

# You Must Be Born Again, Part 1

*John 3:1-15*

As we continue our worship by focusing our minds on the word of God, I would invite you to open your Bible with me to John 3 for this message entitled, “You Must Be Born Again.” Our text for today is John 3:1-15 and in this text we see Jesus reveal what enables a person to believe. Last week we saw that the disciples had child-like but genuine faith, but the crowds had a superficial faith. Why do some believe and persevere and some believe and fall away? Why do others not believe at all? It is because the Spirit must produce life in order for faith to be real.

Last week I said to you that depending on how disciplined I am with this text, we may get to John 3:16 next week on our Missions Weekend. Well, I will preach John 3:16 next week, but we’re not going to finish this text today. Next week we’ll look at John 3:16 with laser focus and intensity, and in a few weeks we’ll come back to this text, and then in moving forward we’ll look again at John 3:16 in its context.

Follow along as I read John 3:1-15. . . .

Our Father, with this text open before us we submit our hearts and minds to what the Spirit would teach us today. Open our minds, illumine our hearts, show us Christ. Sanctify us by the truth; your word is truth. For those among us that need it—young and old—give sight to blind eyes, hearing to deaf ears, life to dead souls. We believe that only you, Holy Spirit, can save and sanctify; and we pray that you would do it for the glory of Christ. For his sake we pray. Amen.

There are only two religions in the world. There is the religion of human achievement and the religion of divine accomplishment. Within the religion of human achievement there is every religion known to man except one. This includes Islam, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witness, and every other religion found in the world, save one.

Though every religion has its own concept of God and man and eternity, what unifies them all is that the way of salvation—whatever salvation means in each religion—the way of salvation is you working to save yourself. These are religions of human achievement.

Within the religion of divine accomplishment, there is only one—biblical Christianity. As revealed in the Bible, and in our text, salvation is accomplished by God. You cannot work for it or earn it. You cannot cooperate with God or entice him to do it in your life. God and God alone is the agent of salvation. It is his work

alone that grants eternal life. This is the religion of divine accomplishment. That is what we're taught by Jesus through his conversation with Nicodemus.

In this passage we learn three requirements to have eternal life. First, you must be born again. Second, you must be born of God. Third, you must believe in Jesus. We'll cover the first and part of the second today, and we'll come back in a few weeks to complete our study.

My prayer is that if you have been born again and have believed in Jesus, you will rejoice in God's work of salvation in your life. But if you have not been born again and have not believed in Jesus, my prayer is that today, in this room, the Spirit will move among us and grant you new life in Christ and that you will believe in Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Jesus teaches these requirements for eternal life to a man named Nicodemus. Verse 1 tells us that Nicodemus was a Pharisee, but not just any Pharisee, he was "a ruler of the Jews." This means that he wasn't one of the 6,000 Pharisees spread throughout Israel, he was one of the 70 members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel made of up Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Sadducees were the Levites and as Levites they managed the temple. They held fastidiously to the Law of Moses—Genesis to Deuteronomy—and rejected anything outside those five books. They were a kind of naturalists who did not believe in angels or life after death because they couldn't find such teaching in Law of Moses. They also rejected anything they believed to be a man-made tradition or doctrine.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, embraced the whole of what we call the Old Testament, but they also elevated oral tradition to the same level of Scripture. And whenever something is held to the same level as Scripture, it always undermines Scripture. The Pharisees embraced the spiritual realm and life after death. They were the religious leaders of the people in that they ruled over the synagogues throughout Israel whereas the Sadducees were primarily in Jerusalem, the center of civil government and temple worship.

The Romans allowed the Sanhedrin a great degree of freedom to preside over civil and religious affairs. One exception is they were not allowed to exact the death penalty, which is why the Romans got involved in Jesus' death. The Sanhedrin had more Sadducees than Pharisees, but because the Pharisees had more sway among the people, there was a kind of balance between them.

All this to say, Nicodemus was a prominent figure—perhaps having a significant position as a teacher as indicated by vs. 10 where Jesus says, "Are you the teacher of Israel and you do not understand these things?" So this is Nicodemus—a man of

importance, a man of influence, a man who desires to hold to true religion. Notice vs. 2, “This man came to Jesus.” Stop there.

