

## No New Birth – No Heaven

*Signposts*

By John 3:1-8

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**Bible Text:** John 3:1-8

**Preached on:** Sunday, January 30, 1994

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Now will you turn with me please to the gospel according to John, a book that we have been working through in our consecutive reading in our Lord's Day morning services over a number of weeks? And we will regress numerically from chapter 20 where we had our reading this morning all the way back to chapter three. Chapter three and I shall read in your hearing verses one through eight. John chapter three verses one through eight.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came unto him by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew [or born from above or born again], he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus saith unto 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, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God! That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew. The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Now let us ask again as we have in the hymn we have sung that the Holy Spirit spoken of in this passage by our Lord Jesus will himself be present to be our teacher through the Word of God. Let us unite our hearts and seek God's face to that end.

*Holy Father, we are thankful that when we read your Word we find you complaining again and again when men merely go through the forms of worship, when they draw near*

*with their lips and not with their hearts, but we thank you that we never find you complaining. When your people come in felt need and sincerely cry to you again, again and again and again, rather we find you encouraging us to be like that friend who at midnight went to his friend's house and knocked and knocked and knocked and knocked again until he had all that he needed to give to his wayfaring friend.*

*You have encouraged us to be like that widow who troubled the judge until out of carnal irritation he responded to her need. So, Lord, we are not fearful that you will chide us for coming again. We have already been led to your throne of grace in prayer. Together we have sung a prayer addressed to you, oh Holy Spirit, and we come again, oh holy Father, and ask that you would grant the Spirit's illumination as we consider these vital words of the Lord Jesus. We pray that you would capture the mind and heart of every man, every woman, every boy, every girl and, Lord, give sight in the inner man where you alone can give sight. Here our cry and meet with us. Bind the powers of darkness. We pray that the devil will not be able to pluck up the seed sown in our hearts. Hear us we cry to you through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Now there are times when an anemic brand of Christianity and even the world so misuse, distort and abuse precious biblical terminology that the true people of God find themselves reluctant to use that terminology even though it is biblical for fear they will be associated with its misuse and its distortion.

However, this is not the right response to such a situation. Rather, the people of God and the servants of God in particular should take those very biblical terms which are buried in the rubble and rubbish of misuse, tarnished and scarred by misconceptions, reach in, take them out of the rubble, scrub off the rubbish, rub off the tarnish, seek to repair the scars and hold up those truths in all of their inherent biblical beauty and even majesty.

Now, such is the term “born again” and “the new birth.”

I frankly confess I am ashamed at how long it has been since I have preached a sermon focusing on the doctrine of the new birth, on the necessity of being born again. And I believe one of the major reasons is because the term, “the new birth” or “born again” came into such tragic misuse, distortion and abuse—as I have already described—in the late 60s and early 70s when almost everything but the lamppost on the corner claimed to have had a born again experience. Everybody and anything was born again. About the only thing I didn't hear about was born again hookers and muggers.

But you had born again everything until in the soul of a true child of God who appreciated something of the biblical doctrine of the new birth there was a tendency to distance ourselves from the tragic misuse and misconceptions that clustered around that terminology.

However, tonight, in our eighth message in this series entitled, “Simple Signposts to the Celestial City,” we are going to be looking at our Lord's teaching on the new birth or being born again.

And the sign post upon which we will look has inscribed upon it five words, only five words; three words, a hyphen and two words. And as we draw near to that sign post we see not etched upon it, but this one is constructed of bright orange day glow neon materials. And it says, “No new birth – no heaven. No new birth – no heaven. No new birth – no heaven.”

And the passage out of which that sign post is constructed has peculiar relevance because our Lord’s clearest, most focused teaching on the subject of the new birth was given not to that immoral woman with whom he discoursed at the well, not with the publicans and sinners who met with him in the house of Levi as recorded in Matthew nine and again in Luke chapter five. Our Lord’s most concentrated focused teaching on the new birth is found as he is interacting with a man named Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, a teacher of great notoriety in Israel.

For you will notice that our Lord says in this very passage, verse 10, “Are you the teacher of Israel and understand not these things?”

So he is not speaking to one who is the riff raff of society. He is not speaking to someone who staggers about in a drunken stupor who has needle track marks up and down his arms and his thighs who is a junkie who turns over in the street at night groaning for his next fix. He is speaking to a man of excellent religious background. He comes out of the Hebrew nation with all of the privileges that that entailed. He came from the strictest sect of the religious groups within that nation. He was a Pharisee. He had excellent training in religious things. He apparently had a keen mind and a bearing and a demeanor which saw him rise through the ranks of his peers until he held a place of special influence as a ruler of the Jews and as a notorious teacher of the truth of the Scriptures and the tradition of the elders.

