**Spiritual Birth Series**

**“The Necessity of Spiritual Birth”**

**Introduction:**

Let me begin this morning by sharing a news flash – you all have been born naturally. If your mother is here this morning she can testify to the fact that you were born naturally. But the question I have for you this morning is “have you been born spiritually?” Have you been born from above? Have you been born again?

Today I want you to examine your spiritual birth. You don’t go to heaven because you go to church – you go to heaven because you have been born again. The Bible tells us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. (2Cor.13.5) And I pray that the Holy Spirit will descend on this place today to give us the ability to know if we are in the faith – if we are born again.

Today we begin a new three-part series of sermons on “Spiritual Birth.” This morning I want us to consider the necessity of Spiritual Birth. In the weeks to come I want us to consider complications that can occur at Spiritual Birth and then the growth that should occur after Spiritual Birth.

This morning we will look at a familiar story in the gospel of John chapter 3 – the story of Jesus and Nicodemus. This is one of the most interesting conversions in the Bible. As I read the story I want you to consider three things: 1) An Inquiring Man, 2) An Important Message, and 3) An Inspiring Message.

Hear now the Word of God,

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;* ***2****this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”****3****Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* ***4****Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”****5****Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and 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.****7****Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’****8****The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

***16****“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.****17****For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*

**An Inquiring Man**

The inquiring man’s name was Nicodemus. Nicodemus was not just a Pharisee, which was the leading religious party in Israel during Jesus’ day, but Nicodemus was *a ruler of the Jews.* Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin (Jn.7.50-51), which was the final court of appeals for matters regarding Jewish law and religion.

So, this inquiring man, Nicodemus, was a man of prominence, wisdom, and religious prestige. Notice that he *came to Jesus* in the night*.* Many have suggested that the reason Nicodemus came to Jesus in the night was because he was afraid of repercussions from his fellow Pharisees. Regardless, it is clear Nicodemus had come to the conclusion that Jesus was a teacher sent by God because no one could the signs that Jesus was doing unless God was with Him. It seems that Nicodemus was inquiring what Jesus thought about his conclusion.

But Jesus wasn’t going to have anything to do with this possible endorsement from an earthly judge. Jesus wasn’t running a political campaign seeking for endorsements. Jesus was running in a popularity contest seeking to become Prom King. Jesus discerned that Nicodemus’ inquiry had deeper significance. Nicodemus wanted to know who Jesus was. Nicodemus wanted to know if Jesus was sent by God. And possibly even deeper than that, Nicodemus wanted to know if Jesus was God in the flesh. Nicodemus by his own knowledge had concluded that Jesus was a great teacher, even a miracle worker, but he didn’t really know who Jesus was.

Listen, you can come to the conclusion that Jesus was a great teacher, one of the world’s greatest philosophers, or a historical religious leader but you can’t really know Jesus until you are born again. That’s why *Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* Jesus is saying that unless one is born again you will never understand God’s rule and reign in your life and you will never really know who He is.

Nicodemus belonged to the Pharisee Religious Party (PRP). I know that Pharisees get a bad rap for being so legalistic but you need to understand that the PRP was the most theological conservative party in Jesus’s day. Being a member of the PRP meant that Nicodemus fasted twice a week, memorized Scripture, attended worship regularly, prayed publically, tithed, and believed in God. So, Jesus is saying to an inquiring man who fasted, memorized Scripture, attend church, prayed, tithed, and believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that *unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* You see, many will say on that day “Lord, Lord didn’t we do this and that” and Jesus will say to them I never knew you. (Mt.7.21-23)

If anyone could have snuck into the back door of heaven it was Nicodemus. He was doing all the right things. He believed all the right things. But he wasn’t born again and unless you are born again, born from above, spiritually born you cannot know the rule and reign of Christ in your life. *Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* And this word “see” means to perceive, to know, to experience. Jesus is telling this inquiring man unless you are born again you will never know who I am, you will never see the kingdom of God, and you will never enjoy eternal life.

Nicodemus’ story reminds me of the testimony of John Wesley – the founder of the Methodist movement in the United States. John Wesley was raised in an Anglican home in England and as a young man attended Oxford, proved to be a fine scholar, and was soon ordained into the Anglican ministry. At Oxford, he joined a Christian society whose members took vows to lead holy lives, take Communion once a week, pray daily, and visit prisons regularly. In addition, they spent three hours every afternoon studying the Bible and other devotional material.

Wesley eventually journeyed to the state of Georgia as a missionary and after a disappointing experience travel back to England. After arriving home Wesley concluded that he lacked saving faith. What? He was an ordained minister, a missionary, who vowed to live a holy life, took communion, prayed and studied the Bible daily! And he’s not a Christian?! He remained spiritually frustrated until the evening of May 24, 1738, when he had an experience that changed everything. Wesley describes his experience in his journal:

"In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

“I felt my heart strangely warmed,” Wesley wrote. This is the supernatural work of God in a person’s heart that brings them to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

“The opposite of sin is not virtue but faith.” (Kierkegaard)

Nicodemus, like John Wesley, like all of us, need spiritual birth – we need to be born again. We don’t need more religious activities. We don’t need more morality. We need to be born again. But Nicodemus is fixated on the natural so he asks Jesus, *“How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”* Remember Nicodemus believed that Jesus was a teacher sent by God. He had already affirmed the supernatural in Jesus but he was missing the fact that he needed the supernatural work of God in himself. So *Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

So out of kindness to Nicodemus, Jesus separates the two events – natural birth and spiritual birth saying*, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* When Jesus says, *born of water,* I believe He is referring to natural birth when at the beginning of or during labor a woman’s water breaks – born of water. When Jesus says, “*and the Spirit,”* He is referring to spiritual birth – born of the Spirit. What Jesus is saying is, as certain as you know you were born naturally so you must know that you have been born spiritually.