Nicodemus came to Jesus. He was well aware of the signs Jesus performed in Jerusalem. He was aware of the things Jesus taught. And unlike the rest of the Jewish leaders who stayed home and seemed to show little to no interest, Nicodemus came to Jesus.

The Gospels tells us of many occasions when Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus to test him, to trap him, to find some reason to bring accusation against him. But that’s not why Nicodemus came. He came to talk to Jesus, and what follows shows that he had a genuine interest in doing so. Vs. 2 again says, “This man came to Jesus by night.”

There are many interpreters who take this reference to night as a metaphor for darkness, as though Nicodemus is an agent of darkness coming to the light of Christ. Though that interpretation is actually quite popular, it tries too hard to find meaning where the Holy Spirit hasn’t given it.

Remember that when you interpret the Bible, the meaning is found in the text—in the words and the grammar and the context. Darkness and light are indeed themes in John’s Gospel, but when they appear, it is rather obvious because John uses the words darkness and light in contrast to each other. Here, night means night, even though it does happen to be dark at night.

The truth is, that Nicodemus came by night speaks to his genuine interest to talk to Jesus. During the day Jesus would be surrounded by crowds as he taught and performed signs. During the day would have been the right time to approach Jesus if he wanted to trap him, or ask him gotcha questions, but it would be impossible to have a meaningful one-on-one conversation.

Had he tried, his position would have raised questions among the people—Why is a member of the Sanhedrin talking to Jesus? Does he believe in him too? So for both political and privacy reasons, it was necessary to go to Jesus at night.

So Nicodemus comes to Jesus and says, LOOK at vs. 2. . . .

“Rabbi,” is a term of respect for a recognized teacher. Later it would become a more technical title for those who went through formal training and were appointed to official positions, but at this time it was a looser term of honor and respect.

Nicodemus says, “We know that you are a teacher come from God.” In saying, “we know” he’s not speaking on behalf of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin would not be quick to give their stamp of approval on a divine messenger. He’s simply

acknowledging the general opinion floating in the air as people responded to Jesus' ministry—and it would seem that Nicodemus agreed with that opinion.. And what is that opinion? He says. . . .

The signs Jesus performed are working—they are pointing people to the greater reality of who Jesus is. But he's not entirely correct. He speaks with confidence of what the signs mean—that Jesus is a divinely sent teacher—but he doesn't yet understand the fullness of who Jesus is—that he is the Christ, the Son of God.

It's important to recognize what Nicodemus says here because this tells us that the signs Jesus performed were not mere magic tricks that amaze people. Though this was before the scientific age, these people were not ignorant of reality—they knew that raising the dead, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and causing the lame to walk were supernatural powers.

If Jesus came to earth today and performed those signs in our scientific world, they would be recognized just as they were back then. Because, as Nicodemus rightly says, “no one can do these signs that [Jesus did] unless God is with him.”

In time, the Jewish leaders became quick to dismiss the opinion of the common person about Jesus; such as when the man born blind received his sight and concluded that Jesus must be a prophet. But they never denied the fact of Jesus' supernatural power. Unable to deny it, eventually the Pharisees collectively concluded in Matthew 9:34, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.” But at this early stage, Jesus had not yet offended the Pharisees by his teaching, so Nicodemus acknowledges the obvious—that he was empowered by God.

But his failure to recognize that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, demonstrates that while he thought he could see into the spiritual realm, he was actually blind to it.

He thought he could observe Jesus and draw accurate conclusions, but he couldn't. That's obvious enough from his words. We don't know what was in his heart, whether he took pride in his education and theological knowledge, or if he believed himself to have unique spiritual insight. But Jesus' response is a direct affront to what Nicodemus thought he knew.

### 1. You Must Be Born Again (vs. 1-3)

LOOK at how Jesus responded in vs. 3. . . .

My friends, you must be born again. This is the first requirement to have eternal life. Though here in vs. 3 Jesus states this truth in the third person—unless one is

born again he cannot see the kingdom of God—in vs. 7 Jesus repeats this truth in the second person—you must be born again.

