

Encounters with Jesus

Week 2: You Must Be Born Again—from Above

John 3:1-18

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- January 21, 2024

Well, good morning, Grace. Wow, that's a fun song, huh? I'd like to sing that again.

We're starting a new year and we'll start a new series. We're looking at how to have our lives changed, and we're going to learn how to change our lives by looking at the various encounters that people have with Jesus. They have these events with Him and He serves as a fork in the road for their future. They are changed one way or the other.

Last week we wanted to highlight the importance of our lives and how to make them count for the Lord by using an illustration where we gave out these. *[Holds up a tape measure.]* We're giving them out again this week—a little measuring tape. And we're supposed to mark off with how many years we have to live in our lives. We cut off the years that we've already lived. For me, that's after sixty. And then, however many years we have left after our life expectancy, when you do that math, you end up (at least for me) with a surprisingly short piece of tape, maybe ten years. That's all I have. What you have left is all you have left.

And the point of that exercise is to help you visualize what you're going to do with what's left. And the years get shorter as you get older. Seize those days. Make them count for the glory of God. If there's ever a time to change, maybe now is that time.

So, we're going to look at people who had encounters with Jesus and how their lives were changed. If you want, you can turn to John 3 today. We're going to look at the first encounter we will study. And maybe this one has the most single comprehensive conversation in defining what it is to have eternal life. What is eternal life and how do you have it? We're going to find ourselves looking at a passage that is maybe the most famous passage in the New Testament and the most often memorized.

Introduction to the Characters

There are two points to the conversation—big points. And one is “What is eternal life?” and one is “What do I do to have eternal life?” And before we get into the conversation itself, let’s introduce the characters.

First is Jesus, the Christ. And John introduces Jesus in his gospel literally in the first sentence, John 1:1. It says, “In the beginning was the Word”—that’s Jesus. **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** Jesus was God who became flesh so that we might be able to see the glory of God in fullness, both of grace and truth.

Now what you need to know about Jesus, particularly in the writings of John, and especially in this conversation, is—here’s how I put it—that Jesus is bilingual. He speaks at least two languages. And His mother tongue, His home of origin, is heaven. He speaks heaven-ese, spiritual-ese. That’s what He thinks in and dreams in and values first and foremost, this spiritual world of heaven and eternity. He’s bilingual, so He speaks flesh, He speaks earth; but it’s secondary.

So, spirit and soul is a primary way of looking at all of life. And then the physical, because the physical is so temporal. That’s Jesus.

The second character in the storyline is a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a religious leader in a group that is called the Pharisees. He’s high-ranking. And if you can imagine him being a priest, but not a common priest; he’s not even a bishop. He would be like a cardinal. And because of his place in office, no doubt he would be very well respected and popular. He would have a considerable amount of power; not just political power, but even a sense of power over people’s well-being—what he says.

And then more than likely, almost certainly, he was a man of great wealth. It came with that position. So, that’s the other character. You kind of need to know this about the Pharisees. First of all, they’re not all bad. Some of us that read the New Testament think it makes it look like they’re all that way. But many of them are threatened by Jesus and often attack Jesus because they are threatened that He could take away their popularity and their power and their wealth.

Nicodemus is not in that category of Pharisees. He's a truth-seeker. It appears that he's looking to follow truth, wherever it leads, no matter the cost. So, he's having a conversation here with Jesus. And it's about what eternal life is and how he can have that.

What Is Eternal Life?

John 3:2

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."

Here goes. John 3:1 says, **"And now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus who was a member of the ruling council."** And here's what he says. **"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 that You are doing if God were not with him.'"**

Clearly Nicodemus has been watching the ministry of Jesus. He is enthralled by His teaching, but realizes that the miracles that are taking place to validate His teaching have to be from God himself.

John 3:3-4

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless that are born again."

⁴ "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!"

Jesus jumps into the conversation right away. **"Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you ...'"** Some of your Bibles will say, **" 'Truly, truly, I tell you ...'"** Some of you who have older translations, it will say, **" 'Verily, verily ...'"** All of those double sayings ... there's another way of saying it. Here's how I would say it: *Now listen to me.* That's what all that "truly, truly" means. *Now listen to me.* **" 'No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'**

‘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!’”

