

# Entry Requirements for the Kingdom

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Date: 14 August 2011

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] maybe we should be taking more risks that was brilliant and obviously more of you knew it than i anticipated and it's obviously a very good tune for that particular psalm i'm sure you'd agree that the words go very suitably to the tune itself so we're going to turn to john 3 john chapter 3 and we're going to read from the beginning of the chapter once again page 1070 in the esv bible john chapter 3 we'll read from the beginning now there was a man of the pharisees named nicodemus a ruler of the jews this man came to jesus by night and said to him rabbi we know that you are a teacher come from god for no one can do these signs that you do unless god is with him jesus answered him truly truly i say to you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of god for many years now one of the biggest debates in the united kingdom has been the question of what to do with asylum seekers thousands of people in various circumstances would try by any means whatsoever to get into this country none of them have ever been here before they've come from all kinds of different countries because conditions in their countries are far worse than they are here and they are so desperate that they believe that this is so prosperous that willing to do anything at all to get into this country some of them stow away in lorries some of them in airplanes some of them try to walk along the channel tunnel railway they would stop at nothing to get into this country and to what they believe is freedom and prosperity they're willing to risk their very lives to get into a country like ourselves i'm sure that the same is true for other countries as well and of course you'll know that there's been much debate as to how many asylum seekers should be allowed into the country and under what circumstances and where they should be housed and what kind of benefits they should have some think that pretty much all asylum seekers should be given sanctuary here others think that only a restricted number of asylum seekers should be given asylum others don't believe that any immigrants should be allowed here at all now it's certainly not my intention tonight to enter in any way to that political debate that's for the politicians it's not for me in the church all i'm going to do tonight is to try and to look at this verse in terms of a subject a debate that we know and that we're familiar with in order to try and understand what jesus is saying in this verse truly truly i say to you unless one is born again uh he cannot see the kingdom of god and that's why when it comes that's because when it comes to the kingdom of god or rather the kingdom of heaven whichever one you want to call it things are entirely different when it comes to a person coming in or going into the kingdom of god for one thing you can't just visit the kingdom of heaven you can't be a tourist you can't come and go you can't go in for

one week and then out for another you can't go there and then come back home it's either all or nothing but furthermore there is only one way to enter into the kingdom of heaven and that is permanently and you have to be born into it let me read it again truly truly i say to you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven in other words if you're going to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven if you're going to enter into the kingdom of heaven you have to be born into that kingdom now imagine for a moment that was the rule of entry in britain there would be an absolute outcry wouldn't there the government would be branded as tyrannical and racist and more importantly would be branded uncompassionate towards the needs of genuine people on the other hand imagine the government were to throw open the doors to anyone and invite everyone and anyone who wanted to come in to come in there would be an equal outcry from those who would be accusing the government of complete irresponsibility one thing is true when it comes to this country or any other country you can't have both you can't on the one hand say in order to be a citizen of this country you have to be born into it and on the other hand throw open the doors and say that and welcome anyone and everyone who wants to come into this country a citizen but that is precisely what jesus is saying he is saying that on the one hand you have to be unless someone is born again in other words born into the kingdom of heaven he cannot see the kingdom of heaven

that's what he says here in this verse unless i someone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of god but but yet paradoxically this statement of jesus is not restrictive in fact at the same time jesus invites and i could take you to many many places in the new testament where there an invitation is given to all those who wish look at chapter chapter 3 this very chapter and verse 16 where he says for god so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever whoever whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life now here is jesus on the one hand he's saying in order to be a part of the kingdom of heaven you have to be born into it on the other hand he's saying paradoxically and i know it sounds like a contradiction to i guess the human reasoning it is a contradiction nevertheless it is a parallel teaching of the bible it is the fact is that both things that both things are correct it's not my job tonight to join up the both things to try and explain them it's my job tonight to be able to i hope explain them to you so therefore let's examine these two paradoxical statements first of all that nobody will see the kingdom of heaven unless he is born again and then secondly that at the same time jesus openly invites all those who want to be in the kingdom of heaven to come in that's the gospel tonight the gospel doesn't make any restrictions on color or race or background or or or or medical condition or criminal record or whatever the gospel opens the