You must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Seeing the kingdom of God is a way of describing eternal life. Eternal life is not a length of life as much as it is a quality of life. This is not a quality of life in terms of lifestyle, but in terms of being spiritually alive and able to know God and understand God's revelation in His word, and be able to live as God designed you to live by the power of His Spirit. This is what Jesus means when he says you must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Let's walk through it in detail.

Notice how John introduces Jesus' words: "Jesus answered and said to him." Until this week I've never understood the connection between what Nicodemus said and what Jesus said, so I always concluded that Jesus ignored what he said and changed the subject. But those introductory words are important—Jesus answered Nicodemus. Nicodemus didn't ask a question, but Jesus responded to what he said.

Nicodemus said, "Jesus, we hear you teach, and we see you do signs, and based on what we see, we know that you a teacher sent from God." Jesus responds, "Nicodemus, unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God—you cannot know spiritual truth. You think you know who I am, but you don't, because you've not been born again."

That is the logic of Jesus' statement to Nicodemus. But let's not skip over the phrase, "Truly, truly, I say to you." He will say that again in vs. 5 and then again in vs. 11. That phrase is what marks the progression of revelation as Jesus unfolds to Nicodemus the three requirements to have eternal life.

"Truly, truly" is translates the Greek words "amen, amen." When we say, "amen" at the end of a prayer, that's not a religious way of saying, "the end. Prayer over." What we're saying is, "truly" which is a way of saying, "let it be true." It's a final plea that the Lord would hear and respond to our prayers. When we say "amen" during a sermon or a conversation, we're affirming the truth that's been spoken.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says "Truly, truly, I say to you" 26 times. And every time he begins a statement with that phrase, he signals that he's about to reveal something important, so you better pay attention. Everything Jesus says is important, of course, but this phrase sounds the alarm and flashes the lights to get you to slow down and listen.

If you want to do a helpful meditation on Scripture, do a search for that phrase in your Bible app. You'll quickly find the 26 verses in the Gospel of John, and you can just read through each one and ponder the truths Jesus reveals.

Let's ponder this one together, shall we? LOOK again at what Jesus says there in vs. 3. . . .

“Born again.” The word “again” is usually a directional term that can be translated “top” as in the curtain was torn from top to bottom. It can mean “from above” as in wisdom that is “from above.” That meaning works here and it's consistent with what Jesus says in vs. 5 about being born of water and the Spirit. But here and in vs. 7 he seems to use it in the sense of “again”. And based on how Nicodemus responds, that seems to be how he understood it as well.

“Unless one is born again,” Jesus says, “he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Connecting the two ideas of being born again and seeing the kingdom of God, what Jesus means is that the kingdom of God is a world into which you are born. All people are born into the kingdom of this world. Some people are born again into the kingdom of God.

In the same way that we are all born into this world and thus can see this physical world. We can perceive it, we interact with it, we grow and mature and learn and become adept at living in this world. So it is that we must be born again to see the spiritual world, to perceive spiritual truth, to interact with spiritual realities, to grow and mature and learn and become adept at living the kingdom of God.

Now to some that might sound bizarre as if we're talking about being able to see the spiritual dimension with our physical eyes. No, Jesus does not mean that those who are born again can see angels and demons going about their work on the earth. He doesn't mean that those in the kingdom of God have supernatural abilities or in some way live outside the physical realm.

To see the kingdom of God means that you have awareness that there is more to reality than just the physical realm, and not just awareness, but understanding and insight and the ability to live in light of realities that extend beyond the physical world. This ability comes not automatically all at once, but as one grows in the knowledge found in God's word.

Until we are born again, we are blind to the truth of God. There are those who look at the eyeball with all its intricacies beyond explanation—they see its complexity and how it works together with the brain to provide the ability to see. And yet what they see is a complex organism that they conclude to be the product of millions of years of chance-based evolution. The same individuals will be looking through glasses that they know were designed and made by people using machines also made by people because nature can't produce such precisely shaped and functioning materials.

Why can they not see that the exponentially more complex eyeball is designed and created by an intelligent and powerful being? Because they are dead to the spiritual realm.