So we are seeing our Lord’s most focused emphasis upon this teaching of the necessity of the new birth, a fundamental, radical, all pervasive, spiritual birth from above given to one who outwardly would seem to least need such a radical religious experience.

Looking at Nicodemus, hearing Nicodemus speak, watching his activities we would think, well, this man is surely on the very border of the kingdom of heaven. All he needs is just a little bit of nudge and he will be over the line and in.

Jesus said to this man, “You need nothing less than a birth from God himself or you will never see nor enter the kingdom of heaven.”

And therefore if he said this to one who had all of what we would call the benefits and all of the plus marks of his background and heritage and training and knowledge and influence, then surely if it is true of him, no new birth – no heaven, it is true of all others who have lesser privileges and lesser measures of knowledge and less religious instruction and background et cetera, et cetera.

Now as Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, I want you to notice with me the two major points of emphasis under two very simple heads: The necessity for the new birth. And then, secondly, the nature of the new birth illustrated.

First of all, the necessity for the new birth and our Lord underscores this necessity in two ways. We have, first of all, the necessity affirmed in verses three, five and seven. And then the necessity explained in verse six. So the necessity for the new birth is first of all affirmed and then it is explained.

Now how does our Lord affirm the necessity of the new birth? Well, let's look at the texts, verse three.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Nicodemus, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Nicodemus, singular, except one, anyone, anywhere at any time in any place in any circumstances of any background, except one be born anew or born again or born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”

Now what is the peculiar emphasis of verse three. It begins with a double amen.

amhn amhn (am-ane' am-ane').

These are what some have called the magisterial pronouncements of the Lord Jesus. He did not use this as some kind of religious shibboleth to appear spiritual. But when he had something that was particularly solemn to say he would introduce it with the amen, the verily. And when you have the double amen—which is peculiar to John—there is an intensified sense that something of critical importance is about to be stated. So the necessity affirmed in verse three begins with this pointer that he is about to say something very important.

“Amen, amen. I say unto you.”

Now, he didn't need to say that. Who else would be speaking to Nicodemus? But he uses the word, “I say unto you,” in order to draw attention to his own unique authority. Nicodemus has acknowledged to some degree that this is no ordinary person. He has said, “No man can do the miracles you are doing except if he is sent of God.”

And if so, the Lord Jesus said, “Do you accept me as a messenger sent from God? Then in the name of God I say this to you.”

So you see the importance is not only underscored by the double amen, but by our Lord drawing attention to his own authority. And then he states it in language that one cannot avoid, “Except one...”

Using the most general term for any person in any place at any time in any set of circumstances, in any country, in any culture, of any racial, ethnic, economic group, “Except one be born anew, born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Now when he says he cannot see the kingdom of God what did he mean?

Well, the commentators debate the question and it means one of two things and both things are true so I will not weary you and I am unsettled in my own judgment.

It could mean he cannot see, that is, enjoy by experience the kingdom of God in its consummate glory and blessing. It would be entering the kingdom in the last day. And our Lord may be saying, in these very words, “No, new birth – no heaven. Except one be born anew, born again, he cannot see, he will not look upon and experience the kingdom of God in its consummate manifestation at the end of the age.”

Or he could be saying, “Except one be born again, he cannot see, he cannot inwardly perceive and understand the kingdom of God.”

A parallel passage would be 1 Corinthians 2:14. “The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them for they are spiritual discerned.”

But, you see, that only leads to the greater. So if that is the lesser. If our Lord is saying, “Nicodemus, look. Look. The kingdom of God is come to you in the presence of the king. You see the insignia of the king in his works. You acknowledge that God must be with me. But my true identity and my true mission will be utterly hid from your eyes. You will never understand the nature of my kingdom and who I am as the king of grace and glory and power unless you are born again. So whether he is saying you cannot see in terms of experience, entrance into at the end of the age or whether presently, this much is clear. Without the new birth there will be no perception of and no experience of the kingdom of God.

But now in verse five our Lord begins in the same way. After Nicodemus responds by saying, “Can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Which, by the way, makes me prefer the translation born again rather than born from above, for Nicodemus seems to take from the language that Jesus would have been speaking in, the Aramaic, a word that would have led him to believe that Jesus was saying you need a second birth.

So Nicodemus responds saying, “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, now notice, again, one of the rare places where you will find our Lord in such an immediate context using the double amen again. “Verily, verily I say unto you, Nicodemus, except...” And now the general term. “Except one, anyone, anywhere, at any time, under any circumstances, of any background, of any racial, ethnic identity, except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

Now you have an additional thought here. In verse three he said that one must be born again. Now that birth is described as a birth of water and of the Spirit. And, again, I will not weary you with all the theories about what this means. To me it seems the simplest explanation is that which would have been most patent to the mind of this teacher in Israel and Jesus himself charges him with a kind of guilt that he did not immediately perceive the emphasis of his words for he should have known well the promise of God in Ezekiel in which God joins these two realities in Ezekiel 36:25 and 26 in which God promises, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your filthiness and I will give you a new heart and I will place my Spirit within you."

