

Born Of The Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you would, please open up your Bibles this morning to the Gospel of John. The Gospel according to John. Last week we ended chapter 2, and we ended with the end of chapter 2, verses 23 through 25.

I'm going to read those verses again for us this morning for the sake of context, because verses 23 through 25 of chapter 2 serve both as the end of chapter 2 and as a bridge here to the beginning of chapter 3.

So if you would, follow along with me as I read chapter 2, verses 23 through 25, all the way through chapter 3, verse 12. Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

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.

[1 : 1 6] Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him, How can a man be born when he is old?

Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus said to him, How can these things be? Jesus answered him, Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

[2 : 3 2] This is the word of God. Let's bow and pray once more. Lord, we pray again and ask, and as your word is preached, that you would move with power and accomplish the purposes for which you sinned.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. We are on sacred ground here with John chapter 3. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the famous preacher, he preached 39 sermons on this one chapter of John's gospel, at least 39 that were recorded, and I'm fairly certain that if he were still with us today, he probably would have preached a handful more.

This chapter, John chapter 3, probably more than any other chapter in the New Testament, possibly more than any other chapter in the entire Bible, is very familiar in the minds of believers and non-believers alike.

In it, we see two very familiar phrases. We see a great condition. You must be born again to enter the kingdom of God, and we see a great provision.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. These are two familiar words to most of us in the room this morning, but let me caution you as we begin John chapter 3 that familiarity can be deceiving.

[4 : 01] Many are familiar with these words, but do not truly understand what Jesus is saying here to us.

So let me encourage you as we begin our journey into John chapter 3 over the next several weeks to listen to these words carefully with attentive ears as if this were the first time you were hearing these words.

Essentially, what I'm asking you to do is I want you to place yourself in Nicodemus' shoes as we journey through John chapter 3 together. As you hear these words of Jesus, this command is not just for Nicodemus, it's for you and for me.

If we would enter the kingdom of God, you must be born again. What does this mean? What does this mean?

I want us to see four answers to that question this morning in our passage. What does it mean to be born again? What does it mean to be spiritually reborn?

[5 : 10] Four answers to that question. First, spiritual rebirth is a matter of necessity. Number one, first, spiritual rebirth is a matter of necessity.

Two times, once in chapter 3, verse 3, again in chapter 3, verse 5, Jesus tells us that spiritual rebirth is a matter of necessity.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Verse 3, and unless one is born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Verse 5, this is a necessary condition that must be met in order for anyone to enter into the kingdom of God. Chapter 3, verse 1, it tells us that Nicodemus was a man, which doesn't sound like much of a detail to us, but we've read the context, and so we understand that John is making a connection for us with the end of chapter 2 to the beginning of chapter 3, the end of chapter 2 where he says that some believed in Jesus' name when they saw the signs that he was doing, but Jesus, on his part, did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

John is showing us that many are seeing Jesus' signs and do not truly believe who he is. They acknowledge something special about Jesus.

[6 : 51] They acknowledge something miraculous is happening. They acknowledge that he is unique in his ministry, but they do not truly yet believe that Jesus is in fact the Messiah, the Son of God, and Jesus knows the difference.

So chapter 3, John says, now there was a man. If you mark in your Bibles, I want to encourage you to draw a circle around that word man at the end of chapter 2 as well as here at the beginning of chapter 3 because again, John is connecting these ideas for us.

Verse 2, he says, this man came to Jesus by night in the cover of darkness and said to him, Rabbi, we know, speaking on behalf of the Pharisees, that you are a teacher come from God for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.

And of course, he is partially correct. He recognizes Jesus' uniqueness and prophets throughout the Old Testament. They performed signs and often performed validating works to validate their ministry, to profess that they were in fact speaking on behalf of God.

But as we've seen already in the Gospel of John and will continue to see as we move forward, Jesus' signs are meant to show us he's not just a prophet, he's the Messiah.

