

Born Again (Part 2)

John 3:3-8

- 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?"

Today we continue last week's message on what happens in the new birth. We are in John 3 where Jesus said to Nicodemus, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,"** (John 3:3). And, **"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"** (John 3:7). Jesus told Nicodemus — and us — that our eternal lives depend on being born again, that is, being reborn from above. The concept of new birth or new creation is all over the New Testament.

[2 Cor. 5:17] 17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

[Gal. 6:15] 15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

[Eph 2:4-5 NKJV] 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

[Eph 2:10 NKJV] 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[Eph. 4:24] 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

[Col. 3:10] 10 and have put on the new [man] who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

[Tit. 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,

[John 1:12-13] 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

[1 Pet. 1:3] 3 Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

[1 Pet. 1:23] 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

This is the language of the New Covenant. The letter of 1 John is full of this kind of language as I will show you later. So we are not dealing with something marginal or optional or cosmetic in the Christian life. This is the essence of the Christian life.

The new birth is not like a makeover. Being born again is not reformation, it is re-creation. The new birth is the creation of spiritual life, not the imitation of life. Being born again is not turning over a new leaf, it is getting a whole new nature.

So last week as we looked at Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus we began to answer the question "*What does it mean to be born again?*" We summed up our insights into the first few verses of John 3 by saying:

1. *Being born again is not getting new religion but getting new life,*

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and had lots of religion. But he had no spiritual life. He needed a new birth. And,

2. *Being born again is not just perceiving a miracle but experiencing a miracle.* Nicodemus saw the supernatural work of God in Jesus, but he hadn't experienced the supernatural work of God in himself. He needed to be born again.

This brings us now to the third way of describing what happens in the new birth. Being born again is not improving your old human nature it is but the creation of a new nature in you.

3. *Being born again is the creation of a new nature in you, not just improving your old human nature.*

Look at verses 5-7:

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.'

The phrase, “**born of water and the Spirit**,” has been interpreted many ways, often according to the theological leanings of the interpreter. I used to think that “**born of water**” referred to physical birth, so that it was like Jesus was responding to Nicodemus’ question in verse 4 by saying, “*Your physical birth as a Jew, Nicodemus, is not enough. You must also be born spiritually.*” And although that is a true statement, I don’t think that is what Jesus was referring to here. For one thing, the Greek construction points to one birth, not two. “Water and the Spirit” are one expression which together refers to spiritual rebirth. It is the equivalent of being “born again” or “from above” (3:3).

Some think water is referring to baptism. I don’t think the context nor the rest of the New Testament allows for that. John Piper in his sermon on this text gives four good reasons why this is not talking about baptism ([What Happens in the New Birth? Part 2](#)).

When we get to verse 10 we find that Jesus reproaches Nicodemus for not understanding, saying, “**Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?**” As the teacher of Israel, Nicodemus should have known his scriptures. There are several Old Testament texts which show that both “water” and “spirit” refer to one’s spiritual rebirth.

The most prominent prophecy of this rebirth or re-creation is found in Ezekiel 36.

[Eze 36:25-28] **25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.**

Ezekiel is prophesying what God will do for his people when he brings them back from exile. Ezekiel predicted a time when God would cleanse His people from their sins and give them a new heart and new spirit and put His Spirit within them so that they would walk in obedience to His Word. To whom does God say, “**you shall be My people, and I will be your God**” (verse 28)? Verse 25: To the ones to whom He says, “**I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean.**” And verse 26: To the ones to whom He says, “**I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.**” In other words, the ones who will enter the kingdom are those who have a newness that involves both a cleansing of the old and a creation of the new.

So being “**born of water and the Spirit**” refer to two aspects of our newness when we are born again. We must be cleansed from our sin and we must have a new heart in which God’s Spirit will dwell.

A. Born of water – cleansed from sin

So the first way to think about the new birth is that it is a cleansing from sin — that’s the point of the referring to water. My guilt must be washed away. Cleansing with water is a picture of that. Jeremiah 33:8 puts it like this: **“I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me.”** So we must be forgiven, and the guilt washed away.

