

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY  
BIBLICAL MANHOOD  
HOW MANY WAYS CAN A MAN BE SAVED?  
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We talked last time about humility and how integral that is to Biblical Manhood. We also looked at a proud man, a man who reminds me a lot of myself, more so in the past than in the present, although certainly we all have an occasion to be a little too proud.

I remember, though, I had no interest in spiritual things as a young man. I had an interest in being well thought of, so I participated in some religious activities, but I had no interest in spiritual things. I started setting goals and started getting my own way. The more I got my own way, the more miserable I became. By the time I was in my early 20's, I was a very miserable young man. I was married, and to be honest with you, at the time I thought that that was part of the source of my misery. I was blaming my wife, Patsy, for a lot of the miseries that I seemed to be going through because I was a very proud young man.

God humbled me, not by taking things away from me, but by giving so much of what I wanted that I was gagging on it. I can remember, and I've told this story here before, ranting and raving around the house one morning and taking the frustrations I had out on Patsy thinking if I could just somehow find the words to express this onus that was eating away at the lining of my gut that somehow I could expiate this frustration, this amorphous feeling in my gut, and I could be free. I was saying things to her that a man should probably not say to a woman. As I looked over at her as I was ranting and raving back and forth, there were large crocodile tears sort of rolling down her face which, to be honest, was not that unusual at that point in our marriage. There was something different this particular day, and I was transfixed and I was not able to look away. After she held my gaze for a brief eternity, she asked me this interesting question. "Pat, is there anything about me that you like?" I remember feeling like I had been hit by a cattle prod and wandering off to the office and staring out of the window for the rest of the morning and thinking to myself, "You know, Morley you are really a nobody headed no where." It was true.

From that point forward, I began to think like the man was thinking last week. I moved from being the Pharisee Phil, the problem look at me, to more of the publican, Paul, more Lord have mercy on me, a sinner. That question began to take shape in me. Luther's famous question, "How can I, a sinner, find acceptance with a righteous and Holy God?" That was the question that focused Luther's pursuit of God, and it's the question that focused my pursuit. So it seemed that visiting a church was the logical thing to do. Met two young couples at this church who took an interest in Patsy and me. One night they invited us over to their home. As we were sitting around either waiting for dinner or after dinner, I don't remember, but we were sitting around and there was a coffee table. I was sitting on the left end of the couch, and there was a woman sitting on the floor on the other end of the coffee table and she said to me, "Are you a Borneo Christian?" I said, "A Borneo Christian, what's that?" She said, "No, I said are you a Born Again Christian?" I said, "Well what's the difference?" I didn't have the foggiest idea of what a Born Again Christian, Borneo Christian. I thought she wanted to know if I was from Borneo. I had no idea what Born Again was. My experience has been, and perhaps yours would parallel this, is that there are many men who would gladly do whatever it is required if they only knew what it was.

In Oxford, England three young men, George Whitfield, John Wesley and Charles Wesley together provided the leadership that John Wesley who had formed the group when they were students called The Holy Club. Charles formed it and his brother, John, a better organizer, sort of took over the leadership of it. It was a religious society. It was built on extreme discipline trying to figure out what could we do to find acceptance with a righteous and Holy God. What is required? What are the things we can do? They applied themselves and they would get up very early in the morning. They had required discipline and Bible study, prayer and fasting, and the taking of communion. They would carry on rigorous devotions at night, they had to write in their journals, they had to go visit prisoners in the Oxford prison jail, and they

had to fast twice a week. These were men who found humility. They were not out living a proud life; they had found humility.

Luther had a similar experience. He was an Augustinian Monk, for crying out loud. He would go to his superior and confess sins, sin after sin after sin, every little peccadillo looking for some way to find acceptance with a righteous and a Holy God. I would just read to you a word from Luther. He said, "I came across the phrase 'the righteousness of God' ". He said it terrified him. "It struck my conscience like lightning. It was like a thunderbolt in my heart," because he knew that he was an unrighteous sinner that fell short of God's righteousness.

Luther said, "I did not love, yet I hated the righteousness of God who punishes sinners. I hated not the righteousness of God, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. Is it not enough," he murmured, "that God crushes us miserable sinners with his love but he has to then threaten us with punishment for the Gospel, too? How do I, a sinner, find acceptance with a righteous and Holy God?"