door of heaven so that those who want what did jesus say he says come to me all you who are weary and burdened and i will give you rest that is that's there's no restriction on on those to whom he is making that invitation let's look at these two things then very briefly tonight let's look at them in the light of this nobody will see in other words what jesus saying is nobody will see the kingdom of heaven unless he is born or she is born into it now imagine for a moment that that was the rule in this country just imagine what would happen if that was i'm certainly not suggesting that it should be the wrong just using it as an illustration to try and understand what jesus is telling us here imagine the government tomorrow would say right from now on nobody's a citizen of britain unless you're born in the country now imagine next week somebody arrives at heathrow airport and they say i want to become a citizen of the uk and the man it's dead easy then isn't it the uk immigration officer tells i'm sorry there's a plain and simple rule unless you're born here you cannot come into this country you cannot be a citizen of this country on the next plane off they would go on to the next plane a week later that same guy comes over and this time he presents himself one one more time in in in in front of the immigration office the immigration officer says i've seen you before yes i was here last week but i've changed my name i am no longer called the name i was called last week mr gomez or whatever i am now john smith i am james hargreaves i have now an english name i have now a british name i want i would like to come into the country what do you think the immigration officer would say well i'll tell you what he would say he would say look i told you last week only those who are born into this country can be citizens of this country on the next plane so he goes off on the next plane a week later he comes back and this time he's all dressed up in the best suit that he could possibly lay his hands on and not only has he now changed his name to john smith he is now wearing the best marks and spencer suit that he could lay his hands on and he says again he says i want to come into this country i've changed my name i now have a british name not only so i now i'm wearing british clothes i look like someone who is british what do you think the man would say he would say exactly the same as he has said last week and the week before he says you don't get this you cannot come into this country unless you are born into this country so he comes back one more time and now he's acting differently he now has gone on a crash course to speak as good english as he possibly can he speaks now in a buckinghamshire accent and he begins to explain to the immigration officer that not only has he changed his name not only has he changed his clothes to look like a british person but now he is acting in every way and speaking like a british person he's given up he's given up his own culture and all the kind of cultural habits that he's had in his home country

and now he wants to drink tea and have cucumber sandwiches and he wants to do everything the way that british people do in order to get into the country and the immigration officer would say to him you really don't get this do you there is only one issue only one issue and that is whether you have been born into this country or not and nothing you can do on the outside will affect whether i let you in or not because of this one rule and you know there are people who treat the gospel exactly the same as that guy who tried to get into brit they say i've been baptized i have a christian name i've been brought up in the church i do everything on the outside which is proper and right and all that is expected of me as a decent upright moral citizen how can you say that i don't belong to the kingdom of god everything about me is right i tick all the boxes i behave in exactly the way

that you christians behave and everything that i expect a christian would do in his lifestyle that is what i am doing you cannot get a person who is more moral and upright than me i do everything correctly unless jesus says you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of god no matter what changes you make on the outside unless you are born again now of course if this were the rule for somebody getting into the country there would be an absolute outcry particularly if the person trying to get in was a poor person or in some way he felt that he could warrant his way of those mitigating circumstances and of course there are people who treat heaven like like that they'll say something like surely if a person is poor surely if a person is underprivileged or surely if a person has suffered then surely he has a right to belong to god's kingdom or if he has tried in some way to reform his ways and try to live a better life you're not going to say people that we hear about all the time who try to be good citizens and good neighbors and try to do their best people say well how can you possibly say that that person is not a christian it's not me that says it these are the words of jesus unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of god plain and simple this is not what the free church believes it's not what the stornoway or the lewis free church believes it's what the lord jesus says way back two thousand years ago in jerusalem so if you're going to believe in jesus you're going to follow him you're going to listen to him as the son of god you have to listen to what he's saying and if we really want to be part of the kingdom of god the kingdom of heaven tonight then the very least we need to do is to listen to what jesus says unless you're born again there's no way of putting this into modern language every version of the bible every language in the bible says exactly the same you cannot get simpler than this unless you are born again you cannot see see the kingdom of god it's the most simple statement that you'll ever find anywhere in the bible and yet it seems like an absurdity and you can't change it you have to discover in your own life what it actually

