

You Must Be Born Again, Part 2

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February 5-6, 2022
John 3:4-7

So unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. These words spoken almost 2000 years ago, ring out through history and they ring out down to our very day. The world has dramatically changed since these words were spoken. Right? I mean, people stopped using horses and camels and now use cars to get around. Cars, We go from cars to planes that can take us all over the world. Food can be refrigerated. I don't have to see you to talk to you. I can talk to you from thousands of miles away, something people in Jesus' day they never would've dreamed of. Lights and electricity make life easier in the dark. Air conditioning and heaters make life easier in harsher environments. Cell phones took dozens of things and put them all into one place. I mean, do you remember alarm clocks, day planners, cameras, Rolodex, notebooks, sticky note reminders, calculators, compasses, and Thomas Guides. Yeah, all of that is now in your pocket.

Great empires have come and gone. Great people have lived and died. Great inventions have been made and replaced. Great events have happened and then faded into memory. And yet until Jesus returns, these words will stand. Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Jesus' words recorded for us in this text, divide all of humanity into the only two groups that really matter. Those who are born again and those who are not. This is true wherever you go, even if you never leave your home. This, this distinction follows us at our jobs, in our schools, on our sports leagues. Even here, right now, a room like this is filled with people, some who are born again, and some who are not. There are actual Christians and there are Christians in name only, who know they're faking it or who don't know they're faking it.

Jesus makes this clear, right? Matthew 13, he tells a story about a man who plants really good seed in a field. And he's excited about the crop he is going to have, but then his enemy does what? Do you remember? Takes a bunch of weeds seed and throws it into his field as well. And he says, that's what my kingdom's going to be like. That's what people who, who call me king. That's what it's going to be like. Those who are true Christians and those who are not. There are those who hear the truth, embrace it for a little while, they leave and never come back. And then there are those who hear the truth and embrace it for their whole lives. And let's be clear about something, with those words in verse 3, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Really, this whole thing boils down to Jesus. If he is God who became a human being. If he is the word, meaning he is the mind of God speaking with human lips. If he is the truth, if he confirmed all of that by rising from the dead, then listen, the world we live in is a very real world. But behind this reality is a greater, more definitive, more real world that will become obvious to everyone who has ever lived one day. That reality is a kingdom and that kingdom belongs to God. And this kingdom can be, and it will be experienced by people, but only people who are what? Born again. That's what our text is about. In order to be a part of that world, you must be born again. In the Bible, being born again is called the new birth, being born from

above, being made alive, becoming a new creation, being reborn or regenerated. So a bunch of different words for this one idea.

This idea has nothing to do with reincarnation. It has nothing to do with being a better you. It has nothing to do with making changes in your life. It is a supernatural act of God's grace, where he does two things. First, he cleanses the sinner of the infection of sin at their very core, cleanses them of that. And then second, gives that sinner new spiritual life. Gives them a new nature, which means that our hearts are souls, the real you. The you at your very core is transformed forever. This changes so comprehensive, so all inclusive, so complete that Jesus chooses the metaphor of being born to describe this, to say this, "This new person comes to life." And many of you know what this is. Right? You can rightly say that that even though you look the same, you're not the same person you used to be. You've been changed. Your thinking changed, your desires, your habits, your likes and dislikes changed. Your feelings, your views, your decisions have all changed. It used to be that sin was no big deal, maybe even a good thing. It used to be that talk of eternal hell, really wasn't a warning and talk of a need for a savior that could easily be ignored. The good news about him just hit your stony heart and bounce right off. You weren't thirsty for the water of life. You weren't hungry for the bread of life. You were not awake to your eternal danger or how eternal life could be had in Jesus. But then you came alive. Maybe you were alone or with other people, maybe you were at home or in your car, at church, but something happened. You were transformed. You became a new person. And what once was a life dominated by sin and self, became dominated by God in his truth. What you hated or ignored or even gave little thought to, you suddenly loved. Maybe a little obsessed, people called you, maybe like a freak. Your mind was changed, your desires are changed, your affections changed. What once made sense didn't make sense anymore. And what didn't make sense became the most important thing in your life, made more sense than anything else. What you once fit in with, you don't anymore. What you cared about most, you don't care about as much now. Why did that happen? What's going on there? You were born again. You were made alive. You were resurrected to new life. And just as a dead man can't raise himself, and just like a statue can't give itself life, so the sinner can't birth himself.

