

"BORN AGAIN, WHO, WHY, HOW?"

John 3:3

Jesus Christ was approached at night by Nicodemus. A ruler of the Jews. Some people criticize him for coming at night - saying that he was a coward. Others say that he is very courageous because he broke with the usual things of his day. And Jesus brushed aside all things that he had to say and dealt with one great issue. In V. 3 "verily, verily, I say unto you - except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

V. 5 "Verily, verily, I say unto Thee, except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

V. 7 "Marvel not that I say unto Thee, that you must be born again."

What does it mean to be born again? How can we find out about this mystery. Who really needs to be born again. Why should one be born again. How can one be born again. I think all of these questions were dealt with by Jesus in this interview. And many people like the man, how can these things be he says.

Charles Coleson of the Watergate situation wrote a whole book entitled - "Born Again". President Carter described his Christian faith in terms of being born again. A reporter asked Gerald Ford if he had been born again. His reply was

"yes".

Where did this term "born again" originate. What do they mean. How did it happen.

Way back in 1870 a Bishop was in charge of a small college. He made an annual visit to the school. He stayed in the home of the college president. One night he was talking to the man, and the Bishop said he thought that everything could be had been invented. The college president thought other wise. And he said, in reply, to the Bishop - I can't agree with you. Why Bishop I believe in 50 years men will learn to fly like birds. The statement shocked the Bishop and he said, why you are speaking blaspheming. Flight is reserved for the angels. Now the name of that man was Milton Wright - he was the bishop. And back home he had two small boys. Named Orville and Wilbur.

I need not go into the outcome of that illustration - because you know what happened to those boys. They performed the impossible. It was not just all talk.

There are some people today who think that this is all (preacher talk) Talk about the new birth. And some people think that preachers talk too much maybe about the new birth. I heard about a preacher whose sermons were somewhat (short). And the Board called him in and talked to him. And he said, I'll tell you - I have had my teeth pulled and it is difficult to preach long sermons without your teeth.

After a (few) days, he was able to get some (new teeth) and his sermons got (longer). And they got up to an hour, an hour and a half. The Board got together and

they said, now we want to know what has happened. You are too long-winded now. Well he said, you see brethren, the Dentist made a mistake. And he gave me a set of women's teeth.

And speaking about long sermons, a housewife once was in a worship service and she had a roast in the oven. And she scribbled a note and passed it to her husband who happened to be an usher. Now he thought that his wife meant to relay this note to the preacher. Without unfolding it and reading it - he slipped it on up to the preacher. And the preacher took it up and read it. "Please hurry home and shut off the gas."

Now I do not think that preachers have been long-winded on "you must be born again". We have not over done it. Maybe we have not preached enough. Some people say that you can't change human nature. Well, that is true - you can't but God can. 2 Cor. 5:17 - The Bible says, "if any man be in Christ - he is a new creature. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things are become new."

I. WHO NEEDS TO BE BORN AGAIN

V. 1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus. A ruler of the Jews.

Now if he had been living in our city - he might have lived around the Civic Center. Or maybe on Chesapeake Avenue here. He was this kind of man. And he was a prominent man in the city of Jerusalem. The statement is very descriptive. It says that he was a ruler of the Jews. And that has great significance - it means that he had achieved a top place in responsibility in the city of the Jewish nation.

And to achieve that status, he must have been a man with a keen mind, a strong leadership about him, highly intelligent, educated, and a well-read man.

It is also likely that he was a wealthy man. And we can only guess at it. He might have been a man of 40-60 years of age. Maybe even 70 when he came to talk to Jesus.

He came to see Jesus at night. For the same reason that we have services at night. For quite often people are busy at jobs and responsibilities in the day time. And they can't get away and come to seek Jesus til night.

Now Jesus was very different from the impression that Nicodemus came to him about. He knew that he had come to investigate Jesus - and he knew actually, that he had come there. That he had a great void and emptiness in his life.

Despite all of the (security) that Nicodemus had in life, he was still (empty).

Think of what this man had! He had the respect of the people. He had the social position. He had education. He had wealth. And he was even a religious man. By heritage, he was a devout man. And by all measurement, he was a moral man.

Humanly speaking - he was probably one of the most religious men who ever came to Jesus. Being a Pharisee, not all the Pharisees were hypocrites. Some of

them were legalistic. And they had become self-righteous. But there were still a few who represented the original purpose. And I believe Nicodemus belonged to this group. And he sought to give himself to these things of religion.

