

John 3:1-6

- 1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
- 2 The same came to Jesus by night, 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.
- 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.
- 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?
- 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.
- 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Nicodemus was a good, clean, moral man: a ruler of the Jews. But he was not happy, he was not satisfied, there was no peace in his heart. One day, when he heard that Jesus was nearby, Nicodemus slipped out under the cover of darkness to talk to Him.

Being an accomplished politician, Nicodemus began by complimenting Jesus. But Jesus brushed the compliment aside and bluntly declared, "You must be born again."

Nicodemus asked, "How can I get back inside my mother and be born again?"

Jesus said, "What I mean is that you have been born of the flesh, but now you need to have a spiritual birth. The wind blows and you hear it, but you don't know where it came from nor where it is going. Being born of the Spirit is like that: it's a mysterious change which comes from God."

Today, we are still asking the same questions that Nicodemus asked: What does it mean to be born again? How do we go about it? If we need to be born again in order to get into Heaven, these are the most important questions in the world!

What does it mean to be born again? First of all, being born again is a definite experience: it really happens - it is something we can look back on and remember.

Someone once asked Dwight L. Moody for a brief statement of his life. He wrote in return, "My name is Dwight L. Moody. I was born of the flesh in 1837, I was born of the Spirit in 1856. I

don't know when the flesh will die, but the spirit will never die."

My own testimony is similar. I was born of the flesh on September 29, 1945 at St. Anthony's Hospital in Terre Haute, Indiana. I was born of the Spirit on December 25, 1967 at Moody Church in Chicago, Illinois. I know my spiritual birth was real because I read the witness of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, and I feel and hear His witness in my soul.

What does it mean to be born again? Being born again is an instantaneous experience. It takes place in a single moment. You may have a long experience leading up to it, but the new birth itself is instantaneous. A baby grows in his mother's womb for nine months but birth occurs at the moment the baby comes out into the world. Labor may go on for several hours, but the birth itself happens at a particular instant. It may take a long time for you to make up your mind to receive Christ but, when you do, Christ saves you at that very instant.

What does it mean to be born again? Being born again is a spiritual experience. It is an inward thing, not outward. It is not the same thing as reforming. In reforming, you decide to drop your bad habits and adopt good ones. (Or at least you try for awhile - I have never met anyone who actually reformed himself successfully).

But in the new birth, you receive a new nature from God which makes you really want to give up your old sinful life. Reformation does not bring the new birth, but the new birth certainly brings reformation. Because when God gives you your new nature, He also gives you the power to overcome sin.

I used to smoke five packs of cigarettes a day and drink a gallon of vodka every week. I tried to quit several times because I knew it wasn't good for me. That's reformation. It failed. I failed. But then one day, God said to me, "Dave, it's time for you to stop smoking and drinking." And I said, "I've tried Lord, but I haven't been able to. If you want me to quit, I want to obey, but I can't seem to do so."

Then God brought to my mind the passage in Jude 24 and 25, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

So I said, "Okay Lord, you are able to keep me from falling. I'll leave it in your hands." And from that moment forward, I never wanted another cigarette or glass of vodka. The desire was gone! Once in a while, a little little twinge of temptation hits, but I just pray, "Lord, you are able to keep me from falling," and it goes away. That's the new nature: it's God's gift, and it works where my own attempts at reformation failed.

What does it mean to be born again? The new birth is a lasting experience. It lasts forever and ever. You were born of a human father. That means you will always be his child, no matter what happens. And, if you are born of God, you are God's child forever. You may backslide, you may become wayward, but you are always His child. If you are born again, you can't be unborn.

Think of how the ugly caterpillar becomes a lovely butterfly. First he is an ugly worm, crawling in the dust. Then one day that worm wraps himself in a cocoon. Later, on a warm day, that cocoon bursts open and a beautiful butterfly comes out. No longer is he a crawling worm: he is a multi-colored butterfly. He soars up towards the heavens and rests in the heart of the flowers. He may become wounded, he may fall to the ground, but no power on earth can ever turn him back into a worm.

