

Subject: *You Must Be Born Again*

Scripture: *John 3:1-10*

John 3 is one of the great chapters in the Bible. It contains the best loved and most quoted verse of all (3:16). It gives one of the most powerful pictures of the cross (3:14). It reveals one of the darkest facts about sinful man (3:19). It contains one of the best descriptions of Christian service (3:30). It describes the two great eternal realities of eternal life and divine judgment (3:17-18), and it records one of the most profound statements in Scripture: “You must be born again” (3:7).

Many who think they are on the road to heaven are, in reality, on the road to hell. Spurgeon said: “There are many roads into hell, but only one way into heaven.” The roads of morality, religion, and good works all lead to hell. The only road to heaven is the new birth. The great evangelist George Whitefield preached many times on the subject: “You must be born again.” Someone asked him why he preached it so often and he said, “It is because you must be born again.”

THE MESSAGE OF BEING BORN AGAIN (vs. 1-4)

Nicodemus was a man of the Pharisees (“separated ones”). Jesus often referred to the scribes and Pharisees, and usually in a negative way. The scribes were the ones who worked out and described all the regulations and stipulations associated with the Law, and the Pharisees were the ones who dedicated their lives to keeping them. He was a ruler of the Jews who served on the 70-member council called the Sanhedrin. This was the Jewish supreme court. In verse 10, Jesus called him “a master of Israel,” which means he was a leading teacher or rabbi at that time. He was a religious man and a highly respected man. He came to Jesus at night. This was the original episode of Nick at Night. Why come at night? It may have been to avoid the criticism of his peers or the community, and it may have been that he wanted to have a prolonged conversation with Jesus without interruption. He was curious and respectful (vs. 2), but he was spiritually needy.

Jesus knew the heart of Nicodemus (Jn. 2:24-25), so He got right to the point (vs. 3). John is the only Gospel that uses the words “verily, verily” (truly, truly). Jesus said that when He was about to make a significant statement. Here Jesus introduced the term “born again.” He was the first person to ever use that term. People today use “born again” as a religious term to divide Christians and in some cases to mock Christians. They speak of “born again Christians” as if there were some other kind. If you are a Christian, you are born again. That’s like saying wet water or hot fire. Jesus didn’t use the term “born again” to describe someone who belongs to a certain religious group or denomination or political party. He used it to describe the only kind of person who will enter the kingdom of God.

When Jesus spoke of the new birth in verses 3 and 7, He was not giving a command, but He was making a statement. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” is a statement of fact. “You must be born again” is a statement of fact. There is no substitute for it. Religious activity and morality are not enough. Just think of the implications of that term “born again.” It is something important. A person must have a new start and have a new heart. It is instantaneous. It happens at a moment in time. It is impressive. Anytime a person is born, it is very special. It is impossible apart from God. That brings us to the questions in verse 4. Nicodemus misunderstood. He thought Jesus meant a second physical birth.

THE MEANING OF BEING BORN AGAIN (vs. 5-7)

Jesus clarified the matter. This is no ordinary birth. It is not a physical birth, but a spiritual birth. Jesus makes that clear in verse 6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh (physical) and that is all it will ever be. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit (spiritual). A man must be born of water and of the Spirit. What does that mean? Water doesn't refer to the birth sack in which the baby develops inside the mother. Water doesn't refer to water baptism, either the baptism of John or Christian baptism. Water doesn't refer to the Jewish ceremonial washings. Water refers to the spiritual cleansing that takes place when a person is born again. It is a cleansing of the soul that can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit together with the Word of God. Other Scriptures that explain what happens when a person is born again:

- **Titus 3:5** *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. It is a work of the Holy Spirit.*
- **James 1:18** *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. It is a work of God's Word.*
- **1 Peter 1:22-23**²² *Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:*²³ *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. It is a work of God's Spirit and His Word.*
- **John 1:12-13**¹² *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*¹³ *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. It is a work of God in those who receive Christ. It is through faith (complete trust) and not human effort.*
- **Galatians 3:26** *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. It is a gift of God through faith in Christ.*

Here's how it works. The Word is the seed. The heart is the soil. The Holy Spirit prepares the heart to receive the Word. The person hears the Word, receives the Word, believes the Word, and the Spirit imparts new life in the soul. The believer is born again, made new in Christ, and passes from spiritual death into spiritual life. It is impossible apart from God. It is impressive. A dead person is now alive forever. It is irreversible. No one can take it from you because no one gave it to you.

Jesus reminds Nicodemus in verse 7: "Don't be surprised that I said, You must be born again." The phrase "born again" can also mean "born from above." You must be heaven born to be heaven bound. The word "must" is a strong word and it is found again in John. Jesus said that He must die on the cross (Jn. 3:14). John the Baptist said that Jesus must increase, and he must decrease (Jn. 3:30). The Bible said that Jesus must go through Samaria (Jn. 4:4), and that we must worship God in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24). And the Scripture said that Jesus must rise again from the dead (Jn. 20:9). You must be born again.

THE MYSTERY AND MARKS OF BEING BORN AGAIN (vs. 8-10)

Jesus used a simple illustration to make His point. He said that being born again is like the wind. You can hear it but you can't see it. You can't see it, but you know it is real because you can see what a difference it makes.

The same is true of the new birth. You can't see it take place, but you know it has taken place because you see the results. A person who is born again has a new life, new desires, new understanding of spiritual things, and a new appreciation for God's blessings. He has a new heart to obey God. The first letter of John reveals several marks of being born again:

- **1 John 2:29** *If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him. **1 John 3:9** Whosoever is born of God doth not commit (practice) sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.* Living a righteous life instead of a sinful life is a mark of being born again.
- **1 John 3:14** *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. **1 John 4:7** Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.* Love for other believers is a mark of being born again.
- **1 John 5:4** *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* Overcoming the world is a mark of being born again.

The apostle Paul summed it up in **2 Corinthians 5:17** *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

Nicodemus was a master teacher in Israel (vs. 10) and he should have known these things. The Old Testament spoke of the new birth.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 ²⁶ *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.* ²⁷ *And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*

Why wouldn't Nicodemus know and why wouldn't he have understood the need to be born again? Could it be that he was so familiar with the Scriptures that he took them for granted. To know Scripture is not enough. It must come into our heart and change us. Some of us have heard this all our lives: "You must be born again." But have you been born again?