So that to be born of water and of the Spirit refers to a spiritual renovation that involves the purging of defilement and the creation of new life, the negative and the positive, the purging away of defilement. For this Pharisee, he was in constant contact with water of purification. And, therefore, it is right to assume there would come to his mind that he needs a spiritual birth that has an intimate connection with that which is symbolized by waters of purification. This separated one, this pure one, this Pharisee is told he is so defiled and polluted that he needs a spiritual birth that involves the cleansing of his soul.

And with all of his knowledge and all of his privileges and all of his activity, he is nothing but a walking, speaking dead man. He needs life. He needs to be born of water and of the Spirit. And without these, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. He cannot enter it now. He cannot live in it now. He cannot enter it in the last day.

No new birth – no heaven.

The necessity is affirmed by our Lord in verse three. It is affirmed again in verse five. Then in verse seven he affirms it in a most pointed, specific personal way to Nicodemus.

"Marvel not that I said unto you, Nicodemus, you must be born again. Now, Nicodemus, you may have missed my point when I said, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, except one, anyone, anywhere, at any time, in any circumstances, be born again, he cannot see the kingdom.' You may have missed it when I repeated the words 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Nicodemus, except anyone be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter.' But now, Nicodemus, how can you miss my point? I am not speaking of anyone else but you. Do not marvel that I said unto you, Nicodemus, you must," and there is that little particle of necessity that carries the tremendous weight of inescapable necessity. "You must be born anew. You must be born again. Nicodemus, no new birth, for you – no heaven."

And I, therefore, say to every man, woman, boy or girl within the sound of my voice tonight, "No new birth for you – no heaven. No new birth for you – no heaven."

And it was this conviction that burned very deeply in the breast of that man whose name many of us feel unworthy to even mention among human servants of Christ, George Whitefield who, in his early 20s, was so mightily wrought upon by the Spirit of God that all people needed to know was that Whitefield was going to be in an area in 10, 15, 20, 25,000 people would gather. People described dust clouds being raised by the horses that

would speed on their way to the place where it was... and their notification was given that Whitefield was going to preach.

None of this five year, multi million dollar mass evangelistic campaign that is just Madison Avenue gone amuck where everything is organized and all the bus crews are lined up and all the promotion is done. The Holy Ghost, I say it reverently, could depart to another galaxy and the campaigns would still be a success.

They are all run on marketing principles, not with Whitefield. That humble man of God in his youth upon whom the Spirit came was mightily wrought upon and the Spirit of God was moving mightily upon the hearts of men. And very early in his ministry Whitefield began to preach wherever he went, "You must be born again. You must be born again."

It is estimated that in his whirlwind ministry that he preached probably at least 300 times in different ways on this text, "You must be born again." And toward the end of his relatively brief life, for he died in his late 50s, Whitefield was asked, "Mr. Whitefield, it is known that over these years you preach again and again and again and again on the text, 'You must be born again.' Why do you preach so often on the text, 'Ye must be born again'?"

His answer was, "Sir, for the simple reason that you must be born again. For the simple reason that you must be born again."

And surely the necessity of the new birth, in order to see—whether that means perceive it now or to see it and experience now and in the age to come—surely the language of verse five is unambiguous. Without it we cannot enter. We should be convinced of the necessity of the new birth as affirmed by our Lord and say to ourselves sitting here tonight, "For me, Albert N. Martin, no new birth – no heaven."

For you, put your name, put your name, for you, say your name in your mind, not out loud. For me, say your name, no new birth – no heaven. And for you folk over here it is the same.

Say your name. No new birth – no heaven.

The necessity for the new birth affirmed, but then notice the necessity explained, verse six. The necessity explained.

"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 unto you, 'You must be born again.'"

Now notice the context of this statement. It is sandwiched in between our Lord pressing the absolute necessity for the new birth, Nicodemus' question: How can I be born again when I am old, and Jesus' final statement in verse seven of the absolute necessity, "Marvel not that you must be born again."

In between those assertions he explains why it is that nothing less than a new birth, nothing less than a birth from above, nothing less than a birth of water and of Spirit will enable us to see and enter the kingdom of God.

He says it is because that which is born of the flesh is flesh. And I think William Hendrickson's comments are the most accurate and simple to grasp. He said an accurate paraphrase of the thought of our Lord would be this, "Sinful human nature, produces only sinful human nature."

That's it. That which is born of the flesh... Fathers and mothers, who are inherently sinful men and women with sinful human natures, what can they beget in natural generation? That which is born of the flesh is flesh so that our children born of us by natural generation can only receive from us that which is fleshy, that which is sinful human nature.

