

John 3:1-15  
You must be born again!

**Prayer for illumination:** please join me in prayer...

**Sermon introduction:**

Not too long ago, the Barna group polled American Evangelical's on the subject of "being born again." Consider the results...

*"The likelihood of married adults getting divorced is identical among born again Christians and those who are not born again."*

*"A minority of born again adults (44%) and an even smaller proportion of born again teenagers (9%) are certain of the existence of absolute truth."*

*"Among born again Christians adults, only 8% tithe their income to their church; 16% give no donations to their church throughout the year."*

*"Among born again Christians- 10% believe that people are reincarnated after death, 29% claim it is possible to communicate with the dead, and 50% contend that a person can earn salvation based upon good works."*

*Finally, George Barna claims, "substantial numbers of Christians believe that activities such as abortion, homosexuality, sexual activity outside of marriage, cohabitation, drunkenness and viewing pornography are morally acceptable."*

This data indicates that many people who think they are born again, are not born again, at least according to John 3.

So, what does it mean to be born again? This brings us to a very famous conversation between Jesus and a religious leader named Nicodemus in John chapter 3.

How important is this subject? Jesus tells Nicodemus that anyone who is not born again will perish. This means that it is really, really, really important to understand what it means to be born again.

Four points this morning....

*The necessity of the new birth.*

*The cause of the new birth.*

*The nature of the new birth.*

*The mystery of the new birth.*

*FYI, I will use the terms the new birth, born again, regeneration, and the second birth interchangeably.*

**First, the necessity of the new birth!**

**Why is the new birth absolutely necessary? We can't enter the kingdom without it.**

**John 3:1-3 (ESV) — 1** 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 are a teacher come from God, for

no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” **3** Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

**John 3:5 (ESV)** — **5** Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus tells Nicodemus twice that we cannot see the kingdom of God unless we are born again. Twice!!! Which implies that he really wants us to understand the necessity of the new birth.

When Jesus talks about being born again, he is not talking about physical birth. He is talking about spiritual birth. Jesus is saying that we must be given spiritual birth or life, or we cannot see the kingdom of God. Seeing the kingdom of God means seeing King Jesus and submitting to his lordship, which is the same thing becoming a Christian. Said another way, regeneration is essential for salvation.

If we are not alive spiritually, we are dead spiritually.  
If we are dead spiritually, we can't see the kingdom.  
If we can't see the kingdom, we can't enter the kingdom.  
If we can't enter the kingdom, we can't be saved.

Summary—it is absolutely necessary for us to be born again before we can embrace the gospel!

Several texts of Scripture corroborate the necessity of the new birth!!!

**Ephesians 2:1–2 (ESV)** — **1** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—

**Colossians 2:13 (ESV)** — **13** And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

**2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)** — **4** In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

**Romans 3:10–12 (ESV)** — **10** as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; **11** no one understands; no one seeks for God. **12** All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

Because we were spiritually dead before conversion, we could not see the kingdom of God. In other words, we could not believe the gospel of King Jesus.

This is why the new birth, or being born again, or regeneration is so important. A spiritually dead person cannot see, hear, or believe anything.

### **Illustration:**

When I was in seminary many years ago, my wife and I took a road trip to Princeton New Jersey. I wanted to visit Princeton University and Seminary.

I also wanted to visit the famous Princeton Graveyard? Why? For over 150 years (early 1760s until the early 1900s) Princeton seminary was the best seminary in the world. As a result, they had a world class faculty. Most of the faculty is buried in Princeton's graveyard. I wanted to see the tomb stones of Charles Hodge, A.A.

Hodge, B.B. Warfield and others. These are the giants of Evangelical theology. This would be like a scientist visiting the tomb stone of Albert Einstein.

Most importantly I wanted to visit the grave of Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest philosopher and theologian. He died in 1758 in Princeton New Jersey.

When we arrived at the graveyard, I asked the attendant where the grave of Jonathan Edwards was located. He said, "Jonathan who???" I just about fell over.

When we finally found the tombstone of Edwards, I had a moment... Then I engaged Jonathan in conversation. I said... what was it like to lose your job, what was it like to minister among the native Americans, of all your sermons and books, which was your favorite????

Do you think I'm strange for talking to a dead guy in a graveyard??? Why? Dead people can't hear, see, or comprehend anything! Why? They are dead!!!