[8 : 19] He's not just a teacher teaching on behalf of God, he is the very Son of God. It's clear that Nicodemus was familiar with Jesus, familiar with his works, but not yet convinced.

And Jesus, in his omniscience, he knows. He sees right through the state of Nicodemus' heart and he utters these famous words here in verse 3, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

It's a matter of necessity. Spiritual birth precedes spiritual sight. Say that again. Spiritual birth precedes, it comes before, it's a necessary condition for spiritual sight.

Here's the thing, anybody with physical eyes can see the signs. Anybody with physical eyes can look and can see that Jesus is unique. All sorts of world religions claim to have a high esteem for Jesus as a prophet, as a teacher, as one who did a lot of good, as one who has a lot of followers, but only those with spiritual eyes can see who he is.

That he is God. Unless you're born again from the inside of the Spirit, you cannot begin to see or perceive the kingdom. Simply acknowledging the signs does not mean that you acknowledge the message of the signs.

[9 : 58] Simply seeing the wonders that Jesus did does not mean that you worship Jesus. Simply being familiar with who Jesus is does not mean that you have faith in Jesus.

This was the beginning of the unraveling of Nicodemus' entire view of everything. His mind is completely blown to pieces here by what Jesus has just said.

And here's the reason why. Nicodemus is limited to physical sight. He's limited to physical understanding.

He does not have the necessary spiritual perception to even begin to understand Jesus' words here. He's only thinking in terms of what is physical, what is tangible.

And so he asks a very physical question. Now, they say there are no dumb questions. I disagree. He says, how can a man be born when he's old?

[11 : 05] Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Now, clearly, Nicodemus was not dumb.

He was highly educated. He was a Pharisee. In fact, not just that. It says he was a ruler of the Jews, meaning he was one of the 70 members of the Sanhedrin.

It's a pretty elite ruling class that ruled over the rest of the Jews. This man was, as far as the physical eye could tell, he was the cream of the crop for the Jews.

And yet, he simply doesn't get it. He can't, he can't see it. To a Jew, the Jewish understanding to, the requirement to be included in the family of God was to be born.

Nicodemus met that requirement. He, he was born physically into a Jewish community, into a Jewish family. He was physically a descendant of Abraham. he was physically circumcised.

[12 : 09] He had hope of a physical kingdom to be restored to Israel with a coming physical king to reign here and now. In his understanding, his relationship with God was on the basis of his physical identity, his physical being, his physical doing, his physical belonging.

Jesus says, all of that's great. None of that is necessary to enter my kingdom. what is necessary for you is to be born again.

Not of flesh, not of blood, not of the will of man, but of the spirit. We often wonder, don't we, why the world doesn't see the worth of Christ?

Why don't they, why don't they get it? Why doesn't the world understand the depth of their sin, the consequence of their beliefs, the consequence of their actions? Why are they so unaware?

Why can't they just get the beauty and the worth of God? It's because they can't. They can't see it. They can't perceive it.

[13 : 21] They're blind to it. Until they are born again of the spirit, all they know is the flesh. So they think according to the flesh.

They reason according to the flesh. They act according to the flesh. They worship according to the flesh. And so did we. Until the spirit of God came and caused you to be born again.

Gave you a new identity from the inside out. This is our second point this morning. Second, spiritual rebirth is a matter of identity.

Spiritual rebirth is a matter of identity. Look there to verse 6. Chapter 3. Jesus tells us that there is a categorical difference between those who are physically born only and those who are spiritually born.

What does he say there in verse 6? He says that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. According to the flesh Nicodemus had everything going for him.

[14 : 40] He was religious. He was highly educated, deeply devoted, well respected, successful, Jewish. Jesus says none of that really matters at all.

You may believe that for whatever reason, maybe because of your religious upbringing, maybe your family line, maybe your religious devotion, maybe you have just a lot of knowledge about Christ and about the Bible, you may think that because of these things that you are in the kingdom of God, you would be wrong.