But forgiveness and cleansing is not enough. I need to be new. I need to be transformed. I need life. I need a new heart.

B. And the Spirit – given a new heart, indwelt by God’s Spirit

That’s why Ezekiel speaks of a new heart and a new spirit in verse 26 and 27. The heart of stone means the dead heart that was cold and unresponsive to spiritual reality. So in the new birth, God takes out the heart of stone and puts in a heart of flesh. The word “flesh” here in Ezekiel doesn’t mean “*merely human*” like it does in John 3:6. It means soft and living and responsive and feeling, in contrast to the heart of stone. In the new birth, our dead, stony coldness to Christ is replaced by a heart that feels the worth of Jesus, that senses the truth of the gospel.

Into this new heart God places His Spirit. Verse 27, **“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes.”** When we are born again God Himself comes to indwell us through His Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit in John 14:17 calling Him, **“the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”** 1 John 4:13 says, **“By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”**

So back in John 3 Jesus goes on to tell Nicodemus about the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth:

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.”

Jesus is saying that there is a fundamental divide between the physical and the spiritual (3:6). By “flesh,” He is referring to human nature or the natural man. We’re all born with a sinful human nature. We are dead in trespasses and sins

(Eph. 2:1) and so we need God's Spirit to impart spiritual life to us so that we can become God's children. The flesh can never bring about the new birth. All that the flesh can produce is what? More flesh. You can't get from flesh to Spirit. As Jesus says (John 6:63), **"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life."**

God must intervene to give new life. Otherwise, all you have is the flesh trying to improve itself. But the flesh can never give itself new life that comes only from God. So that is why Jesus says in verse 7, **"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"** And that "you" in "You must" is not just addressed to Nicodemus. It is the plural form of the second person personal pronoun. It means "you all" must be born again.

How do you know if you have been born again? That is what verse 8 is about.

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."

Jesus and Nicodemus may have been sitting on the rooftop to catch the cool evening breezes. Perhaps as they felt the wind blow gently, Jesus said, "Did you feel that, Nicodemus? You can't see the wind, you can't control it, and you can't understand it. It comes from above and it goes where God sends it. But you can observe its effects. See the curtains moving and the leaves rustling? So it is with the Holy Spirit. You can't control Him, because He works according to God's will, not the will of the flesh. But you can see His effects when He brings the new birth to a person. There is an internal change brought about by new life within. Where the Spirit works, the effects are plain to see."

What are the effects of the new birth? John wrote his first epistle to show the early church some genuine marks of salvation, so that they could be on guard against many false teachers. How do you know that you are born again? Listen to these verses in 1 John:

1 John 2:29: **"If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him."**

1 John 3:9: **"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God."**

1 John 3:14: **"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death."**

1 John 4:7: **"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."**

1 John 5:1: **"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him."**

1 John 5:4: **“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”**

1 John 5:18: **“We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.”**

John is saying that there is a real change in those who have been born again. John is not referring to a sinless life, but he is saying that those who are born again will begin to live a life that sins less. In other words, all whom the Spirit saves, He sanctifies. No Christian is perfect, but we should be in a perfecting process. It takes a lifetime, but those who are born of God become more and more like Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in them.

Maybe you are here today and you say, I don't have that new heart. What do I do? I want that new birth. How does it happen? That is the question that Nicodemus asked in verse 9, **“How can these things be?”** Jesus' answer we will look at in more detail next time, but it is summed up in verse 16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** It comes through believing the good news that God sent His Son to die for your sins and to give you new life through His resurrection. James 1:18 (NIV) says **“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”** You can't be born again apart from hearing the gospel. But today, you have heard the word of truth. Christ died for your sins. He was raised to life for your justification. Believe in Him.

When Peter preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost the Jews asked “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). His answer is, **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,”** (Acts 2:38).

Let me tell you what you can do. You can do what any sinner can do, you can ask...you can ask God in His mercy and in His grace to give you life. Repent. Turn away from your sin and your selfish pride and turn to God. Believe in Jesus Christ. Trust in Him alone to save you. Jesus said, **“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out,”** (John 6:37). Just come to Him now. He does the rest.