

Born Again  
John 3:1-13  
October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025

1. Rule keeping will not \_\_\_\_\_ us (3:1-2)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. We must be \_\_\_\_\_ (3:3-13)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Applying the Word
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ must be born again by the Holy Spirit.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. The person you are \_\_\_\_\_ the gospel with must be born again.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on John 3:1-13

1. Make some observations about the passage:
  - a. What are the repeated words or phrases?
  - b. What are the patterns in the conversation?
2. What can we learn about Nicodemus from this passage? How does that affect Jesus' interaction with him? If time, compare that with other interactions that Jesus has with other people. (i.e. the woman at the well in John 4, the man by the pool in John 5, etc.)
3. Based on what you know about Pharisees and based on Nicodemus' responses in this passage, how does Jesus radically confront Nicodemus' approach to entering the kingdom of God? How is that similar to other "religious" people today?
4. What do we learn about being "born again" in the following passages? 1 Peter 1:3, 23; James 1:18; Titus 3:5-7 (note: the word "regeneration" is a parallel term to "born again"); 2 Cor. 5:17
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the most common interpretations of the "water and the Spirit" in v. 5?
  - a. There are two births – one natural (water) and the other supernatural (Spirit)
  - b. Water = baptism
  - c. Water and Spirit both describe supernatural birth
6. How did the Old Testament anticipate the new birth? (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:25-27; Jer. 24:7; Psalm 51:10)
7. How is the work of the Spirit like the wind? What is Jesus' point in this analogy?
8. What do we learn about Nicodemus in the rest of the gospel of John? (7:44-53; 19:39-40)
9. How should this passage affect the way we approach evangelism, including the way parents approach their own children's response to the gospel?

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Big idea: The only way to enter God's kingdom is to be born again by the Spirit of God.

Intro

Jesus is a master at using everyday things to make important points.

He describes Himself like the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.

He describes some religious leaders like whitewashed tombs, painted on the outside but dead on the inside.

He described himself as the grape vine and us like branches that need to be connected to him.

And in this passage he describes the need for us, every one of us, to be born *again*. All of us were born once, that's why we're here. But there is another type of birth, a new birth, that is necessary.

We don't need better rules to follow. We don't need a better example to follow. We don't need a second chance where we start again with a blank record. We need a total transformation at the heart level. We need to be born again.

1. Rule keeping will not **save** us (3:1-2)
  - a. We learn a few things about Nicodemus.
    - i. He was a pharisee
      1. Jewish religious leaders, mostly from middle class. More popular with the people than the Sadducees, who were primarily wealthy. Probably around 6,000, according to Josephus.
      2. Zealous for mosaic law. Judaism teaches that the Old Testament has 613 commandments—248 dos and 365 don'ts. The Pharisees were a religious group of around six thousand men committed to obeying every single command. When one became a Pharisee, he pledged in front of three witnesses to uphold every detail of the law for the rest of his life (Barclay).
      3. Placed layers around it so they would keep from violating the law and came up with detailed rules about God's law.
      4. One of the original commands was to keep the Sabbath day holy. To keep it holy one must avoid working on the Sabbath. The Pharisees spent time figuring out what constitutes work. Is tying a knot on the Sabbath work? Yes and no. Tying a rope to a bucket to draw water from a well is work. A lady tying a knot in her clothing on the Sabbath is not work. So, if you need water on the Sabbath, you can have a lady tie a knot in her clothes around the handle of the bucket and lower it.
    - ii. He was a ruler of the Jews
      1. Likely a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council that one person described as a combination of the US Senate and Supreme Court. It was made up of 70 men, led by the high priest, and was the highest governing body over the Jewish people at the time.
    - iii. He was THE teacher of Israel.
      1. In v. 10 Jesus doesn't just refer to him as a teacher but *the* teacher. He was an educated and influential man.

