

“You Must be Born Again”
John 3:1-7
(Preached at Trinity, July 26, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In the previous chapter Jesus had gone from Cana in Galilee, and then to Capernaum where he stayed a few days, and then he made the journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. Having arrived He entered the Temple and was angered at the sight of this holy place of worship being used to satisfy the carnal lusts of merchants. He quickly drove them all out.
2. Being asked for a sign to validate His authority for His actions He declared, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” His disciples treasured these words in their heart and believed. The others hardened their hearts against them.
3. **Chapter 2** ends with the danger of a counterfeit faith – a faith not built upon the testimony of the Gospel.
4. Now as we enter **Chapter 3** we find a Pharisee who was being drawn to Christ.
 - A. We are given his name, his religious party, and his position – Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, which likely means he was a member of the Sanhedrin. **Verse 4** may suggest he was advanced in years. In **Verse 10** Jesus refers to him as a teacher.
 - B. The Pharisees find their origin around the 2nd century BC. Originally, they stood for purity against the influence of the idolatry of the Greeks but by the time of Christ they epitomized the worst of external religion and they violently opposed Christ.
 - C. At this point Nicodemus came secretly by night for fear of the other Pharisees. He may have had a timid disposition. We do not find him speaking at our Lord's trial. But we do find him continuing to stand as a disciple of our Lord at His burial, a time when the rest of the disciples fled.
John 19:38-39 NAU - "After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret *one* for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. ³⁹ Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds *weight*."
 - D. This official teacher of the Jews came by night declaring Jesus to be a teacher sent from God.
5. Notice Nicodemus at this point could be included among the masses in 2:23
John 2:23 NAU - "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing."

- A. Nicodemus was amazed by the signs Jesus had done.
John 3:2 NAU - "this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."
- B. Jesus knew his heart, but Jesus engaged Nicodemus. He taught him; opened his understanding.
6. Jesus answers the question that He perceives to be upon the heart of Nicodemus, "What must I do to have eternal life?" This is the answer given in **Verses 15-16, 36**.
 It's interesting Nicodemus was a rich old ruler asking the same question as the rich young ruler.
7. Like **Verse 19** of the previous chapter, Jesus' words were incomprehensible to the ears of Nicodemus. To his ears, Jesus was speaking a riddle.
John 3:3 NAU - "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." - ἀνωθεν
- A. It can mean "again or anew" or it can mean "from above."
 Theologically, we can read it "from above," but Nicodemus seems to have understood it, "born again."
John 3:4 NAU - "Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"
- B. Jesus stresses the natural versus the spiritual.
 This seems to be the meaning of **Verse 5** – water referring to natural procreation while Spirit refers to the new birth.
8. Tonight I want us to consider the question. What does it mean to be born again? Or using theological terminology, what is regeneration? This is of infinite importance. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that this is the starting point of our salvation.
- I. To begin to understand regeneration it is essential that you understand the nature of the human being before regeneration
- A. All human beings are born spiritually dead
1. Adam's sin brought not only physical death, it brought spiritual death
Romans 5:12 NAU - "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-"
 2. By death we mean separation – physical death is a separation of the soul from the body. Spiritual death is a separation of the soul from God
- B. This spiritual death brought terrible consequences
1. It left us void of any Spiritual understanding – we are unable to know or understand God
1 Corinthians 2:14 NAU - "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."
 a. This lack of understanding is displayed in **Chapter 2**
John 2:19-20 NAU - "Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

- b. Nicodemus also fails to comprehend the spiritual teaching of Christ.
John 3:4 NAU - "Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"
 - 2. The Bible describes this as a form of blindness
Ephesians 4:18 NAU - "being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart"
 - 3. Being spiritually dead, the lost man has a sinful predisposition – a sinful nature. And he will always live according to that nature.
 - C. The sad consequence of our spiritual death is we are satisfied to remain in that condition
John 3:19 NAU - "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil."
 - 1. Unless God does something supernatural no man would come
 - 2. Jesus confirms this in Chapter 6:
John 6:44 NAU - "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."
ἔλκω – “To drag”
Acts 16:19 NAU - "But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities"
 - 3. Something has to be done to us that is as powerful and supernatural as God calling forth the light to shine out of darkness on the day of creation.
2 Corinthians 4:6 NAU - "For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."
 - 4. This is precisely what occurs at the new birth
 - 5. All of this would have been strange to the ears of Nicodemus. He had thought of eternal life as being tied to Law/works. In other words, by human effort. Jesus is talking about something completely of God.
John 3:8 NAU - "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