This must happen to him because it can't happen by him. That's why the analogy is birthed. Right? The sinner contributes just as much to his rebirth as all of us contributed to our physical births, which is how much? Nothing. Right? Zero. With the birth analogy, given eight times in six verses in our text. Jesus shows that the new birth has at least four marks. If you think about this analogy of being born and you bring it into the spiritual reality of the new birth, there are at least four marks of this, of this new birth. So first like your first birth, this is instantaneous. It happens in a moment. You were born. Just like it happens, it's not a process. You were born in a moment physically in the same as true spiritually. Second it's uncontrollable, which means we have no say in this second birth, just like we had no say on our first birth. I know we joked that the baby's in there like, "Oh, they didn't want to come out today." Right?

But they really weren't thinking, "I like it in here. I'm going to stay for a little while." That's not what they do. They have no control over this thing. Just like we have no control over our spiritual births. Third it's gracious. It's a gift. It's not based on earning it at all. The baby has done nothing. And yet is given the gift to physical life. We do nothing to earn it. It is 100% a gift. And forth, it's passive. Not only do we not control it, but we don't even help with it. Right? It's not like the baby's going, "Okay, mom. You and me, we're going to make this happen. Let's go. You push and I'll push. Together we'll produce my birth." Right? That's not what happened. And

that's the same thing here. We're just along for the ride physically and led to physical life. And we are along for the ride spiritually that leads to spiritual life when we're born again. So that you have spiritual life, that you were born again, the fact of that experience in your life is 100% owing to the work of God in your life. He gave you new life and then you lived. Then being alive from the dead according to John 1:12, you received Christ. You believed in his name. And then John 1:13. People, It says, people are born again spiritually. It says that we are "born of God". God gives us spiritual birth. And he does this according to John 1:13, not because of our family history, not because of our ethnicity, it doesn't come to us because of what we want or what we can do. And it doesn't come to us because of what others want or what others can do.

You may care very deeply about your salvation. And when you have done everything you know to do and you have done it the very best that you can, you pushed yourself to the limit of your good deeds, in the end, you must still be born again. Without this, you can't, I can't, we can't even see, let alone experience, enter the kingdom of God. This is the one prerequisite for heaven. Without this, there is no good afterlife. You must be born again. This is what Jesus is talking about with Nicodemus. Jesus is there in Jerusalem celebrating the Passover. This is the beginning of Jesus ministry on earth. And none of what Jesus says makes sense to Nicodemus. He is filled with confusion. Look again, at verse 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?"

Being born again didn't make sense to a man who believed with all of his heart that entering the kingdom was solely based on two things. The fact that he was Jewish and the fact that he was seeking, that he was obeying God's rules. See, Nicodemus believed in God. Right? He believed in grace. He believed in the Bible. He believed in a future Messiah who would lead a future kingdom that would cover the earth. He assumed he would be a part of that kingdom one day. But now with Jesus' words, Jesus isn't just reading this guy's mind, but every category Nicodemus had for his place in the future kingdom of God was being dismantled with every word Jesus spoke. Piece by piece the house of salvation that Nicodemus had built for himself was being taken apart as the implications of Jesus' words were settling on his soul. Why? Jesus is speaking from another universe where salvation is not by human ancestry and it's not by human effort, but salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Every other way must be rejected and renounced, but Nicodemus is not there yet. To him, what Jesus is saying, that is just impossible. That's what his questions are. That's just impossible, Jesus. And you know what? He's right. It is impossible. It's impossible to give birth to yourself. Entering the kingdom is not by human effort, he's learning. He can't do it. He can't achieve it. He can't earn it or make himself worthy to receive it for a self-righteous person like a Pharisee. This is absolute heresy. Like this could not any more opposite of what Nicodemus believed. It challenges the very core of everything he believes and everything he lives for.

