

How Does A Christian Become A Jewel In God's Crown Of Glory?

Text: John 3:1-15

1) Not By Nature

Suggested Hymns:

2) By Virtue Of The New Birth

139, 140, 793, 294, 532

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 3:1-15, ¹ *There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."*

³ *Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*

⁵ *Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

⁹ *Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?*

¹¹ *Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.*

¹⁴ *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Christian's God is the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons in one divine essence. All other gods are false gods. "*Useless things*" is what Scripture calls them.¹

In the Triune God Christians believe as we confess in the Apostles' Creed. We worship Him "*in spirit and in truth.*"² We strive to serve Him all the days of our lives as we promised in our confirmation vows. In this Triune God we rejoice.³

And, truly, the God of the Christians is worthy of our adoration.⁴ Indeed, He is the God of glory, "*For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.*"⁵

Not the least of God's glory are His wonderful works.⁶ The works of creation, redemption, and sanctification.

God is good to all His creatures,⁷ to the evil as well as the good, *for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*⁸

He is especially good to His Church. We read in Isaiah 62:3, *³ You shall also be a crown of glory In the hand of the LORD, And a royal diadem In the hand of your God.*

He calls us His "*diadem,*" His "*crown of glory,*" the crown of all His works, because He has clothed us "*with the garments of salvation*" and "*clothed us with the robe of righteousness.*"⁹ The members of His Church, the Christians, are His "*jewels,*"¹⁰ the jewels in His crown of glory.

Truly, we have reason to worship the Triune God. But the question arises, how did we become God's jewels? Let us, then, consider the question: *How Does a Christian Become a Jewel in God's Crown of Glory?* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Not By Nature

Our text says begins, ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*** No human being is by nature a jewel in God’s crown of glory, but instead a lost and condemned creature.

This is not God’s fault. God originally made man in His own image, in His own likeness. God, the Holy Trinity, did. We read in Genesis 1:26–27, ²⁶ ***Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*** ²⁷ ***So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.***

Notice the plural personal pronouns *Us* and *Our*. God is perfectly holy and righteous, and so was man when he left the hands of His Creator. We read in Ephesians 4:24, ***put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.***

Man was ***“very good”*** then.¹¹ Originally the earth was the Lord’s crown of glory, and man was the foremost jewel therein.

But the fall of man brought sin into the world.¹² Since then all people, as they are born into the world, are flesh born of the flesh as our text says. As born we all have a sinful, corrupt nature, alienated from God, and hostile to God.¹³ This condition is called Original sin,¹⁴ and leads to actual sins.¹⁵

“The wages of sin is death.”¹⁶ With sin, death entered the world, temporal death,¹⁷ and eternal death, which is eternal damnation in hell.¹⁸ This is the eventual lot of man, whom God originally created for life, unless he is born again.

Is not this a terrible teaching? To the flesh, indeed. But remember the words of Galatians 6:8, ⁸ ***For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption.*** This includes hearkening to the voice of the flesh. This is Jesus’ doctrine. He knows of what He speaks.

¹¹ ***Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.*** He accompanies His statement with a solemn double affirmation: ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”***

Does Christ's word have any weight? Nicodemus calls Him "*are a teacher come from God*" and a miracle-worker. Jesus does not contradict him. The fact of the matter is that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, who has come down from heaven.

He is now dwelling on earth while at the same time He is in heaven.¹⁹ His doctrines are those of the Godhead.²⁰ It is the Triune God who affirms that all people are by nature outside of the kingdom of God and eternally lost unless they are born again.

Is there really no exception to this rule? None except Jesus Himself. But He was not flesh born of the flesh in the sense of *That which is born of the flesh is flesh*. Jesus was by the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit conceived a true man by the Virgin Mary as we learn from Luke 1:35.