Job asked the question in Job 14 that is very relevant to the concern that is before us, Job 14. For you children Job is just before the book of Psalms, 14:4.

"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one."

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

Sinful human nature can produce only other sinful human nature. And in those simple words our Lord is seeking to go to the heart of Nicodemus' problem. He is seeking to show to him that though he was born of sinful nature that was exceedingly religious and though he was privileged to have his own sinful nature surrounded with all the benefits of the covenant people of God and the intensified benefits of intimate contact with the Scriptures and the temple and synagogues and instruction in the Word of God and the tradition of the elders and all of the life bound up in religious things, he is still sinful flesh because that which is born of the flesh is flesh. And nothing that has only what momma and daddy gave me can either see or enter the kingdom of God.

And in a day when we are being told on every hand that what we are by nature is fundamentally, essentially good and noble and praise worthy and, therefore we must stroke our self worth and self esteem, it is vital to thunder into the ears of this generation, drunk with the poisonous deadly wine of self deception, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

Sinful nature can only produce and beget sinful nature.

According to Scripture, what are the characteristics of sinful nature? Let me just give you a couple of them as samples. Same family of words is used in Romans eight and verse seven.



“For the carnal mind, the mind of the flesh is enmity against God. For it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can it be.”

Flesh produces flesh and the mindset, the prevailing disposition of every son and daughter born of fleshly parents, the disposition is one big clenched fist in the face of God. The carnal mind is in its very essence enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God neither, indeed, can it be. That which is born of the flesh and as flesh it has a clenched fist in the face of God and it will live and die and go to hell that way unless almighty God intervenes. It is enmity. It is not subject to God, neither, indeed, can it be.

Furthermore, take a text like 1 Corinthians two. “The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God.”

The man, woman, boy or girl who only has what his mom and his daddy could give him by conception and birth and training and education and culture and nurture, still a natural man. He has never been born of the Spirit. He only has that which nature and training and culture can give him.

“The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them.”

He has no faculty to truly know and perceive them because they are spiritual discerned and he does not possess the Holy Spirit because that which is born of the flesh is flesh and it is not only one big clenched fist in the face of God, it is one big blind eye to the things of God.

Now I know that is not very, very helpful to self esteem to be told, “I am one massive clenched fist in the face of God and I am one massive blind eye before the things of God.” But that is reality, my friend. That is reality. It was reality of Nicodemus. He wasn’t a bum. He wasn’t whoremonger. He wasn’t a thief. He was a Pharisee. He was the teacher in Israel. He was a ruler in Israel, a religious, a devout, upright, influential man. But he was, by nature, one mass consist and one big blind eye.

Or take another text, Galatians 5:19-21.

“The works of the flesh are manifest which are these.”

Where there is that which is born of the flesh, it will bring forth works consistent with what it is. And Paul says they are very evident. You don’t need to go on some kind of an exotic hunt to the back woods of an Amazonian jungle to find these things. Just open your eyes. Open your ears. Look around and everywhere you will see the works of the flesh.

And what are they? Listen to them. They are manifest: Fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness.

My friends, open your eyes. Fornication, the stuff of which all the plots of soap operas are made, the stuff of which even so called good movies are made that only have, quote, one moderate sex scene, some married people hopping into bed like animals in heat. The works of the flesh are manifest. Fornication, fornication, uncleanness, double innuendo, filth coming out of the mouths now even of women. They have got to show that they are equal to men and they can be as foul mouthed as men without twitching an eyebrow, female comedians who traffic in uncleanness, idolatry, surely manifest today.

Half of the inhabitants of the nation.... What is our present population? It is estimated 240 million, the advertisers were planning on having 135 million people bowing before their electronic god on the Lord's Day, idolatry, worshipping electronic tubes while a nation totters under the evident tokens of God's displeasure, striking vacation land in Florida with the worst hurricanes in remembrance, then a 500 year flood in the quiet subdued, conservative Midwest. There is the Mississippi broke her banks for hundreds of miles. Shaking the plates of the earth's crust in California, dumping the east coast into a deep freeze and God is thundering to us in the elements that he controls.

And rather than falling before that God in a national day of repentance, it is Superbowl Sunday. The works of the flesh are manifest idolatry. Sorcery, sorcery. Think of it. Unashamedly, in the middle of [?] a woman operates her shop and she has been there for years and she has not be subsidized by the town taro card readings, palmistry, works of the flesh, horoscopes screaming out from newspapers, *TV Guide*, call the National Weather Service and the 976-1212 and you can't get the weather without saying, "Now that you know your weather, get your horoscope" and they give out the number. Sorcery.

Count off the living God, personal, loving, intimate God.

Men must have some god so they will go to the impersonal forces of the stars to control them. God, have mercy on us. Sorcery.

