

Being Born Again

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Date: 08 March 2026

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[0:00] Today's readings are from Isaiah chapter 40, verses 1 to 8, then 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 22, to 1 Peter 2, verse 3.

Isaiah chapter 40, verses 1 to 8. A highway for our Lord, our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low. The uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. A voice says, cry, and I say, what shall I cry?

All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows on it.

[1:22] Surely the people are grass, the grass withers, the flower fades. But the word of our God will stand forever. 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 22, to 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 3.

1 Peter 3, verse 3.

1 Peter 3, verse 3.

1 Peter 4, verse 4. Here ends our reading. Thank you very much for reading, Ashley. As a pastor, I am regularly asked a common question, especially by people who have not seen me in a while, and they, in getting updated, would almost always ask me this particular question.

They would ask me, is the church growing? And what's interesting about that question is that they could be asking me if the church is growing numerically, they could be asking me if the church is growing spiritually, but it always occurs to me that they're asking, is the church growing numerically?

[3:36] And I find that puzzling because that's really not the best way to inquire about a church. Churches may grow, not grow, and at the end of the day, it really is not here nor there because a church may be growing and not be healthy.

And a church may not be growing and even declining and be healthy. The better, indeed, the best indicator of how a church is doing is its spiritual growth.

How a church is doing is determined, really, by the extent to which the members of that church are growing in godliness and bearing fruit to show that they are being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

And brothers and sisters, if there is a band of brothers and sisters whom the Lord says, if two or three are gathered together in my midst, there I am in my name, there I am in the midst of them. If those gathered together are growing in godliness and growing in conformity to the image of Christ, that is far more meaningful and they are far more healthy than the largest church that would be growing and only growing because it's simply growing.

[5:11] But there is no evidence of transformation and conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, at the end of the day, what really matters in churches, what matters in this church, at the end of the day, is I'll be being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Are our lives being transformed? Is it evident that we have passed from death to life? Because brothers and sisters, if that is not our reality, we are marking time as we gather Sunday by Sunday. This morning we come to a section of this letter of 1 Peter as we continue our sermon series in this letter. And Peter reminds us of this truth.

Peter reminds us of this truth of the importance of being transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he also brings us face to face with another reality. And that is the reality that those who are born again have an enduring life.

[6:41] I want us to consider this this morning, but first let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, would you draw near to us in this moment as we sit under the preaching of your word.

Lord, would you help me to be faithful, to proclaim it? Would you help all of us to be humble, to sit under it, and to let you have your way with us? Lord, even in this moment, in the preaching of your word, would you build your church?

Would you sanctify us by the word? Lord, even in this moment, would you conform us more and more to the image of Jesus Christ?

Would you cause us to grow in loving what you love and hating what you hate? And, O Lord, we pray that any person who stands outside of the ark of safety, the ark of your salvation, God, would you have mercy?

Would you convict of sin and righteousness and judgment to come? And would you save each person who's away from you?

[8:05] We ask that you would do this. In Jesus' name, amen. In this passage of 1 Peter, we encounter for the second time a very important but widely misunderstood term in Scripture.

It's a two-word term. It's a term born again. We encountered this the first time in verse 3 of chapter 1, where Peter tells us that God himself caused us to be born again.

And what we say in these verses that we're considering this morning from 1 Peter is that being born again is the means by which we experience a transformed life and receive an enduring life.

It is through the new birth that we experience these two realities. We experience a transformed life. And we also experience eternal life, which is a life that endures beyond this life.

And so in our remaining time, I want us to consider these two results of being born again from this passage in 1 Peter. First, it is through the new birth.

[9:41] And the new birth only that we experience a transformed life. And so how does it happen?

How does the new birth transform those who have received it? Well, Peter tells us in verses 22 to 23, but sometimes it's easy to miss it because of the way the sentence is constructed.

So I want us to look at the sentence, and I want to start reading it from verse 23. Essentially what Peter is saying in these two verses is, since you have been born again through the word of God and have purified your souls by obedience to the truth to enable you to love one another sincerely, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

Peter's point is that it is only through the new birth that this brotherly love, this sisterly love, that we are called to in this passage and in Scripture is possible.