Jesus says that's not how this works at all. The very best, most religious, kindest person you know, if they have not been transferred from the flesh to the spirit, they're still flesh.

They're still sinful. They're still hostile to God. Jesus says the requirement for you to enter into his kingdom is that you must have an identity change from flesh to spirit.

You must become something entirely different than what you are. How does this happen? not by our doing.

[15 : 54] There is no amount of effort that you or I can put into this fleshly identity to cause it to be spiritually reborn.

You can change a lot of things about who you are. You can change behavior. You can change attitude. You can change actions. You can change physical appearance. You can change the way you dress, the way you talk, the way you act, what you drive, what you do, what you eat.

None of that determines your identity because you cannot change who you belong to. I had a seminary professor who used to say all the time the most important thing about you is not who you are, it's whose you are.

Not who you are. To whom do you belong? If you belong to the flesh, you are flesh. If you belong to God, you are of the spirit.

I drive a Chevy Equinox. It's fine. It does the job. I'm not a car guy at all, but I can usually pick out the nice cars when I see one.

[17 : 07] I tell y'all what, I've never seen as many Teslas in my life as I see in Mount Pleasant when I drive the boys to school, when I go into town, those things are everywhere.

I saw one this week that had this nice shiny white paint job. I could tell just by looking at it, that car was an entirely different thing than my car. They were entirely in different categories all together.

That Tesla, my Equinox, not the same thing. Imagine if I went home and took a can of white spray paint, took it outside and sprayed my car white, went back inside, came back out with a Sharpie, wrote with permanent marker a big Tesla T right on top of the Chevy logo, and then imagine I drove that car into town and parked it right there next to all the Teslas.

What did they say? you're crazy. A little paint and a handmade logo does not make a Chevy a Tesla.

There is no amount of work that you can put in to change that car into that. It simply cannot be done. In a way, this is what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus.

[18 : 33] He says, you think your worldly accomplishments, your worldly belonging, is of any value. You are just decorating the flesh. What you need is to be born of the Spirit.

You need something entirely new in your identity. So how is this done? Look to verse 5. He says, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is flesh is flesh. That which is born of Spirit is Spirit. Many suggestions, as you can imagine, have been made as to what exactly he's talking about here.

Water and the Spirit. Some see a reference to baptism. Some see a reference to physical birth. I'm convinced this is a reference to the prophecy that was read this morning from Ezekiel chapter 36, a passage that Nicodemus as a Pharisee should have been well familiar and acquainted with, where the Lord tells the exiled people of Israel, I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

Listen to this. I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness. and from your idols I will cleanse you and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you.

[20 : 10] I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

How is this done? God does it. God does it in you. Does this sound like anything we can do in the flesh?

This is a work of God in you to give you a new identity by purifying you as with water and by recreating you with a new heart by putting his own spirit in you.

This is a miracle. We can describe it. We can see it clearly here in the pages of scripture. We've experienced this.

If we're in Christ we have experienced this firsthand but I have to be honest we cannot fully understand this. We can't fully grasp the depth of what God is doing here and giving us his own spirit and recreating our identity.

[21 : 25] It's a wonderful beautiful spiritual mystery which is our third point this morning. Spiritual rebirth is a matter of mystery.

It's a matter of mystery. It certainly was to Nicodemus. We don't see his response recorded here. I'm just speculating but I'm just going to assume that his jaw had dropped all the way down to the floor.

Jesus says in verse 7 do not marvel that I said to you you must be born again and he gives this wonderful illustration the wind blows where it wishes and you hear it sound but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

So it is with everyone who is born of the spirit. What's he saying? What's he saying? Well for one he's making a play on words here.

The same word in the Greek for spirit is the exact same word that they translate wind and so he's making a connection, a comparison here, a play on words between spirit and wind.

[22 : 40] He's comparing the movement of the wind with the movement of the spirit. Here's the point I think he's making is the movement of the spirit is a mystery. who can predict with 100% certainty, accuracy, when someone is going to come to faith in Christ?