Enmities, strife, race against race.

White supremacist groups breaking out by the dozens all over the country, Farrakhan preaching his get whitie and kill him.

Strife, factions, divisions, envyings, drunkenness, revellings and such like.

The list is not complete. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Where does all this horrible cesspool come from? It comes out of flesh that has been born of flesh.

That is why our Lord said, "When I make my statement, 'Verily, verily, except one be born again, he cannot see the kingdom. Verily, verily, except one be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter. Marvel not that I said unto you, 'You must be born again,'"

I am not overstating the case. The explanation for this necessity is what man is by nature ever since our first father Adam sinned. And add to all of this he is not only a clenched

fish, a blind eye, a moral cesspool, in that condition he is so spiritually impotent he can't even get to the remedy.

John 6:44, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

It is one thing to be in a sad state and need a doctor and want a doctor and have the power to get to him. It is quite another that one is in such a state that he cannot even get the remedy.

"No man can come to me."

Dear people, that is why Jesus said, "Except one is born again, he cannot see, he cannot enter."

No new birth – no heaven.

We have it in the Word of Christ.

Now then consider with me in the second place, having looked at the necessity for the new birth both affirmed and explained, now the nature of the new birth illustrated, verse eight, verse eight, the nature of the new birth illustrated.

"The wind blows where it wills and you hear the voice or the sound thereof, but you do not know the place of its origin," is the way we would say it today, whence it comes. You don't know the precise place where that wind began to build up its force, nor do you know the precise place where it spends itself and is no more. You do not know its origin nor its destiny, but you can hear its sound when it passes by.

If it is a gentle wind, you can hear its sound rustling the trees. If it is a fierce wind you can hear its sound whistling and screeching through the trees and other elements that are in its way.

And then the Lord concludes by saying, "So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

And the word translated "so," *outwv* (*hoo'-toce*) is an adverb which means, "In this way, in this way."

In other words, the Lord is saying, "Nicodemus, there are analogies between the operation, the origin, the destiny, the effect of the wind that will help you to understand the nature of this birth of which I speak. You know the laws that govern human conception and human birth. But, Nicodemus, this birth is of an entirely different kind and it has an analogy, there is something analogous in the activity of the wind. In this way, so is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

And there are three aspects of the nature of the new birth that our Lord highlights in this analogy of the wind. The first is this. It is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

Look at the text. “The wind blows where it wills.”

Now our Lord personifies the wind and gives it a will. We know that he was not teaching that the wind is some independent agent with a mind and a will that operates outside of the mind and will of God. He is using human language. We speak this way. He is underscoring the fact, “Nicodemus, if there is an unusually hot day in the place where you live and you would love the refreshment of a cool breeze upon your cheek, do you go out and snap your fingers and say, ‘Oh, wind, come and blow and please come off the Mediterranean with a little bit of refreshing coolness or come down from the mountains bringing some of the cool mountain air. Wind, wind, come.’”

Oh, no. Nicodemus knew well there was an element of unpredictable, uncontrollable sovereignty in the activity of the wind.

“The wind blows where it wills. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

It is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. And there are two texts which nail this down in language that takes us out of the realm of an illustration.

For some might say, “Well, the Lord is just using an illustration. Don’t build doctrine on illustration.”

Well, my friend, if the illustration is given to elucidate doctrine, you better build doctrine on it. Don’t just build more than is warranted. But Jesus is saying, “So is everyone born of the Spirit.”

This is not a Harold Camping arbitrarily saying, this number means this and this number means that. And you say, “Who says so?” And the answer is, “Harold Camping says so.”

Jesus said, “So is everyone born of the Spirit one aspect or analogy is the wind blows where it wills. It is sovereign in its activity, underscoring that in the nature of the new birth we must understand it is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.”

Two texts that state this in categorical language: John chapter one verses 12 and 13.

“Having come to his own and his own received him not,” John says, but, verse 12, “As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the children of God even to them that believe on his name who were born, who were begotten.” Here is our word for birth, “Who were begotten.”

May I paraphrase and say, “Who were born again”?

How? Not of blood, not according to natural blood lines, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Their new birth is attributed solely to the sovereign activity of God. It doesn’t come because you have got the right blood lines or you have

got good and godly people around you who will and even pray for your new birth. You will be born again if God begets you again by his Spirit. That is the emphasis of the text.

And in James one and verse 18, though it is a different word and could be rendered “brought us forth,” it still is in the category of the new birth, James chapter one. Here we read in verse 18 of his own will.

“He brought us forth by the Word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.”

When a man or a woman is brought forth to spiritual birth, God using the instrumentality of the Word as an accompaniment of his mighty working, whose will makes the difference? Is it the sinner’s will? No, of his own will he brought us forth.