Among mere men there is no exception. Nicodemus was no exception, even though he was a good man in the sight of men. He was a Pharisee, and according to Christ's own testimony, *the teacher of Israel, a ruler of the Jews*. This means that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest council of the Jewish Church.²¹

He was respected by his fellow-men because of his exemplary personal and civil righteousness. He was highly honourable because of his justice, and his fairness.²²

He was considerably interested in Jesus, and kept himself informed concerning Christ's doctrines and miracles, and thought highly of Him. He was keen to learn Christ's views concerning the way to heaven. It was with this matter in mind that he approached Jesus.

The Lord knows this, and answers his question before it is put. Yet the Lord tells this virtuous, learned, influential, truth-seeking ruler, and teacher of his people, *'You must be born again.'*

Without the new birth, Nicodemus would have been lost as well as the meanest character in Israel and the idolatrous pagans around the world.

This was the sad condition of every Christian by nature, spiritually blind, dead, and hostile to God and subject to the divine wrath and eternal condemnation, all because of his sins.

But, lo, the Christian has become a jewel in God's crown of glory, a citizen of God's glorious kingdom

2. We Become A Jewel In God's Crown Of Glory By Virtue Of The New Birth.

This new birth is made possible by the heavenly Father's unspeakable love of a perishing world,²³ and by Christ's inestimable sacrifice.

We are told in our text, *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,*¹⁵ *that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*

The children of Israel had murmured against Moses and Aaron, their God-appointed leaders in the wilderness. Thereupon the Lord, as a punishment upon His rebellious people, sent fiery serpents among them.²⁴ All who were bitten died, and many were bitten. Then Israel repented.

In answer to Moses' intercession for them the Lord of mercy told Moses to erect a bronze serpent on a pole and promised that all who were bitten by the fiery serpents and looked at the uplifted serpent would live.²⁵ Here was life, temporal life, for a look.

The brazen serpent was a type and symbol of Christ. ¹⁴ *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*²⁶ Man has rebelled against God. The fiery serpent of hell has stung him.²⁷ Death, both temporal and eternal, is inevitable.

This takes us back to Genesis where we read in Genesis 2:17, ¹⁷ *but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*" Sin is the sting of Satan; the Law, the strength of the sting.²⁸ "The Son of Man," is the Messiah, the incarnate Son of God, the Crucified One, the uplifted Saviour.

See Him hanging on Calvary's cross. Look and live. *Believe* as our text says and accept Him in simple, trusting faith.

Christians are jewels in God's crown of glory because they have looked upon the cross where Jesus Christ *"gave Himself a ransom for all,"*²⁹ suffered and died as men's Substitute,³⁰ where He, our Saviour, fulfilled the Law for us,³¹ removed its curse,³² abolished death,³³ conquered Satan,³⁴ atoned for all our

sins,³⁵ and opened heaven for us. He is now is lifted up and standing at the right hand of God in heaven.³⁶

Coming to faith happens through regeneration. Regeneration is not reform. To reform a person means to make him better morally, to deliver him from vicious habits as, for example, the drunkard from drink, the criminal from following a life of crime, etc.

To regenerate a person means to give him *“a new heart.”* We read in Ezekiel 11:19–20, *¹⁹ Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.*³⁷

Nicodemus did not need to be reformed, but he did need to be born again. The reform of a man may be wrought by himself or by others with human or earthly means. A drunkard may be constrained to do better if strong drink is withheld from him; the criminal, by being put behind prison bars. Because of temporal considerations, or even eternal (thinking of those who think that they can merit their own salvation), men have at times “mended their ways.”

But regeneration is beyond human power. Regeneration, the new birth, means to give sight to the spiritually blind,³⁸ life to the spiritually dead,³⁹ and to replace enmity against God,⁴⁰ with love for Him. Man might as well try to raise the dead as to regenerate a man.

The regeneration of man can only be done by the Holy Spirit. Although a stumbling-block to human reason, *“How can a man be born when he is old? How can these things be?”* ¹² *If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*

Notwithstanding the fact that human reason will accept as true and real the mysteries of nature, ⁸ *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes,* ⁷ *Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’* This new birth, regeneration, is real.