means what it means is this that there's not a single christian man or woman either here tonight or anywhere else in the world who has not been born again if you're a christian you've been born again there's no distinction between a christian and a born again christian people talk about that discrimination particularly in the united states they talk about born again christians well i don't know any other christian but a born again christian because unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of heaven so what then does it mean to be born again well let's take it first of all let's look at what happens when a baby is born i've been there six times watched six babies being born the most fascinating experience the most wonderful experience that you can ever have in this world is to watch a life coming into this world and yet that baby who is the center of attention all eyes and minds and thoughts and intentions are focused in that delivery room on one person and one person alone and that is the baby who's just about to come into this world and there is a hive of activity with nurses and orderlies and perhaps doctors perhaps and midwives and and there is machine there are machines and at any given moment if something goes wrong then the most experienced knowledgeable people will be on page and they'll be there in a moment to help out and everybody is doing their own work midwives have trained for three four five years doctors have trained for for who knows how many years and experience and obstetricians and all the rest of it and all of it is focused and all of the work that goes on and you know the only person who doesn't get a say in the matter is the baby who's just about to be born in the world entirely passive doesn't do anything doesn't get a choice nobody asks the baby are you do you consent to come into this world do you realize your human right to either stay where you are or come into this world doesn't happen like that the baby has absolutely no choice in the matter at all everything happens to him or her and everything is focused on that child and it's the same when a person comes into the kingdom of god he comes into the kingdom of god by a miracle working of god in which he or she plays no part i know what you're thinking and i'll come on to that in a few minutes i will come on to that in a few moments what is our responsibility in this what do i what does the bible tell me that i have to be well come on to that in a few moments and yet at the same time a person comes to jesus christ purely and only and uniquely as god's spirit works in that person to bring that person to life in jesus christ and that means that if you're a christian tonight it's because god has done a work in your life and he has saved you you can't take one ounce of credit for it and neither can you afford to judge your fellow man as if you were any better than them i'm here tonight because god changes people and performs miracles in people continually and god works a miracle and gives that person a new life in jesus christ

[ 20 : 27 ] and that's what it means for a person to be born again for a person to for god to work in that person's life in secret and draw that person miraculously to you see the bible tells us that we

are quite frankly dead when it comes to standing before god we're dead you cannot respond a dead person cannot respond to anything i can go down to sandwick cemetery cemetery tonight and i could preach the best sermon in the world i hope and nothing would happen not a single thing doesn't matter who i was when a person is dead when a body is dead they can't respond to anything unless god works in that person to bring them to life again and that's what happens when a person comes to faith in jesus christ but let's carry on when a person is born when a baby is born that person is born into a family into a community and has a right to the privileges of that family he instantly or she instantly belongs to that family and everything everything for that person is new the baby cries the mother feeds the baby washes the baby but she she she does everything that that baby needs and not only so but the government into which that baby is born he has privileges and rights uh and and for safety and to be and to have a an education and all all of the rest of it and it's the same when a person is born into the family of god god gives that person rights and privileges and god tells that person you are my son you are my daughter and i will take care of you and i will provide for you and i will do everything necessary for you to live the kind of life that i want you to live because after all it is me that has brought you to life and i'm going to sustain you you see some people they put so much emphasis on a person's conversion it's like nothing else happens but conversion is only the beginning of your christian life where you begin to discover the love of god in jesus christ and it's a continuous and increasing discovery of how god sustains you and he makes all things work out together for good to those who love him and how he even brings light out of darkness and he helps and strengthens us and encourages us through the bible and he provides god's family in order to give us that that that help and prepares us for this life and for the life to come but thirdly when a person is born again that person is a changed person the person that once was now is finished he's gone he's dead the new person rises paul says to newness of life just like a new baby when you think about it when a person when a baby is born everything is new there's no such thing as old it's the starting point of that baby's life and from then on everything is a discovery it's the same with a christian when somebody comes to life in jesus christ let me tell you one other thing for me as a minister there is no greater verse in the bible because it tells me that conversion is a work of god's spirit and it tells me that when i stand here in the pulpit and when i speak about god's word i know that god is working and it doesn't depend on my fluency and whether i've got the gift of the gabon whether i can sell something or not it doesn't depend on me being a smooth talker i hope i'm not but i hope i'm able to explain the bible in in simple terms that's my job so that god can take his word and he can move throughout the congregation and that he can in his own mysterious silent way bring you to