And as the teacher of Israel, according to John 3:10, this goes against everything he's been teaching all the people in Israel. He's the number one Bible teacher of his day. Hundreds, maybe thousands of people flock to hear this guy, teach the Bible. And he is realizing everything I believe and everything I live by and everything I teach is false. I've got to choose between all of that and Jesus' words right there. What is it like 10 words, you unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. In other words, to agree with Jesus is for Nicodemus to say everything I believe is wrong. And it would mean that he needs to turn away from all of it decisively and trust Jesus' words instead of everything he's believed, everything he's lived in, everything he's taught. He's in deep confusion. And guess what?

The same is going to be true for us too. When we talk about this to people, especially people who've been exposed to other forms of Christianity, who've been exposed to religion, point 1). We should ***expect confusion about the new birth. Expect confusion about being born again.*** Do not be surprised if people look at you funny, when you talk about being born again, and when you talk about their absolute need to be born again, too. Everybody assumes they're going to heaven when they die. Everybody. To hear that they're not, to hear that they can't achieve it because of anything they are or anything they can do, at best, that's going to cause confusion. Now, where does this confusion come from? I'm going to give you four reasons, four ways, four pathways that this confusion comes in. The first comes from what we are before we're born again. When it comes to our minds before we're born again, 1 Timothy 6:5 says that our minds are depraved.

The word here there means morally corrupt. It's crooked. So the straightness, the word is orthodoxy. The orthodoxy of God's word, the straightness of it doesn't fit our minds because our minds are depraved, crooked. Ephesians 4:17 says our minds are feudal, meaning empty or useless when it comes to the things of God. Other things, they work great. But when it comes to things of God, our minds just don't compute before being born again. Our minds are also described in Ephesians 4 as darkened, which means unable to see the light of God's truth. We don't even get it. It does doesn't make any sense to us before being born again. Colossians 2:18 calls our minds fleshly, which means that our minds are dominated by sin and self and the things of this life. This creates in us, wicked ideas, rebellious intentions, foolish decisions that make us. In the words of Romans 8:7, hostile to God, makes our minds hostile to God and resistant to following his rules.

All of that is the description of our minds before we're born again. So when somebody hears these ideas, they're like that doesn't make sense. Yeah, the truth of God doesn't make sense to them. The second, this confusion comes from the strangeness of this metaphor, being born again. That just like Nicodemus. So how can a man be born when he's old? Jesus? huh? Can he enter a second time into his mother's woman to be born? Like this is silly, he's saying, uh, So think about it. You saying you must be born again is like saying you must see, even though someone's eyes work just fine. You must hear when their ears have no problem. It's like telling someone who's very much alive, "No, you're really not alive. You're dead. Well, I mean you're dead spiritually, not physically, but you're dead. You're dead spiritually and you need to be made alive. Well, you are alive, but spiritually alive, you need that."

Right? You see the confusion? It makes sense that it's hard to understand, but it's a metaphor for something that they have to know. And what they have to know is that they are not good enough and never will be good enough to go to heaven. They must become a new them, but that new them is not based on what they can do or what they want to do. Like birth, it's based 100% on something you can't do, but something that is done for you. And which leads to the third reason for confusion, which is that there is no such thing as how to be born again. Right? Like Jesus isn't here going, "You must be born again." Verse 4. There's confusion. And then the rest of the passage, Jesus goes, well, okay, let me give you the steps. Okay, first you got to be baptized and then you got to go to confirmation. And then after that you know, you'll be born again.