Here’s the key to the conversation. It says right here, **“No one can see the kingdom of God unless they’re born again.”** The key to all of this and the reason there will be somewhat of a misunderstanding is because of the word “again.” “Again” in Greek is the word *anōthen*. And *anōthen* is used by John multiple times throughout the gospel and can be translated two different ways. It can be translated as “again,” or it can be translated as “from above.” Every time John uses the word *anōthen* it’s translated “from above” except here. I don’t know why. Some of it has to do with the fact that Jesus is kind of having some fun here with Nicodemus. But the point of this is that Jesus’s primary language is spiritual, and He’s having a spiritual conversation, and Nicodemus keeps thinking he’s having a physical conversation. So, Jesus is saying “from above” and Nicodemus is hearing “again.”

So, what Jesus said is this: “Now listen to me. No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born from above.”

And Nicodemus heard: “Now listen to me. No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

Jesus says, “You must be born from above.”

“I have to be born again? I don’t see how that’s going to work.”

“What? I said ‘from above,’ from heaven. You’ve got to have a spiritual birth.

“I still don’t understand how you think I’m going to be born twice.”

That’s what is going on here. Jesus is saying, “You can’t get to heaven unless you’re born from heaven.”

And Nicodemus is missing it. A physical heart can’t make it unless it’s absolutely—it can’t be reformed; it has to be transformed. You have to have a spiritual heart. That’s what Jesus is saying.

Two Illustrations to Demonstrate Physical Birth and Spiritual Birth

And Nicodemus can’t stop thinking physical, physical, physical, and so, Jesus is going to jump and say, *Okay, let me give you two illustrations to help you see the difference between a spiritual rebirth and a physical rebirth.*

John 3:5-7

Jesus answered, “Now listen to me, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born from above.’”

Two pictures here. The first one is that He’s going to say, *Look, there are different kinds of birth we’re talking about here.* So, in the next few sentences, **“Jesus answered, ‘Now listen to me. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they’re born of water’”—physical—“ ‘and spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at me saying, ‘You must be born from above.’””** It’s just that simple. Physical birth—physical; spiritual birth—spiritual birth. There it is.

John 3:8

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.

And now He’s going to say, *Look, it’s how the Spirit works. The Spirit is like the wind.* Spirit and wind are the same word. So now, His second illustration is how the Spirit works. So, verse 8 says, **“And the wind (Spirit) blows wherever it pleases. You can 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.”** *I’m talking about two different kinds of births here. Not again—from above.*

And Jesus is now going to confront Nicodemus by saying, *You’re a cardinal. You’re a leader of the teachers in Israel and Jerusalem. I thought you spoke spiritual-ese. I thought you knew heaven-speak.*

Nicodemus says, *Yeah, well ... where’s the bathroom?* Not a whole lot of language here, apparently.

John 3:9-11

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Now listen to me, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.”

Verse 9 says, **“How can this be?”** Nicodemus is still confused.

“Aren’t you a teacher? Aren’t you Israel’s teacher?” Jesus said. “And do you not understand these things? Now listen to me, you speak from what you know, and you testify from what you’ve seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.”

Why is Nicodemus so stuck in the physical and unable to break through and see a spiritual conversation is taking place here? I think it’s because of what’s true then, as it is now. You can know a lot of the Bible. You can be a Bible scholar. You can know all sorts of Bible truths but not have biblical worldview.

Again, as I said before, Jesus dreams in spiritual, He thinks in spiritual, He sees all of life that way. And He’s going to be coming into these conversations with that priority in mind. You can know these words but not know what they mean. And so, Nicodemus has a physical worldview. He doesn’t see the values of heaven; he just knows of them. And he eventually will think about spiritual things.

It’s like ... let’s just pretend that my wife Melinda has a great love for chocolate, like a chocoholic person. And she has decided in this year of 2024 to give up chocolate until her birthday in August.

So, we’re having a conversation later on, and I say something like, “Boy, I just love spending time with you. You’re so sweet.”

“You’re saying I’m chocolate.”

“What? No, I said that you have a soothing personality that brings calm to conversations.”

“Soothing—you mean chocolate?”

“Why do you keep bringing up chocolate?”

And then she says, “You’re the one who keeps talking about chocolate.”

And I say, “I’m talking about your soul.”

“Chocolate?”

That’s what he’s doing. He can’t get it off his mind because he’s not rising above and seeing a spiritual world all around him, so he’s missing this conversation.

Now Jesus is going to interject and say, *Do you know who I am? Do you know where I’m from? Don’t you know my mother tongue and the way I see all of life? I dream in the spirit.*

John 3:12-13

I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.