V. 2 - The manner in which he spoke to Jesus says a great deal about the man's heart. He was very respectful. He confesses that he believes that Jesus was a man of God. And he believed that because of the miracles.

So this man had everything - just about. He was sincere in religion. He was a master of the law. He was a genuine moral individual. And, he needed what Jesus came to earth to give men. And this helps us to answer - who needs the new birth. Who needs a new spiritual life. This man was not an isolated case.

W. I remember some years back I visited (a couple) - and the wife said to me - I am glad you have come. I want to talk to you about my husband. Her husband said, what, about what. And she said, I want to talk to you about his soul. He is not saved. And I am worried about his salvation. The man said, but you know I joined the church when I was just a boy. The wife said to me, well, I am not talking about him joining the church. And he replied that I am a good man. And I have treated you good. And she says, well, I am not talking about that either. I am talking about being saved - really, becoming a Christian.

The situation was a little bit charged because both of them had their names on the church roll. However, in a short while, the man began confessing to some things that he had been doing. That were not in keeping with the marriage vows and the Christian life.

Now that's who needs the new birth. And I am impressed tonight to talk to you about this because there are lots of people - maybe some like you, who thinks that things are going along pretty good. But you have sort of made up a few things for God. And when Nicodemus began to talk to Jesus - Jesus said, now lets not talk about me, Lets talk about you.

He turned the conversation immediately from himself to Nicodemus. And he focused on the spiritual need of his life.

X I want you to know that Jesus did not even condemn Nicodemus. Or for lack of knowledge. Nor did he commend him for his virtue. But he put out a spiritual truth that baffled Nicodemus.

He tried to comprehend the idea that Jesus suggested. Of course Jesus had to use many illustrations to try to explain to this man what he was talking about.

Perhaps you are one of those people tonight - who appear to have everything. You have respect, and you have a lot of other things. And you think of yourself as being a little bit religious. And everything appears that way, and yet you know - that there is something missing. If you have never experienced this second birth by faith in Jesus Christ - that is what is missing in your life. And neither being sincere or moral will fill that empty spot.

Some of you may have the same problem that Nicodemus had. And we cannot understand this because we have never been touched by the spirit, in this way.

He came by night. With an earnest desire in his heart. And that is why - or who needs the new birth. To be born again. Why Nicodemus was a part of the old system. Which reached way back to Adam. And Adam was the first one to try it. To initiate his merit. He sowed his fig leaves and tried to cover up - hoping to be acceptable to God. It did not work. It does not work today. Still people try to get God's favor. But our righteous is as filthy rags. Isa. 54:6. Here was a man who was a guest of Jesus. He had a great heritage. He had a great relationship. But his nature was full of sin. Even the best person's life is contaminated by the old sin nature. And we all need to be born again.

II. WHY SHOULD ONE BE BORN AGAIN

Well, the new birth is an in time experience with lasting results. The expression ever lasting life speaks of a quality of life. In our present life, the unregenerated just as long or longer than the redeemed. Christ is giving this man an offer and opportunity to be born into something that will be fullness of joy and will be ever lasting for him.

We must be born again - first, in order to comprehend and enjoy life in time.

Second, a new spiritual temperment is needed in order to live constructively.

Third, a new nature is needed to equip us for a Heavenly home.

Why must we be born again. Nicodemus knew all about the tragedy of sin.
He was a good man. He knew that there was such a thing as sin. You know sin is
a tragedy whether it is in the mountain, in the mansion, down in the valley, or in
the hut. The deadliest sin of all is being conscious of no sin at all.

Do you know what the sweetest words in the world are. Thy sins be forgiven
Thee. What are you going to do with your sin. Every where, every thing is going
to depend upon the new birth. Now we prune trees - not to make them good. The
tree is good or the tree is bad. But we prune it to help make the fruit good.
The early church was made up of converted people. Who talked like converted people.
Who lived like converted people. And who went out and changed society. They were
twice born individuals.

You remember when God said - let us make man in our own image. Gen. 1:26-27.
He gave man freedom of will. But chiefly he gave them a moral image. For God
is love. And God is spotless and pure. And no man was in the beginning pure from
every single spot. He was created able to stand. And he ate of the tree thereof.
And the Lord commanded him - thou shalt not eat of the tree thereof. And the
rebellion against God declared that God ruled no longer over his life. And so,
God said the day that you eat, thou shalt surely die. And do you know something
- the word of God cannot be broken.

Accordingly, that day - he died to God. And he did die. He lost the life
of God. The body died. It was separated from the soul. It is separated from
God. And so this man hide himself from God among the trees.

