

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

The Disturbing Necessity of the New Birth

Read Text: [John 3:1-8](#)

Exposition

1. The Most Important Qualifier (vv1-3)

Nicodemus is a man that could be described as a person who honors the Word of God above most. He was part of a holiness group that strictly interpreted the Mosaic Law. He held a post of great honor in the Sanhedrin, the supreme council in Jewish affairs. He showed amazing respect to Jesus.

He came to Jesus with an important assumption. We understand his assumption because of the answer Jesus gave him. Nicodemus, speaking on behalf of others also, was wondering if the promised Kingdom was arriving in Palestine. He had good reason to assume that. The Jews expected signs to accompany or inaugurate the promised Kingdom of God (see [Isaiah 35](#)). By casting out demons and healing people, Jesus was demonstrating the power of the Kingdom. When the both the ministry of John the Baptist, and Jesus, commenced their message was: *“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*” (Mark 1:14–15, ESV)

Before we delve into this text much further, we need to know what we are talking about when we use the term: Kingdom of God. Broadly speaking, the kingdom of God is the rule of an eternal, sovereign God over all the universe, accomplished by banishing his enemies and restoring his people. To a Jew with the background and convictions of Nicodemus, ‘to see the kingdom of God’ was to participate in the kingdom described so well for us in [Isaiah 35](#): *“Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”*” (Isaiah 35:4, ESV). So the question in Nicodemus’ mind was clear: Are we seeing the Kingdom of God? *“Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*” (John 3:3, ESV)

Nicodemus was right. There was clear evidence that Jesus was inaugurating the Kingdom of God, but Jesus makes this profound statement: *“Unless one is born again (better: born from above, or born of God (John 1:13)) he cannot see (better: experience (John 3:36)) the Kingdom of God (in other words restoration, salvation and eternal life).”*

Let me suggest to you that I, as well as most of us, do not do justice to the idea of regeneration by referring to it as “born-again”. No where in Scripture are we taught that we simply need a second birth. The weight of Biblical emphasis is not merely “second-birth” but we need to be “born of God, born from above.” (See Endnoteⁱ). There is no doubt that the Greek word could mean “born-again”, but the

immediate context, the Gospel of John and indeed the New Testament speak of this act as “born of God” or “born from above”. I would encourage us to use this more accurate phrase. Why? Because it emphasizes that this necessity is clearly a work of God that is initiated at the heavenly throne.

So Jesus’ correction is clear: Nicodemus you cannot experience the Kingdom of God until you are born from above, born of God.

2. The Blindness of the Intellect (v.4)

Nicodemus’ response regarding physical birth indicated that he had no idea what Jesus meant. True Christianity believes in what theologians call ‘Total Depravity’. It might be better named, ‘Total Inability’. In this case what is being exposed to us is that the natural man cannot understand the things of God. (*“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”* (1 Corinthians 2:14, ESV)).

The obvious bombshell of this interaction is that on a human level there may have been no one on the planet that had the credentials and experience that Nicodemus had. If any could experience the Kingdom of God, surely it had to be a person who devoted his life to the holy obedience of the Law of God? If anyone could experience the Kingdom, surely it would be a man who was a highly respected, devout, religious leader? No, even for Nicodemus there had to be a radical transformation initiated and accomplished by God, before he could experience the Kingdom.

So here’s the sermon – a sermon of an audience of one!

3. A Sermon to an Audience of One! (v6-8)

Let us not forget that Jesus is dealing with an ultra-religious man; a man that has a precise knowledge of the Old Testament. So, Christ goes to where he is and re-states the presumption: *“Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* (John 3:5, ESV)

Christ’s Text: If you were Nicodemus this would not be strange to you. This is a direct reference the Old Testament promise found in [Ezekiel 36:24-27](#). Christ shows this “teacher of the Law” from his own Bible the truth that to experience redemption, God demands a total transformation of heart and spirit. This promise of the gift of the “new heart” points to the topic at hand: being born of God, or the new birth, or otherwise known as regeneration. The “heart” in Jewish thought stands for the whole nature of a person. A “stony heart” is stubborn and self-willed. A “heart of flesh” is pliable and responsive. The evil inclination is removed, and a new nature replaces it. This is nothing less than the promise found in the New Covenant ([Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)).

The Application: *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’”* (John 3:6-7, ESV). If you cannot understand, experience or reap the benefits of the Kingdom (i.e., salvation) apart from the New Birth then humans

can accomplish nothing on their own. The primary, determinative cause of any experience of salvation is to be born of God. We should not be surprised at the universal, absolute truth: Only the Spirit can produce spiritual effects.

The Spirit's work in conversion is free and sovereign ([He] blows where [he] wishes). The Spirit's work is mysterious (*I know not how the Spirit moves, Convincing men of sin, Revealing Jesus through the Word, Creating faith in him.*¹). But the effects of the Spirit's work are clear and discernable: a total transformation of character.

How do we apply this to our lives today?

Application

It is the Divine Author that grants us the application. We read, "So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."² The process and management of the new birth are, from a human standpoint, inexplicable. We can only observe the results? "Where the Spirit works, there is undeniable and unmistakable evidence."³

Jesus will develop this thought further, but to give a spoiler alert, we will soon learn that the undeniable and unmistakable evidence of the New Birth is faith in Christ – trusting, obedient faith. He had already said this in his Prologue: "*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*" (John 1:12–13, ESV). Faith in Christ is the effect of those who are born of God. John was so certain of this. He wrote in his first letter: "*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.*" (1 John 5:1, ESV).

Here's the point: One cannot experience eternal life (the Kingdom of God) apart from the decisive, determinative cause of being born of God. And those that are born of God are evident by their vital continuing, obedient faith in Christ. It is here I'm going to cheat. If you want to evaluate the evidence of saving faith, versus a dead faith, I encourage you to listen to Pastor Josh's message of last week. Let me remind you of his application:

- *"Men show me your faith by the way you lead your family. Show me your faith by the way you sacrificially love your wife as Christ loved the church. Show me your faith by the way you lead and teach in the church.*
- *Ladies show me your faith by the way you care for your families. Show me your faith by the way you help and submit to your husbands. Show me your faith by the way you teach the women coming up after you!*

¹ Daniel Webster Whittle | James McGranahan, I Know Whom I Have Believed, © Words: Public Domain Music: Public Domain

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 3:8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

³ MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). [The MacArthur Study Bible](#) (electronic ed., p. 1581). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.

- *Everyone believer here show me your faith by the way you engage in prayer and study of the Word. show me your faith by the way you support the Christ's body the Church. Show me your faith by the way you share the gospel boldly wherever you go. Show me your faith by the way you let your faith spur you to action in Christ's name and at his command!"*

ⁱ "But Jesus also insists that this new birth, this new begetting, this new regeneration, must be the work of the Spirit, who comes from the realm of the 'above'. Certainly the other occurrences of *anōthen* in John mean 'from above' (3:31; 19:11, 23). As he does with other terms,⁴ John may be choosing to extend double meaning to this one in John 3:3, 7, both 'from above' and 'again'; he certainly does not mean less than the former. Readers who have followed the Gospel to this point will instantly think (as Nicodemus couldn't) of John 1:12–13: 'to be born again' or 'to be born from above' must mean the same thing as 'to become children of God', to be 'born of God', by believing in the name of the incarnate Word." - Carson, D. A. (1991). [*The Gospel according to John*](#) (p. 189). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.