And so, he says here in verse 12, **“I have spoken to you about earthly things and you don’t even believe. How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—that is, the Son of Man.”**

Jesus is saying, *I am the beginning. In the beginning, I was in the beginning. I was with God, I am God. I am the God who has taken on flesh so that you might behold His glory in its fullness of truth and grace. I’ve been to heaven. I know how to speak about eternity. This is eternal life: you must be born from above.*

That’s a declaration of what eternal life is.

Two Observations

Let me make two observations before we move on. Clear, profound, and undeniable truth about Jesus’ statement: one is that you must be born from above. You must be born again, you must be born from above. And the second one is to look at the nature of this new birth.

The first thing let’s draw attention to is that Jesus said that everyone must be born again. He says that unless someone is born again, they will not see the kingdom of God. He uses the phrase “no one” and “unless” repetitiously. The point is this. In our culture today, we’ll say things like “Oh, he’s a born-again Christian.” Or, “Are you a born-again Christian?” as though it’s a kind of Christian. According to Jesus, there’s no other kind of Christian. He said, “Absolutely, there is only one way. And it’s to be born again from above.”

So, it's repetitious. It's redundant to say "born again" and "Christian." It's like saying, *Well, I'm a round circle. I know some of these people are circles that aren't round, but I'm a round circle.* If you're a Christian and you say you're not born again, you're not a Christian. Because unless you're born from above, you will not see the kingdom of God. Unless there is air, there won't be fire. It's a necessary requirement. It's a qualification.

And so, Jesus is saying this: "Verily, verily"—"Truly, truly"—*Now listen to me. I have descended from heaven. I know what I speak of. I'm going to say it in verse 3, I'll say it in verse 5, I'll say it in a different way in verse 7 just in case you missed it. But you must, have to be, born again from above. You have to have a spiritual birth to be able to have a spiritual experience. You have to be spiritually born to be part of the kingdom of God. I know I'm the King.*

This is what Jesus is saying. *You have to have a spiritual birth to have eternal life. I should know; I'm the King. If you want to get into the kingdom, ask the King.* That's what He's saying.

It's not for some people—you know, those guys who had a hard life and maybe did a little time in the pen or have some major issues with anger and addiction to lust or something. *Oh, that's a born-again thing.* No. Unless ... everyone—everyone must be born again to see the kingdom of God.

George Whitefield was a pretty famous Methodist evangelist. And he would do a tour and preach, and he had the propensity to teach almost exclusively on this one passage. And so, one of his friends said, "How come you've preached so often on 'You must be born again?'"

And he said, "Oh, that's simple. Because you must be born again."

I mean, it's true. It's the only way. So, the first thing you see in Jesus' teaching here on eternal salvation is that it is the only way and it is absolute.

The second thing let's notice is that it's a different kind of birth. It's not a difference in degree; it's a difference in kind. It's a completely different way of doing things. In other words, it's not a reformation of a soul that gets to a place of spiritual well-being with God. It is a do-over. It's a transformation.

I mean, consider the audience. Please, consider the audience Jesus is speaking to. Nicodemus was, I'm certain, a very righteous man who had a wonderful reputation. You would love to go into business with him. You would let him babysit your children for a long period of time. I'm sure he was quite generous and caring for his fellow man—all those things.

And Jesus comes to this man and says, *Wow. None of that is going to have any consequence in an eternal life. You'll never see the kingdom of God with that model. You have to have a different kind of birth. You don't need to be reformed. You don't need to get better. You need to be transformed. You need to be born again from above.*

I love what Tim Keller uses to describe this in an illustration when he's looking at this passage. He said this: if you had a peach orchard and then suddenly you wanted to maybe go in the apple business, how could you get apples from most peach trees? Well, if someone comes by and says "Hey, I've got a way. If we prune them way back, maybe change some of the fertilizer, then we'll get some apples out of those peach trees."

Hire a new assistant or advisor here. You can't. That's not how this works. If you want to grow apples, you're going to have to dig up all of those peach trees and start over with a different kind of root—apple tree roots. It's a different kind; it's a different kind of birth.