It must be understood therefore that we have spiritual needs. And Spurgeon

said there is no substitute. He was asked what was the greatest experience when you were called to that great church. He said it was when I found him - preaching to 5,000 people was not a great experience. But he said, when I found Jesus Christ in the new birth that indeed was a great experience.

Now there may be some of you who say - well, I don't believe in the new birth. I think that is out of date. Oh, they say, I'm going to make things right just before I get ready to die.

As one person said, if God could make Adam good out of nothing - he can make you good out of what is left. And so the words must and again - are words that may be old-fashioned, and you may get angry about it. But this is what the Bible says - ye must. Who, needs the new birth. Why do you need the new birth. It seems it is very clear. The answer to these questions.

And you may doubt it but whose words are these anyway. They are not my words. They are not somebody else's words. But Jesus said it. They are his words. And this doctrine does not belong to the Baptists, the Methodists, the Salvation Army, etc.

George Whitfield preached on this subject over 300 times. He did not invent it. General Booth, one of the most wonderful men God ever gave this world - used this idea over and over. But he did not invent it. It is no human invention. Jesus Christ said it - do not forget that.

And if God has a message for you and for me - then the Holy Spirit will make it

plain to you. So who needs this. Why do you need it. You will notice to whom he said it. A drunkard - no. A harlot, a murderer, a gypsy. Listen, he was probably saying it to a church member. You see it is possible to be a church member without being born again.

Henry Drummond said that the inquiry room reveals an awful fact that the majority of church members know nothing about the new birth. They know the letter of the law, as well as they know their own names. But they are ignorant of this grace. It is possible to have your name on a church roll without having it on the lamb's book of life. Or to take the cup of communion without ever taking the cup for salvation.

So you can be an office bearer without being a member of the inner circle with the Master. Think of that. And it will make you think. And if we can get men to think - then we will be doing something. What can a man be - and how can he be born when he is old. This is the question that really man has asked. So we come to another question.

III. HOW DOES IT TAKE PLACE

V. 4 - Nicodemus said, how can a man be born when he is old. How can these things be. How can you explain this experience. John 1:21. This will help us to think - how can one be born again. Now Christ's word "again" translated above. It has really two meanings. It means born again. Or fresh. Or born from above. And this means that it has a Heavenly source of such birth. And this is what Nicodemus tried to understand - born again from a natural standpoint.

His big question was how. How can one be born again. And Christ tries to demonstrate for him with the use of the wind.

He began to think about these things - how can a man be born when he was old. That is a logical question. It is possible to be saved when you are an old man. It is possible - but you know something, it is improbable. It is possible - but it will be difficult. How many times do you see a gray-headed man unite with the church. Man or a woman. For every gray-headed man that comes to church membership - you will see, they tell us, at least 75-80 others who will come. The majority of people who come to Jesus Christ are under 25 years of age. And if you go over 25-30 - you will have less chance. And if you go between 30-40 - you will have less. And then between 40-50 - there will still be less. And less again, between 50-60. When you go between 60-70 - you may write it down, wonderful when they come. What does it mean to be aged and gray headed. It means that you can say no to Christ - you lose your desire to say yes. That is what it means. Can a man be born when he is old.

Have you ever tried to learn to play a piano or some other musical instrument after you have gotten past 60 or 70 years of age. See how easy it is and how your joints have grown fixed and stiff. And if it is not easy about this - then the hardest thing is to show that you have the approval of God. Do not think, my friends, because you are growing old that you can crowd out of life the things of God, and the things of the day of judgement, and the things of right and holiness in Heaven. Don't think you can shut these out of your life and then cram them in in the last five minutes of your existence.

Listen, eternal matters have to be taken care of now. Can a man be born when he

is old. Listen. Yes, he may - for when God says it, it must be. He says, it may be but it will be a miracle. And I would rejoice seeing a gray-headed man come - but you would rejoice more seeing a young boy come. Why? Because, let me illustrate with a testimony that I read about.

That in a church, a man got up and told how God had saved him. He had been a burglar, and had spent so many years is prison. And when he sat down and got up, his friend who sat beside him - said in a friendly voice with tears, that he was before a grand jury for murder. And that he had been in prison, for 20 years. But God had saved him. But he said, the jury knew that I was guilty. But the drink was in me, and the judge knew it too. The drink was in me when I did it. And my youth saved me from hanging and God has saved me. When he sat down, another man said - I had been a drunkard for 20 years and the Lord saved me. When he sat down, another got up and said - I've been a sinner and God has saved me. Etc.