We're born into this world as fallen people. We're born into this world as broken people, as those who belong to Adam, and we've come into this world in bondage to sin.

[11:06] We come into this world selfish. We come into this world without any natural ability to sincerely and love one another from a pure heart. None of us has an innate ability to do that to the level that Scripture calls us to do it.

But the new birth enables us to do it. The new birth enables us to love this way because the new birth transforms us.

It produces a transformed life. And how does the new birth happen? In the New Testament, we first encounter the term born again in chapter 3 of the Gospel of John.

We encounter it from the lips of Jesus when he encountered Nicodemus who came to him at night. And Jesus told Nicodemus that the new birth is being born from above.

That the new birth is being born of the Spirit. And here in verse 23, the Apostle Peter further adds to that when he tells us that the new birth comes through God's Word.

[12:21] Addressing the believers he wrote to first and then to all believers by extension, notice what he says in verse 23. He says, You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and abiding Word of God.

And then in verse 25, he goes on and he says that the Word is the good news that was preached to you. We know that good news is the Gospel.

And so Peter is saying that we experience the new birth. We experience the birth of the Spirit through the Gospel being preached when we hear the Gospel preached, whether it's through another person or in the pages of Scripture.

So brothers and sisters, being able to obey the truth, being able to have our hearts purified, it only comes through the new birth.

Through the new birth, we are able to do this. And it is interesting to me that as Peter's writing this letter to these saints scattered abroad in the area that we now know as modern-day Turkey, they were isolated.

[13:45] They were hated by those around them. And what he does is he calls them to something that God has given them, something God has put in their hearts. And he says, You need to love one another earnestly and sincerely from a pure heart.

I think that one of the most overlooked evidences that we have been born again is this love that Peter talks about.

It is one of the most overlooked evidences as to whether we are born again. The Apostle John takes a lot of time in his letter to underline this point.

He says it repeatedly throughout his letter. Here's one section where he addresses this in 1 John 3, verses 14 to 18.

He writes, We know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death, in spiritual death, in darkness.

[15:00] Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and the sisters.

Verse 17, But if anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Little children, let us not love in word, on talk, but in deed, and in truth. Brothers and sisters, love for one another is undeniable evidence that we've been born again.

And love is not a fickle feeling. Love is not a fuzzy feeling. Love that we have, this love that John talks about, is divine in origin.

And God, by his grace, through the new birth, deposits it in the depths of our souls. The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit re-genes us to love in this way.

[16:22] And this love comes from God, and it is connected, not to our first birth, but to our second birth. And this love, by its very nature, is self-giving, and it is sacrificial.

Do you know that the most popular scripture that most people know, including unbelievers, is John 3.16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.

But do you know, one of the most, one of the least known scriptures, especially for those of us who belong to Christ, is 1 John 3.16. 1 John 3.16 says, by this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

John is not saying that we are to die on the cross, or die in some physical way as Jesus died. No, Jesus has died the one sufficient sacrifice for all. And so that's what John is saying to us.

But what John is saying to us is that when we love one another, it is self-sacrificing. It is self-giving. It calls us not so much to lay down our lives, but often to lay down our way of life that will cost us to love brothers and sisters as we are called to love one another in an ongoing way.

[18:01] But God deposits within us the ability to do this through the new birth. John goes on in chapter 4, verses 7 to 8, and he says it even more pointedly.

This is what he says. He says, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. And so although we see Peter earlier calling the church to live holy lives, that's generic, that's broad.

This would be the first specific command that he lays on God's people when he says, you are to love one another earnestly from the heart.

Notice that as Peter goes on in chapter 2, in verse 1, he says, So, put away all malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

[19:21] this is one of those occasions where you can see how chapter and verses don't serve us so well.

Chapter and verses were added some time ago, some time after Peter wrote this letter. Peter didn't write the letter with chapters and verses, but we can see from the way Peter is making his point that verses 1 to 3 of chapter 2 really are a part of the thought that he starts in verse 22.