Who could have foreseen it in your own life? What would happen to you when the spirit gave you life and caused you to be born again? Weathermen only get their job right maybe half the time, right?

Maybe, if that, predicting the wind, and we're maybe, maybe that accurate in understanding the spirit. In some cases it seems like someone should come to faith, everything that you can perceive, it seems like they're a great candidate God.

What's going on? They're kind, they're generous, they seem interested, why won't they believe? And they never do. In another case, someone else seems so far from the kingdom, so hostile to God, so turned off to the things of the Lord, and yet it's like the wind blows and everything changes.

All of a sudden, they're willing to sell everything and go and make Christ known. How do we explain this movement of the spirit?

[24 : 00] We can't. It's a mystery. But another point I think that he's making here is that the spirit, like wind, cannot be controlled by the flesh, cannot be controlled by the flesh.

How do you get born again? What must I do to be born again? You can't do it. You can't control it. You can't manufacture it. You can't manipulate it.

You might as well reenter your mother's womb. It's an impossibility for the flesh. It's like wind. Where does the wind come from? How do we know where it will go next?

You can observe it. At times, you can feel it. You can respond to it. You cannot control it. My boys this week have been playing with kites.

Out in the yard, they got some kites. They've been running around playing with kites. When the wind blows, the kite lifts off. It takes off. It has life. It flies.

[25 : 06] When the wind doesn't blow, guess what? It lies dead. boys had a great time when the wind was blowing. When the wind stops, they look at me.

They, Dad, make my kite fly. I have to say, son, I cannot control the wind. Neither can we control the spirit.

Nothing that we have done in the flesh causes our spiritual rebirth. We need to understand this. nothing that we can do in the flesh causes our spiritual rebirth.

Walking an aisle, saying a prayer. Faith and repentance are the results of rebirth, not the cause of rebirth.

I'll say that again. Faith and repentance are the results of spiritual rebirth, not the cause of rebirth.

[26 : 06] earth. The kite can't fly unless the wind blows and gives it flight. Dead men cannot have faith. Dead men cannot repent unless they're brought to life, born again by the spirit.

Baby Christians can't take a single step of faith until they are first born again of the spirit. Blind men cannot perceive, cannot see, unless they're first given spiritual sight.

Think of your own story. Christian, you were going about your life far from the Lord. Someone comes along, invites you to church, shares the gospel with you.

Maybe you grew up in church all your life. You were like Nicodemus, familiar with the Lord, but did not yet truly understand, truly trust, truly have faith in Christ.

But then now all of a sudden, something happens. All of a sudden, you feel this new desire for the Lord, this new love for God. Something awakens in you.

[27 : 06] You're aware of the depth of your sin. You begin to hate sin and love God. Where did that come from? You didn't manufacture that in yourself.

What did he promise in Ezekiel? Again, I'll read it again. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit within you.

I will cause you to walk in my statutes. I will cause you to be careful to obey my rules. This new birth is God's work.

To us, it's a mystery. But here's what we do know. We know the means that God uses to do it.

It's the authoritative message of the gospel. The authoritative message of the gospel.

[28 : 10] For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they've not believed? How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

How are they to hear without someone preaching? How are they to preach unless they are sent? as it is written. How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. But they've not all obeyed the gospel.

For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? So faith comes through what? Through hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.

Being born again is a work of God in you that he brings about through the proclamation of the gospel as you listen to the word of Christ and believe.

Which means fourth. And finally, spiritual rebirth is a matter of authority. Spiritual rebirth is a matter of authority.

[29 : 19] If you want to learn about engineering, ask an engineer. If you want to learn about gardening, ask a gardener. If you want to learn about mathematics, go ask a mathematician.

And if you want to know about being born again as a child of God, ask the Son of God. If you want to know about eternal life, life from the dead, ask the one who rose up from the grave.

If you want to know about things of the Spirit, ask the one who sins the Spirit. Nicodemus says to him in verse 9, how can these things be?