He just says what? Uhhh, You must be born again. He just says it again. He doesn't answer any of his questions. There's no steps to being born again. There's no, there's no deed like baptism, no schedule, no routine, no phase or process for anybody to go through. Being born again is

something they need desperately. Their eternal lives depend on it. And yet is not something they have the ability to do. Which leads obviously to what? More confusion. Right? You say, "I can't go to heaven unless I'm born again and yet I can't achieve it either?"

Exactly. Like your first birth it happens to you, which means it's 100% a gift. Which means it's not payment for your good deeds or the good things about you. And this takes us all the way back to the fundamental issue in religion. Right? Is salvation a gracious gift for those unable to achieve it, or is salvation a required payment for those who are able to achieve it, but maybe just need a little help? On the one side of that question is every human being and every religion on the planet. And on the other side, all by itself, is biblical Christianity and people who are born again. And that's because the fourth reason for confusion, is this, being born again is not a command. In other words, verse 7, you must be born again, does not mean see to it that you are born again or let yourself be born again or give birth to yourself spiritually. Or I command you Nicodemus, be born again. That's not what this is. This is a statement of fact, it's not a command. This is not something done by us. It's something God does, what? To us. He does it invisibly. He does it instantaneously when as a gift of his mercy to rebels. He washes us from our sin and gives us his life and his nature when he makes us spiritually alive. So in all of this, this is the four that I could see from the text, all of this means that we should expect confusion about these things. Cuz, why? Because it only goes against everything people believe about God, religion, themselves, their ancestry, their abilities, as well as their ideas about good works and good intentions and the goodness of humanity. And it goes against on top of all that, fairness, free will, and the basic need to contribute something to my salvation.

It only goes against the most fundamental realities we have when it comes to religion. So it is right that we should expect people to be confused, just like Nicodemus. And what does Jesus do with this confusion? Let's take a look at verse 5. He brings some clarity. Jesus answered, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." Now there is a ton to unpack in this passage. So um, stay with me, I'm going to unpack this one verse at a time and I'm going to do it under point 2) **Explain the new birth. Explain the new birth.** Since we should expect confusion about the new birth like Jesus does here with Nicodemus, we should be prepared to explain it. Which is what we're going to do now and what we're going to do next week.

So Jesus starts with this. He says, "Listen, I'm the authority. Truly, truly I say to you." He starts with... Why does he start that way? The answer is because he is God. And as God, he only speaks the truth. To speak anything other than truth would go against his nature, which is one of a handful of things that God cannot do. God cannot deny himself. So in contrast to all of Nicodemus' lies that he believed about salvation, Jesus says, "Unless one is born of water in the spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." Now two things. First, Jesus in verse 5 simply repeats verse 3. So being born of the water in the spirit is the same as being born again. Entering the kingdom is the same as seeing the kingdom in verse 3. Second, being born of water in the spirit, that would mean that this is one birth and not two.

So you're not born of water and then born of the spirit. This has nothing to do with baptism, by the way. This is the same as being born again, just looked at from two different angles. And what Jesus is doing here in this text is he's saying Nicodemus, I want to remind you of a Bible verse that you know already, and what he's referring to in verse 5, water in the spirit, is Ezekiel 36. So you can turn there if you like, it's on page 807 in those Bibles we give away or you can just

listen. In Ezekiel 36, God is describing the future restoration of Israel as a nation. It's the fulfillment of the promises made to them that we, as non-Jewish people, as well as some Jewish people, that we get to benefit from now. But one day all of the promises, the spiritual promises, and the physical promises, all of those promises will be fulfilled when Jesus returns and establishes his kingdom.

Right now we are benefiting from the spiritual promises and one of those benefits is being born again. Which he begins to speak about looking at it from two aspects, starting in verse 25, where he says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be cleaned from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. I will cleanse you and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put in you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." Now did you catch the emphasis I was placing on words there? I tried to make it really obvious. Um, those words I will, six times in three verses, God is making it clear that this is something he is going to do alone by his grace without anybody's help.