And it begins with, So, he's saying, So, because you are called to love one another this way from a pure heart that's possible through the new birth, put away all malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

One of the first things we should notice is that or we should consider is, why does Peter highlight these sins and he says to us, put away these sins. Let me know that there's a laundry list of sins that he can say to us, put these away.

Why does he highlight these ones? He highlights them because these are relational sins. These are sins that get in the way of our loving one another earnestly from a pure heart.

[20:50] These are sins that belong to our old nature. The love that we are called to belongs to our new nature, the new nature that we receive by the Spirit.

And Peter says, you're to put away these particular sins. And what we see right away is that the Christian life, when we are born again, it doesn't mean that sin is a thing of the past.

It's not a thing of the past. We still have indwelling sin. We still have indwelling sin related to our old nature, but we have a new nature in Christ and that is what defines us.

Our old nature doesn't define us. We wrestle with it, it is there, but that's not our identity. The Bible says if anyone's in Christ, he's a new creation. The old is passed away, no longer identified by that. We're identified by the new, but we wrestle with our old nature and within indwelling sin. And so Peter highlights these relational sins that could undermine this call that we have to love one another sincerely and earnestly from a pure heart.

[22:13] And so brothers and sisters, we should never hold ill will towards one another. That's malice. We should not operate in deceit.

We are called to walk in the light. We are called children of the light. So there should be nothing about us that is deceptive and nothing about us that's underhanded. When we are relating to one another, when we are engaging one another, there should be no suspicion of any kind of deceit or underhanded or ulterior motives.

Peter tells us that we must put away hypocrisy. It tells us we should not pretend to be who we are not. We should not pretend to stand where we do not.

It tells us we're not to envy one another. And envy, by its very nature, is really discontent with God. Envy by its nature is discontentment with God because when we envy another person, whatever they have or whatever they have done, we are pushing against the sovereignty of God in our lives that withheld that from us and in the person's life whom we envy because God has allotted that to them.

[23:53] And as brethren, I prayed this morning, we are to mourn with those who mourn and we are to rejoice with those who rejoice and when others have that which is wonderful and even something to be desired, not to be envied but to be desired, we can rejoice with them out of a pure heart instead of envying what they have.

And Peter says we should not slander one another. We shouldn't speak ill of one another. We should not speak of one another in a way that diminishes our reputation or character in somebody else's eyes.

We should not speak about a person in a particular way that causes them to be diminished in the eyes of the person to whom we are speaking. That's slander. That's not love.

Scripture says we are to love one another earnestly! earnestly from a pure heart. In verses 2 and 3 of chapter 2, Peter points us to further evidence of a transformed life that results from the new birth.

Notice what he says. He says, like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up into salvation if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

[25:27] Peter is saying if indeed we have tasted that the Lord is good, we have tasted of his goodness and salvation in the same way that newborn infants crave milk.

He says we are to desire, we are to long for spiritual milk for the nourishment of our souls, for the satisfaction of our souls.

He says we are to long for the spiritual milk, the pure milk for the nourishment of our souls.

Now what is the spiritual milk? Some translations like the King James and the New American Standard Bible fill it out and say the pure spiritual milk of God's word.

And in context that is correct. Notice that Peter doesn't say we are to desire pure spiritual milk. He says we are to desire the pure spiritual milk.

[26:34] And clearly in context what he is referring to is the milk of God's word. And here again it is important to see that Peter is not saying something to us like when we are born again we should desire spiritual milk like a newborn baby desires a mother's milk.

That is not what he is saying. He is saying in the same way a newborn baby desires his mother's milk you who have been born again are to long for the spiritual milk of the word in an ongoing way. Not just when you came to Christ early on but in an ongoing way because of the transformation that has happened in our hearts because of the regening that has taken place in us by the Holy Spirit we have new affections we have new appetites and he says you in an ongoing way are to long for this spiritual milk and he tells us why in verse 2 so that we may grow up so that we may mature in our salvation.

Peter says something in verse 3 that is critically important and yet it is easy to miss the implication of what he says.