Nicodemus was a man again of great authority. His peers had great authority from a human perspective. He was the authority on the law, on righteousness, on God.

But Jesus says, are you a teacher of Israel? And yet you don't even understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know.

[30 : 22] we bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I've told you earthly things and you don't believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

Jesus is asserting himself here as an authority of all things spiritual, of all things that we need to know and understand to enter into the kingdom of God.

Jesus says, I am the one that needs to be listened to. And then to add to his resume here in verse 13, he says, hey, you know, no one has ascended into heaven except he who has descended from heaven, the son of man.

In other words, Nicodemus, forget everything you thought you knew and listen to me. We speak of what we know and bear witness to what we've seen.

You still don't receive our testimony. Why? Because you have not yet been born again. You are still of the flesh. To be born again, you must set aside all self-trust, self-reliance, self-righteousness and believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[31 : 54] That he alone is the supreme authority, that he has the authority to lay down his life and take it up again, that by his authority, by his word alone, can anyone enter into the kingdom of God.

And if the Lord says that the way into the kingdom is you must be born again, the debate is settled. You must be born again to enter in to the kingdom of God.

It is amazing to me how anyone can just assume that if they're good enough, they will enter the kingdom.

On whose authority do you base that on? Yours? Somebody else tell you that? It's just what you assume to be true?

Any other path, any other suggested way to be right with God, all the many different world religions that claim a path to God, it all comes down at the end of the day to a question of authority.

[32 : 59] Whose word are you trusting to be true? I'll speak for myself. If we're talking about eternity, I'm going to put my trust in the one who rose from the dead.

only one, only Jesus has conquered the grave. Only Jesus has died for your sin. Only Jesus.

He says, I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. This gospel call is for all of us here this morning. If you would repent and believe in the name of Christ, you will be born again.

This is Lord willing what we'll see next week. An incredible detail as we see from John 3.16 this great need of ours.

How can one be born again? How can one be given a new heart? It's not by doing. It's not by earning. It's not by being. But by believing.

[34 : 08] God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Whoever believes should not perish but have eternal life. But here today, church, we need to see that this call that Jesus makes to Nicodemus, to the Pharisees, is not just for them, it's for us.

If you would enter into the kingdom of God, there is one requirement. you must be born again. We don't know what happened to Nicodemus immediately after this encounter, but I guarantee you his head was spinning.

I'm sure he probably didn't get any sleep that night. He was probably tossing and turning, thinking, reflecting, reading on the passages Jesus was referencing, thinking back to the words of Christ, probably went home questioning everything he thought that he ever knew.

Maybe when we get to heaven, we can ask him. Because I believe that this encounter changed Nicodemus' view on Jesus.

And that he, by the grace of God, was eventually born again. Why do I say that? Well, we see Nicodemus two more times here in the Gospel of John.

[35 : 29] chapter 7. The people are disputing and arguing over who Jesus is. The Pharisees wanted Jesus arrested, but Nicodemus, who previously had come by the cover of night to avoid any association with this man, he spoke up, came to his defense, he faced the social criticism that he once avoided.

The second time, we see Nicodemus again in chapter 19. After Jesus was crucified, a man named Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, and it says, Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, now came publicly, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds in weight.

The average Jewish burial required five pounds of spices to prepare someone for burial. Nicodemus brought 15 times that much.

So together, Joseph and Nicodemus, they took the body of Jesus, they bound it in linen cloths with the spices, an abundance of spices, to honor the Lord who had changed their lives.

Has he changed yours? let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the mystery of the new birth.

[37 : 09] This is not something that we can do ourselves, it's only by the power of your spirit that comes as you send it, Lord, that blows as the wind.

We can't understand it, but Father, we praise you for it. We praise you for the new life that you've given us who are in Christ, and if there are any here who don't know you, Lord, we pray, Father, that that same spirit would blow and move in their hearts even now, we ask in Christ's name.

Amen.