- b. He came to Jesus by night.
  - i. Maybe just a historical detail
  - ii. Benefit of the cloak of darkness, secretive
  - iii. Like many people, he began his exploration of the claims of Christ with some secretiveness, not wanting to be seen by his colleagues.
  - iv. I think of the guy I heard about from a friend who hid a bible in his desk drawer and read it at lunch where his family wouldn't see it. Or the people who are raised in another religion but begin to question it and do research on the internet where they can remain anonymous. As much bad as has come from the internet, there has also been so much good.
- c. He starts well enough but like we've already seen and will continue to see in John, he doesn't quite get it and Jesus will waste no time getting to the heart of the matter.
  - i. He calls him rabbi (teacher) and states that he know He comes from God because of the signs Jesus has done.

2. We must be ***born again*** (3:3-13)

- a. Jesus answered even though there was no stated question.
  - i. Implied question – who are you, then? Are respond you just a teacher or are you more?
  - ii. Josh Moody - His approach is a little like someone going to a counselor and saying, “I have a friend who has such-and-such a problem,” and it's obvious that the “friend” is little more than a smokescreen for their own problem. So Nicodemus comes along, saying, as one academic rabbi to another, *Let us discuss this question regarding all the signs you are a performing*. This was so much code for, Help me understand why you are doing what you are doing.
  - iii. Nicodemus didn't ask a question and Jesus didn't respond to what he said. He pivoted to the greater need – he must be born again.
  - iv. Jesus took control of the conversation and he pulled the rug out from underneath Nicodemus.
- b. We must be born again to enter God's kingdom (3:3-5)
  - i. Your religious credentials, your rule keeping, your self-righteousness, your Jewish heritage – none of that matters. You must be born again or you cannot see the kingdom of God and you cannot enter the kingdom of God.
  - ii. What is meant by the kingdom of God?
    - 1. God's people in God's place under God's rule
    - 2. Present spiritual reality with an eventual literal fulfillment
    - 3. Jewish people would have understood this as the kingdom at the end of history, presided over by a son of David
    - 4. We can think of it as “heaven” – you cannot go to heaven, you cannot be saved – but it is a more robust understanding that we often have in mind. It is eternal life, as John 3 will go on to say, it is the opposite of perishing in hell, but it is life with Jesus in His millennial reign and then life forever on a renewed earth.
  - iii. Nicodemus points out the ridiculousness of this idea – he can't go back into his mother's womb!

iv. Jesus repeats and clarifies – to be born again is to be born of water and the Spirit.

1. There are three main options for what this means

a. two births – one natural and the other supernatural

- i. Water is amniotic fluid – but no ancient sources that picture natural birth as from water.
- ii. And water and spirit are paralleled with “from above” or “again”
- iii. But this does parallel well w v 6 of those born of the flesh and those born of the spirit

b. water = baptism

- i. But that wouldn’t have meant anything to N. and N. was assumed to understand this and he should have known it

c. Water and Spirit both describe supernatural birth

- i. First, expression is parallel to “from above” or again
- ii. Jesus believes Nicodemus should have already known this – do not be amazed, you are the teacher of Israel and you don’t understand this?

c. New birth was anticipated and taught in the OT (3:5-7, 10)

i. Isaiah anticipated that the Spirit would be poured out from on high in the kingdom (Is 32: 15ff)

ii. **Ezekiel 36:25-27** "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

iii. Who is doing the work in these verses? What is God promising to do?

1. God will sprinkle water to clean them (forgiveness and purity)
2. God will cleanse them from sin and idolatry
3. God will give a new heart, not an unyielding heart of stone but a heart of flesh
4. God will put His Spirit within
5. God will cause them to walk in obedience
6. And the result is transformation

iv. Unless one is forgiven for his sins and regenerated from having a dead heart toward God, he cannot be part of God’s kingdom.

1. You are not sick and in need of medicine to make you better. You are not weak and in need of strengthening. You are not a decent person in need of some moral improvement. You are not an academic in need of more enlightenment. You are spiritually dead and you need new life, new birth, a radical transformation.
2. Your righteousness must exceed that of the pharisees.

