

## **You must be 'Born again'!**

My reading is taken from John 3 verses 1-8.

### **Jesus Teaches Nicodemus**

*"Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."*

*<sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again"*

*<sup>4</sup> "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"*

*<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup> You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'*

*<sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit"*

### **You must be born again!**

I thought I would put our study on Galatians on hold for another week as our subject this morning is a deadly serious one! - The destination of heaven and hell hangs in the balance. As Jesus says: *"no one will see the kingdom of God unless you are born again"*. Are you born again? Is the question I will be asking this morning?

And its absolutely foundational to our Christian life, it all starts here - you cannot live the Christian life, you cannot even get off the starting blocks, until you're 'born from above'.

**So WHY do we need to be born again? Well to put it bluntly because we are dead!** Here's a statement: every one of us (without exception) is born physically alive but spiritually dead.

To get some understanding of this we need to go back to our roots in the Garden of Eden. We know in the beginning man was created perfect, he had unspoilt fellowship with God - but then the fall came.

You may recall man's tragic demise through Adam and Eve into disobedience and sin, it tells us in Genesis 2:16-17

*"And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, **for when you eat from it you will certainly die.**"*

But he did eat! He disobeyed God and what God said came to pass "You will certainly die" and what God meant was he would die physically (which he did later on) **but also die spiritually** and he did so immediately.

So tragically the fellowship man had with God was broken there and then. And this sin, this broken relationship with God, has come all the way down the gene line from Adam to us.

And that is the case for each and every one of us born into our world - no exceptions - its part of your DNA and it's called a sinful nature.

So here's the thing, the amazing truth; when we become Christians, when we are 'born again' our spirit becomes alive again - the communication channel is open again with God.

**So what does it mean to be born again?** Well firstly, let's get rid of some misconceptions - **what being born again is not.**

**Firstly** it isn't a renovation job, patch up the old life, cover over the cracks then fill it in with some good works and add in some morality.

**It's not believing in certain truths** like believing Jesus was a good man - or I've always been a good person - doing charity works, and saying I've never done anybody any harm.

**It's not just the respectable thing to do**, to come to church and keep the Sunday Sabbath, or be on my best behaviour, to help my neighbour and give money to charity.

**It's not about how you have been brought up** - in a religious home and always gone to church; its not- doing certain things and not doing others. It's not your baptism either that gives you new birth.

**No it's a complete radical change.** I would call it a complete heart transplant 2 Corinthians 5:17;

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation.** The old has passed away; behold, the new has come"*

So if it's not that! - What indeed is it to be born again? - **Well firstly it's a gift** Ephesians 2:8-9

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast".*

**It is also something that is done to us. Not something we can do ourselves.**

Now, just as we had nothing to do with our natural birth. (If you think about it, you played no part!) Likewise we don't have anything to do with our spiritual birth.

In essence I believe it's a bit like the time we spend in the womb before birth. We know life really begins at conception but we spend 9 months being formed in your mother's tummy.

I think this forming time after conception in the natural sense, in the spiritual sense is where God is drawing us to himself - preparing the ground for us to accept Him - to be born again.

Now you may say to me don't we have a choice? Absolutely. We make a real choice to choose to repent of our sins and choose to follow God. But, scripture is also clear that God chooses us before we choose him.

The Bible doesn't try to reconcile these two truths, but instead presents them side by side.

Acts 16:14 is very helpful in answering this question. Speaking of Lydia, it says, "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." In other words, **God made her spiritually dead heart come alive** so that she could hear and respond to the gospel message.

Another helpful verse is John 6:65, where Jesus says, "This is why I told you that **no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.**"

I think my own testimony would be helpful in this instance;

I had gone through a traumatic time in my life, my father dying, then depression and illness.

However all that time, God was 'drawing me' to Himself, He had begun that work in my heart. Somebody gave me a Bible. I read the gospels for the first time and I believe it was there and then, reading the scriptures I was born again.

Jesus words became alive to me - scripture says this Romans 10:9-10

*"That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"*

I think it was then, reading the gospels 'I believed in my heart and confessed with my mouth Jesus was Lord'

However it wasn't until a number of months later - going along to a church where I heard those words 'there is one man here who has been searching for years this is the last link in his chain'

It was then, I realised **what had already happened to me!** I was 'born again' and that night I chose to follow Him.

We have to be aware of 'making decisions for Christ' i.e. that it is all about the choice we make, it's all up to you!

They did a survey and found that something like only 3-6% of people who came forward at evangelistic crusades, that had made decisions to follow Christ, were following God 12 months later.

