

Born Again

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[0 : 00] Today's lesson is called Born Again. I just have a question. What's a big, longer theological word that means the same thing?

! God summons us by name.

His voice penetrates into our lives and he calls us. The Spirit comes into our hearts and brings conviction of sin. And suddenly we see what we talked about last week.

We see our guilt. We see our condemnation. We see the glory of Jesus Christ and the sin of continuing to ignore him. The Spirit convinces us that we need Christ, that he's the risen, righteous Savior.

He's coming again in judgment. There is no escape. And so with his call, we hear his powerful voice break into our souls with the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 17] He puts one finger on us and says, you are the man. You are the guilty one. And he points another finger to Jesus Christ and says, and Jesus is the only one that can save you.

But is that enough? Would all of that make you a Christian? What do you think? No. Why not? God calling, God convincing.

Why isn't that enough? We're dead in our sins. So what does that mean, Steve? We cannot do anything to change ourselves.

We can't just change our mind or change our heart. I mean, you've got to remake us. Yeah. So we're dead. We're unable. We can't respond. And so, yes, he's calling us.

But apart from what we're talking about today, we wouldn't come to him. And apart from him changing our desires, we wouldn't respond to that finger pointing to Jesus and that conviction of sin.

[2 : 23] And so now we're going to talk about regeneration. Because the story, the process is not complete until there is this work of regeneration. The word regeneration means another genesis.

Another genesis. And so that shows something of the gravity and the greatness of what we are talking about this morning.

We are not talking about some little thing. We are talking about something amazing and huge and big. The greatness of this doctrine. Every other religion and every other sort of human idea to say, okay, this is man's problem.

How do we fix this problem? It just involves us needing fixed up a bit. It involves us needing, you know, we're just a run down house and we need some fixing up, some straightening out, a new paint.

We need a little help. False versions of Christianity leave men's problems at that level. So what do I need?

[3 : 35] I need a little help. I need a hand up. I need to know what I'm supposed to do. Give me, I'm sick. Give me some medicine. Get me on my feet.

And that's not the Bible's picture. The Bible's picture is Steve said we're dead in our sin. So what do you do when you put a corpse on his feet?

Have you done any good? And what's going to happen to that corpse? You give him a hand up and he'll immediately fall down again.

That's not what that man needs. That's not where he is. He needs, in the Bible's picture, a new Genesis. So you know how the Bible begins.

You know Genesis 1, God, 1, 1. God, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Creation ex nihilo, out of nothing. That's Genesis 1, 1.

[4 : 37] Does anyone remember what verse 2 says? What's the condition of things at this very beginning? What does it say?

Formless and void. Go on. What else describes it? Yeah, there's darkness. And the Holy Spirit is hovering over the face of the deep, over the chaotic waters.

Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep. And so formless, empty, dark, depths.

That's the vast expanse of chaos. Now that's where God finds the sinner. That's the condition in which the Holy Spirit enters into a sinner's heart.

Darkness. Formless. Chaos. And the Spirit comes and hovers over this waters, over this rolling chaos.

[5 : 49] So regeneration is this next Genesis. It's a new creation is what we're going to say. It's not a hand up. It's not a shot of medicine.

It's the new birth. It's new creation. It is resurrection from the dead. And so what we want to do here at the beginning is just look at some pictures of regeneration.

Some pictures of regeneration. And the first is birth. It's a new birth. John 1.13 says that those who become Christians are children born not of natural descent, not of human decision, or a husband's will.

That's not regular biological descent. It's not an adoption where you decide that this person's going to be a child. It's not by a husband's will. That might be sort of like a, I've now married you, and so I'm going to take your child as my child.

It's nothing natural or human, but we are born of God. Born of God. Born from God.

[7 : 07] So in talking to Nicodemus, Jesus says the indispensable requirement for seeing and entering the kingdom of God is that you must be born again.

In 1 John, Christians are defined as people born of God. In the book of James, he says, God chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

Now, just a few verses before that in James 1, he talks about another pregnancy and another birth. He talks about sin giving birth.