They cannot see the kingdom of God. They cannot see and perceive and understand and accept that God exists as the divine Creator and that he has revealed in Scripture how the eyeball came to be what it is. They see the eye, but they are blind to the truth.

Now you might say that there are many indeed who do acknowledge that the eyeball was made by a god—though they may attribute it to a god other than the God of the Bible.

The reason that is the case is because God has made us in his image and there is a built-in sense of the divine in us that is suppressed and distorted by sin. But the fact that anyone fails or even refuses to acknowledge that the eyeball—along with everything else—was created by the God who revealed himself in the Bible and came to this earth in the person of Jesus Christ is because they cannot see the kingdom of God. They are dead to reality as God has revealed it.

Nicodemus could observe Jesus and come to a conclusion that Jesus was somehow connected to the divine. But he could not see the reality of who Jesus is. He did not have spiritual eyes to see spiritual reality. He did not have a spiritual mind to understand spiritual truth.

The Bible describes this as being dead to God. This is the condition of all people born into this world. We are born dead and blind and deaf to the kingdom of God. Ephesians 2:1-3 says, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Being dead to God means that the only life available to us is living out of our passions and desires, enslaved to the cravings within us.

Quoting the Old Testament, Paul describes this dead-to-God life in Romans 3:10, “as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Using the mouth to deceive and spew hatred and using the body to cause

destruction are not learned behaviors—they are natural instincts that show up at the earliest stages of life and which thankfully can be tamed, but they remain our natural tendencies that must be kept under control.

Those passages, Ephesians 2 and Romans 3 describe the fallen condition in terms of mankind's active rebellion against God. But it's not as though sinners who are dead to God can simply be told to cease hostilities and submit to God. 1 Corinthians 1:14 says, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." The natural person is a person born into this natural world and dead to the spiritual world, and because they are natural, they are incapable of understanding spiritual realities.

Paul again describes this inability in Romans 8 where he says in vs. 7-8, "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." It's not just that those who are dead to God don't want to please God—that's true—but it is more fundamentally true that they lack the capacity to do so.

As a result of this inability to understand the things of God and to please God, everyone is born into this world living for themselves according to their passions and desires. And despite having the revelation of God all around them in creation, they deny and suppress what is right before them.

Romans 1:18-20, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

This is the death promised by God to Adam and Eve when he warned them not to take of the fruit of the one tree. Physical death was included in that warning, but it was more than that—there was a spiritual death that cut humanity off from the kingdom of God. That is why all people—you and me—are born into this world dead to God.

Because we are sinners by nature and by choice, we lack the functional capacities to see the kingdom of God. We cannot understand the truth of God, we cannot please God, and therefore we live entirely out of our passions and desires and suppress anything that would otherwise point us to the truth of God.



Nicodemus represents the best one can do who is dead to God—you can see Jesus' signs, you can hear his teaching, and you can conclude that there's something unique about this man. But you cannot truly know him and draw the right conclusions about him because you are blind to the kingdom of God. The only way our condition can change is if we experience a fundamentally new life—if we are born again.

And so it is that Jesus says, “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

In his spiritually dead condition Nicodemus is confused. He doesn't understand. So he responds in vs. 4, LOOK at it. . . .

This is an absurd interpretation of what Jesus means and Nicodemus knows it. Though he ought to know the Scriptures that speak of the spiritual realities involved, because he can't understand the things of God truly, he doesn't see that Jesus is speaking in spiritual metaphor. The absurdity of being physically born a second time is the only possible interpretation he can come up with.

Now to his credit, Nicodemus recognizes one thing accurately—he understands that something radical is required. It's not lost on him that Jesus speaks of something beyond natural human ability. But then we have to take away that credit because notice that Nicodemus assumes that this new birth must be done by the person. LOOK again at his second question in vs. 4. . . .

The verb “to be born” is a passive verb. It is a law of nature that you cannot birth yourself—you are born. And so it is with spiritual birth. But Nicodemus' thinking about salvation is so man-centered and works-oriented that even when presented with the requirement that you must be born again, he assumes that somehow you must play a part in that by putting yourself in a position to be born again.