This is very important because *unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.* This is very important because *unless one is born of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* Jesus reiterates His point saying, “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh* (natural birth)*, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit* (spiritual birth).As certain as you know you were born naturally so you must know that you have been born spiritually.

This is an important message:

**An Important Message**

*Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”*

The whole issue of spiritual birth is not marginal in the Christian faith it’s central. Being born again is not a metaphor it is the supernatural work of God. Being born again is not a mystical emotion it is a supernatural experience. Being born again is how we become the children of God, *born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of God!* (Jn.1.13)

This phrase “born again” is unique to Jesus and to the Christian faith. I’m going to date myself. The phrase “born again” became popular in the United States in the late 1970’s when President Jimmy Carter identified his Christian faith as a “born again” Christian. During that same time, Chuck Colson, who had been convicted in the Watergate scandal, wrote a book describing his Christian conversation entitled, “Born Again.” The whole phrase became a way to identify one’s faith in Christ by saying, “I’m a born again Christian.”

But to say you are a “born again Christian” is like saying a single man is an “unmarried bachelor.” Get it? A single man and an unmarried bachelor is the same thing. Saying you are a “born again Christian” is like saying a triangle is a “3-sided triangle.” Get it? A triangle and a 3-side triangle are the same thing. My point is that you cannot be a Christian without being born again. A Christian is born again! Being born again and being a Christian is the same thing! By using the phrase “born again,” Jesus is not talking about adopting a philosophy, or embracing a morality, or identifying with a certain religious sect. Jesus is talking about a supernatural work of God in a person’s heart that brings them to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

*The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

Jesus is making the point that being born of the Spirit is the sovereign work of God’s grace through Christ. The Spirit of God blows where it wishes. You see the effects of it but you don’t know where it came from and you don’t know where it is going. But you do know that it has been there. My born again experience was direct and dramatic. I had grown up in the church, went to Sunday School, and Summer Camp but I was living in rebellion against God and man. My parents had done a great job of planting the seed of the Gospel in my life but nothing was taking root. Until one day in June of 1976 my father said to me, “Brian, the only answer for your life is Jesus Christ.” I had heard that my whole life growing up but that day it pierced my heart, I got on my knees, and surrendered my life to the Lord Jesus.

God, according to His great mercy had caused me to be born again. (IPt.1.3) When I sat down to talk with me father that day I had no intentions to become a Christian. Surrendering my life to Christ was the farthest thing from my mind. I was happy in my rebellion. I was pleased with my sinful behaviors. But God by His grace caused the wind of the Holy Spirit to blow into my heart and I confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. God transformed my heart. He renewed my mind. The old things passed away and behold all things became new. (2Cor.5.17) God had done a supernatural work in my heart causing me to be born again. So, I confessed with my mouth Jesus as Lord, I believed in my heart that God raised Him from the dead, and I was saved! (Rom.10.9) And that day my life changed.

Shackled by a heavy burden,
'Neath a load of guilt and shame.

Then the hand of Jesus touched me,
And now I am no longer the same.

He touched me, Oh He touched me,
And oh the joy that floods my soul!

Something happened and now I know,
He touched me and made me whole.

**An Important Message**

People ask me, “Do I need to know the date of my spiritual birth?” No, but you need to know when the Lord touched your life and drew you to Himself. There are a lot of people in the world that don’t know their actual birthday but they know the general time of their birth. I also believe that many people confuse having a spiritual encounter with Christ and being born again. I personally had many spiritual encounters with Christ growing up but it wasn’t until that day in June 1976 that I was born again. Let me try to explain this using natural birth as an example. There is difference between Conception – Pregnancy – and Birth. Let’s ask the experts on this Mother’s Day 2018. Is there a difference between Conception – Pregnancy – and Birth? Yes! Conception was when the seed was planted. Pregnancy was period of time as the child was developing (hell – miserable). Birth was the delivery. We celebrate our birthday not our conception day.

My point is that you need to know when the Lord delivered you from your sin and misery. When He enlightened your mind to the knowledge of Christ, renewed you will, and persuaded and enable you to embrace Jesus Christ, as your Lord and Savior. (WSC#31) You need to know when you were born again.

Well, how do I know? (Pin Illustration)

**An Inspiring Message**

***16****“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.****17****For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*

Jesus spoke these words to teach us about God.

1. God’s love: *For God so loved the world*
2. God’s Gift: *that He gave His only begotten Son*
3. God’s Will: *that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*
4. God’s Divine Desire: *that the world might be saved through Him.*

**Conclusion**

I began this sermon telling you that I wanted us to examine our spiritual birth. The Bible tells us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. (2Cor.13.5) And I pray that the Holy Spirit will descend on this place today to give us the ability to know if we are in the faith – if we are born again.

*For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God;*(IPt.4.17a)

*How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*(Heb.23a)

There is an episode in the book of Acts when the Apostle Paul is sharing the Gospel with King Agrippa and King Agrippa said to Paul, *“In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am . . . .”* (Acts 26.28-29)

**Call to Prayer**

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes* (Rom.1.16)