But following all of those testimonies - this other man said, listen, God has done wonders for you - but don't you forget it. That God has done more for this gypsy boy than for all of you put together. He saved me before I got there. Prevention is a better cure. And we need to put a fence at the top of the hill rather than a hospital at the bottom of it. Can a man be born when he is old. Yes, he may. But remember this - God can save young people and save children.

Some people talk about born again Christians - like there was some other way to become a Christian. There is no other way. We become Christians by super-natural power. Paul said, I have been changed. And this is a work of God. Now you have heard it expressed so many times. I don't know, you may have been guilty of saying

it yourself. People talk about (different) religions. And they think of them as being different (doors) going into Heaven. There are several different (stairways) that you can take. But I want to say to you - (this is all false). There is not a word of truth in it. There is only one door - and Jesus said, I am the door. There is only one way - and there is the new birth. And this is the thing that changes a man. And makes him whole.

V. 8 - How does it take place? V. 8 - We may not understand electricity, and we may not understand the wind. But Jesus said the wind blows and you hear the sound. You cannot tell when it is going to come and when it is going to go.

So it is, that everyone that is born of the Spirit - now here is the wind itself. It is a mystery. Here is the wind blowing. And humanly speaking, we cannot understand this. There are people who say, tell me how it works. Explain it. I (cannot see) it. You never can see it or will see it. Or (understand it). And don't expect too. There are those who say - if I can only see it. Through the process, I would believe it. But you'll never see through this process.

And Jesus told him about the new birth. He said, Nicodemus - listen to the wind. Listen to the wind that is blowing tonight. This wind which flattens out the fields. His wind that up-roots the trees. The night is full and filled with this wind.

You know, the Holy Spirit, is just like that - Jesus said. It has a ceaseless action and the Spirit moves over the church. And we cannot hear - and yet it is still

God at work. In his solemn and sovereign freedom.

No man can control the spirit - Jesus said we have nothing to do with it. But he says, we can see someone saved. We can see some life changed. We can see some good work being manifest. No single person here really diagnosed could tell us where it comes from. And you can't tell the destiny of the Spirit. No man can track it or know where the Spirit will lead him too. Where did the Spirit lead Nicodemus? Well, the Spirit led him to the judgement hall of Pilate. To beg the body of Jesus. Now, no person listening to me now, should say that my life is fixed, my life is situated because it does not yet appear what we should be. If you would give yourself to the control of the Spirit, open your heart - he will come in and manifest himself to you.

Now the President of Harvard would not agree with John Jasper. Who preached a sermon on the new birth. John Jasper said, when you say, "there is no such thing as the religion that I have preached, you ought to say - not as you know of. I had it and since I had it - you haven't got it. And I am a higher authority on that than you are.

Now this is more than a change - like one receives when he gets a diploma in education. This is a divine change. It is a complete change that God makes in a life. It is so much of a change that it caused Zacchaeus to be willing to give, to sell, and to return to all of those people that he had robbed from.

It is not really a long process - but it may happen in a moment. But you can be saved. You can experience it in the twinkling of an eye. You open your heart.

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I remember reading about a man plowing in the field. His wife had been praying for him to be saved for a long time. He got under conviction. It possessed him. He stopped the mules and fell on his knees right in the field. The Spirit burned its way into his heart. He was converted. He stopped work and headed for the house to tell his wife about the experience. As he arrived, his wife was standing on the porch and she said to him - I know what has happened. I have just been praying for you. You have just been saved. Yes, God's part is calling us. And the Spirit convicts us and cleanses us of all sin.

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Dr. John Hutton used to tell of a workman who was a drunk - and finally was converted. And some of those that worked with him tried to make a fool of him. And surely they said to him, you don't believe in miracles, do you. You don't believe in such a thing as being converted. And he says, I believe in it - just as surely as I believe that Jesus touched my life. Oh, surely you don't believe that Jesus worked a miracle and turned the water to wine. No, he says, I don't know what you believe. But I know what has happened to me. And Jesus, just as surely as he worked in the Holy Land, he came into my heart and life. And in my home, he has turned beer into furniture.

How can we make it any simpler or any plainer. That people can experience the new birth.

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Dr. Marshall Graig said one night he had a call. There was a dying girl in her late teens. And she had taken some poison. He went into the room and he said - what can I do for you. She said, what can you do for me. You are a preacher. Well, there is not much that you can do.