To correct that mistaken notion, Jesus reveals the second requirement for eternal life. Not only must you be born again, but that birth must be accomplished by God. The second requirement is that you must be born of God.

## 2. You Must be Born of God (vs. 5-8)

LOOK at vs. 5-8. . . .

The new birth, Jesus says here, is brought about by the Spirit of God. To be born again is to be born of the Spirit. There is no human agency in being born of the Spirit. God is the agent of salvation. He is the one who accomplishes salvation. It is he who saves us and not we ourselves.

To remove all doubt about this Jesus expresses the divine work of salvation three ways—being born of the Spirit is the fulfillment of the New Covenant, it's outside the physical realm, and it is imperceivable to physical senses. We'll just be able to cover the first with our remaining time.

LOOK again at vs. 5 to see that being born of God is the fulfillment of the New Covenant. . . .

Notice again he how begins, “Truly, truly, I say to you.” This is an important truth—a divine revelation of life-changing importance. Listen up. He says, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Did you notice that in vs. 3 he said “see the kingdom of God,” and here he says “enter the kingdom of God”?

Seeing and entering refer to the same reality, but he uses the word “enter” here as a play on Nicodemus’ statement of entering the mother’s womb. You can’t be born again by entering your mother’s womb, but once you are born again, you enter into the kingdom of God.

How does that happen? How does the new birth take place? You must be born of water and the Spirit. There is a lot of ink spilled debating what this means. There are those who say that “water” is a reference to the amniotic fluid of physical birth and Jesus is simply saying that you must be born physically, and then you must be born spiritually. While that’s a true statement, it’s a little too obvious.

It’s like saying, “Before God can save you, you have to exist.” It’s a little on the nose, if you ask me. Sometimes in conversations we make a statement like, “It goes without saying, but...” and then we say something that should be obvious. But there are some things that are so obvious it doesn’t even cross our minds to say. So I don’t find that interpretation convincing.

Another interpretation is that water refers to baptism—that to enter the kingdom of God you must be water baptized and be born by the Spirit. Some take this in the direction that baptism is a requirement for salvation. Others take this in the direction of baptismal regeneration—that it is the act of water baptism that brings about the new birth by the Spirit.

As further evidence of these views some point to the apostle’s preaching in Acts where, for example, Peter says in Acts 2:38, “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.”

Passages like that seem to lend support for baptism being a requirement for salvation. But this interpretation fails on multiple counts. First, it makes your salvation dependent on you—you must do the work of baptism to be saved. Second, passages like Acts 2:38 and others can just as easily be understood to refer to baptism as a response to salvation, not a requirement of it. Third, there are many passages of Scripture—as we'll see in a moment—that speak of God bringing about salvation without any reference to baptism.

The best interpretation which is both faithful to the text and most consistent with the abundance of biblical teaching is that being born of water and the Spirit refers to the New Covenant promise of divine salvation. There's a couple passages in the Old Testament where the New Covenant is promised by God as to how he will save his people in the future, but the key one is Ezekiel 36:25-27 which says this, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within 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."

This New Covenant is the promise by God in the Old Testament of how he would redeem His people. It is not just God's promise of salvation, it's also God's method of salvation. When God saves, he washes away your sins and he grants you a new heart and he implants his Spirit within you. And he does those things, not on the basis of what you've done, not in response to anything you do, but solely by his sovereign grace.

Paul also uses the language of washing and granting of the Spirit in Titus 3 starting in vs. 4 where he writes, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Those acts of God—cleansing from sin, granting a new heart, implanting his Spirit—is what it means to be born again. It is to have your sins forgiven, to be given spiritual life, and to have the Holy Spirit dwell within you.

When God does that in your life, you see and enter the kingdom of God and the first natural act of a reborn child of God is to take a deep breath of the life you've been given. And that deep breath is exercising faith. With new eyes to see and new ears to hear and a new heart to understand, we see our sin for the ugliness that it

is, and we see Christ as the glorious God that he is, and we believe! The new birth leads to faith.