And I want you to notice first, the idea of being born of water is in verse 25, where he says that he will sprinkle clean water on you. And what happens when that happens? You shall be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols, I will cleanse you. So there's that washing away of sin. Second angle of being born again is in verse 26. Being born in the spirit, where he says, "I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. I'll remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my what? My spirit within you." And because he is in you, he will cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. So Ezekiel 36:25 to 27 is the same thing as being born again. It's just describing it from two different angles. It's giving a little more detail about what happens when a person is born again. They are cleansed from sin and made new.

Now turn back to John 3. Jesus then gives a kind of illustration of this or states a universal idea when he says in verse 6, basically Nicodemus, you should know this, because not only is it in the Old Testament, which you are the teacher in Israel of, but verse 6, that which is born of flesh is flesh. You know that. That which is born a spirit is spirit. In other words, like produces like, bugs make bugs and dogs make dogs and trees make trees and humans make human beings. Humans don't make spiritual beings. For that, the spirit is required. Fleshly beings can only make more fleshly beings who are dead in sin and can't save themselves.

Even if a person could go back into their mother's womb and be born a second time, they're still born physically. Fleshly beings, Jesus is saying, needs spiritual birth and that only comes from the spirit. In fact, the reason that Christianity doesn't make sense to people is because they need the spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, "the natural person does not accept the things of the spirit of God". They don't embrace it. That they can't embrace the things that the spirit has given us in his word, why? It says first, "for they are folly to him". They don't make sense, it's foolishness. But why is it foolish? Paul goes on, "He is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned". In other words, without the spirit giving spiritual life, the sinner does not even have the ability to understand Christianity.

I was talking with a man in the last service, after the last service. And he was saying, "I've been in church my whole life. I was in Lutheran Church and I was baptized and confirmed now. I went through all these things." But he said, "Just within the past few months, the Bible makes sense now. It's like, I didn't get it before and now suddenly it all makes sense. And I'm seeing

connections that I've never seen before." And what we do is we go, "Well, this is just the product of education. I just know the Bible more." No. When this book doesn't make sense and suddenly it does, it's because now the author lives inside of you and he's teaching you. Here's what my word means. You're like, "Wow, this makes sense now." Yeah, because you've been born again. That's why Jesus here is talking about a completely new nature, not a New Year's resolution or turning over a new leaf or deciding to be a new and better person.

See like the vast majority of people alive today, this is a completely new concept in Nicodemus. Even though he knows Ezekiel 36, even though he knows verses like Jeremiah 31 that connect to Ezekiel chapter 36, even though he knows this maximum like produces like. He knows all this stuff, but Jesus confronts his confusion, anyway. One more time, verse 7, where he says, "Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again." You know the old Testament, you know this general principle, you are the teacher of Israel. And then he says, "Stop being surprised at all of this. You know this stuff. Spiritual citizens are the only ones who can populate this spiritual kingdom."

And then in verse 7, there is that word again. Must. That word confronts all of us with the fact, the truth, reality, that being born again is heaven's requirement. There's only one absolutely essential reality that must be true for you if you're going to go to heaven when you die. You must be born again. It is crucial, it is required, it is mandatory, and there are no exceptions whatsoever. Listen, if there was an exception, if there was some other path, some other way, would not Jesus, the lover of our souls, would he not have told us? But there isn't because there isn't another way. Now if we follow the who, what, where, when, why and how paradigm, it's good to follow that when you get to a text, we see the what, which is being born again. We see the who, which is this is God's work carried out by the Holy Spirit.

It can happen at any place and at any time, which we'll see more of next week. And then we also see the purpose, the reason, the goal for why people are born again, is what, according to our text? So they can enter the kingdom. So they can have eternal life. So this leaves us with one major question. If we know the what, the who, the where, the when, the why, we need the how. How can a person be born again? Like I said last time, there is no how to be born again. Jesus doesn't say, "Just go be baptized and that'll take care of it." So what do we do with that? Like if you've been listening, I've created, I think the text is created, this absolute need to be born again and isn't the natural response to say, "What do I need to do?"