The Preacher said, no, really I can't do much. But Jesus can. And he took out his New Testament and he began to read in the Bible what it has to say about sin. What it has to say about the Saviour. And then she said, you know, I have had all of these dregs of life, I left my mother. And I have been living any awful life. And soon she came to surrender her heart to Christ. Just like Nicodemus. And in tears, she said, I will give my heart to Jesus. And her final words were - "isn't it wonderful that Jesus can save a sinner like me."

Have you ever experienced anything like that.

The final question is - how can I tell when I have been born again. And as Jesus explained, the wind blows where it will, how can I know. The Bible says very plainly - just what it means to be born again. Now you listen very carefully to me.

1 - First, I John 5:10 - He that is born of God hath the witness in himself. All who believe this, know in their hearts that it is true. If anyone doesn't believe this, he is actually calling God a liar. So, if you are walking in newness of life, and are trying to keep yourself unspotted from the world, you know you are a child of God. You feel differently about God. You think of him as your father. And you find it easy to believe this.

2 - Second, I John 5:1 - Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born in God. That he is God's son and your Saviour. I believe that, you say. But how do you believe it. Do you give just your mind to it. Do you believe it in your heart. If you really believe that thing - then it will be confessed in your mouth

and in your life.

3 — Third, I John 3:14 - We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. "If you are born of God, you will love each other.

What I am saying to you is - you will love Methodists and you'll love Episcopalians - and you'll love these other people and all of the rest of them. And you will not see a denomination as getting into a scrap over a lot of things. Or a congregation being torn apart by strife. Now that is the work of the Devil. It makes no difference what a man's social position may be really, but if he is a child of God, and has the Spirit of God in him, then it means that we will love other Christians. And it proves that we have been delivered from Hell. And we have been given eternal life in Heaven.

4 — Fourth, I John 5:4 - Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world. I'll tell you - that ought to cause some church members to wake up and to examine yourselves. Instead of overcoming the world - you are becoming overcome by the world. For every child of God - defeating sin and evil pleasures, by trusting Christ to help you. If we are born again having the Spirit of God in us, you would love the things that God loves. And of course, there are those that have that carnal nature and just as soon be out playing golf on Sunday morning, as going to the house of God and worshipping. They would rather go to a show and watch a lot of half-dressed girls. Than to go to a prayer meeting - where God and the church have a right for you to be expected. He that is born of God overcometh the world. The world will always be your Master until you give God the right place, in your life. And God's Spirit rules - and the world is not going to rule and you can be sure that you are a Christian. You have been born again. Verily, I say - you cannot see the Kingdom of God,

except ye be born.

5 - Fifth, I John 2:29. Everyone that doeth righteousness is born of God.

We know that God is always good and does only right. Then we can expect that all those who do right are his children. What is righteousness. Why, it is just this. Doing right in the sight of God. Now before you became a Christian, you did those things that pleased you. You never stopped to think about pleasing God. Now when you are a child of God, and you make a mistake - you want to confess it. You want to promise to do better. So it is not enough to believe a few things. I ask you, are you a Christian. Have you been converted. Have you been born again.

6 - Sixth, I John 3:9 - Whoever is born of God doth not commit sin--now, that does not mean that you will never commit sin. But what it says is this, the person that has been born into God's family does not make a practice of sinning. Because now God's life is in him. And so he can't keep on sinning. But this new life has been born into him, and controls him. He has been born again. Somehow you belong to God. If he is a Christian, you won't go on sinning.

If he goes out like Simon Peter, and sins - he is going ^{to} weep bitter tears and he is going to repent of that sin. There are a lot of people in the church today that make sin a practice of their lives. Sometimes it is a secret sin that nobody knows but themselves. But you can't deceive God. If you make a practice of doing wrong - you are a child of the Devil. As sure as you are born, and you will be in Hell - because he that is born of God, doth not commit sin. Now it is like this - a sheep. You let him fall in the mud and he will get out as quick as he can. And he won't go close to that spot again. But a hog will get in, and he will lie down

in that mud with satisfaction. You can drag him out and scrub him up - and you turn your back, and he'll run for that mud hole just as soon as you turn him loose. That is the difference in nature - and we ought to understand that. The hog likes the mud and the sheep doesn't. Now the Christian may make a mistake or go wrong - but he will not lie down in sin. And when you are born again, that old hog nature is past. The illustration is old - but I'll tell you, it is very good. Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin.

Every addition to the church ought to mean a subtraction from the world! To live like Christ - this is a great challenge. And this is a must. And I think the new birth is certainly something that needs your concern and is very, very important. And the reason that Nicodemus -