

Title: **“BORN AGAIN”**
 WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

Text: John 3:1-8
Subject: *The New Birth*
Date: Sunday Morning — July 20, 2008
Tape: John #16
Reading: *Ezekiel 37:1-14*
Introduction:

Do you know what it is to be born again? That is the subject I want to discuss this morning. Turn with me to John 3, and we will read a portion of our Lord's famous discourse with Nicodemus about the new birth.

(John 3:1-8) “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: (2) The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. (3) Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (4) Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? (5) Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into 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) Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. (8) The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

Much has been said and written about Nicodemus, about him coming to the Lord Jesus by night and so on. Many debate about whether Nicodemus ever was born again. And scores of books have been written about the meaning of the word “*water*” in verse 5. In this message, I will deliberately pass by all those things without comment because I want to focus your attention upon our Lord's message to Nicodemus. His message to Nicodemus is his message to sinners today. It is plain and clear. We have it stated with utmost clarity and simplicity in verse 7. — “*Ye must be born again!*”

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“BORN AGAIN” — **WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?** These days, almost everyone talks about being born again; but virtually no one knows what the Word of God teaches about the new birth. Therefore, I want to address the subject in simple, clear, unmistakable terms. When you leave here today, I want you to understand what the new birth is and how it is accomplished. More importantly, I want you to leave here born again. May God be pleased to make it so for Christ’s sake.

The religious world around us, in its apostate rejection of the truth of God, has made the new birth to be nothing more than making a decision, walking an aisle, and saying a prayer. Because of their abuse and error regarding the doctrine of the new birth, our tendency is to shy away from using the term “*born again*,” lest we be identified with those who deny the gospel of Christ. But, no matter how much men may pervert the language and the doctrine of Christ, our Lord’s admonition to Nicodemus still stands. It is as necessary and urgent today as it was when he first made it more than two thousand years ago. — **“Ye must be born again!”**

Some of you have never made any profession of faith in Christ. I want you to hear this message. — **“Ye must be born again!”** Perhaps, some of you have been in the church for years who are yet without Christ. You made a profession of faith a long time ago; but you are yet without life before God. May God the Holy Spirit cause you to hear this message and grant you his grace this very hour. — **“Ye must be born again!”**

Look at those five words, and ask God to give you wisdom and grace to understand what they mean. Here is **A PERSONAL WORD** — **“Ye.”** This message is for you. I know you are moral. I know you are religious. I know that you are well instructed in doctrinal truth. So was Nicodemus. He was a well respected religious leader, a Pharisee and a ruler among the Jews. Nicodemus was a teacher who taught the teachers. He was a preacher, but more. Nicodemus was a preacher who taught preachers. He was a theologian. This was a man of highest rank in the Jewish church. But he was dead. He was without life before God. He was totally ignorant of all things spiritual. He was a lost man. — If you are yet without life toward God, my message is to you. I have this word from God for you — **“You must be born again.”**

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Here is **A PRESSING WORD** — “**Must.**” — “*Time is short.*” — “*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*” This is not a good recommendation. This is not wholesome advice. This is imperative. This is vital. This is a necessity. “**You must be born again!**” Otherwise, you will perish in your sins. You will die under the wrath of God! Hell will be your portion forever!

Here is **A PASSIVE WORD** — “**Be.**” The new birth is not something you do. It is something done to you, something God does for you and in you. A man has no more to do with his spiritual birth than he does with his natural birth. In this matter of regeneration man is passive. He has nothing to do with it (John 1:12-13). You cannot save yourself. You cannot give yourself life. You cannot be born again by something you do (Titus 3:4-6).

(John 1:12-13) “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.”

(Titus 3:4-6) “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, 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; 6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;”

- Not by moral reformation.
- Not by baptism.
- Not by religious fervor and devotion.
- Not even by faith in Christ.

Faith in Christ is not the cause of the new birth. Faith is the result of the new birth. We believe according to the working of God’s mighty power, by the operation of his grace (Ephesians 1:19; 2:8; Colossians 2:11-12). The new birth is something done to you, for you, and in you by God’s sovereign, irresistible grace. It is not something you do. “**You must BE born again!**”

I fully agree with what **Martin Luther** had to say in this regard. — “If any man ascribes anything of salvation, even the very least thing, to the free will

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of man, he knows nothing of grace, and he has not learned Jesus Christ rightly.”

Here is **A POWERFUL WORD** — “**Born.**” I am talking to you about a gift; but it is not just any ordinary gift. I am talking to you about the gift of life, eternal life. When our Lord declares, “*Ye must be born again,*” he is saying you must be the object and recipient of Divine power. Just as God created the world, God must create life in your soul. Just as God breathed into Adam and made him a living soul, so God must breathe into you the breath of life by his Spirit, or you will perish in your sins. This is what I am saying, you are spiritually dead, helplessly lost by nature. Your only hope is that God the Holy Spirit will give you life. — “**You must be born again!**”

Here is **A PROFOUND WORD** — “**Again.**” The new birth is a mystery of grace. It cannot be explained, neither can it be fully understood. It is a work of God beyond our comprehension. When our Lord says, “*Ye must be born again,*” his meaning is twofold. The word again has two meanings.