He says if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. When we connect what Peter says in verse 3 to what he said earlier in verse 2 what he is saying is this he is saying if indeed you have tasted the goodness of the Lord in salvation you will long for the pure spiritual milk of God's word.

[28:28] If indeed you have tasted he says if indeed we have tasted of God's goodness and salvation brothers and sisters we will long for the pure spiritual milk of the word to satisfy our souls to feed our souls that we might grow up into salvation.

salvation. I think what Peter says in verse 3 merits all of us who say that we are born again to ponder what he says and reflect on what he says.

Peter says you will desire the sincere the pure milk of the word if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

And so brothers and sisters we who profess to be born again we need to ask ourselves do I long for the spiritual milk of the word?

Peter says if indeed you have tasted you will. And so we need to ask ourselves the question do I long for the spiritual nourishment that comes from the word of God?

[29:51] And I think on a basic level we should ask ourselves do I have any longing at all for the spiritual nourishment that comes from God's word?

And I ask it this way because we all walk through seasons of drought and low seasons of life where spiritual life is ebbing like a low tide we all walk through those seasons but brothers and sisters if indeed we have tasted if indeed we have been born again if indeed the divine life has been our experience from God there must be some measure of longing in our souls for the pure milk of the word that we might grow there must be brothers and sisters the Bible doesn't know any other kind of birth of spiritual birth of transformation other than that kind that causes us to long for more of what we have tasted of and so I encourage us to reflect on this and

I'm not saying that we do all the reflection right now we just need to take it away and if by the grace of God there's any longing any desire in our heart for the nourishment that comes from God's word a longing when we gather times like this I want to hear God's word a longing when seasons in our lives we're being drawn to God's word we want to open his word and read his word and hear what he says to us brothers and sisters that is evidence of spiritual life that only comes from God and so I

pray that all of us who say that we are born again can be a witness with some measure of this desire that Peter talks about where he says if indeed you have tasted if indeed you have tasted! then you will long to but if it is your portion this morning that you would say I am born again but you have never known never known this thirsting never known this hunger this longing for this pure spiritual milk of the word then I would encourage you to honestly get before the Lord as best you know since you claim that he is your father and do business with him and do business with him because brothers and sisters this is too serious a matter to push to the side and to allow the business of life to crowd out scripture says that we are to make our calling on election sure and so I want to encourage us this one if you find yourself in this place where there is no spiritual desire not that you had it and it just rained over time rained in the season of life but if this is not something that you have ever known I urge you to make your calling on election that you would know this precious truth that those who have been born by the spirit have no appetites!

[33:40] no desires! fresh affections and Peter says one of those is we would long for the pure spiritual milk of the word but not only does being born again result in a transformed life being born again results in an enduring life and this is my second and final point look again how Peter says this in verse 23 he says since you have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God for all flesh for all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass the grass withers and the flower falls but the word of the Lord remains forever notice in verse 23 that

Peter points to two kinds of seed perishable and imperishable and he points to two kinds of life that these two kinds of seed produce the perishable seed produces perishable life and the imperishable seed produces imperishable life and both of these seeds they had an origin the perishable seed comes from a father and it produces perishable life when it connects to the egg of a mother and that's the way that all of us came into this world we came into this world through perishable seed we were born and Peter tells us that those who have been born again they have been born again by imperishable seed and that is the seed of

God's word connecting with our spirit and bringing the new life that those of us who have been born again have come to experience he's talking about two seeds and two kinds of life one perishable and the other imperishable Peter's contrasting them he's contrasting our first birth since he's writing to believers he's also talking about the second birth the birth that endures beyond this life and Peter quotes Isaiah which is the first scripture reading that we had this morning he quotes Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 40 and why does he do that why does Peter quote Isaiah he quotes Isaiah because he wants us to understand that perishable life the flesh that we all walk around in that one day is going to end and he likens it to grass

Isaiah likens it to grass and actually there's a part of it that we don't find of Isaiah 40 that we don't find in Peter's account and so let me read for us Isaiah 40 verses 6 to 8 and I a voice sorry verse 6 a voice says cry and I said what shall I cry all flesh is as grass and all its beauty is like the flower of the field the grass withers the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it this portion we don't find in Peter's quotation but this is the full quotation what