From the day we are born in the flesh, we are like that worm. But then one day, we trust Christ Jesus and the Spirit of God lays hold of us and works a wonderous change in our soul. We become a child of God. We soar up to sit in heavenly places. We may slip and fall, but no power on earth can ever change us back to what we were before we were born again!

The new birth is NECESSARY!

Jesus said, "You MUST be born again." The word MUST simply jumps out of the text at us. There is no way to get to Heaven except through the new birth. We are not saved by our works, our zeal, our gifts, or our good lives. We must be born again to be saved.

We must be born again because of human depravity. We have all sinned, we are the natural children of wrath, the children of Satan himself from the day we are born. If we are ever to become the children of God instead, we must be born into His family.

Some people think that they can get to Heaven by being decent people and living a good, honest life. That's not true. That's a lie. It's a lie Satan tells us to trick us and cheat us out of Heaven and into Hell. Jesus said, "You MUST be born again."

Suppose you and I were to go down to Wrigley Field to see a Cubs game. The admission fee is \$6.00. You only have a penny. You won't get in. But I have five dollars and ninety-eight cents. And my own son is an usher at Wrigley Field - He works for the cubs. But guess what - I won't get in either! I may think I'm closer than you, but it doesn't matter - We both fall short of the \$6.00, and neither one of us is going to get in to see the game.

But suppose somebody comes along and gives us each a free ticket. Then both of us could get in. Well, that's what Jesus did. We call some men good and other men evil. But God says, "ALL have sinned and fall short of My Glory: nobody is good enough to get

into Heaven. But I love them and don't want them to go to Hell. So I'll send my Son Jesus to pay the price for them so I can let them in!"

The new birth is a mystery. Nicodemus didn't understand how it could work. I won't kid you: I don't understand it either. I don't think man is capable of fully understanding it. But that doesn't mean we can't take advantage of it. You don't always have to understand something to use it.

I don't fully understand how television works, but I'm not going to throw my television out the window just because I don't understand all its workings. I don't understand how a black seed buried in the ground can produce a beautiful rose or lily or carnation, but I still love flowers.

One day, Jesus opened the eyes of a blind man. The Pharisees found the man and asked him how it happened. "I don't know," replied the man, "I can't explain it. But this one thing I do know: I once was blind, but now I see!"

I don't fully understand how God's Spirit can transform my whole life, but I thank God that He does just that when I surrender to Him. I am willing to leave the mystery to Him.

The new birth is powerful. The transforming power of God's Spirit in human lives can be witnessed in those He has adopted into His family.

Back in 1933, a man by the name of Harry Spencer was arrested for murder here in Chicago. When he came to trial they said he was the vilest, most profane man ever to enter a courtroom. The newspapers called him "a man without a soul." He was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death.

But a good Christian woman became interested in his case and came to see him. She told him, "I came because I am the mother of three boys. I love them with all my heart. I feel that you have been denied a mother's love, since she died quite young. Is your heart hungry for something?"

In tears, he replied, "Yes ma'am, it is."

"You missed a mother's love," she said, "but I have come to tell you of a greater love." Then she told him the stories of the prodigal son and of the penitent thief on the cross. When she asked him to invite Jesus to come into his heart and cleanse him from all sin, he did.

Now many prisoners claim to have become christians after going to

prison. They say they're christians in the hope that it will get them out of the punishment they deserve. But Harry Spencer was truly transformed. He began to study the Bible and the nearer he came to the date set for his execution, the happier he came to be. "Life means nothing to me now," he said, "I just want to go see the Man who died for me."

The last night of his life, a group of Christian friends came and held a service outside of his cell. That night he slept like a baby. When the lady went back to see him she said, "You seem mighty happy." He answered, "Yes, because I am so near to God." At 9 o'clock he thanked the lady for what she had done for him, then went to his death with a smile on his face and a song on his lips.

You may not be the sinner that Harry Spencer was, but if you are without Christ, you need the new birth as much as he did. And, thank God, you can have it. Turn your back on your sin, then come to Christ in simple faith. In the twinkling of an eye, you will be born again and on the way to your eternal home in Heaven!

Hallelujah! Amen!

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