

3: The Necessity of the New Birth

John 3:1-8

1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

[1] 有一个法利赛人，名叫尼哥底母，是犹太人的官。

This man Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a man who has studied the Scriptures. He was also a ruler of the Jews. So he was a religious leader.

2 The same came to Jesus by night, [2] 这人夜里来见耶稣，

He came to Jesus by night, on his own. The religious leaders didn't like Jesus because the ordinary people were going after Him rather than them. In fact the religious leaders were instrumental in getting Jesus put to death later on. But Nicodemus went to see Him on his own. He didn't want any of the other leaders to know he was meeting Jesus, otherwise he would be in trouble with them. But also, maybe he couldn't sleep. He'd heard bad things said about Jesus in the council, but he didn't want to go against God. So he had to find out about Jesus for himself.

and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

说拉比，我们知道你是由神那来作师傅的；因为你所行的神迹，若没有神同在，无人能行。

Nicodemus understood that the miracles Jesus was performing showed that He came from God. And that's true. Nobody else could do these miracles, that's exactly what the miracles pointed to. But Before Nicodemus could even ask Jesus a question, Jesus said something very strange:

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

[3] 耶稣回答说：我实实在在地告诉你，人若不重生，就不能见神的国。

He told Nicodemus that he couldn't even see the kingdom of God unless he was "born again." What does that mean? Nicodemus was confused too:

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

[4] 尼哥底母说：人已经老了，如何能重生呢？岂能再进母腹生出来吗？

The only birth Nicodemus knew about was natural childbirth, and he knew that a man couldn't go through that again. He really wanted to understand what Jesus was saying, but from his own experience he just couldn't understand it at all. But Jesus explains further:

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

[5] 耶稣说：我实实在在的告诉你，人若不是从水和圣灵生的，就不能进神的国。

So, Jesus was not talking about natural childbirth, He was saying that there are two types of birth, one “of water,” which is natural childbirth which we’ve all been through, and the other, which is similar, but is “of the Spirit.” We have to experience both in order to see the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

[6] 从肉身生的就是肉身；从灵生的就是灵。

We have all been born of the flesh, we are all here in this world now, and we all experience what we experience here. But there is a whole new dimension that we just naturally cannot see. Only those who have also been born of the Spirit can see it, and that’s what Jesus meant when He said we must be born again.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

[7] 我说：你们必须重生，你不要以为希奇。

We shouldn’t be surprised at this, even though spiritual things are, to us, invisible.

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

[8] 风随着意思吹，你听见风的响声，却不晓得从那里来，往那里去；凡从圣灵生的，也是如此。

A person born of the Spirit is compared to the wind. We can’t see the wind, we can’t tell where it’s coming from or going to, but we can hear it and see it’s effects. Similarly spiritual things are invisible, but a person born of the Spirit can know for himself the Spirit’s effects.

We now have two questions to answer: Why must we be born again? And How can we be born again?

Firstly, Why do we need to have this spiritual aspect to our lives? Can’t we live perfectly well without it? The short answer is, no, we can’t.

We must first understand that we’re born with a sinful nature. We’re born living primarily for ourselves, living self-centred, selfish lives.

Romans 3:10-12

10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

[10] 就如经上所记：没有义人，连一个也没有。[11] 没有明白的；没有寻求神的；[12] 都是偏离正路，一同变为无用。没有行善的，连一个也没有。

Genesis 6:5

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

[5] 耶和華見人在地上罪惡很大，終日所思想的盡都是惡，

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

[9] 人心比萬物都詭詐，壞到極處，誰能識透呢？

Ecclesiastes 9:3

the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

並且世人的心充滿了惡；活着的時候心里狂妄，後來就歸死人那里去了。

Every religion on earth, including many forms of Christianity, teach that it is possible to atone for our sins by ourselves, all we need to do is make an effort. Maybe we need to do good works, or say certain prayers, or go through certain rituals, and we can be made clean. But that's not true. No matter how many good works we do, we can never do enough. That's the problem of the human condition. There is no hope at all, unless, as Jesus said, we are born again, completely changed and renewed in the heart.

3 Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

人若不重生，就不能見神的國。

And we can't do this ourselves, it is a gift of God. Salvation, being made right with God, is a free gift. It has to be because we can't do enough to please God ourselves.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

[8] 你們得救是本乎恩，也因着信；这并不是出於自己，乃是神所賜的；
[9] 也不是出於行為，免得有人自夸。

So how do we receive this free gift? We ask.

Matthew 7:7-8

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

[7] 你们祈求，就给你们；寻找，就寻见；叩门，就给你们开门。 [8] 因为凡祈求的，就得着；寻找的，就寻见；叩门的，就给他开门。

Luke 11:13

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

[13] 你们虽然不好，尚且知道拿好东西给儿女；何况天父，岂不更将圣灵给求他的人麽？

Men don't want free salvation, they don't want a free gift from God. They want to believe they can make it to heaven by themselves. So they get all the glory. But nobody can. To get to heaven is a free gift, given by God to all those who ask.