The wind blows where it wills. The nature of the new birth is underscored, first of all, by our Lord as being a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, my unconverted friend, listen to me. This is not a doctrine of fatalism. But this is reality and it is meant to undercut every last vestige of pride and creature confidence. You kids who have the benefit of godly moms and dads and godly nurture, you have been instructed, you have been catechized, you have been fairly and consistently disciplined and trained and taught. Listen, listen, kids. You ain’t going to make it because mom and dad long with all their being to get you in with them. If God doesn’t beget you to spiritual life you will go to hell as sure as if you had a cussing, drinking, fighting mom and dad who only use the name of Jesus as curse words and never taught you one verse of the Bible and never took you to church and go to the same hell.

And all of you kids who are just rocking along on mom and daddy’s coat strings thinking, surely somehow I will be pulled in while grabbing to theirs, you kids listen to me. You cannot and will not. You must be born of God. That is why you have got to get beyond just being carried along by mom and dad’s influence to instruct you and teach you and pray for you and with you. And you must personally cry to God.

“Oh, God, I thank you for a mom and a daddy who teach me your ways and your word and who catechize me and spank me and train me. And I know they want me to go to heaven, but, Lord, you said, ‘Except I am born again, I cannot see, I cannot enter.’ And you have said that being born again is a sovereign work that you alone can do. Oh, God, do it in me by your power.”

When you start having dealings with God himself, kids, that is no doctrine of fatalism. That is shut you up to God where you need to be shut up. And to us, the people of God, it is a doctrine of hope. What gives us any hope? Some of us have spent our lives pouring ourselves into our kids and some have chosen to defy the God of their mother and their fathers.

What is our hope? Here is our hope. If God is out to get them and beget them, he will do it. He will do it.

“Of his own will he brought us forth.”

And, therefore, we are not dependent on hopeful signs as we perceive them. And we cry to God. If our prayers must track our children down to the very gate of hell we will pray for them, right to that gate, believing that almighty God can intervene and give them new life.

Furthermore, if we believe that it is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, we will have no sympathy for this notion that the new birth is just a kind of an emotionally triggered religious birth.

That is what a lot of people think the new birth is, an emotionally triggered religious birth in which Jesus has a little something to do somehow or other and you feel better about yourself and about other people.

I have been appalled when they talk about Jesus this and Jesus that. All they have had is some kind of an emotionally triggered religious burp.

Do you know what? What you have a good burp how you just feel so good afterwards? You just feel relief. That is why I use the term [?].

I see you are all laughing because you didn't admit it. You feel good after you have a burp, don't you? Sure you do. You are getting rid of gas that doesn't belong there.

Now, you may be embarrassed. If you are a mouth breather like I am and you have an obstructed nose and you happen to be breathing and a burp comes out it is really embarrassing because the mouth becomes a beautiful echo chamber and it would make you very acceptable in certain cultures where such a belch is saying a nice thank you to your host and hostess, but it is not so kosher in our society.

But now seriously. Do you see why I use the term? Having an emotionally triggered religious burp that makes you feel good and Jesus is somehow in the midst of that. That is not the new birth. Anyone can produce that. It can be self induced psychological experience.

The new birth is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, it is an effective work of the Holy Spirit. Or you may want to use the word discernible. I wrestled with which one to use. One is in the main notes, one is in brackets. It is an effective work of the Spirit.

How do we know that? Look at the text.

“The wind blows where it wills,” sovereignty, so is everyone born of the Spirit. “And you hear the sound thereof. How do you know the wind is present? Not because you can tag when it began and where it will go and end, but because of its immediate present effect upon you. You can hear its sound.

The Lord could have said, “You can feel its pressure, you can see its activity.” It is an effective working element in God’s creation. So is everyone born of the Spirit.

This is why in the book of 1 John, John can state at least five things that are true of everyone who is born again.

“He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God,” 5:1.

3:9, “He that is begotten of God does not make a practice of sin.”

2:29, “He that is begotten of God practices righteousness.”

3:14 and 4:7, “He that is born of God loves the brethren.”

Chapter five and verse four, “He that is begotten of God overcomes the world.”

Chapter five and verse 18, “He that is begotten of God keeps himself and the evil one touches him not.”

John says wherever there is the new birth, there is an effective work of the Holy Spirit. And, listen carefully. He doesn’t say one word about hearing voices, seeing angels, speaking in tongues, having goose bumps. The tests are all ethical, moral and doctrinal as our English friends would say.

Those are the tests that the Spirit has done his work of a new birth, if we have truly cast the weight of our souls upon Christ Jesus of Nazareth as our only hope of life and salvation. We have done so because we have been begotten of God. Faith in Christ is the first motion in acting of a regenerate heart.

“Whoever is born of God does not make a practice of sin.”