- First, it means, “**You must be born from above.**” James tells us that “*every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*” — Then he tells us what he is teaching in the next verse. “*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth*” (James 1:17-18).
- Second, it means, “**You must be born a second time.**” Your first birth was of sinful parents, and you were born in their image. The second birth is of God, and we are born in his image. — The first birth was of corruptible seed. The second birth is of incorruptible seed. — Our first birth is in sin. Our second birth is in righteousness. — By our first birth we were polluted and unclean. By our second birth we become holy. — Our first birth was fleshly and carnal. Our second birth is spiritual and makes us spiritual. — By the first birth all men are foolish and ignorant. By our second birth we become wise unto salvation. — By our first birth we were slaves to sin and the lusts of the flesh. By our second birth we are made free from the dominion of sin. — By our first birth we are all children of wrath. By our second birth we are children of promise. Our Lord says, “**Ye must be born again,**” **because we were all born wrong the first time.**

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Proposition: Our Lord said, “*Ye must be born again,*” because none shall ever enter into glory except those who are born again by the power and grace of God and made to live in and by the Lord Jesus Christ.

In order for God to save a sinner two things must be done. God must do something for you. And God must do something in you.

- Redemption is the work of God for sinners.
- Regeneration is the work of God in sinners.

Both are the works of God. Man has nothing more to do with regeneration than he has to do with redemption. **“Salvation is of the Lord!”**

“Not all the outward forms on earth,
Nor rites that God has given,
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,
Can raise a soul to heaven.

The sovereign will of God alone
Creates us heirs of grace;
Born in the image of His Son,
A new peculiar race.”

Divisions: Let me answer four questions for you from the Word of God about the new birth —

1. Why must we be born again?
2. What is the new birth?
3. How are men and women born again by the Spirit of God?
4. When is a sinner born again?

WHY?

Why must we be born again? There are many answers to that question in the Word of God. But we will stay with our text. Our Lord gave Nicodemus **three reasons** why he must be born again. These three things make it imperative that you must be born again.

1st **Unless you are born again you cannot understand anything spiritual**
(v. 3).

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(John 3:3) “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The natural man is totally void of spiritual understanding. You may be a logical, reasonable, rational and well educated person among men, but with regard to the things of God you are as ignorant, foolish and unreasonable as a madman. You have no capacity for spiritual knowledge (Romans 8:5; 1 Corinthians 2:14). The heart of stone is hard, cold, unbending, unaffected.

(Romans 8:5) “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.”

(1 Corinthians 2:14) “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

You cannot see the spiritual nature of **God’s law** (Matthew 5:21, 27, 38, 43, 48). — You cannot see the spiritual nature of **sin** (Matthew 15:17-19). — You cannot see the **glory of God in redemption** (Romans 3:24-26). — You cannot see the **spiritual condition of your own heart** (Jeremiah 17:9). — You cannot see the spiritual nature of **salvation**. It is a heart work (Ezekiel 36:25-27). — You cannot see the spiritual nature of **obedience** to God (1 Samuel 16:7; Romans 14:17). — (**All human religion is carnal. It has to do with carnal things!**) — You cannot see the spiritual nature of **faith and worship** (Philippians 3:3). — You cannot see the true **character of God** (Exodus 33:18-34:7). — You cannot see the **glory of God** in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

- His suretyship
- His incarnation
- His substitutionary atonement
- His ascension and exaltation

You cannot see **the gospel** of the grace of God (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

2nd Unless you are born again by almighty grace you can never enter into the kingdom of God (v. 5).

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(John 3:5) “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

You can reform your life without the new birth. You can be baptized without the new birth. You can join the church, be zealous in religion, teach a Bible class, serve as a deacon or elder, you can even preach with great success without being born again. But unless you are born again, you will never enter the kingdom of God.

- You will never be a part of the church and family of God.
- You will never have eternal life.
- You will never enter into the worship and fellowship of God’s saints.
- You will never be admitted into the presence of God’s glory in the bliss of heaven (Revelation 20:6; 21:27).

(Revelation 20:6) “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

(Revelation 21:27) “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

Only new creatures will enter the new Jerusalem. Only holy men will walk into the Holy City. Only heaven born citizens will possess the bliss of heaven.

3rd **“Ye must be born again” because by nature you are a fallen, sinful, depraved child of human flesh** (v. 6).

(John 3:6) “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

All flesh is defiled. All flesh is corrupt. All flesh is sinful. All flesh is condemned. All flesh must die. The flesh is your natural, sinful self (Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Romans 5:12; Revelation 20:11-15). Unless you are born of the Spirit, you will die in your sins, and your flesh shall be justly damned.

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WHAT?

What is the new birth? — I cannot explain the mystery of the new birth. It is one of God’s incomprehensible works. But there are several things in the Word of God which identify God’s regenerating grace.

