

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

2 ²³Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people believed on his name, having seen the signs that he did. ²⁴But Jesus did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all men. ²⁵He did not need anyone to testify about a man; for he himself knew what was in the man.

3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²This man came to [Jesus] at night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you are doing, unless God is with him. ³Jesus replied to him by saying, I tell you the truth, Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ⁴Nicodemus asked 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? ⁵Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God! ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be amazed because I tell you, You must be born again. ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases, you hear the sound of it, but do not know from where it came or where it is going; the same is true with regard to everyone who is born by the Spirit. ⁹Nicodemus asked him, How can these things be? ¹⁰Jesus responded by asking him, You are the teacher of Israel, yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹I tell you the truth, We speak of things we know, and give testimony concerning things we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have spoken to you [about] earthly things, but you do not believe, how can you believe if I speak to you [about] heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven, except the one who descended out of heaven, [namely,] the Son of man, who is in heaven. (Jn. 2:23-3:13)

Introduction

Throughout her teenage years Ann had always had a deep sense of emptiness. She married, thinking that marriage would make her happy and fill the void. Three children came and filled her life, but the void inside still remained. She testifies, "We did all the right moral things, and attended Sunday School and church. When the children became teenagers, they attended membership classes and had their names added to the church roll. But there was no peace in our home."

As the children grew, the problems increased; but Ann had no answers. By the time she was 38, her world had fallen apart. Her oldest daughter had left home to live with relatives. Ann and her husband were on the verge of a divorce. Then they learned that their fifteen-year-old son, John, was using drugs.

In desperation they took John for counseling to a pastor who was working with young people. At first John wanted no part of it. Each day as Ann sat waiting for his counseling session to end, she wondered if it would really help; and she dreaded the long, sullen ride home.

But one day she watched John coming down the hallway after his counseling session and she knew something had happened to him. She could not remember the last time John had laughed or smiled or seemed happy. But today John's face was radiant—as if somebody had turned on a light.

As they got into the car, Ann found herself staring at John, almost unable to believe the change in him. Ann was about to learn that John had been born again—he had received Christ as his Savior and had turned his life over to Him.

John's question, "Mom, are you saved?" began to haunt Ann as she observed the changes in her son over the next few weeks. One day he made the statement that if he were to die he knew that he would go to heaven—Ann wondered how anyone could be so sure.

A few weeks later Ann found herself talking about spiritual things with her pastor's wife. Ann relates the result of those conversations:

Ever since I could remember I had believed that a man named Jesus had died on a cross a long time ago, had been buried, rose from the dead and had gone to heaven. This is what I'd been taught. Suddenly I realized that it was for **my** sins He died, and that I had never approached the cross to ask for forgiveness and cleansing.

[My pastor's wife] took my hand and invited me to pray. And I surrendered. We knelt on the floor, and I asked the Lord Jesus Christ to wash away my sin and come into my heart as my personal Savior and Lord. Even before the prayer was finished, I felt as if someone had laid a blanket of peace over my entire being. As we rose to our feet, I knew that, if I had never done anything right in my life, that day I had made the right decision. I knew also that Christ had filled the void in my life with His peace, His love, and His joy. (*POWER*, 12/26/82, pp.2-ff.)

In that moment Ann, too, was born again and entered into the kingdom of God.

Jesus declares that if you would enter into the kingdom of God and go to heaven when you die, it is necessary for you to be spiritually reborn. You must be born again.

I. You Must Be Born Again, ...Because by Nature You are Not a Part of the Kingdom of God

In this third chapter of John's gospel we find a sincere and devoutly religious man approach Jesus in order to speak with Him about spiritual things.

What is the first thing Jesus says to this man? *"Jesus replied to him by saying, 'I tell you the truth, Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'"* (Jn. 3:3.) Jesus immediately forces this man, Nicodemus, to come to grips with the

necessity of the spiritual new birth. It is as though Jesus is saying, "You cannot even hold a meaningful conversation about spiritual things unless you have first been born again." By way of illustration: You would be completely out of place and at a loss in a foreign country unless you knew the language and something of the culture of that particular country. Three times in this passage the Lord Jesus solemnly repeats the necessity of experiencing the new birth if one would enter into the kingdom of God:

Jesus replied to him by saying, I tell you the truth, Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (Jn. 3:3)

Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God! (Jn. 3:5)

Do not be amazed because I tell you, You must be born again. (Jn. 3:7)

Jesus teaches that unless a person is born again he or she is not able to enter into the kingdom of God (vs. 5.) Jesus is telling us that by nature, as we are born into this world, we are outside the kingdom of God and have no place in it. Consider the Apostle Paul's analysis of the spiritual state and condition of the human race:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest [of mankind], we were by nature children of wrath. (Eph. 2:1-3)

The Scriptures teach that by nature, we are dead towards God: living in a state of enmity against God, hating and resisting the righteous and rightful claims and demands of God upon our lives. In Romans 8:7, the Apostle Paul describes sinful man's attitude towards God in these terms: "*the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*" The natural expression of the sinful heart is a life that is contrary to the very character of God in His holiness, righteousness, and self-giving love: "*we also once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another*" (Titus 3:3.)

By nature, we are under the influence and dominion of the devil, rather than willingly living under the dominion of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 2:2, referring to the operation of the devil upon and in the lives of sinful mankind, the Apostle Paul declares, "*you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*"

By nature, we are "*children of wrath:*" provoking God to righteous anger and subject to His just condemnation.

John 2:25 tells us that Jesus "*knew what was in the man*"—and He describes the condition of the human heart in the following terms: "*out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimony, slander; ²⁰these are the things that defile the man*" (Matt. 15:19-20.)