- a. **Matthew 5:20** "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.
  - 3. You are to be perfect
    - a. **Matthew 5:48** "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
- v. V. 6 - Flesh/flesh, Spirit/spirit
  - 1. Just as your physical body came from a physical birth, so your spiritual life must come from a spiritual birth.
  - 2. Only human nature can beget human nature, so only the Holy Spirit can give spiritual life.
- d. The work of the Spirit in new birth is like the wind (3:8)
  - i. Wind and spirit translate the same word – pneuma – so it is a fitting analogy.
  - ii. He works where He wishes just like the wind blows where it wishes
    - 1. We are experts on the wind here in Pocatello, it's a windy place.
    - 2. Of course we have learned more about what causes the wind and patterns for how it will blow.
      - a. Every river I've ever floated seems to develop an upriver wind in the afternoon, which is not very convenient to row against.
    - 3. Less knowledge of weather patterns then, but even now we aren't great at predicting where hurricanes or tornados will hit or how bad they will be.
  - iii. You can not see the Spirit but you see His effects
    - 1. We can see the trees wave, we can hear it, we can feel it – even if we can't see it and don't know where it comes from.
    - 2. In the same way, God's HS works where He desires, and His work is necessary, and His work is transformational as He gives new life.
    - 3. The letter of 1 John lists several effects:
      - a. **1 John 2:29** If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.
      - b. **1 John 4:7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
      - c. **1 John 5:1** Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him.
      - d. They are family traits showing that someone is born again into God's family.
        - i. I didn't go find kids who looked like me and say, "I'm taking you to be in my family."
        - ii. Rather, the kids who were born into my family have certain traits that reflect our family.
  - iv. Nicodemus: How can this be?
    - 1. His religious system is getting totally upended in one conversation.

2. That must have been disorienting.
3. That disorientation is repeated every time someone with a rule-based religion really grapples with the gospel of grace.
  - a. “Wait, are you saying it’s not about being good and doing good things? I can get to heaven just by faith? Just by belief? That’s too easy! ‘I’ need to DO something.”

e. Jesus speaks about the new birth with the authority of heaven (3:11-13)

- i. Jesus says, “I’m telling you what’s true here on earth – you must be born again – and if you don’t believe that, how will you believe if I tell you more?”
- ii. He speaks as one with authority from heaven.

### 3. Applying the Word

a. **You** must be born again by the Holy Spirit.

- i. The term “born again” became popular in the 70’s and 80’s to describe evangelical Christians in contrast to other “Christians.”
- ii. But this passage says every Christian is a born-again Christian – you must be born again to see or enter the kingdom of God.
- iii. In John 3:7 the “you” in “you must be born again” is plural
  1. In English you/singular and you/plural are the same and it’s confusing.
  2. The southern Y’all is helpful – Y’all must be born again
- iv. If I must be born again and that is a work of the Spirit and the Spirit “blows” where He wishes, does that mean I don’t need to do anything?
  1. Vv. 14-21 get to that and we’ll see it in more detail next week.
  2. We believe in Jesus as the Son of God who came to save us so we don’t perish (v. 16)
  3. We turn from loving our sin in the darkness to the light of Jesus.
  4. We can ask God to forgive us, give us new life and a new heart and when He does, He gets the glory because it’s His work, not ours.

b. The person you are **sharing** the gospel with must be born again.

- i. We should learn how to share the gospel with people.
  1. What verses to show them? How to answer their questions? We should be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us.
  2. But just like we can’t rely on our own goodness to get us to heaven, we can’t rely on our own skillfulness or technique to get others to heaven.
  3. That can lead to another type of pride or despair – pride if someone responds, despair if they don’t.
- ii. Your own children need your parental care to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, but if they come to Christ and walk with Jesus, it isn’t a time to pat yourself on the back but to drop to your knees and thank God. And if they reject Christ, it isn’t time to heap all the blame on yourself, but rather continue to pray and ask God to work.

1. God does use means to accomplish His ends, so parenting matters, but our trust is not in our parenting but in God's Spirit.
- iii. That's true of random conversation on campus, it's true of deep, invested relationships with friends, it's true in foreign missions.

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