Asking an unregenerate person to believe the gospel is like...

Asking a totally deaf woman to respond to your speech.

Or asking a blind man to read you a book.

Or asking someone on the sidewalk to fly up to your eighth story window.

These things are all impossible.

### **Application:**

In a similar sense, it is impossible for a non-Christian to see the kingdom of God or believe the gospel unless, unless, unless they are born again.

Sure, they can comprehend the facts of the gospel, but they will not embrace king Jesus until they are born again.

Regeneration must precede (i.e., come before) conversion.

Let me ask you a question...

Is it more biblical to say...

I believed and then I was born again... or

I was born again and then I believe...

According to John 3, it is more biblical to say, "I was born again and then I believed."

According to Jesus, regeneration must come before belief.

**John 3:3 (ESV) — 3** Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

*OK, the new birth is necessary for faith. But what causes the new birth? This brings us to the second point.*

*First, the necessity of the new birth.*

## **Second, the cause of the new birth**

### **Who causes the new birth? God, the Holy Spirit!**

**John 3:4–7 (ESV)** — 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter 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 marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

Imagine hearing these words of Christ for the first time. You too would be confused. Nicodemus says, “I must be born again... How is this possible? Do you want me to climb back into my mother’s womb? A ridiculous notion. I’m an old man for crying out loud.”

Nicodemus is thinking about physical realities, but Jesus is talking about spiritual realities.

Jesus says, “No, no, no Nicodemus. I’m talking about Spiritual birth. I’m saying you must be born of water and the Spirit if you want to see the kingdom of God.”

*What does it mean to be born???*

The word born is used eight times in verses 3-7. Every time this word is used in chapter 3 it is in the passive voice. We must remember that when we were born, we were totally passive in the process. We contributed nothing to our birth. Our mothers did all the pushing. Thanks mom!!!

In a similar sense, when we are born again, we are totally passive in the process. We do nothing, we contribute nothing, because we are spiritually dead!

What does it mean to be born of *“water and the spirit?”*

This is not a reference to water baptism. This is a quote from...

**Ezekiel 36:25–26 (ESV)** — 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel connects cleansing water with the new birth.

He is describing the spiritual purification that sinners experience when the Holy Spirit regenerates them.

The point of John 3:4-7 is that the new birth is something that the Holy Spirit does to us. We are totally passive in physical birth, and we are totally passive in spiritual birth. The Holy Spirit alone causes the New Birth.

Theologians call this act of God a monergistic act, meaning that God alone acts.

### **Application:**

We don’t cause the new birth, God causes the new birth.

It does not depend on our persuasiveness.

It does not depend on our niceness.  
It does not depend on our skillful use of apologetic arguments.

All thought all these things are means that God often uses.

I don't know about you, but I find this very encouraging.

We can't cause regeneration. So, what should we do? Ignore lost people? Of course not! The most important thing we can do is pray for God to regenerate the hearts of our lost and dying friends.

We must proclaim the gospel faithfully, be as persuasive as possible, love extravagantly, and most importantly pray like crazy that God would perform the miracle of regeneration.

When God saves a sinner, it is not a slight course adjustment, or a minor change, or a reformation of a few behaviors, it is a resurrection miracle.

In addition, if God is the cause of the new birth, there is no room for boasting.

People don't become Christians because they have keen spiritual insight.  
They don't become Christians because they were born in Christian homes.  
They don't become Christians because they can master complex doctrines.

We sometimes think, "Joe and Suzy seem so nice, I bet they would be open to the gospel!!!" Being nice has nothing to do with it. We are all dead in sins until God regenerates. Even really nice unbelievers are spiritually dead before conversion.

People become Christians because God regenerates hearts...

Again, this means we have nothing to boast in...

God deserves all the glory, honor, and praise for saving sinners. Have you thanked him???

This doctrine led the great reformers of the sixteenth century to the rallying cry *Sola deo gloria* and *Sola deo gratia*.

*We have talked about the necessity and cause of the new birth. But what actually happens when one is born again? This brings us to the third point.*

*The necessity of the new birth.  
The cause of the new birth.*

**Third, the nature of the new birth!**

**What is the new birth? A secret work of God's spirit that leads to visible change!**

**John 3:8 (ESV) — 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

How many of you have ever seen wind? No one has ever seen wind, but we see the results of the wind.