So the picture is sin pregnant. Have you ever thought about that? So there's this, it's sin, and sin is pregnant with a child. Now, can you imagine what kind of child sin would have building in her womb?

Giving birth. And so sin delivers death. It pants and sweats until it finally delivers death.

[8 : 26] That's what's going on. But James says God chose to give us birth through the word of truth. So if things had gone on as they were going on, sin in our life, it would just give birth to death.

But God chose to give us birth through the word of truth. That's a picture of regeneration. God giving birth to a child, to his children, to a Christian.

And his delivery is, God's delivery of a child, his birthing of a child, it is not like a normal human pregnancy.

It's not normal because if things go the way they're supposed to go, that baby begins as one cell and multiplies and grows.

And hopefully if everything comes out and works out well, the baby grows healthy and happy. until delivery. But that's not how God's children are born.

[9 : 31] God's children are already stillborn. They're already dead. They're already decaying.

They're already getting ready to experience even the second death. And that's when God chooses to give them life. So he doesn't start with a happy, healthy, one cell growing to a whole baby.

He starts with a dead person. And through the power of the Spirit, he gives that person life. So that's the regeneration.

It's God giving life. And just like in a regular birth, the baby gets its life, gets its strength, gets its creation, its genesis from the mother.

Well, in the same way, God, his life, produces this new life in us. And so that's the first picture.

[10 : 37] The second picture is a new creation. And we already talked about this, but just to emphasize it again, what God does and what God has done, I really want you to think about this, what God has done in your life already is not a fixed up, fix up job.

It's not, it's a new creation job. It's going all the way back to the beginning, back to the emptiness and the darkness and the chaos.

And from there, bringing forth something that was never, never seen before. So Paul says, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything.

What counts is a new creation. So in the book of Galatians, there's all this tension and debate that Paul is responding to about circumcision, uncircumcision, what does all this mean? And what Paul says is what really counts, what really matters, what really makes the difference is a new creation.

[11:49] A new creation. Without this, everything is what he's saying. Without a new creation, everything is empty. It's pointless. It's vain. In 2 Corinthians, Paul says literally, if anyone in Christ, new creation.

It's like it has an exclamation point. He's saying, if you are in Christ, new creation. It's this amazing reality that has happened in you. So a whole new world.

So, you know, at the end, in Revelation 21 and 22, it's a new heavens and a new earth. It's a new creation. Comes down out of heaven.

And God says, behold, I am making all things new. So what has happened in your life, brothers or sisters? What has happened in my life? It's like a piece of that.

That world, that time, that creation has transported back into time and into your soul.

[12:51] You are a part of that new creation. You're not there yet. You're detached still from that creation, but you are a part of that creation and you are going there.

That's what God has done. So out of the darkness, out of the chaos, God said, let there be light and the light of God's love and his presence, the glory of God shining in the face of Christ Jesus has already come into your hearts.

Again, you know the picture in Revelation 21-22. There's no sun because the Lord is the sun. The Lord is the glory of heaven. And that glory has already dawned.

The sun has come up in your heart. And now, we need to pause there and say this, brother or sister, Christian, ordinary, not special, just unexceptional, little Christian, just think of what God has already done in your life.

Done for you in his grace. He gave you birth. He began the new creation. in you.

[14:18] God took you as a stillborn and delivered you as his living child. And that is what you are. That's what has happened to you.

So Sinclair Ferguson said, if only we would allow this to expand our minds. Pastor John has been talking about how we need, we're like that pizza dough that continues to shrink and we need to be rolled out and stretched out.

And this is what Sinclair Ferguson is saying, the same sort of thing. If we would allow this to expand our minds and so enter into the enjoyment of these great privileges.

privileges. Has that struck you? That you're a new creation? That you're a child of God? He's saying, if you would enjoy these great privileges, we would see something of the glory of God exhibited in the character and the quality of our living.

If these things would expand our minds, if the goodness of them and the joy of these things, the amazingness of these things, if they would have an effect on us, then it would invariably!

[15:35] It would invariably change the character of our lives. Going back to 1 Peter 1.18, we wouldn't live empty, pointless lives anymore.

We would be living towards God as His children. We'd call it a Father. We'd be holy. And so if you let this sink in, you'll live happier, holier lives.