II. Regeneration is a birth from spiritual death to spiritual life

- A. It is the beginning of spiritual understanding
John 3:3 NAU - "Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."
 - 1. Most people think Jesus is talking about heaven or some future manifestation of Christ’s reign – but much more is being taught here
 - 2. Our Lord’s Kingdom is the manifestation of His rule and dominion – It is manifested though the lives of His people. Unless a person experiences the transforming work of regeneration the nature of this Kingdom will be beyond his comprehension. I’ll teach more about this next time.

3. The parables of Jesus taught about various aspects of His Kingdom
Only the Disciples of Christ could understand the Parables
Luke 8:10 NAS - "And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is* in parables, in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand."
 4. Jesus uses a possible play on words to describe the blindness
John 3:3 NAU - "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."
ὄραω can refer to physical sight or mental perception. It is impossible to perceive the nature of our Lord's Kingdom without being awakened through regeneration.
Matthew 13:13 NAS - "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ "And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive.'" ὄραω
- B. The new birth must occur before faith and repentance will be possible
1. Many people today think the new birth is something that is the *result* of faith and repentance
 2. IT MUST OCCUR FIRST!!
 - a. How can a man do something before he is born!
How can a dead man do anything!
 - b. If the new birth doesn't occur the sinner will remain dead
Dead men do not make decisions!
 3. Most Southern Baptists believe the new birth comes after faith, that it is the result of faith – this is contrary to their own statement of faith
1963 Baptist Faith and Message (unchanged in the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message)
"Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."
Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace.
 4. The New Birth is a work of God's saving grace
 - a. Salvation begins with God – not with man
 - b. We cannot earn it; we do not deserve it
 - c. Dead men don't even desire it!
 - d. It comes strictly according to God's mercy who works when and how He is pleased to work.
John 3:8 NAU - "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

III. What are the results of Regeneration?

- A. With Christian salvation a person becomes convinced of his sin
1. This is the work of the Law. It is a work of the Holy Spirit but not necessarily regeneration.
 2. It may be gradual; it may be sudden and intense
We become aware of our sin and are awakened to a sense of great danger
 3. Every Christian has come to a real sense of his guilt before God
 4. At this point the sinner may go through endless efforts to appease his conscience and remove his guilt. Many turn to religion and human works. This will never do.
- B. The sinner then hears the Gospel—the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.
1. The Holy Spirit then brings about the new birth – regeneration.
 2. The awakened sinner sees Christ as all glorious.
 3. The first fruit of regeneration is faith and repentance - the new birth enables us to believe in Christ alone and turn away from our sin
- C. Regeneration is a completely transformed nature which results in a transformed life
1. The regenerate man will have a love for God's Word
 2. He will have a hunger for righteousness
Matthew 5:6 NAU - "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."
1 John 2:3 NAU - "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:"
 3. He will have spiritual understanding. He will become heavenly minded
 - a. He has new appetites. He will enjoy worship. He'll enjoy the company of the saints. He will enjoy spiritual conversation.
 - b. He is no longer motivated by worldly things
1 John 2:15 NAU - "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."
 - c. He will have a transformed mind
We are changed from lovers of self to lovers of God.

Conclusion:

1. Jesus makes it clear, "You must be born again."
Salvation is a conversion, a transformation
2 Corinthians 5:17 NAU - "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."
2. We must patiently preach and earnestly plead with sinners – but salvation is not just convincing sinners to walk the aisle or pray a prayer or join the church.
It is a transformation.
Evangelist R.F. Gates used to say – "We must do all that we can do. But we cannot do what must be done."
"You must be born again."