To be born again is to be raised from the dead (Ephesians 2:1-5).

(Ephesians 2:1-5) “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved.)”

To be born again is to be made a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

(2 Peter 1:4) “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

In regeneration a new nature is created in our souls, so that men and women upon the earth are born in the image of God (Galatians 5:22). Christ is formed in us (Colossians 1:27). **To be born again is to have Christ formed in us** (Galatians 4:19). To have eternal life is to have the Lord Jesus Christ living in you (Galatians 2:20).

(Galatians 2:20) “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

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To be born again is to have a good seed implanted in you by grace (1 John 3:9-10).

(1 John 3:9-10) “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

By nature we are all sprung from bad seed — Adam. But in regeneration we are sprung from good Seed — The Lord Jesus Christ.

To be born again is to be made a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

- A New Heart To Know And Love God.
- A New Will To Bow To The Rule Of Christ.
- A New Mind To Understand The Things Of God.
- A New, Spiritual Nature To Know, Enjoy, And Live Upon Spiritual Things.
- New Eyes, Eyes Of Faith, With Which To See Christ.
- New Ears With Which To Hear His Voice.
- New Hands, Hands Of Faith, With Which To Lay Hold Of Christ And Do His Will.
- New Feet, With Which To Flee To Christ And Walk With Him In The Newness Of Life.

Here is the great difference between the law and the gospel. The law demands everything, but gives nothing. The gospel demands nothing, but gives everything!

“Run, run and work,” the law demands,
Yet gives me neither feet nor hands;
But sweet, good news the gospel brings.
It bids me fly, and gives me wings!

With these my heavy soul may fly
Away to Christ and reach the sky,
Nor faint, nor falter in the race,

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But work with cheer and sing of grace!

HOW?

How are men and women born again by the Spirit of God? Anyone who understands the nature of man and the nature of the new birth realizes that divine, sovereign power and grace is required to give dead sinners life.

- Moral reason cannot give men life.
- Eloquence and logic cannot give men life.
- Emotional stirrings cannot give men life.
- A mere exercise of the will cannot give men life. — “*Ye must be born again.*”

Regeneration is the sovereign, irresistible work of God the Holy Spirit
(v. 8).

(John 3:8) “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

At the time appointed by God, the Holy Spirit comes to the sinner who was chosen by grace in eternal election and redeemed by Christ at Calvary, and creates life in that sinner by his sovereign, irresistible, effectual grace (Galatians 4:4-7).

(Galatians 4:4-7) “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, (5) To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. (6) And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. (7) Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

The instrument by which the Holy Spirit causes men and women to be born again is the gospel of Christ (vv. 12-16).

(John 3:12-16) “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven,

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heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

“It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” — “Of his own will begat he us with the Word of Truth.”— Sinners are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever...And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

In preaching the gospel to you, I am calling upon dead men to arise (Ephesians 5:14).

(Ephesians 5:14) “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”

Illustration: “*Tabitha, arise!*”

I know that I am preaching to dead sinners. I know that you cannot hear me and cannot obey me. But if God the Holy Spirit will be pleased to speak through me to your heart, though you are dead, you shall hear and you shall live (John 5:25).

(John 5:25) “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.”

(Revelation 20:6) “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

FOUR PICTURES

How are lost, dead, helpless sinners born again? If one picture is worth a thousand words, let me point you to four thousand words of explanation

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given in Holy Scripture. How are sinners born again? **You must be born again in the same way and by the same power displayed when...**

1. **God recreated the world that was in chaos** (Genesis 1:1-3).

(Genesis 1:1-3) “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. (2) And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (3) And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.”

2. **The dead, polluted infant was restored in Ezekiel’s vision** (Ezekiel 16:6-8).

(Ezekiel 16:6-8) “And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee *when thou wast* in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee *when thou wast* in thy blood, Live. (7) I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: *thy* breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou *wast* naked and bare. (8) Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time *was* the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.”

3. **The dried bones Ezekiel saw were raised to life** (Ezekiel 37:1-15).
4. **Lazarus was raised from the dead** (John 11:43-44).

(John 11:43-44) “And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. (44) And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”

WHEN?

When is a sinner born again? I have no interest in answering the foolish questions of men about the chronological sequence of events in a man’s

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salvation. I will leave that to theologians who have nothing better to do than dissect the Scriptures and dissect my sermons. But I do want to tell you when a person may with confidence say, “I am born again by the grace of God.”

When you know Christ, you are born again (John 17:3).

(John 17:3 “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”)

When you believe on Christ, you are born again (John 3:15, 36). (See Isaiah 45:22).

(John 3:15) “That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

(John 3:36) “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

(Isaiah 45:22) “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.”

When you have Christ, you are born again (1 John 5:10-13). — Get Christ and you get life. Miss Christ and you miss life.

(1 John 5:10-13) “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. 11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. 13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

“Come from the four winds, O Spirit of God, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” Oh, may God be pleased now to grant eternal life to you for Christ’s sake.

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Amen.