In the divine begetting there is a vomiting out of sin, a turning from sin as a way of life, a turning from sin’s dominion and lordship and the commitment to universal holiness.

“He that is begotten of God practices righteousness,” 2:29. He is committed to an active pursuit of evangelical obedience to the law of God. He takes the law of God seriously in all of its length and breadth in spirituality. He loves the brethren with all their warts and molds and quirks and irritants. He loves them because they are brethren, because they are born of the same God, indwelt by the same Spirit and the image of the mutually trusted Christ has begun to be formed in them. He overcomes the world. He that is begotten of God overcomes the world.

The world does not squeeze him into his mold and hold him there so that we are worldly in how we view our dress.

Don't talk about spirituality if it doesn't touch your wardrobe. More of that when we come to, "Love does not behave itself unseemly." The Bible does talk about modest apparel. And God doesn't give us a 10 page manual saying so many inches off the floor and so many inches from the sternum to the cleavage, but he does say modest and he does say there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot, assuming that in every given culture there are the symbols in our clothing of modesty or immodesty. And the woman begotten of God is prepared to be considered a little dotty if to the immodest she is called dotty.

And the world has its music and its standards of lechery and uncleanness and godlessness and materialism and moral relativism with hatred and violence and brutality and sadism breathing out from everything, so called soft rock to hate rap.

"He that is born of God overcomes the world."

He rejects that as any part of his entertainment.

How can one born of the God of truth and the God of love and the God of righteousness and the God of order entertain himself while listening to that which breathes of the Spirit of darkness and hate and disorder?

My friends, stop playing games. You listen to the same music as your neighbors who don't profess anything of Christian faith. What proof do you have that you have overcome the world?

I am talking in generic terms. The world comes in its specific propositions to us, with its styles, with its entertainment, with its music, with its avocations, with its recreations, with its standards of what is worthy of being pursued. God says we are to pursue holiness. We are to seek first the kingdom.

The world says, "No, seek riches."

And God says, "No. Charge them to be careful about seeking riches, for they that would be rich fall into manifold snares and drown themselves in perdition."

If riches come God says, "Set not your heart upon them." They can go a lot quicker than they came.

Do you overcome the world? Do you keep yourself from the enemy, the evil one?



You see, the new birth, my friends, is not being able to look back to some time when you had a nice warm feeling because you had some kind of an emotionally triggered burp. It was a morally, ethically, religiously, transformed work of the Spirit of God.

“The wind blows where it wills, so is everyone born of the Spirit. You can’t tell where it comes, where it goes, but you hear its sound.”

So it is an effective work of the Spirit.

And thirdly, and finally, it is a mysterious work of the Spirit.

Look at the text. You can’t tell its origins. You cannot designate its destiny. You hear the voice, but you don’t know where it came from and where it is going. There is an element of mystery. The wind is just there. I will never forget.

My wife came up to my study a few months ago. We have been in that one house in Cedar Grove for 27 years now. This summer I think it will be 28 years and we have watched our neighbor’s beautiful blue spruce grow from about this high to where it was about 50 feet high, one of the most beautiful, symmetrical blue spruces I have ever seen. Its fronds were about that thick, just beautiful, exquisite.

She came up to my study blanched white and she said, “Honey, honey, the Mouldin’s tree has gone over.”

I went downstairs and looked out the window and there it was lying flat amidst a big mud ball. In less than an hour [?] was there and he made quick work of that [?]. Chopped it up, put it in his shredder and it was gone.

The wind. Where did that wind come from? Where did it go? I don’t know, but every time I look out to where that tree once stood and I envision it in my mind I know that the effect of that wind was real. And it was permanent and radical. It changed the whole face of the front part of that southern side of their lot.

But there is a mystery about the wind. Where did it come from? Why did it come with such intensity right there and where did it go to do other...? I don’t know. There is an element of mystery.

And so, likewise, with the new birth. And one hymn writer captured that beautifully in the gospel hymn, *I Know Whom I Have Believed*. Do you remember the third stanza, I believe it is?

I know not how the Spirit moves,  
Convincing men of sin,  
Revealing Jesus thro' the Word,  
Creating faith in Him.

I don't know how. I don't know how...

But I know whom I have believed,  
And am persuaded that He is able  
To keep that which I've committed  
Unto Him against that day.

And I know that my faith is not the faith of the demons or mere historical, dead, temporary faith. For it is a faith that has united me to Christ and in the virtue of that union has transformed me into a new creature so that those effects of the new birth I see not perfectly, but fundamentally and growing in my life. I do believe in Christ. I do no longer practice sin as a way of life. I do practice righteousness. I love the brethren. I do overcome the world and I do keep myself from the evil one.