In our passage today, John: Chapter 3, we meet a man like a Wesley, a Whitfield, a Luther, a me, a you - his name is Nicodemus. Let's begin at Verse 1. If you don't have a Bible, let me encourage you to look on with someone who does and also stop by a good Christian Bible Book Store afterwards and pick up one for next week. "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council." It's worth noting here that Pharisees, it's almost a pejorative term in our culture today, were layman; they were well-to-do layman. They were layman who had enough time on their hands to make religious studies a central part of their life. They were kind of like deacons in the Baptist Church. They're kind of like Elders in the Presbyterian Church. What else have we got here? We have 53 different churches here and at least 13 different denominations, so we'll get you all before it's over. Anyway, he was a guy like us in many ways. "He came to Jesus at night..." Interesting that he would come at night. He had a lot to lose. He had a big stake in being a religious guy. It would be a little embarrassing to say, "Look how religious I am, but I might have made a mistake here." So he came at night. He said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God." This doesn't sound like the proud Pharisee Phil from last week does it? This sounds like a more humble man. "You know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the miraculous signs that you are doing if God were not with him. In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, unless a man is religious like you are, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.' "

Apparently, Jesus saw some kind of distinction between being part of the Kingdom of God and being religious. He said, "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." Remember, he's talking to a guy who goes to a weekly Bible study. He's talking to a guy who's active in his church. He's talking to a moral guy, a guy who probably fasts and tithes, and probably talking to a guy who's a whole lot more religious than you are. If you think about it probably a whole lot more righteous than you are. Probably a whole lot more moral, probably doesn't go to the same "R" rated movies that you go to.

I go to "R" rated movies, and I love them. I had a woman in our office this week who went to see the movie, "Panic Room." You know, we're a ministry, and so I said, "How did you like it?" She said, "Well, it was okay." When I say it was okay that means that I really liked it but I'd be too embarrassed to recommend to anybody else.

"I tell you the truth, religiously, unless a man is born again, he will not enter the Kingdom of God."  
" 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked." Let's give this man a judgment of charity. He was sincere. This is probably a very sincere guy. He's probably like you. He would gladly do the right thing, the thing that's required if he only knew what it was. "How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. ' Surly he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered. 'I tell you the truth ... unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.' " Water would be the flesh, some people think it's baptism, that doesn't make any difference. I happen to personally think it's born of flesh and Spirit, born once, die twice, born twice, die once. You've heard this before no doubt. Some of you have. "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." It's starting to sound like Jesus is making a statement either

about the exclusivity of how you get into the Kingdom or something else. We'll figure this out as we go along.

Verse 6: "Flesh gives birth to flesh," that's why I think it's the water meets the flesh and not baptism because of this next verse. "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit." Now he's saying this to a religious guy. He's saying this to you and me. Your mamma, your daddy they gave you your physical birth, but it's the Holy Spirit of God that gives birth to your Spirit. That's interesting. Let's keep reading. "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'you must be born again. 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. How can this be?' asked Nicodemus."

What does it mean to be born again? Apparently, there is, in the mind of Jesus, a difference between being religious and born again. Apparently, in the mind of Jesus, there is a difference between being religious and doing your Bible study, doing your quiet time, folding your hands and praying, putting your \$2 in when you walk in here. That can't be what it means to be born again, right? Apparently, in the mind of Jesus there is a difference between being religious, like Nicodemus or Whitfield, Wesley, Luther, and you or me and being born again.

That's the big idea here this morning, men. We're talking about Biblical Manhood and the foundation of it all is simply this, you must be born again. Everything you are doing is worthless and of no value unless you are born again. You must be born again. What does it mean to be born again? I suppose we could take a look at some differences between what it means to be religious and what it means to be born again. To be religious is to put out effort to do the right things, to be moral, to be a good guy. Is there value in this? Would it be better to have a moral society or an immoral society? It would be better to have a moral society. A lot of people put a great emphasis on being religious. There are 43,000 religions in the world. Did you know this? There may be a handful of major religions, but 43,000 different religions. Did you know that all of them, except Christianity, are based upon your performance? You have to do something in order to be good enough to make God happy or at least avoid his wrath. So religious-thinking people look at the Kingdom of God as something you achieve. You make it happen. You do it, you be moral, you be good. Jesus says that there is apparently something different about being born again and being religious. Jesus is making the point, as we will see, that the Kingdom of God is not something you achieve, it's something you receive. Religious people would say that the essence of Godliness is discipline and you see this everywhere - people putting forth a lot of effort. As we will see, Christianity is a gift that we get; it's a grace. Faith is a grace in regard to discipline. Now, should you be disciplined? Should you exercise faith in a disciplined way? Sure. But unless you have received faith as a grace of God, then you really are operating on your own strength.

Romans: Chapter 9, Verse 16 says, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." Salvation does not "depend on man's effort or desire but on God's mercy." Look down with me if you would. "How can this be?" he says. Verse 14, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert so the son of man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life." The Kingdom of God is what? Eternal life. "Jesus says everyone who believes in Jesus may have eternal life." So it's believing in Jesus. That's how we receive. We don't achieve it by our own efforts.

Some of you, however, are having some light bulbs go off right now. Hopefully, you are. "Everyone who believes in Jesus may have eternal life." This word, believes, is faith. Faith is believing in Jesus. Believing what? What do we believe? Jesus is a wonderful example for me to follow. Is that what we believe? It's interesting that C.S. Lewis (can't get away from Lewis - don't want to get away from Lewis - I would be devastated if I lost my books on Lewis) says, "Christians think that the chief point of the story lies here. They think the main thing he came to earth to do was to suffer and be killed. The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start."