The Lord Jesus teaches that if we desire to go to heaven and not be cast into hell, we must be born again. In John 3:3,5 Jesus speaks in universal terms, using such words as "*anyone*" and "*everyone*." Now in verse 7 Jesus speaks to Nicodemus—and to each of us—in personal terms: "*You* (in Greek it is the plural pronoun) *must be born again.*" Even a person like Nicodemus—one who was devoutly religious—he was a Pharisee; one who had attained a high level of religious respectability and prestige—he was a ruler of the Jews; one who displayed no small degree of humility—he came to Jesus and acknowledged Him to be a teacher sent from God, he came to learn from Jesus; one who possessed some degree of spiritual perception—he recognized Jesus' works to be signs from God—needs to be born again.

You must be born again, because by nature you are not a part of the kingdom of God.

II. You Must Be Born Again, ...Because You Cannot Naturally Evolve into the Kingdom of God

In John 3:6 Jesus teaches that there is no such thing as "spiritual evolution;" He declares, "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" That is to say, a man cannot transform himself; he cannot change his own nature; he cannot cease being a sinner and convert himself into a saint. A man cannot undergo a self-induced metamorphosis, transforming himself from being "a caterpillar of sin" into "a butterfly of godliness." If we are to enter into the kingdom of God, what is required is nothing less radical than a spiritual rebirth.

When men think about God and the fact that they must stand before Him on the day of Final Judgment, one natural response is for a man to seek to reform himself, to embark upon a self-improvement program. But all such programs, although they may produce limited results, are doomed to failure. Self-reformation and religion can never change your basic nature; they can never change your heart. Consider the case of a man named Duane:

At the age of 36, Duane was foreman and superintendent with a construction firm in Rock Island, IL. He was nearing his lifetime goal to be Number One in his company. His farm background and heritage of hard work and perseverance were finally paying off.

But there were troubling things about his life he seemed powerless to change. Duane didn't think he had a problem with alcohol until one night he

came home late and overheard his ten-year-old daughter tell her younger brother, “Dad’s drunk.”

Her words deeply affected Duane and he decided it was time to turn his life around. He determined to do it through better church attendance, reading the Bible, and seeking God.

Several months later, during a church seminar on personal witnessing, Duane realized that he had been futilely trying to straighten himself out. He still had no inner power, no sense of God’s presence in his life.

When the seminar leader spoke about all people being sinners, and related the need for inner cleansing to Christ’s death on the cross, it became clear to Duane that he had never been born again through faith in Christ. (*POWER*, 7/15/90, pp. 2-ff.)

Furthermore, self-reformation and religion can never pay for our sins. As the hymn writer, Robert Lowry, expresses it:

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nothing can for sin atone,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
None of good that I have done,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

You must be born again, because you cannot naturally evolve into the kingdom of God.

III. You Must Be Born Again, ...By a Work of God in You that Produces Faith in Jesus, the Savior

The Bible speaks of the new birth as being an act of God; the one who has experienced the new birth is said to have been born or begotten by God:

“But to all who did receive him, to those who believe on his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God—¹³they were born, not by natural descent, nor by human will, nor by a husband’s desire, but by God” (Jn. 1:12-13.)

The Bible speaks of the new birth as being a sovereign act of God:

“By his own volition he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we may be a kind of first fruits of what he created” (Jas. 1:18.)

The Bible speaks of the new birth as being a gracious act of God:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **according to his great mercy gave us new birth** for a living hope.* (1 Pet. 1:3)

The Bible speaks of the new birth as an act of God performed by His Holy Spirit. John 3:5 brings together the elements of new birth and cleansing and the operation of the Holy Spirit: *“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!’”* Titus 3:5 further explains these things: *“he saved us—not by works that we ourselves performed in righteousness, but by his mercy—through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”* The Apostle Paul speaks here of *“the washing of rebirth and renewal.”* Just as you take a bath to wash your body and make it clean, so the Bible here is speaking of a spiritual “bath” that will not only wash your soul, but will also make you a new person. When you “step out” of this “bath” you are not only made morally clean, you are made a new creation—it is a washing that regenerates you, a washing that causes you to be spiritually reborn or born again. Paul goes on to teach that this is produced *“by the Holy Spirit.”* This great washing and renewing is the work of the Holy Spirit: He drags the sinner out of the “mire” of sin, He plunges him into this holy “bath,” and He presents him to God, clean and new. That is to say, the Holy Spirit causes the sinner to come to Jesus Christ and believe in Him: Jesus Christ Himself provides the “bath,” which consists of the blood He shed at Calvary for the forgiveness of sins and the regenerating of the believing sinner.

The Bible speaks of the new birth as an act of God that produces personal faith in Jesus:

*But to **all who did receive him, to those who believe on his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God—¹³they were born, not by natural descent, nor by human will, nor by a husband’s desire, but by God.*** (Jn. 1:12-13)

If/when this work of God—defined as the new birth—takes place in your life, the following results take place: You come to recognize that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who saves sinners. You come to recognize that **you** are a sinner who needs Christ to be **your** Savior. You come to put your trust in Jesus, completely surrendering yourself to Him as He graciously offers Himself to you.

Conclusion

Jesus says, *“I tell you the truth, Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

Have you been born again? Can you identify with Ann? Listen again to her testimony:

Ever since I could remember I had believed that a man named Jesus had died on a cross a long time ago, had been buried, rose from the dead and had gone to heaven. This is what I'd been taught. Suddenly I realized that it was for **my** sins He died, and that I had never approached the cross to ask for forgiveness and cleansing ... I surrendered. We knelt on the floor, and I asked the Lord Jesus Christ to wash away my sin and come into my heart as my personal Savior and Lord.