Isaiah was told to cry out was that the grass the flesh it withers when the breath of the Lord blows on it and he says surely the people are grass and so all of us we live in this flesh and what Isaiah is saying what God is saying through Isaiah is that one day he will blow on all of our lives and our lives will end the transient lives that we live on this earth one day will come to an end when a sovereign God determines that that's our last breath not a moment before not a moment after but he will determine that and Isaiah says the grass withers and the flower fades all of our best accomplishments they will fade with us in our death and he ends it by saying but the word of our [38:57] God will stand forever and what Peter does is Peter takes this and as he is talking to these precious saints that he is trying to encourage he is trying to help them to see that this life that they live on this earth this physical existence!

it will not end when they die he is saying them through the new birth through the imperishable seed that has given you new birth you have an imperishable life you have an enduring life beyond this life and when your perishable life ends on this earth you will have enduring life beyond this earth Peter takes the words of Isaiah to help us to understand what the new birth does what our second birth

does that our first birth could never do when we are born only once when we're born only once when we only are born of perishable seed we will die twice what Peter helps us to see is that when we are born twice when we are born of perishable seed first and then imperishable we have a first birth and then a second birth that is from above

Peter says you will die once you will only die when you throw off this flesh and to be absent from our bodies those of us who know Christ we will be present with the Lord and we will die no more the apostle John in Revelation chapter 20 gives us a vision that helps us to understand how those who are born once only a physical birth from a perishable seed will die twice look at what he says in Revelation 20 starting in verse 15 he says and I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it from his presence earth and sky fled and no place was found for them and when I saw and I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne and books were opened then another book was opened which is the book of life and the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done and the sea gave up the dead who were in it death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them and they were judged each one of them according to what they had done verse 14 then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire this is the second death the lake of fire verse 15 and if anyone's name was not found in the book of life he was thrown in the lake of fire the lake of fire is the second death and those who have only experienced first birth but have not experienced second birth their names will not be found in the book of life yes they will be judged from the things written in the books but their name will not be found in the book of life and if their name is not found in the book of life since their name is not found in the book of life they will be thrown into the lake of fire to give eternal life to give new birth to those whose portion whose destiny apart from

God's intervention was to be in the lake of fire brothers and sisters all of us who have come to Christ this is where we deserve to be in the lake of fire we deserve to have the second death but God in his mercy through sending his son has enabled us and brought about in us the second birth that gives us an enduring life that gives us eternal life that we will not know this lake of fire that when we are absent from our bodies we will be present with the Lord and so brothers and sisters Peter brings us face to face with these two realities that by being born again our lives can be transformed where we can have affections that our sinful nature doesn't know but we know because

[44:09] God has regained us by his spirit and altered our affections and caused us to love things that we don't naturally love cause us to love the brethren cause us to love him and then when we die when we shed these bodies of flesh that we will know eternal life with him never to die again and so when we think of death death is hard for those we leave behind but for those of us when we die in Christ death is reward we will be with the Lord forever and we will never know the second death but again if you can only testify to being born and you cannot testify to having been born again this is what scripture says awaits those who only know one birth and so that's you this morning and you only know that you've been born and you don't know this transforming experience that the apostle

Peter lays out to us this morning this new birth that God gives freely by his grace I said to you this morning come to Jesus turn from sin repent and put your trust in Jesus Jesus said to Nicodemus he said Nicodemus unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of heaven and what Jesus said to Nicodemus applies to all those who have not been born again so I say to you this morning come to Jesus this morning put your trust in him and what you will find is a savior who is merciful and a savior who is quick to pardon all of your sins your greatest sin and it matters not what it is his grace is more than enough for our greatest sin let's pray heavenly father thank you for the new birth that transforms our lives and enables us to love in a way that we never could on our own and then lord thank you for the enduring life that we have because we have been born again by imperishable seed may those of us who know the savior live as dead as to your mercy and may we rejoice in your grace and oh lord would you convict the hearts of those who do not know you will you save them in Jesus name amen