see what you're really like in front of him and bring you to see why jesus came into the world and bring you to see that christ is inviting you and as you discover that invitation it becomes as god's spirit brings it to life in you it becomes the greatest invitation the greatest news in all the world is that christ died for you once once the holy spirit brings a person to realize these the the condition in which that person is then all he wants is to be saved he wants to be lifted out of of this awful darkness in which he is maybe there's i hope in fact i know that there's some of you tonight and you have discovered what that darkness is perhaps even for a long time perhaps it's only just last week or last month perhaps for a long time and you're here tonight because you're desperately seeking to know god and to know how your sin can be forgiven that's what the gospel is all about and i would ask you tonight do you keep on praying that god will work in your heart and that he will bring you to life draw you into that relationship with jesus whereby your sin will be forgiven and that you will come like a baby in a delivery room come to experience and to know the new life that god can give you in jesus christ well then some of you will say if that is the case if a person coming to faith is all a matter of god working in that person's life then what can i do in fact why are you telling us all this what's the point in coming to church if it's all if it's only a matter of god working in my life well why do i bother coming to church if he's going to work in my life he's going to work in it anyway i might as well be sitting in the in the house might as well be driving the car might as well be in the kitchen because there is another side to the story and the other side is the invitation to everyone to come and these two things are equally important it is as important for us to know that god is working in people's hearts secretly creating life within them as it is to know that it is through the gospel that someone will come it's as you hear the invitation and as you come to grow in your knowledge of what jesus did on the cross at calvary that your appetite increases and becomes desperate and you see that the only need that you have in this world over and against every other priority in this world

is to know god through jesus christ you may be at that stage even tonight or you may not you may be just just beginning and if you are beginning then you keep on you may be like the disciples in the boat when jesus came to them walking on the water and at first it was just a figure of just a silhouette in the darkness they were filled with fear and confusion they had no clue who this was but all they knew was that there was something strange happening around them and something strange happening to them it might be the same tonight all you know is that there's something strange happening to you i don't know why i'm here i don't know what the bible there was a time not so long ago when i had absolutely no time for the bible and yet now there's something there's something i don't know and i've heard so many people saying the same there's just something you can't even put a word to it it's so it's just music to my ears when i hear that because that's the way god works he starts off with that something with that undefined silhouette in the darkness and as the lord jesus makes it makes

his way to you he becomes clearer and clearer and clearer until you see who he is and when you see who he is all of a sudden it all falls into place might not be all of a sudden it might be gradually everybody's experience is different but one thing is always the same and that is that a person comes to faith in jesus as they become willing to accept what jesus has done for them on the cross at calvary and that's the moment that is the time it's jesus jesus jesus not church church church it is jesus and what he has done for us at calvary and jesus gives that invitation irrespective of who you are tonight don't believe me believe jesus let me let me just quote what jesus says on many occasions he who follows me said jesus john chapter 8 who he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life there you go the invitation who so ever then uh john chapter 3 and verse 16 we've just quoted it already whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life john chapter 6 and verse 46 jesus said he who comes to me i will never drive away and again john chapter 6 whoever drinks or john chapter 4 join whoever drinks of the water that i shall give him shall never thirst again everyone to the looks to the son and believes in him shall have everlasting life and i will raise him up at the last day and that invitation is entirely unconditional you know if somebody wanted to become a citizen in this country there would be all kinds of checks done on them particularly two things first of all there'd be a check into that person's criminal background and if that person had a criminal background he was guilty of of horrendous crimes in their own countries very unlikely that the government would allow that person into the country if there were a danger or if they brought with them their own criminality into this country if they had a past the door would be shut but the gospel door is open to those with a past so that whatever your life you have done in your life god welcomes you into his kingdom tonight so the kingdom of god is all about god welcoming sinners people have made a complete mess of their lives people who have gone from one mess to another and deliberately so and then the question would be asked of course well what can that person bring what skills can that person bring god doesn't ask that you may not have any skills at all it doesn't matter god welcomes you into his kingdom and you say you don't know the badness and the darkness in my life i don't but god does it was for bad people that christ came into the world it was for that darkness that he died