So, when Tim Keller is telling this as an example, he just turns it on the audience and says, "This is how many of us have a spiritual life. Maybe our whole lives we are finding places where we want to change, where we want to grow closer to God, where we want to become a better person. And so, what do we do? We find ourselves saying, 'Well, I'll just start doing better things. I'll start being more of a giver, I'll go to church, I'll be more consistent with my attendance, I'll be praying more and reading my Bible more.' And it's this life story of just in and out of church, in and out of spiritual awareness. And the point is that you're just pruning and changing fertilizer. That's not what causes this new birth. Because this new birth is a spiritual thing, and the Spirit goes wherever He wants. It's hard to know what He's going to do next. Church-hopping, church experiences don't make you born anew, again, from above."

Jesus says that it's going to have to be a spiritual thing. The Holy Spirit himself is going to be a part of this new heart. So, you can't get to the kingdom of heaven without having a kingdom heart. You can't get to heaven without having a kingdom heart. There's no cure for what we have from our own. We have to start all over, and it starts with God. That's what He says. He's the King; He knows how to qualify for the kingdom. **"You must be born again from above"**—His words, not mine.

What Do I Do To Receive Eternal Life?

The second point that he brings up is how he can he have, get, or receive this eternal life. And I'm grateful for what He does here because He sees the state that Nicodemus is in, trapped in thinking physically in a spiritual conversation. So, Jesus says, *Look, here's what we'll do. I'll use a physical illustration that you know from history to explain a spiritual truth.* So, He's going to use a physical story to help Nicodemus understand how to obtain eternal life.

John 3:14-15

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.

And this is what He says in verses 14 and 15: **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.”**

Jesus is referring to a historical event in the life of the Jews that, as a Jewish scholar, Nicodemus knows. He says, *Remember the time Moses lifted up that serpent in Numbers 21? Right—that's salvation.* This is a vivid, graphic picture of what it means to grasp eternal life.

Here's the story. We don't know that story—he does. In Numbers 21—this is the exodus, so Israel was in bondage to Egypt for a long time in the context of slavery, certainly towards the end when they were beaten and worked to death. And then they cry out to God, and God leads them out. And on their way to the promised land they're at this midpoint where they're roaming in the desert for years. And they became mutinous, angry. They're hating Moses and mostly, they're hating God. They're hating God from bringing them away from slavery into a future freedom. And so, they break out in rage towards Moses and God.

So, God sends a plague to them. And the plague is in the form of these snakes that have venom, poison. So, these snakes are all around them biting men and women. And as they are bitten, they're dying. And the point—I mean, why would God do that? He's showing them the poison in their souls is far worse than the poison in their bodies. The poison in their souls is going to lead to eternal death just as the poison in their bodies is going to lead to a temporal death.

So, He allows this to take place so that they see the depth of their sin. That poison in their soul is when we rebel against God, whether it's passive or active, whether we're ignoring Him or shaking our fist at Him. That poison will destroy our very spirits.

And so, the people cry out for a cure. And the only cure that's available is one God gives Moses. He tells Moses, "Forge a serpent out of bronze. Put it on a post and put it high and lift it up so that everyone can see it. And anyone and everyone who looks upon that serpent will be cured." And they were. And that's why it's a perfect, vivid, physical example of what needs to take place in order for us to have a spiritual experience where we can be born from above-- spiritual salvation in a physical form.

Let's look. What Jesus is saying here is, *There will be a day when I'm that serpent, high and lifted up. And those who look upon me, who believe in me and what I'm doing, will be saved and have eternal life. They'll have spiritual, eternal life.*

Three Parallels

Look at the parallels. There are three that I want to bring up.

One is the absolute need, the type of need. In Israel's context, they are desperate unto death. There is no hope anywhere outside of an intervention from God. And it's not like they just need a little something to be helped; they're going to die.

In our context, in the spiritual context that He's making here, there is poison in our soul. There's no hope for us. It's not a little problem, this, that, or the other thing; the problem with us is that the poison in our soul is a gravitational pull that brings us back to say, *What about me? It's always about me.* And we can't stop that from happening. And we can't fix it.

So, that's the type of need that's taking place. The second thing is the type of cure. In the Old Testament story, it's interesting: the very thing that's killing them—these serpents—is the very thing that will save them. And God does that so we can understand the spiritual by seeing it in the physical, because we're all spiritually-learning impaired. So, He has them forge a serpent and has them look at that serpent. The very thing killing them is going to be the very thing that is going to cure them physically.