I'll just go and birth yourself. How do we do this? What now? For this, I'm going to take you to two texts that give us an answer. First is James chapter 1, verse 18, James 1:18. If you have a Bible from one of our ushers it's page 1,113. 1,113. James chapter 1 and drop down to verse 18. This text is about being born again and it tells us two things. It tells us why people are born again. And it gives us insight into how people are born again. Listen to James 1:18. "Of his own will", talking about God, the father. "Of his own will, he brought us forth". How? "By the word of truth". So why are we born again? Answer. "Of his own will". Translation, it was his choice to give us new life. And second, how are we born again according to this text? "He brought us forth", which the word means to give birth to, he gives birth to us spiritually. Notice, "By the word of truth".

So God, the father, by the power of the spirit gives us spiritual life by the word. God uses the word, which is the Bible. He uses the Bible to give dead sinners, new life. Second passage. Turn to 1 Peter chapter 1. 1 Peter chapter 1, which is four pages to the right in those blue Bibles, page

1,117. It's the very next book. 1 Peter chapter 1. Drop down to verse 23. The context of this is, the word of God. It is what the word does, what the word is. And I want you to notice verse 23. 1 Peter 1:23 says, "you have been born again". There's our subject. There's what we're talking about. "You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable. Through the living and abiding", what? "Word of God". So we are born again through the living and in destructible word of God. This is how people are born again. So if a person with us today here online is wondering, when were, when were you born again? All I, I can tell you this.

It was a moment that was connected to the Bible. Either the Bible you were listening to, Bible you were reading, Bible you were hearing preached, Bible you already had in your minds, either way, the spirit uses the Bible to give sinners the new birth. Which means, as we put all of this together, as you reflect on what happened to you personally, and you recognize, wait, the metaphor is birth. I don't help with that. I don't contribute to that, but it happened to me. Then that reality settling in on your soul, should create a massive sense of gratitude that the God of the universe would visit you personally and give you this gift. And second, if you're a person with us, who's wondering if you are born again. If you want to know how to be born again, the answer is, keep yourself exposed to the Bible. People are cleansed by the washing of the word. Jesus told his disciples, John 15:3. "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you".

So if you're like, I don't, I don't know if I'm born again, but I'm seeing Jesus' words on this page and I know that I absolutely need to be, then fill your life with the Bible all the time, every day. Read it, study it, listen to it, pay attention to the Bible being taught, pay attention to the Bible being preached, read books about the Bible. If you're not born again, you can't do anything to make that happen. You can't pray to get it, but you can pray to God to give it to you, to be merciful to you and give it to you. You can't earn it. You certainly can't demand it from God in the universe, "You must give me that or you're not fair." Baloney. God doesn't owe us anything, but you can fill your life with the one thing he uses to give people new life. And that one thing he uses is his word, the Bible.

This, I'll end where I began, unless someone is born again, he cannot, she cannot see the Kingdom of God. These words had been ringing throughout history for almost 2000 years. Let them ring in your soul today. You must be born again, are you?

Let's pray. Jesus, as I reflect on this text, this text is full of so much kindness and so much grace to a man completely deceived about his, about everything he believed and everything that he was doing based on those beliefs. You, out of your love for him, gave him the truth. Your truth overturns every paradigm. It overturns every religion. It overturns every ideology. You did that for him. And I pray that you would do it again. You are here now through the preaching of your word, where your word is preached faithfully, you are present. And so I pray that you would do the same work in Nicodemus that you did in Nicodemus, that you would do that here as well. And that for those who you've done that to, by the power of your spirit, I pray that reflecting on this reality for the past half hour or so, will fill our hearts with gratitude for just how kind and gracious you have been to us. To help us to see what we never would've seen and not just to see it, but to marvel at it, to be amazed by it, to be crushed with a good brokenness over our sin and the fact that you would be gracious and merciful to rebels. May that be the effect of your word as you seek to conform all of us, I pray to these truths. I pray these things Jesus, in your name. Amen.