

'The Son of God and the Lord of Glory Series'

Sermons in the Gospel of John

Message 24 - 'What Happens in New Birth?' John 3:3 - 5



No man can please God through His own achievements or intellect. Jesus says very clearly that a man must be born again. What does it mean to be born again? It is so important that the Lord repeats the explicit command in v7, you must be born again. These are matters of eternal importance. So we considered three questions:

Why must we be born again? (v3) - If you are not born again, you cannot see, and will not go to heaven. The Lord is very clear. There are no exceptions, and the clarity and strength of the words of Jesus should resonate with every person. Eternal truth with eternal consequences. 'Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'. Did you understand that? Do you see its importance? Unless you are born again, you will not see heaven, you will be separated from God for eternity. That is the seriousness of the truth which Jesus is bringing to the attention of Nicodemus and also to each and every person. That is also why we cannot mess around with the truth as presented in the Word of God, we cannot cut out and edit, we have to speak in love and truth, the Gospel in entirety and reality.

What is the New Birth? (v3) - There is a vital element that needs to be seen in the meaning of the word 'again'. The one used here is 'anōthen', and it refers to the repetition of an act, but there is also more to it. 'Anōthen', can also be translated 'from above'. When the Bible speaks here of again, it is speaking that this new birth is from above as well as again, it is supernatural, and has God as its source. There is another distinction to be made, as 'anōthen' also makes it clear that the repetition of the act has the same source as the first. God is the author of all physical life, and He is also the author of all spiritual life. So, as the Lord speaks to Nicodemus, He is saying, that the new birth has the same source as his original birth. So just as God granted Him physical life, for Nicodemus to be born again, he would have to be brought to life spiritually by God. So what is the new birth? It is God working and bringing life to the spiritually dead.

What happens in New Birth? (v4, 5) - Nicodemus asks the question, how? Jesus was calling him to turn away from everything he was committed too, and at the heart of it, his own self-sufficiency. Jesus has made clear that the source of new birth is God, it is from above, but in v5, He grants further insight into what happens in the new birth. Two elements present themselves in our Lord's words, 'water', and 'breath', or 'spirit'. He speaks of the means by which this occurs. As is the case with many of our Lord's words, here have been several interpretations of what he meant. In my opinion one is to be preferred. That being that 'water' is often used in the Scriptures as a picture or metaphor for the Word of God, the Bible. Think on Ephesians 5:26 for a moment, *'that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word'*. This is also enforced by James 1:18, *'Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.'* As one commentator explains, *'God is pictured as the Divine Begetter, the Father of His spiritual children, and we learn that the written Word of God together with the working of the Holy Spirit is the means by which the new birth is accomplished.'* 1 Peter 1:23, *'having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever'*. In 1 Peter it speaks of the means by which a person enters the kingdom or family of God.

Firstly, think on the Cross (v18,19) - *'knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.'* Christ's redeeming work on the cross is the basis of redemption, the basis of the new birth. There would be no gospel, no new birth if Christ had not shed his precious blood.

Secondly, think on the importance of Faith in Christ (v21) - *'through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.'* The basis of the new birth is the cross, but the new birth reveals itself in the expression of faith. Place your faith in Him, and run to the fountain of the precious blood of Christ, be washed, be cleansed, be made new.

Thirdly, think on God's sovereign grace in election (v23) - *'having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.'* In the light of the truths above, in the light of the work of the cross, placing your faith in Jesus Christ, you can then reflect with Peter as he points to the electing love of God, emphasising the fact that God is the Father of His children, and that as we are born again and adopted into His family, it is of His Word. The term that Peter uses here speaks of seed, and the matter of conception. Putting all of this together, we see the wonder of what Christ was saying, in the creative beauty of the new birth wholly of God. What happens when a person is born again? God plants within the heart of a person the gift of faith, like an ovum of faith, the Scriptures tell us that faith itself is a gift of God. Ephesians 2:8, *'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.'* Then God sends forth the seed of His Word, and the seed containing the divine life comes to the heart, and together the water or the Word, and the Spirit come together to conceive new birth. A new spiritual life comes into being, a life that has its origin in God, a new creation, not just some improvement of the old, but a new life. 2 Corinthians 5:17, *'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.'* So it is that the Lord speaks to Nicodemus.



Penzance Baptist Church

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Pastor Jonathan Stobbs