Watch this. This is for you Calvinists, and Armenians and whatever else you are out there. Two guys were coming down the stairs and one of them tripped and they both fell down the stairs. One was a Calvinist and one was an Armenian. The Armenian got up and said, "Why would God allow that to happen?" The Calvinist got up and brushed himself off and said, "I'm glad that's over with."

"The central Christian belief is that God's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start." That's the Gospel. Now watch this. Curious as to how it did this, another matter. A good many different theories have been held as to how it works, but what all Christians agreed on, however, is that it doesn't work. I don't really care what your theory is. I don't care if your Armenian, Calvinist, pre-millennious, post-millennious, --- millennious, drunk, I don't care. The point is that being born again is believing in Jesus. Being born again is having faith in Jesus. Believing that Jesus is who He says He is, did what He said He did, and will do for you what He said He would do. That He says who He says He is, the son of God, that He did what He said He did, but He died on the Cross to take on the penalty for your sins so that you could find acceptance with a righteous and Holy God because you would gladly do what is required if you only knew what it is, but you can't do the things the law requires, so the only thing that you can do is believe in Jesus. He died on the cross for you, and He will do for you what He said He would do and that is that He would give you eternal life. Wow, wow, wow! Amazing!

Do you mean I don't have to achieve His righteousness? I don't have to be this super-disciplined guy? You mean this is something I just believe? I put my faith in Jesus and I receive it? It's a grace, something given to me, and all I do is believe in Jesus which you can't do, of course, unless you have humility.

Last week we talked about the inseparable character of a Godly man is humility and the foundation under every part of being a Godly man is faith in Jesus. So you must be born again, you MUST be born again. Go to Verse 18 with me. "Jesus says, 'Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he does not believe in name of God's one and only son.' " How many ways are there for a man to be saved? Are there 43,000 ways for a man to be saved? "Jesus said, 'I am the way the truth and the life. No man comes to the father except through me.' "

Now we can dismiss this and choose not to believe it, but this is what Christianity is. So if you don't want to believe Christianity, that's fine, but don't pick and choose little bits and pieces of it and say that what you believe is Christianity if you believe there are many ways for man to have eternal life. There may be 43,000 religions, but 25% of the world's population is Christian. There's a reason for that because it is a faith that works. It is a faith that actually saves, and you see people who have put their faith in Jesus and you've seen their life transformed. You're looking at one. I'm looking at many. Jesus Christ actually does transform life..

There is an insight that Tim Keller has that is very liberating for me. That is, that while Christianity is an exclusive religion it excludes people if they don't believe in Jesus. It is the most inclusive of all the religions. He calls it inclusive exclusivity. Anyway, the point is that Christianity is the most inclusive of all the religions because all other religions are based upon your performance. You have to be righteous to be saved. How can a man, how can I, a sinner, find acceptance with a righteous and Holy God? That's a question that all men ask to seek God. The point is that in all of the religions, nobody makes it. In Christianity, everyone who believes receives eternal life. It's a very inclusive religion much more inclusive than any other religion in the world. You MUST be born again. So, you must be BORN AGAIN, you MUST be born again, and YOU must be born again. Are you born again? Are you a sinner? Have you, a sinner, found acceptance with a righteous and Holy God? Have you been humbled and fallen on your knees and said, "Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord, I've hated your righteousness because I can't keep it. Lord, I would gladly do whatever is required if I only knew what it was." You must be born again. YOU must be born again.

John Wesley left the Holy club, went to Georgia here in the colonies to convert the Indians. He started an orphanage. One day someone said to him, "Do you know Jesus Christ as your savior?" He said, "I know that Jesus is the savior of the world." The person said, "Yes, but do you know him as YOUR savior?" Wesley could not answer that question. It rattled him, and he went back to England. At about the age of 35, many years later, he was reading Martin Luther's commentary on Romans one night, the commentary that Luther was Romans: 1, Verse 17 was the verse that led to Luther's conversion to Christianity. Wesley was reading Luther's commentary, and he was struck by God. I am going to read what he said. "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt a dead trust, O Christ. Christ alone for salvation and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins." There he was, he'd been extremely religious, but he was not born

again. Luther had been extremely religious, but he was not born again. Nicodemus was extremely religious, but he was not born again. How religious are you? Are you born again?

As we close I am going to pray a simple prayer, and if you have been going through the motions of "religiosity," and you are not born again, and you would like to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, I would invite you to pray with me and invite Jesus, receive Jesus, be born again, receive the grace, put your faith and belief in Jesus.

Let's pray:

If you want to be born again, pray this prayer. Lord Jesus, I believe in You. I believe that You died for my sins. I believe that by putting my faith in You that You'll forgive my sins and give me the gift of eternal life. Lord, forgive me for being a religious man. I now accept the gift of being born again. I want to be born again, and by faith I receive Your grace.

If you have prayed this prayer, would you with your heads still bowed just raise your hand so I can get an idea of what may be happening here today? There are probably a half dozen men. Whether this is a first-time commitment or a recommitment, I pray that you would bless them to God with an assurance of your acceptance. Amen

/cjb 4/29/02