

Small Group Questions | October 7th, 2018

Explore God – Is Christianity Too Narrow?

John 3:1–18

Other Passages Referenced: Numbers 21:4-9; Ezekiel 36:25–27; Matthew 7:14; John 14:1–6; Acts 4:12

Introductory Comments to Group Leaders:

Here are the video links for this week's videos that correspond to our big question:

Pulse of the World – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yX3i_6Pz4jA&list=WL

The Curiosity Collective – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqPx1i934pA&index=2&list=WL>

“Is Christianity too narrow?” can actually involve two separate questions. First, “Is Jesus the only Savior?” This asks if anyone can be saved apart from Jesus’ sinless life, sacrificial death, and resurrection. The second question is, “Does someone need to know about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection and then explicitly trust in Him in order to be saved?”

Again this week, I put some answers to the questions and commentary in bold text at the bottom of this document. The numbers correspond to the numbers of the questions. Please refer to those answers after you have delved into the text on your own.

Sermon Recap: Asking “why is Christianity so exclusive?” is a valid question particularly in our contemporary culture where more than half of Americans believe all religious faiths basically teach the same lessons. For those folks, both the exclusive claims of Christ and the lifestyle Christian faith promotes are both considered too narrow. As we look at the Scripture, there is no avoiding the fact that Jesus Himself spoke of His uniqueness as the only one who could save people from their sin and restore them to a right relationship with God. Another equally valid question is, “Why is Christianity so inclusive?” The account of Nicodemus in John 3 gives a basis for answering both questions. **The big idea to take away is, “Jesus gives everyone an inclusive invitation to an exclusive approach to God.”**

Hook: A Question to Help Ignite Conversation

Please show one or both of the videos above, depending on what you think will be most helpful to your group. Allow a few minutes for comments.

Look: (Please read this to your group.): We’re going to focus on **John 3:1–18**. In Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus, we find that Nicodemus had lots of questions. Jesus does not always directly answer Nicodemus’ questions but give Nicodemus answers to the questions he needs to be asking. We want to draw out that Nicodemus came to Jesus with a narrow view of salvation, believing that it was exclusively for the Jewish people. Jesus offered a view of salvation that was broader and more inclusive than Nicodemus’ on one hand, but shockingly excluded Nicodemus and many other Jews on the other hand. We’re going to see a clear example of Jesus offering everyone an inclusive invitation to an exclusive approach to God.

Background Helps

- When Nicodemus is referred to as a “ruler” of the Jews, “ruler” designated him as one of the 70 Jewish leaders who comprised the **Sanhedrin**—essentially the Jewish Supreme Court.
- The Pharisees developed a tradition of strict interpretation of the Mosaic law, developing an extensive set of oral extensions of the law designed to maintain religious identity and purity. The origin of the term “Pharisee”

comes from the Aramaic word פִּרְשָׁה (*prsh*), which means “to separate,” “divide,” or “distinguish.”¹

- In John’s gospel, he quotes Jesus beginning especially important phrases with the words, “Truly, truly I say ...” This is literally, “Amen and amen I say ...”
- The term “born-again” can also mean, “born from above.” We’ll see how that ambiguity confused Nicodemus.
- When we read the word “believe” in the New Testament, it almost never refers to cognitive belief or opinion alone. Greek has a verb form of “faith” that English does not have. When you see “believe” it is a good exercise to substitute “trust ... depend ... give allegiance to” to get a truer sense of the force.

Read John 3:1–18

1. Noting the three “Truly, truly ...” statements of Jesus in verses 3, 5, and 11 will give a good framework for the passage. What do they say? (You may find it helpful to use a whiteboard, or ask someone to write down answers as the group cites them.)
2. What details do we learn about Nicodemus in John 3:1?
3. What do we learn about being **born again** or **born from above** in v. 3?
4. According to verses 5–6, what is required to be born again? ... Also read **Ezekiel 36:25–27**, verses that Nicodemus should have been very familiar with as one in his position expecting the Kingdom of God.
5. What do you think Jesus is trying to communicate by comparing the wind with being born of the Spirit?
6. What is the very narrow requirement for salvation according to Jesus in this passage?
7. To whom is this invitation to salvation offered?
8. What do we learn about “those who do not believe/put their faith in Jesus?”
9. What do we learn about “those who believe/put their faith in Jesus?”

Illustrations:

Illustrations and quotes can be found on the “Sermon Slides” link at the bottom of www.wcchapel.org

Took: *Applying the message to our lives.*

Practical Applications:

1. Were you able to share something God has been teaching you with someone else this past week?
2. How does the big idea that Jesus offers everyone an inclusive invitation to an exclusive approach to God apply to your witness with those who don’t believe it is necessary to believe in Jesus for salvation?
3. What evidences in your life can you point to that show where the unseen Spirit “has blown in” to give you new spiritual life?
4. Will you pray for God to lead you to someone who needs to hear what God’s word has been teaching you through this sermon/study?

Prayer/Verse: “Lord, we are convinced and trust that you were the only one who lived the life we should have lived, died the death we deserved to die, and invites us to salvation for which we would never qualify on our own. Give us your heart for those we would not naturally be inclined to invite, but whom you have invited just like you did us. Give us compassion and courage so that we don’t communicate with our words or with our silence that there is any other means of salvation apart from you.

What we hope members glean from the passage.

¹ Bradley T. Johnson, “[Pharisees.](#)” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

1. "Unless born again one cannot see the Kingdom of God" ... "Unless born of water and spirit unable to enter the Kingdom of God" ... "we (Jesus and company) testify to what we have seen and know but you (Nicodemus and unbelieving Jews) to not accept our testimony."
2. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, meaning he was a member of the Sanhedrin.
3. No one can see the Kingdom of God unless born-again. It is important to note that the Pharisees were a pretty exclusive group as a whole, but Nicodemus was especially outstanding among the Pharisees as a member of the Sanhedrin. He and all of his peers certainly expected to "see the Kingdom of God," but Jesus tells Nicodemus that in his then-current state, he would be excluded.
4. Being born-again or from above requires being "born of water and spirit." Note that in the Ezekiel 36:25–27 passage, being born of water and spirit go together as one act that cleanses and brings new spiritual life. John is not saying that water baptism causes the new spiritual birth. You may recall this theme of becoming Children of God through faith John introduced in John 1:12 that spoke of a non-fleshly birth.
5. This should provide some good discussion. A few possible takeaways are: 1) We see visible and hear audible evidences of the wind but the wind itself is unseen to our eyes. 2) We can't cause the wind to blow by anything we do. The wind is a force beyond our control that has effects on us. We can see and hear evidences of the Spirit's work in bringing spiritual changes to our lives, but we cannot see or control Him. (It is interesting to note that in both Hebrew and Greek the same words can be translated "Wind/Spirit/breath.")
6. Believe/trust/depend/give allegiance to Jesus.
7. Whoever believes/...
8. They will not see/enter the Kingdom of God ... They will be judged and perish.
9. They will be born from above ... cleansed of sin and given new spiritual life ... They will see/enter the Kingdom of God ... They will not perish or be judged but will have eternal life.