the punishment of that sin was placed on him so that our sin could be taken away you say you don't know how trapped i am how enslaved i am you don't know you don't know anything about me correct i don't but god does he came to set men free he promises you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free you say you don't know what my background is like if you knew you wouldn't be so smart you wouldn't be so ready to offer me this life it's not me that offers the life it's christ that offers the life and he does know all about you he knows all about your background he knows what scars you bear he knows the skeletons in your cupboard he knows about the days that you wish with all your heart never had taken place he knows how many times you wish you could turn back the hands of time and go back into the past and undo the past and things that you know are with you and your your your greatest fear is that they're going to be with you plaguing you for the rest of your life and you feel that you can't tell anybody about them and perhaps you haven't been you you haven't told anybody well god does and ultimately even if you were to tell people what could they do they can't do a thing but god can he can actually remove your past he can remove the guilt whatever guilt that you have incurred upon yourself whatever shame you have brought on yourself and other people god can remove it and he will remove it in jesus christ you know what the bible says it says the blood of jesus christ cleanses us from all sin that means that if you think tonight you are the worst person in storn away you are not too bad for god to forgive there's nobody too bad nobody too guilty god can forgive you take away all the guilt of your sin perhaps you're

afraid of the future tonight you say you don't realize how insecure i am in myself you don't know what kind of person i am you don't know that how untrustworthy i am how untrustworthy i've been in the past everything i've tried i've failed i don't but god does he knows how to bring security and safety and confidence to people who don't have it tonight he's able to meet with you where you are at your point of need he knows everything about you he doesn't want you to be me and he doesn't want me to be another person he takes us as we are and accepts us as we are irrespective of our weaknesses and our utter failures god is able to do in us and for us more than we can ask or even think whether it's your family circumstances i don't know but god does and he's promised to walk with us and to be with us through every difficulty that we face every tension and every conflict and every sadness and disappointment i'm not saying he takes sadness away he doesn't make our he doesn't he's not the cure to every single problem in the world but we can face our difficulties and our circumstances when we have christ with us he gives us the strength to face them you say then tonight well

if god freely invites everyone why is it that there are not more christians in the world why is it that there are so few christians even here tonight where we have a good crowd of people and yet what is that and compared with the whole of stornoway or the whole of lewis why isn't everybody following jesus if it were that simple well i'll tell you the answer is this that when you come into god's kingdom god will accept you for who you are he will promise to take away your sin but he commands that you surrender your old passport you can't have two passports you can't have dual citizenship if you're part of god's kingdom it's either his or the old kingdom the problem is at this point that people say i can't because i love the life that i have and i know i love all the wrong things and i know that there's much in my life which is wrong and shameful but i love it too much and i don't trust god enough to give my life to him and to surrender myself to jesus christ that's the problem all i can do is i leave that with you and hope and pray that god in his mercy will convince you of the futility of holding on to the things that actually mean nothing in the light of eternity tonight the lord is offering you life new life forgiven life abundant life and eternal life are you really going to walk away from it are you really going to walk away from the the free gift the invitation the greatest invitation that you will ever receive in your whole life tonight a person belongs to the kingdom of god when he is born into it at the same time god invites all to come in and that all includes every one of us here don't ask me to reconcile these two truths just discover them for yourself let's pray our father in heaven there are so many things that we don't understand and we stand here tonight lord and we once again we want to grow in our understanding and we want to know jesus more and and perhaps there are some of us here tonight who are who feel so vulnerable because your words contain such a power unless someone is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of god and lord what could be more important than our part in the kingdom of god our entry into it lord none of us would deny that it's the most important issue in the world and yet lord there are so many voices so much confusion in our understanding and even more confusion in our willingness to listen to your word and accept jesus lord we pray that you will take that confusion away and work in the hearts [ 40 : 50 ] of young and old here tonight forgive our sin in jesus name amen you