

Jesus said to a very religious man by the name of Nicodemus, "You must be born again." That phrase is found in John chapter 3, verses 3,5,7. In our previous message on the new birth we discussed the question, "Who must be born again?" and we saw that Jesus taught that this very important truth stands before every member of the human race. Nicodemus, of course, stood at the very top of the social, moral totem pole or ladder. Nicodemus was a man who came to Jesus by night. He represents one of the highest classes in Israel. He represented religious fervor, legal conduct, moral integrity, and all that you would ever hope to be and all that a mother might hope her son might be. It was to this refined gentleman that Jesus said, "You must be born again." As if to emphasize the truth that if a man like Nicodemus needed to be born again, certainly all others who are not as respectable and religious need to be born again. In the next chapter of John Jesus is found speaking, not to moral, refined, religious Pharisee, but instead, to a very vile woman, who by her own confession was a despised and polluted sinner. To this woman he offers the same salvation on the same terms. He had stated to the cultured Nicodemus, who represented the top of the moral ladder while the woman at the well in Chapter four represented the extreme opposite. But, you see, there is only one way of salvation to both. God's plan of salvation is not different from the most degraded, down-and-outer to the most refined, religious, up-and-outer. You see, before God, there is absolutely no difference. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Or as Romans 3:10 puts it, "There is none righteous, no not one." One must be saved by faith in the fact that Jesus Christ shed his blood upon Calvary for the purpose of taking care of man's sins, and through his resurrection he offers to all his very own life eternal. Faith and faith alone in that provision is the way one obtains eternal life and is born again.

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Today we'd like to answer another question--"What is the new birth?" Sometimes we can describe a thing better by defining what it is not. In that there are so many substitutes to be offered today for the new birth. So, first of all, I would like to declare what the new birth is not so that we might better understand what it really is. Regeneration is not living a good life. God has a right to expect that everyone of us should live a good life, but you see, the best life that was ever lived, except for the life of the Lord Jesus, simply was not good enough. To put it another way, actually the law of God, or the 10 Commandments, commands 100% perfection. Man, because he is born a sinner, is incapable of delivering the goods. He is born a sinner, thus he is born prone to fail. Jesus Christ, the god-man, was the only one who ever walked upon the face of the earth who never had to say, "Excuse me" or "I'm sorry." Jesus Christ never stubbed his toe. Jesus Christ never made a mistake. He was absolutely perfect.

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Yet, we as sinners, fail daily. We make mistakes daily. We make decisions that are wrong. We do and say things that are incorrect. These are merely proof of the fact that we are sinners. God is holy and he demands goodness and perfection. So no matter how good a man may seem to be as far as his own moral conduct is concerned as he looks at himself through his own eyeglasses, yet he fails to perform that absolute perfection that divine good, which God expects. In the light of the fact that all have sinned and come short, and we are born sinners, dead in trespasses and sins, actually separated from God, the need for the individual is a brand new life which is received through accepting Christ as Saviour. Observing ordinances cannot save a man. Circumcision cannot save a man, nor is this the way in which one obtains the new birth. Baptism

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(water baptism, that is), sprinkling an infant or adult, is not the way in which one is born again. Church membership, confirmation cannot take the place of regeneration. While the Bible does teach that water baptism for believers is an identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, it plays no part in obtaining salvation. It is merely a testimony of the fact that that believer has already experienced the new birth. No amount of water can wash away sins and instill new life. Furthermore, the new birth is not reformation. It is not turning over a new leaf. It is not giving up bad habits, nor is it an education. A man may know the Bible and even much of it by heart and still wind up in hell because he has never been born again. No doubt Nicodemus knew much of the Scriptures, for Jesus called him "Master" which meant he was a teacher in Israel. All these things Nicodemus had culture, education, religion, membership in the ecclesiastical assemblies of his day--yet he was never born again.

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The confusion among people in regards to the real meaning of the new birth is partly due to an unfortunate translation of terms in the third chapter, "You must be born again." You see, this is physically impossible. Nicodemus, of course, recognized that; therefore, he answered, "How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4). To this Jesus answered and said, "No, Nicodemus, you do not understand. A man cannot enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born again. Even if he could, that would not help, for you see, he must be born a second time, just as he was born the first time, but the second birth is a new birth. It is a rebirth, a birth which is from heaven, from above. You see, to go back to the mother's womb to repeat the natural birth would result in the same thing as the first birth. I would merely be born a sinner the second time. What you need is not a rebirth, actually, or a repetition of the natural birth, but a new birth which is from above and brand new." The word translated again in the Greek is anōthen. It means "from above." So it should really read, "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." By our first birth, we are born sinners.

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We are born from below. This birth is totally corrupt, incapable of any good or righteousness.

I am hopelessly lost in sin. Even God will not attempt to make it over again or to remodel or make it into something better. The new birth, then, is not a rebirth of the old man, but a new thing entirely given from God above. Our first birth was a natural birth; our second birth is a spiritual birth and is absolutely distinct and totally separate and contrary to the first birth. It has nothing in common with what we have by our first physical birth or by nature. As a result of receiving Christ by faith as our saviour, we're born anew and are actually new creatures in Christ as Paul puts it in 2 Cor. 5:17, "If any man be in Christ, he is a brand new creation." You see, when man fell, he fell all the way down to the bottom. He was not merely wounded, and a doctor cannot nurse him back to spiritual health again. This is the reason why Paul says in Romans 5:6, "While we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." That means the natural man does not have the strength to produce a quality of righteousness which is acceptable to God. That means he needs new life given to him, and thus, through the power of this new life he is able to reproduce that kind of life which is acceptable to God. There are two births mentioned here. The first is of our natural parents from which we inherit our sinful nature; the second, John says, is "born of the Spirit" or I John 5:1, "born of God." These two births are totally distinct and different from each the other. The natural birth is first; the spiritual birth, then, must follow. The natural birth, of course, is not enough, "for they that are in the flesh," the Bible says, "cannot please God." So, the question, "Why must we be born again?" finds a very simple solution. The answer is, "We are born wrong the first time. We are born of the flesh, and that which is born of the flesh is flesh." In I Peter 1:23 it says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed (which is true of our first birth) but of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever." You see, the genes are corruptible in our first birth. The second birth finds its origin in the incorruptible Word of God. When one place their faith in the unchanging Word of God and the promise of the Gospel of God in Christ, that then creates life within that individual, and he is born from above. Have you received that life which is offered to you in God's Word?

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