodemus blinked. *Born again? What does that even mean? Can a grown man crawl back into his mother's womb?* He wasn't being ridiculous. He was being completely logical. And that's exactly the problem.

The Word That Changes Everything

The word Jesus used — the Greek word is *ἀνωθεν* (anōthen) — carries a double meaning. It means *again*, but it also means *from above*. Jesus was saying both things at once. You must be born *again*, and you must be born *from above*. A new birth. A heavenly birth. A birth that no human being can arrange for themselves.

Think about your first birth for a moment. Did you plan it? Did you work for it? Did you earn it? Of course not. You simply *received* it. You were helpless. Someone else did all the work, and you arrived. Jesus is telling Nicodemus — and us — that entering the Kingdom of God works the same way. You don't climb in. You don't earn your way in. You are *born* in. Someone else does the work. You receive it. This is the moment the tension in our three texts begins to tighten.

The Conundrum

Here is the uncomfortable truth: every human instinct tells us we should be able to *do something* to make ourselves right with God. We make our lists. We try harder. We compare ourselves to others who are clearly worse than we are. We think, *surely if my good column outweighs my bad column, I'll be okay.*

Even Nicodemus — a brilliant, sincere, godly man — came to Jesus thinking he could reason his way to the Kingdom.

And Paul, writing to the church in Rome, takes a hammer to all of it.

He asks about Abraham: did Abraham earn God's favor? And then Paul answers his own question: "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'" (Romans 4:2-3).

That word *counted* is important. It's an accounting word. It means credited to your account. God looked at Abraham's faith — not his accomplishments, not his moral record, not his religious resume — and God said, *I'm crediting righteousness to this man's account*. Not because Abraham earned it. Because God *gave* it.

The Breaking Point

Now here is where everything comes together, and it is so beautiful it almost doesn't seem real. Jesus doesn't leave Nicodemus in the dark — literally or spiritually. He explains it. He opens the whole thing up and lays it bare: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). *God so loved*. That is the engine of everything.

Not *God so demanded*. Not *God so required*. Not *God so evaluated*.
God so loved.

Just as Abram didn't find God — God found Abram. Just as no baby plans its own birth — God arranges the new birth through water and the Spirit (John 3:5). Just as righteousness was credited to Abraham as a gift — it is credited to us through faith in Jesus Christ, who took the judgment we deserved and gave us the standing we could never earn.

The Rest of the Story

Here is something we don't talk about enough. When God called Abram, he didn't just say, "I'll bless you." He said, "You will be a blessing"

(Genesis 12:2). There was a *destination* to the journey. There was a *purpose* beyond the promise.

Paul writes that Abraham would be "heir of the world" (Romans 4:13). Not just saved. An *heir*. A co-owner of the future God is building. And Jesus says he came so that the world might be *saved through him* (John 3:17). Saved not just from death, but *for something*. Saved into a new life — a new kind of humanity — being prepared to stand beside the King of all creation and share in his reign over everything he made.

You are not simply rescued. You are being *remade*. Shaped. Prepared. The new birth is not the end of the journey — it is the beginning of it.

What God Is Doing Right Now

Abram packed his tent and walked into the unknown because God had spoken. Nicodemus walked out of the night and into a new life because the Son of God explained it to him. Abraham trusted God and received a righteousness he could never have earned. And God is doing that same work in you — calling you by name, crediting you with a righteousness that is not your own, giving you a birth you did not arrange, and leading you toward a destiny that is far bigger than you have dared to imagine.

The King of all creation has called you friend. He has clothed you in his own royal raiment. He has made you an heir. And the journey — the glorious, sometimes frightening, always grace-filled journey — has already begun.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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