How precisely, even in my case, when the Spirit did his work I can point to neither day nor hour nor even week. I can only point to a bracket of several months when on the front end of that bracket was a tortured conscience and fear of hell and of judgment and at least a dozen false starts of Christian profession. And on the other end it was something God did that ain't stopped to this day.

Blessed be God. And it isn't going to stop until I am in heaven and I am like the Lord Jesus. And then it is still going to go on because we are going to grow more and more in heaven.

Now, my friend, I ask you as we close tonight, having looked at what our Lord Jesus has told us, that I have called this eighth sign post to the celestial city, "No new birth – no heaven."

We have seen our Lord's statement of the necessity of the new birth asserted, three times he asserts it. Then he explains that necessity. It is because of what we are by nature.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

Then he turns us to something of the nature of the new birth. It is something like the activity of the wind. It is a sovereign work of the Spirit. It is an effective work of the Spirit. It is a mysterious work of the Spirit. And my question to you as we bring the message to a close tonight is this. Have you been born again? Have you been born anew? Have you experienced the new birth? And can you back up your answer, if it is in the affirmative, with an honest consideration of those five accompaniments of the new birth which John outlines in his first epistle?

John Owen said in what is roughly quoted Owen, "Two of the greatest undoing and damning delusions with which the devil destroys the souls of men are these. Number one, that without the new birth they are ready to die and go to heaven and, secondly, that they have experienced the new birth without a life of universal holiness to prove it."

He said, “Those two lies are taking more people to hell than any others.”

Are you believing either of those?

“Oh, ho, maybe Nicodemus needed the new birth, but not me.”

My friend, I have emphasized that when Jesus underscored the necessity only once, only once did he exclusively direct his words to Nicodemus. In the two other assertions he generalized, “Except one be born again, he cannot see. Except one be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter.”

Don’t believe the lie that for you there is an exception, that on that sign post no new birth, no heaven, somehow God has inscribed in invisible ink your name saying, “Except for,” and then your name. And in the day of judgment he will run a brush over the invisible ink and then your name will stand out as the one exception.

God will not do it. If you are not born again, you will not enter.

John Owen says that is the great delusive lie of the devil that without the new birth you can enter heaven. And the second great lie is that you have experienced the new birth without the fruit of that new birth manifested in a commitment to a life of universal holiness, not the attainment of perfection in any area, let alone every area, but a commitment of the heart, that there is no area that you are not prepared to have controlled by Jesus Christ and his Word.

Is that where you are?

“Oh, yeah, I am born again.”

Oh, are you?

The wind blows. You hear the sound. What sounds of the Spirit’s work are echoing out of your life that cause people to look at you who know you intimately and say there is only one explanation for that man, that woman, that boy, that girl? That explanation is the life of God is in him. The power of God has transformed her. He or she is begotten of God.

As I said last week, dear people, my greatest fear is that once again we have drawn near to the very nerve centers of the issues of life and death and you have listened so attentively. I never preach anywhere, but what I am delighted to come back and preach to you and pull the word out. With but few exceptions your attention is commendable.

But, dear friends, you can be attentive to the Word and perish. The Word must be embrace and no one can embrace it for you. And I beg of you to stand before that sign post in the secret of the place where you would have dealings with God before you pillow

your head tonight and look him straight in the eye and say, “Yes, no new birth, no heaven, Lord. Do I have biblical grounds to believe I am born of you?”

Then take the time to read those passages in the book of 1 John with judgment day honesty. And if those things are not present, all of them to some degree, then face the reality: You may be deluded. And, if so, then go to the God alone who can give you life and say, “Lord, surely you wouldn’t have shown me my delusion here to mock me, but you have shown me my delusion that you might show me mercy.”

And then you read on in John chapter three and the gospel is there set out.

You see, the doctrine of the new birth is not the gospel. The gospel is the good news of what God has done in Christ for sinners. And it is always in the context of the preaching of the gospel that God brings people to new birth. For if whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God, when God does the divine begetting, unless it is in a gospel context there could be no faith in Christ.

So, my friend, if God has found you out, don’t go looking into your heart. Look to him who was lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness and cry to him for mercy. Cry to him for grace. Cry to him to do for you what you cannot do for yourself that you might know the mercy and the grace and the sovereign working of God in your life.

Let us pray.

*Our Father, we thank you again for your holy Word. We praise you for the faithfulness of our Lord Jesus who is not only the way, but the truth as well as the life. And we pray that his words would be written upon our hearts and that they may bear fruit unto everlasting life in many hearts tonight. Thank you for the privilege of being able to meet unmolested and without fear in this public assembly. Thank you for the privilege of opening your Word. And, oh God, we thank you that we are here tonight. Many of us do not begrudge that we are here and nowhere else. But we can’t it our joy to have this foretaste of the great gathering in that final and eternal sabbath. Oh, Lord, hasten the day and prepare many more for that day we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.*