Turn back just a page or two to John 1:12-13 where we were introduced to this reality. After saying that the world didn't know Christ, and his own people rejected him, LOOK at his explanation of how it is that some believe. John 1:12-13. . . .

The new birth comes before believing out of necessity because in our natural state we are incapable of seeing and hearing and believing as we said earlier. So God, Ephesians 2:4 tells us, "being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."

To be made alive is to be born again. And so 1 Peter 1:3 explodes with praise, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." And James 1:18 says, "Of his own will [not of ours—of his own will] he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

Again, the result of this new birth is that we can now see the kingdom of God. Earlier I quoted from 1 Corinthians 2 which tells us that the natural man cannot understand the things of God. Vs. 12 says, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God."

It is only by being born of water and the Spirit that we can see and enter the kingdom of God. So when God accomplishes the new birth in a person's life, that is the fulfillment of the New Covenant, which can only be a work of God.

We'll come back to this in a few weeks to see how Jesus further adds to his revelation that the new birth is a divine work unaided by human effort, and that belief is not a work that contributes to salvation, but a response to the salvation accomplished by God.

## Conclusion

But to draw our time to a close, I would draw your attention to vs. 7. . . .

Do now see why Jesus said that you must be born again? It's because you must be born again. Apart from the new birth you and I are lost. We're destined for eternal wrath. Born with a sinful nature and living a life of sin, you and I have earned for ourselves eternal condemnation from the just and holy God.

He has only been good to us. He made us and has blessed us with innumerable blessings. He gives us life and breath and all things. And yet we are born hostile to him. In our natural state we want nothing to do with him. We live as though he were dead and when his laws are pressed upon our minds we wish he were dead so we wouldn't be held accountable.

And if we had the opportunity, we would be glad to be the ones who would put God to death. If we were in Jerusalem at the Passover on the day that Jesus stood trial before Pilate, had the grace of God not been at work in us, we would have gladly joined our voices to the chorus crying out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

And why would we do such a thing? Because we were dead and blind and unable to accept the things of God. Some of you are still in that condition. Maybe you're sitting here realizing that you've read the Bible and you've heard preaching, but it's never penetrated your soul because you have been spiritually dead your whole life.

Perhaps you thought you could work your way to heaven or earn God's forgiveness or do good things to outweigh the bad in your life. My friend you've got it all wrong. There is only one way to be saved, and that is this: you must be born again. You must have the Spirit of God do a work in your soul to grant you spiritual life. He and he alone can accomplish the regeneration your soul needs. He and he alone can wash your sin away and give you a new heart and grant you his Spirit.

And perhaps even now your heart is warmed to these truths and you can see these realities like never before. Perhaps your mind is able to comprehend what you've never understood and you're beginning to feel new life rising within you. If that's true of you I call upon you to believe!

Believe in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God who came into the world. He lived a perfect sinless life and was put to death on the cross to receive upon himself the wrath of God that sinners deserve. But three days later he rose from the grave and then he ascended into heaven where he now sits at the Father's right hand until the day that he returns to take his people to himself.

Oh my friend, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ so that your sin is counted to his account and your debt to God is wiped away, and the infinite righteousness of Christ is then placed into your account and you are forgiven and set free from condemnation. Believe in Jesus who gave his life to redeem sinners like you and who freely offers eternal life to all who would believe.

Now if you're sitting there and what I'm saying means nothing to you, if the words and ideas are confusing or even offensive, plead with God to grant you new life.

Pray to God that you might be born again. Ask him for the gift of spiritual life and the ability to believe.

Because if you don't believe before you die you will never see and enter the kingdom of God, but you will only see and enter the lake of fire where you will experience torment forever. So cry out to the Lord and plead with him to grant you life and then believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And finally, to those of you who have been born again, rejoice! Celebrate the life you've been given. Know that it was not your own doing, but it was the Spirit of God who enables you to see and believe.

And with the life you've been given, live it for Christ. Remember the words of 2 Corinthians 5:15, "and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

So live your new life for him who washed your sins away and gave you his Holy Spirit. And grab hold of every opportunity the Lord gives you to proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and be sure to tell the world, "You must be born again."

Benediction

Ephesians 1:18-23