

Born Again

John 3:1-8 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." 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.' 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."

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Born again? What does that even mean? Jesus told Nicodemus that "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus asked the question, too: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" It seemed so foolish to tell him to be born again that Nicodemus follows up with a question to show the lunacy of what Jesus called for. Born again? Certainly I'm too big for that, Jesus. And laughter from the crowd seems to be the expected result.

2 How can a man be born again? That's the subject of a book by a prominent theologian with a similar title: *How to be Born Again*. Four steps: first, you must recognize what God did through Jesus on the cross. Second, you must repent for your sins. Third, you must receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Fourth, you must confess Christ publicly. How do you get born again? Do these things: make Jesus your Lord; give your life to Him. Simple, right?

3 It would be easier to climb back into your mother's womb to be reborn than it is to give your life to Jesus. St. Paul says, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins 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-among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and

the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Eph 2:1-3)

You have no life on your own, no life to give to Jesus. Your sins leave you dead. So repent of supposing that being born again means you do anything. Nicodemus is right; that’s foolishness.

4 But Jesus answers Nicodemus, saying, “Truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Being born again involves water and the Holy Spirit. The One whose Mother was a Virgin, whose birth was made necessary by the sin which left us dead and helpless, was born not of water and the Spirit. He was born with flesh, real human flesh. He took human flesh and was crucified in the place of humanity, paying the price for the sins of all who were dead because of their sins. He is the One who tells Nicodemus to be born again of water and the Spirit.

5 Where do water and the Holy Spirit come together? St. Paul writes to Titus, “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us through Jesus Christ, our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” (Ti 3:5-7) Being born again is nothing more, nothing less, that rebirth through the work of the Holy Spirit in the waters of Holy Baptism. Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word. It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe.

6 You have as much role in your rebirth, your second birth, as you had in your first birth. It is God alone who intervenes in the world through ordinary water. How can water do such things? Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God’s word, the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit.

7 Thanks be to God that He has not left you dead in your transgressions. Thanks be to God that He does not leave you to find within yourself confidence in your salvation. Thanks be to God that the command to be born again is not an exhortation to dedicate yourself to the Lord but an invitation to receive from the Lord the gift of faith and forgiveness of sins. Thanks be to God that this is not an abstract idea but a concrete, tangible reality. Thanks be to God that He may deliver this gift to anyone whom He wishes, infants and old men alike. Because it is the Lord alone who has paid for your sins on the cross and because it is He alone who has delivered to you the benefits of Jesus' death on the cross through the waters of Holy Baptism, you may take confidence in your baptism. "To be baptized in God's name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God's own act." (LC, Baptism, 10)

8 When tempted by the devil to question God's love for him, when afflicted with trials of many kinds, Luther found great comfort in a little sentence. Depending which account you read, he either wrote in chalk on a table or exclaimed out loud: "I am baptized!" There is no magical power in baptism, no Christian good luck charm to be made thereof. Instead, through the ordinary waters of Holy Baptism, God claimed you as his own, placed His very name upon you. So may you, when plagued by temptation, when fraught with guilt over sins, when given trials of any kind may find comfort in what your Lord has done for you through these waters. So may you rejoice, "I am baptized!" The sign of the cross which was made over you first at baptism remains for you a sign of the marvelous work done for you in this sacrament. Make it often to remind yourself of this treasure.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer

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