**We Must be Born Again**

John 3:1-15

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Introduction: we have either heard or used the, “if you were to die tonight, do you know where you would spend eternity,” opener to evangelism. It is not a bad way to break the ice. However, I want to take that open and modify it slightly. “If you were to die right now and stand before God and God were to ask you, ‘why should I let you in to my heaven?’ What would be your response?” While you think about that, let me inform you that I do not believe that any such dialogue will take place between God and man when we enter eternity. But indulge me for just a moment. What would you say? Do not be confused, loved ones, there is only one right answer to that question. The answer, looking to Christ, I believe that Jesus bled and died for me. Brothers and sisters we need no other argument or plea. It is enough that Jesus died and that He died for me. I plead with you today to either look upon Christ with a refresh sense of awe for what He has done or to look to Him for the first time in believing faith and to be born again.

Main point: We must be born again, or we will not enter the kingdom of God.

3 exchanges between Jesus and Nicodemus on being born again.

Some ground work: do not misunderstand what is happening here. Many people think that Nicodemus was questioning and misunderstanding what Jesus was saying because he was dumb. **That is not the case**. Have in mind here a conversation between two learned scholars who are differing perspectives. Remember, Nicodemus was a lead teacher to the Jews. He was a smart and well educated man. However, his understanding was by looking through the lenses of a Jewish understanding as well as not understanding Jesus to be the one who had come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Nicodemus needed instruction and new birth just like all of us.

1. Exchange #1. 1-3
   1. Nicodemus. Who are you? He comes to Jesus at night. Remember, the main things are the plain things and plain things are the main things. Do not get hung up on why he came at night. He approaches Jesus and he begins by saying, “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.” Jesus does not give Nicodemus to ask a question before He tells him he must born again (more on Jesus response in a moment). What is happening here is that Nicodemus has come to Jesus on behalf of himself and other Jewish leaders and teachers. **Notice the “we.”** Essentially what Nicodemus wants to know before he has the chance to ask is, “Who are you? And what are you doing?” He knew about the work and miracles Jesus had done up to this point. He doesn’t get a chance to ask the question before Jesus gives him the answer.
   2. Jesus Response: You must (pay attention to the must) be born again. Why do you think Jesus interrupts Him? **Because Nicodemus has already started with half the picture. Jesus is more than a great teacher from God. He is the lamb of God. He is the Son of God. He is the one who came to take away the sins of the world.** You must be born again. The phrase here could and should be translated born from above. The idea of new birth, or regeneration, is that we are coming to life spiritually by being transformed by the power and mercy of God. As Jew Nicodemus would not have had this understanding. In his mind, one must become a Jew either by birth or proselyte baptism and keep the Mosaic Law in order to see the Kingdom of God. **Jesus is getting straight to the heart of the matter**. **Do not waste your time on parsing and mincing theology and terminally. You must be born from above. You must be born again. You must be made new.**
   3. Quote: one theologian puts it this way, “By the term born again, he means not the amendment of a part but the renewal of the whole nature.”
   4. Transition. This is a weighty concept. John has already introduced us to this concept of Christ as the sacrificial lamb. Jesus here pulls the curtain back a little further and explains that in order for man to spend eternity with God, man must be born again from above through Jesus. **Remember, what nicodemus was asking…”who are you?” Jesus just told Him, “The lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world as the agent of new birth.** But Nicodemus is struggling to understand. Maybe some of you are as well. So lets look at the second exchange.
2. Exchange #2. 4-8.
   1. Nicodemus: How can a man be born when he is old? Again, Nicodemus was not dumb. However, this was a concept that was not on his radar. So he ends up taking Jesus’ statement literal by asking, “Can we enter a second time into our mothers womb.” Nicodemus knows that this is not possible. This is his way of emphasizing the lack of sense. He simply does not understand what Jesus is saying. **How many of us misunderstood the concepts of being born again the first time we heard it? Probably all of us. Maybe you are asking the same question. How does Jesus respond.**
   2. Jesus: you must be born of the water and the spirit. You might be thinking at this point, “okay, preach, you’re not helping get a handle on this whole thing.” Hang with me. This phrase is a reiteration of Jesus previous statement with a little more detail. Jesus, at first, said you must be born again. So how does the water and the spirit clarify that reality? Throughout all of the old testament and into the new, water is seen as that which purifies and makes clean **(the ritual washings ie the wedding at Cana; Ephesians 5; Titus; 3)**. The spirit is a reference to the Spirit of God and the work God does in cleansing people and bringing them into His kingdom. This could be a lose reference to baptism, but only in a pictorial sense. Because thats all that Baptism is anyways. A picture of us dying to our flesh and being cleansed and raised to newness of life in Christ. Jesus goes on to say, “that which is born of flesh is flesh. That which is born of spirit is spirit.” Meaning, that we are not born physically into the kingdom of God. The only way for us to see and enter the kingdom is by being born of the spirit, by being born from above, by being born again.
   3. Transition: this is where Jesus alludes to Ez. 36 but Nicodemus misses it. Jesus is trying to help Nicodemus see that He is the one who has come to bring the New Covenant. He is the one who has come to fulfill the promise of the removal of a heart of stone transplanted with a heart of flesh through the new birth from above. Nicodemus is still confused. If you are too, Jesus is about to make it abundantly clear.
   4. Exchange #3. 9-15
      1. Nicodemus: How can this be? Nicodemus does not get it. He is to the point in the dialogue with Jesus where he simply asks, “How?” How, Jesus? How is this possible. Beloved, I believe vehemently that this dialogue was not only intellectually enlightening to Nicodemus but spiritually awakening to him. This is the beginning of a spiritual journey for this man.
      2. Jesus. These things can be through the cross of Christ. Jesus first low key rebukes Nicodemus for not understanding the reference to the New Covenant in Ez. 36. **How do you not know these things.** He then goes on to discuss how He has shared earthly things and he has not understood. How could he ever understand heavenly things. **So Jesus takes another approach. He makes a divine claim as being the one who defended from the father in heaven. He then shows the Messianic message bound up in Numbers 21:4-9. Just as the bronze serpent was lifted up and all who looked were healed. *So too, the Son of Man must be lifted up, death on the cross, and all who look to him in faith will be saved, will be born again, born from above.***
      3. Transition to conclusion: How, Nicodemus? How church? How are we born again? By looking to Jesus. Look to Jesus. That’s why this series is called behold the glorious christ. Because we must look to Jesus in order to be saved.

Conclusion: loved ones do you see Jesus? Are you looking to Jesus? Do you believe that He is the beloved son of God who is the lamb who sacrificed Himself so that you could be saved? I hope you do. I hope this day together we can say, I am on my way to the kingdom of God because Jesus died for me and I am looking to Him. Look to Him today. If you have never trusted Jesus, now is the time to look to Jesus and be born again through believing faith. If have looked to Him and your eyes have strayed, I challenge you this morning to turn your eyes upon Jesus LOOK full in His wonderful face so that the things of earth might grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.