**Illustration:**

Nov. 17, 2015, Spokane experienced its worst windstorm on record. It killed two people and left 200,000 people without power for days. The National Weather Service recorded wind gusts throughout the area as high as 77 miles an hour.

This windstorm caused millions and millions of dollars in damage, making it one of Spokane's most expansive natural disasters of all time.

Trees fell through Roofs.  
Trees fell through garages.  
Fences blew over.  
Trees fell on cars.

A few days after the storm, we walked through Whitworth's campus. We could not believe the devastation. Every we looked we saw downed pine trees, hundreds of them.

No one saw the wind, did they, but we all saw the effects of the wind, didn't we?

Jesus says that the new birth is like the wind.

### **Exposition:**

If someone is born again, the result of the being born again will be very evident in the person's life.

Why? When someone is born again, something amazing happens.

God rips out their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh...  
God writes his laws on our hearts.  
God fills us with the Holy Spirit.  
God unites us to Christ by faith.  
God breaks the power of sin in us.  
God changes our desires.

We become new creations in Christ Jesus! (2 Cor. 5:17)  
We become alive in Christ Jesus! (Eph. 2:1,5).

As a result, we slowly change over time. It is guaranteed!

**Wayne Grudem** writes,

"If there is genuine regeneration in a person's life... he or she *will* believe that Jesus is the Christ, and *will* refrain from a life pattern of continual sin, and *will* love his or her brother and sister, and *will* overcome the temptations of the world, and *will* be kept safe from ultimate harm by the evil one." (Grudem, 304)

Listen to how the Bible describes born again people.

**1Jo 2:29** If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

**1Jo 3:9** No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

**1Jn 5:4** For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.

**1Jn 5:18** We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

What is the point of these verses? Regeneration changes people. If you are a Christian, God is in the process of changing you!!!

**Illustration:** My story...

**Application:**

Parents, don't be naive!!! Don't settle for nice behavior.

If you are born again, you will change!

If following Christ has cost you nothing....

If you have not changed at all, since becoming a Christian, you should wonder if you are a Christian.

On the other hand, if you are changing, be encouraged, God is at work.

This raises the question, how does one become a Christian? This leads us to the last point.

*The necessity of the new birth.*

*The cause of the new birth.*

*The nature of the new birth.*

**Fourth, the mystery of the new birth!**

**John 3:9–15 (ESV)** — **9** Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” **10** Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? **11** Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Verse 15 says that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life.

What do we believe?

Verses 14-15 are a reference to a story from Numbers 15. In the book of Numbers, the Israelites would not stop grumbling and complaining. God sent poisonous snakes to discipline them. Many died, but all who were willing to look on a brass serpent held up by Moses were saved.

The point of the story is simple. All one had to do was look at the snake and they would be saved.

All we have to do is look on Jesus and we will be saved.

We don't have to read our Bibles...

We don't have to give away our money...

We don't have to serve on a ministry team...

We simply look to Jesus with the eyes of faith, and we will be saved.

If we have done this, it is because God has regenerated us.

**Application:**

Here is the mystery!

Everyone must decide to follow Jesus.

We will all be held accountable for how we did or did not respond to the crucified and now reigning resurrected king.

Yet, we can't respond to Jesus unless we are born again.

But we must respond to Jesus.

How does this work? It is a mystery.

God's sovereignty and human responsibility are both clearly taught in Scripture.

Here is the point, we must believe. And when we do, we must praise God for giving us the ability to believe.

He receives all the glory!!!

We have looked at four aspects of the new birth.

*The necessity of the new birth.*

*The cause of the new birth.*

*The nature of the new birth.*

*The mystery of the new birth.*

**Conclusion:**

Let me leave you with one crucial question.

Are you born again?

I did not ask if you prayed the sinner's prayer, got baptized, went to Christian school, live a moral life, or walked down the aisle at church.

None of those things ultimately matter. All that matters is the new birth.

If you have been born again, you will cling to Christ by faith. And Christ will change you.

If you are not a Christian, there is hope. Christ is ready to receive you with open arms. But you must decide today, to turn away from your sins and trust him.

Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord, will be saved.

Lets pray...