**It has to be a genuine move of God in the heart beforehand by the Holy Spirit before any one is born again.**

**So what are the signs of this new birth?** - How do you know you are saved? Now I'm not saying you have to manifest them all, **but in every new birth there has to be signs of life.**

Here are 5 that I think are important and are good indicators;

**Firstly our language/ our conversations** listen to this fundamental truth from Jesus '*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*' (Luke 6:45, ESV)

Now if we have been given a new heart and that signifies been 'born again'? Then it follows that what comes out of our mouth should reflect what is in our heart - right?

I have to admit that when I hear some people speak. I hear everything other than spiritual things! Now I'm not saying we shouldn't talk about everyday ordinary things, like the weather, or England's performance in the World cup etc.

But the truth is; if we are Christians there should be an overflow from our heart and then through into our conversations and out of our mouth about spiritual things. These are the things that we should be interested in - the most important truths to us.

It should be something that wells up again and again, the major part of our conversations, what God is doing in our lives, What was said in the sermon, something we can't understand in the bible, etc, etc... If there isn't that desire coming from your heart flowing through into your mouth wanting to speak about God. I would suggest there is something wrong.

**Secondly we should be pursuing holiness not happiness**

The word of God says: Without holiness we will not see the Lord (Heb 12:4) What path are you on? The path of self seeking? And the preoccupation with yourself and pursuit of material things, things that do not last or have any eternal value,

Would you rather be at church, or praying with someone, or fellowshiping with other Christians than doing anything else?

If you are 'born again' you will want to pursue holiness, God will put that within you, of wanting to be more like Jesus, you will be aware of your lack of it! And crying out for more, you will be saying like John the Baptist, talking about Jesus "**He must increase I must decrease**" Your happiness will be secondary to your pursuit of holiness.

**Thirdly another sign; does your conscience lead you into sin again and again or does it rebuke you?**

1 John 5:18 *"We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin"*

That doesn't mean we don't fall into sin from time to time, but it's not your life's path, we don't continue to practise it, it's not what makes you happy, in fact it makes you miserable. And when you do sin, you long to confess it, repent of it, and draw closer to God again.

**Fourthly another sign of being 'born again' is: do you love the brethren?**

Scripture says: *"We know that we have passed from death to life, **because we love each other**"*. 1 John 3:14

**Now when I say love I don't mean like!** There's a big difference in the Christian life - you are not called to like people but to love them.

Here's what love is:

*"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs.*

*Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres"* (I Corinthians 13)

Have you noticed here, in this description of love – **its actions and qualities not emotions**, (that's not to say there are not emotions in love because there are) Now you may not necessarily get on with someone, you may find them difficult or even exasperating.

**But you can love them by bearing with them, by being patient, being kind, persevering, keeping no record of wrongs etc.**

And should we love the brethren more so than our own natural family? I think so! These are brothers in sisters in Christ, brought **together through the sacrificial blood of Christ - not ordinary human blood**. These are the people we will spend eternity with (changed somewhat hopefully!) Also we should love

and feel for those brothers and sisters we have never met -the persecuted Church.

**Fifthly and finally we should be doing good works – living out our faith in practical ways** - James says;

*"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.*

*<sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead".*

If we are sitting on our backsides waiting for things to happen when we have been given a commission to make disciples (Matthew 28:19) - what is our faith all about?

Church is not a social club where we all sit around claiming we are ok because 'were in' we are saved and the poor blighters out there are lost.

No we are told to 'make every effort to make our calling and election is sure'. (2 Peter 1: 10-11) 'To run the race marked out for us – 'to strive to enter the kingdom of God' (Luke 13:24)

These I say are some of the signs of new life - of been born again. I don't say these things to condemn anyone - but for us all to honestly evaluate ourselves,

Scripture says "test yourself and see you are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5) and there is nothing as misleading and deceiving like our own heart. (Jeremiah 17:9)

If you don't feel you are, cry out to God, seek Him with all your heart, don't give up until you find that witness in the Spirit that says I am a child of God.

Just to remind you of the story of John Wesley – who was one of the finest Christians that ever lived. He thought he was a believer, born again - doing all the right things. Until he was on his way back from America on board a ship in a fierce gale. He thought he was going to die, but then he looked on at some fellow travellers, some Moravian brethren from Germany, they were happy in the midst of the storm, singing and praising God. He realised in his own soul he was afraid to die.

After much soul searching and months later, he heard a simple message from the book of Romans. God melted his heart and he was born again. May God grant the same to us

Amen.

*Tony Troy*