To be born again does not mean a natural rebirth, (if that was possible, it would still leave a man just as he was before), but simply to be born again means

to be brought to believe in Jesus Christ as the uplifted Saviour of the world, and in the salvation that is “through faith in His blood.”⁴¹

This belief, or faith, is the gift of God,⁴² wrought by the Holy Spirit,⁴³ ***“in the name of the Lord Jesus,”***⁴⁴ and in harmony with the gracious will of the Father.⁴⁵

Our text says ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.***

We also read in 1 Corinthians 12:3, ³ ***Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.***

And in 1 Corinthians 6:11, ***But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.***

The new birth is also known as the new creation.⁴⁶ ***“That which is born of the Spirit is spirit,”*** has the Spirit’s mind. This means that the person’s heart, mind, and will are now directed to God and to that which pertains to God.

The means of regeneration is through Holy Baptism, ***born of water and the Spirit***, the washing of regeneration. It is ***“the word of God which is in and with the water”*** as Luther says.

We read in Titus 3:5, ⁵ ***not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.***

“This Sacrament actually works and gives new life; the water is not merely a symbol, but an actual means, through the power of the Word, in working salvation. But one that has been converted in this way and has thus become a partaker of the grace of God, thereby enters into the kingdom of heaven, into the invisible Church.”⁴⁷

That is the grace that has come to us Christians. We are created of God and redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s Son. We have been born again in Holy Baptism through the operation of the Holy Spirit, and have been turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.

We have entered the holy Christian Church, the crown of God's glory, and are honoured as the jewels thereof. Is it any wonder the Triune God is the God we love and adore? Is it any wonder we celebrate Trinity Sunday in His honour?

Jewels sparkle. Christians, ¹⁴ ***"You are the light of the world. ...*** ¹⁶ ***Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.***⁴⁸ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Acts 14:15

² John 4:23

³ Philippians 4:4

⁴ 1 Chronicles 16:7-36

⁵ Romans 11:36

⁶ Psalm 19:1, Psalm 139:14, Deuteronomy 3:24

⁷ Acts 17:27-28, Hebrews 1:3, Psalm 145:15-16

⁸ Matthew 5:45

⁹ Isaiah 61:10

¹⁰ Malachi 3:17

¹¹ Genesis 1:31

¹² Genesis 3:1-7

¹³ Romans 8:5-8, Romans 5:12

¹⁴ Psa. 51:5; Rom. 7:18; Gen. 8:21; Eph. 2:3

¹⁵ Matt. 15:19; 1 John 3:4

¹⁶ Rom. 6:23; Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:20

¹⁷ Rom. 5:12

¹⁸ Isa. 66:24; Luke 16:23-24

¹⁹ Verse 13

²⁰ John 5:19; 14:10

²¹ John 7:50

²² John 7:51

²³ John 3:16

²⁴ Num 21:6

²⁵ Numbers 21:4-9

²⁶ John 8:28

²⁷ 1 John 3:8

²⁸ 1 Cor. 15:56

²⁹ 1 Tim. 2:6

³⁰ Isaiah 53:4-6

³¹ Galatians 4:4-5

³² Gal. 3:13

³³ 2 Timothy 1:10

³⁴ Gen. 3:15

³⁵ 1 John 2:2

³⁶ Acts 7:56

³⁷ See also Psa. 51:10, Ezek. 36:26

³⁸ 1 Cor. 2:14

³⁹ Eph. 2:1

⁴⁰ Rom. 8:7

⁴¹ Romans 3:25

⁴² Eph. 2:8

⁴³ John 3:5-6, 1 Cor. 12:3

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:11

⁴⁵ 2 Tim. 1:9, John 3:16

⁴⁶ 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15

⁴⁷ Kretzmann, Pop. Com., Vol. 1, 421

⁴⁸ Matthew 5:14-16