And in our situation, in the spiritual world with this poison within us, when Jesus is high and lifted up and we look at Him, we're looking at our poison in His soul. He takes on our rebellion and mutinous attitude toward God, passive or active. And He says, I'll do that. You're

supposed to be up here dying; I'll die for you. It's why Paul says in his epistle, "**He who had no sin became sin on our behalf, that through Him we might have the righteousness of God.**" He is our sin. The very thing killing us is what's healing us.

It's the need, it's the type of cure, and then maybe most importantly, is look what they have to do to be physically healed, to have physical salvation. Look at what they do. Because this is where the physical and spiritual are overlapping. And we need to make sure we understand clearly what's happening. What did they do? They just looked up at that serpent and they were cured—they were healed. And do you see the connection between looking at the serpent and being healed? Do you see how it works? There's no connection there. If you see a connection, you're missing it. There's no connection. If there were a connection, if there were a literal connection between looking at that serpent and being healed, how would that apply to us? This would be awesome, right?

You'd go see your oncologist:

Sorry, Mrs. Wilson. Really bad news. You have an inoperable brain cancer.

Wow. Is there anything you can do?

As a matter of fact, there is. We've got a sample of that brain cancer, and we put it on one of these little tongue stickies, and I'm going to put it up here. You look at it and you'll be healed.

If there's a cause and effect of looking at it and being healed, we'd still be doing it. Maybe that's why it's the logo for the AMA.

What's happening here is, for them to be healed, they had to have faith in the words of God through the mouth of Moses. And that's how salvation always works. It's having faith and trust in the words of God, in the promises of God. If you believe in those promises, that's how faith happens. And as the promises get more detailed, you believe in those details.

So, what did they do? They just looked above and saw that image high and lifted up, and they believed, and they were healed. That's what we do. We look up at the high and lifted up Jesus Christ being crucified for our sins, and we have eternal life. That's how we're born from above. He does everything. We just look and believe.

How does that happen? Look what it says in the passage. It just says, "**The Son of Man [Jesus] will be lifted up, and everyone who believes will have eternal life in Him.**" Just look.

Gaze. Believe in the promises that are attached to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He becomes sin so that we won't have to pay for that venom.

Look at the details. Look—that's all you do. It's faith alone. There are no works. In the Old Testament story, the story doesn't go like this: *Moses, have them crawl forward and touch the staff and they'll be healed. And only the healthy will make it there.*

No, all you had to do is just look. It's faith alone. There are no works attached to this. Your faith is in an object, and that is the gift of grace alone, the gift of Jesus coming and taking our place. And it's in a person. It's in Jesus alone. He's the only one doing anything for this cure.

So, in this conversation it is our faith alone in the gift of Jesus alone, and that's how we have a new birth. That's how we have an experience of being born from above. That's how we see the kingdom of God. We look upon His king and see He has done on our behalf. It's the only key that fits this lock, just like it was the only key that fit the lock that unleashed the cure for the people of Israel from that venom. You see the kingdom of God by seeing the King. And then your spirit is born again.

What does it mean to have eternal life? You must be born again from above. How do you have eternal life? You must believe completely. It's all Him, in Jesus alone. That's how.

John 3:16-18

Because God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ Because God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

There's a pause here in the passage. Wow. And why in the world would God send His Son to be that sacrifice, crucified for our venom? Why would He do that? So, John swoops in and becomes the narrator and says, *I want you to know that heart of Jehovah. I want you to know what motivated Him to send His only Son.* (And the first word we say, "for," is really "because." It's the same word in Greek.) Here's the heart of God. Why would He do this? **"Because God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not**

perish but have eternal life.” Why? “Because God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”

Let me say it another way: **“Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, and whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”** He did it for love. He provided a cure that we could never do because He saw us and wrote Himself into the story, so that we could, if we chose, believe to live with Him for eternity.

How Nicodemus’ Story Ends

There’s an epilogue to this story. And really, it’s about encounters with Jesus Christ, the power of a new heart, a power of being born from above. This is the story of Nicodemus, part two. We don’t read much about Nicodemus throughout the gospels again until the very end. And this is at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jesus has already died. Now at this point in the storyline, Jesus’ followers have left Him. They’ve run for their own safety. There are very few disciples left near the cross. But most people are afraid, because if they crucify Jesus, they will do the same to the rest. If He couldn’t stop it, then the other certainly can’t.

