

## Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday March 13, 2022. "How are we born again?"

### I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're now well in 2022 and we've got some big things planned. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's area is expanding and we are retooling our student ministry. We also have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can check all that out through our social media sites. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

### II Recap.

We're in our second Sunday of our "**Bible says WHAT?!**" series looking at some of the hard sayings of Jesus. There were a lot of teachings of Jesus that can just be head scratchers. They're vague, confusing, can be interpreted in so many different ways, and at times just plain contradictory. I realize it can feel scary to say these kinds of things out loud. But it's worse to just pretend those things aren't there, and never really dig into the truths and teachings contained in scripture. So, we had to begin this study with just some basic, fundamental understandings of how to interpret scripture before we could dive into some of these harder teachings. And this will be kind of a lengthy recap.

**First**, the primary foundation for this series is to create a safe place for us to admit that sometimes it's VERY difficult to make sense of what scripture is saying, and how we're supposed to apply it to our everyday life. Scholars and experts over the years have vehemently disagreed about what certain passages and teachings mean just proves this point. Which gives us permission to struggle also.

**Second**, our understanding of scripture is as much rooted in how we were raised, our spiritual background, as it is having a correct understanding. The more honest we are about that, the more honestly we can approach scripture. And that also includes people who didn't grow up in any faith system, and their hesitancy or discomfort with scripture.

**Third**, and finally, our conversation around each of these passages will NOT be answers. Which will be kind of a rub for us. We love answers. We just want to know the things we're supposed to know or do in order to live how God has called us to. Our understanding of God, scripture, and how to live will always be more a process of growth than just acquiring answers. This is because we have to leave room for the mystery of God. We will never have answers, but we can always be working towards a growing understanding and a relationship. And that's the entire goal of this series. We need to wrestle with these thoughts about reading scripture before we talk about being born again.

### III Sunday.

Being "*born again*" was a fairly commonly used phrase especially in more evangelical Protestant churches. It comes out of John 3, and is part of a larger story of Jesus being visited by a Pharisee.

**What is your spiritual history with the term "*born again*"?**

**How have you come to understand it now?**

The primary passage is **John 3:1-17**. Read this, answer some questions, and we'll talk about it.

**What jumped out to you about this passage?**

**Did you see anything new or different than what you believed before?**

In order to understand what Jesus was talking about when he said we must be *"born again"*, we have to gain some understanding about what the Kingdom of God actually is.

**1. Original understanding of KoG was the here and now.** The Roman Emperor Constantine in 313 nationalized Christianity, and made it the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire and used his army and brute force to establish a very violent understanding of the Kingdom of God. Even those outside of the Roman Empire built communities; Qumran Community, (Dead Sea Scrolls), convents, monasteries, and more were communities trying to build the KoG in their own time.

**2. Apocalyptic future of KoG.** Then in the mid 1800's Christianity began to shift from a current, (in the now), understanding of KoG to a more apocalyptic, in the future, end times, understanding of KoG. An explosion of premillennial dispensationalism was born; rapture, tribulation, final battle at the end of time came about. This specific understanding of KoG is fairly new in the history of Christianity. And has moved our focus from building the kingdom to knowing about the kingdom.

**3. "Already and not yet" understanding of KoG.** A growing belief melds the two into an; *"already and not yet"* understanding of the KoG. Jesus came to establish a kingdom now, we are to be about continuing the work of building this kingdom. But it won't be 'realized', in whatever form, until a later time. And being *"born again"* is the process of being transformed, so we can join the kingdom now.

There are many passages that talk about the Kingdom of God being now, but none more clearly than **Luke 17:20-21**. It's pretty plain that the Kingdom of God is in our midst now, actually 'within us', and being *"born again"* is how we see and become a part of this work Jesus was doing.

**So we finally hit what does "born again" mean?**

All of these seem to point to the KoG is **'here now and will be'**. It seems, *"born again"* also has to be 'here now and will be', *"within us"*. Which also means John 3:16, eternal life, is also 'here now and will be'. **"Born again"**, eternal life, all seem to point to this 'here now' process of renewal. A more accurate translation is *"born from above"* or *"born of the spirit"*. John hints at this twice in the John 3 passage. ***The Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. Born of the Spirit.***

There is a transformation process happening. It's slow, long, and can be very difficult. Like actual childbirth. It's not a one decision and done. It's *'here now and not yet'*. It's accepting the **"IF"**, and then doing the work of opening yourself up. Being *"born again"* is not just saying the prayer ...getting your *"get into heaven"* card. **Work of being transformed for the 'here and now', for the 'not yet'.**

**IV Challenge.**

There are Old Testament passages that paint a picture of being *"born again"*.

**Deuteronomy 30:6 *The Lord your God will change your heart and the hearts of all your descendants, so that you will love him with all your heart and soul and so you may live!***

**Ezekiel 36:26 *And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.***

The process of being saved, receiving eternal life, (*'here now and not yet'*), being transformed by the Holy Spirit is the old, possibly hardened, incomplete, divided, will be born from above, anew.