And then, at the foot of that cross is Nicodemus. And Nicodemus negotiates, using his political power. He negotiates with the Romans for him and another man of wealth to bury Jesus. They take Him off the cross and they provide for Him a burial suitable for a king. And he does this at great risk and expense. He does this at great risk of his popularity, of his power, and his wealth. Because now, at the lowest point in the Jesus story—He hasn’t been raised from the dead yet—he’s saying, *I’m with Jesus* in the presence of a bunch of people he’s associated with who put Jesus on the cross. He’s going to lose a lot of popularity. But what has happened—this is the nature of a new soul, a born-again spirit—is that he sees real popularity by being popular with the King, not anyone else. He’s exited the cave, the shadowlands. He’s entered the eternal kingdom of God and he sees life differently. This is what he dreams in now. This is what he imagines. This is his number one language now. And now he sees the power of the politics and rank is nothing compared to the power of being part of the kingdom and knowing and seeing the King. And wealth—I would imagine he would spend his wealth from this point forward on doing

anything and everything the King told him to do, because he has a new life. He's going to give his money for the gospel's sake.

That's what a life transformed looks like. That's what it looks like when you get a new heart—not reformed your old heart, but completely changed your heart because of a spiritual birth from above.

Application

Clearly the passage is coming right at us, isn't it? What about you? What about us? Every real Christian denomination says this: you must be born from above. They might not hold it to that today. But that's how it all started. Every one of these Christian denominations started this way. Here's why. Because Jesus said that. So, if He requires it, the question is, Have you experienced it? Can you think of a time in your life when you said, "I'm going to transfer my hope and my trust from some kind of earning myself into the kingdom of God to abandoning that completely and utterly and saying, *I will only have faith in staring and gazing and enjoying the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ for the payment of my poison.*" Maybe today.

There are two ways to enjoy the kingdom of God. One is to become a child of the King. And the other is to continue to grow in that, becoming like Christ in all of that. Sometimes I feel like we aren't able to grow after becoming a follower of Christ because we're like spoiled kids, honestly. We get this amazing gift, this eternal, everlasting, infinitely valuable gift, and we think, *Aaaa ...so?* So, growing in Christ is going back. It's the same answer. It's looking and gazing and desiring and appreciating that cross, high and lifted up.

So, the two applications here are: Have you made a decision? Not from your background, where you just kept going to church. *Oh, I was always ... whatever.* But because of what He's done and you're putting your hope in that.

And then, are you living that way? Is your primary language spiritual, then physical? Is it eternity, and then here? Live like a child of the King.

It's interesting—Charles Spurgeon, one of the most famous Baptist English-speaking preachers, had a born-again experience that was almost just like this. He was a righteous man desperately trying to be righteous, confessing daily, giving money generously, serving his fellow man, and just knew he was inadequate. He never had confidence in where he was in his relationship with God.

He goes and see an evangelist as a young man, and the preaching was on Isaiah 45. And Isaiah 45 says, **“Look to me and be saved ... for I am God, the only god there is.”** And he hearkened back to John 3. **“Look up at me and you’ll be saved.”**

And from that point on, he wasn’t doing those things so that God would love him; he started doing those things because God has saved him.

What about you? Have you been born again from above? Maybe you can be today. Let’s pray for that. Put that in mind.

[Prayer.]

Lord, we are running out of ribbon. There is not much left and the years go fast. And so, clearly, in this early conversation, this first encounter we see, the way to glorify You and make the most of eternity and what we have left is to look upon You and what You have done and realize that the only cure for us is Your death and resurrection for the payment of our sins.

So, Lord, there are people here who have never transferred their hope and their trust, their faith, from their own good works to Your good work. They’ve just tried to reform their hearts instead of having them transformed. They’ve just Nicodemused: *How do I be born again?* And the whole time, You’re saying: *You’ve got to be born spiritually, again, from above.*

And so, for those men and women, I ask that this would be the day that they choose to switch their allegiance to Your love. For You so loved us You sent Your only Son so that we might have eternal life.

And for members of the church here that have lived like spoiled children, not appreciating the fullness of what You’ve done and the gift that You’ve given us, I’d ask that we would repent of that and live a life boldly declaring, and living life first and foremost in the spirit world, able to hear and listen and obey the King, that we might enjoy the fullness of an intimate relationship in this life until the next life. I’d ask that this would be a church that does that; that boldly declares what You have clearly stated, that you must be born again from above to have eternal life. There’s no other way. And everyone, anyone, can do that.

Lord, I’d ask that You would continue to bless our church and make us holy. And help us enjoy our lives, what little ribbon we have left, not for our joy, but for Yours. And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.