I'm going to repeat that. If you let just what we've talked about so far sink in, you would live happier, holier lives. That's the first two pictures.

The third picture of regeneration is resurrection. resurrection. Ephesians 2.4-5, but because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, He has a lot of mercy, He has so much, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

Now you see the, the, sort of the why of regeneration. How does it come about? What's the reason for it? What's the driving impetus?

[16:50] It's not something we choose. It's not something we earn. When Jesus says, you must be born again, He is not giving us a command to do.

Because that's an impossible command to keep. It's not even impossible in the same way of, you know, you shall not murder or you shall not commit adultery.

Yeah, we find some of those sins, heart sins, we say, oh, it's impossible for me to be completely holy and sinless. Well, this, this is not a command that you should be born again as if we could give birth to ourselves.

No, it's not something we choose. It's not something we could earn. It's because of God's great love. God who is rich in mercy. So God has a stockpile of mercy, a bank account full of mercy. And because He is so rich in mercy, He comes to dead, decaying sinners. And even when they were dead, He makes them alive.

[18:01] He raises them up. So Romans 6, 13, Paul says, we were brought from death to life. And so offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.

If you were once dead and you gave your body and the instruments of it to sin, He's saying, now you've been brought from death to life.

So now offer your bodies as instruments of righteousness. So we're born of God. We're new creations. And the resurrection from the dead, in every case, it's not something that we do. It's something that God does in us. God does for us. And so when Jesus told Nicodemus, you must be born again, you must be.

It was the one thing needful. But it is the one thing we can't do. So where does that leave us?

[19:08] Where does that leave us as humans, as sinners? The one thing we must do is the one thing we can't do.

Well, it leaves us in the place of grace, isn't it? Salvation belongs to the Lord.

And if we understand these things, we don't say, oh, okay, this is what I have to do. And now we say, Lord, please save me. This is all your grace.

So those are some pictures of regeneration. Now let's talk about why is it necessary? Why is it necessary? Why must we be born again?

Well, for that, turn to John chapter 3. John chapter 3. And this is a very well-known passage, and so we're not going to get into all of the context or anything.

[20:06] Let's just dig right in. It's this passage where you see Jesus telling Nicodemus, you must be born again. And he gives us why you must be born again.

So John chapter 3, and we're just going to first look at verse 5. John 3, 5.

Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit.

Now, you must be born again because human life, flesh, fleshly life, and I don't think he necessarily means exactly what Paul talks about when he's talking about flesh in Romans.

It's not necessarily the same thing. I think he's merely, although it definitely has some overlap, but he is saying human life, what we have available to us, what we can do.

[21:10] flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit. So you must be born again because human life, humans are only capable of recreating other humans, only human, more human life, more human nature.

And, in fact, that is a wonderful thing, isn't it? Just, I mean, we don't want to disparage that unnecessarily, but when a mother brings forth a baby, it is an amazing thing.

But, as wonderful as that is, human nature is powerless to bring about spiritual life to God. And you know that because as parents, as Sunday school teachers, as friends, as relatives, as much as you would say, I wish I could give spiritual life to this other person, to this child, to this friend, to this neighbor, to this, my mom, my dad, we cannot do it, can we?

There's nothing we can do that can produce that spiritual life. We can give more human life, but we cannot give more spiritual life.

So why must you be born again? Because you have to be born from God. The Holy Spirit has to be the one who gives life.

[22:31] Because flesh gives birth to flesh. Secondly, why must you be born again? Why must we be born again? Because we cannot see.

We cannot see the kingdom of God. Let alone enter it. We can't even see that it's there. We can't appreciate it.

We can't understand it. Verse 3, I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. We can't see God's power. We can't see God's grace.

We can't appreciate it. We can't understand it. We can't recognize it. We can't embrace it. So just think of Nicodemus here. Just think of Nicodemus. Just think of the situation.

It says it's night. That's when Nicodemus is meeting Jesus. It's night. The lights are off. It's dark. It's dim. And that's Nicodemus. He can't see. What's Nicodemus doing?

[23 : 31] Who's sitting right in front of Jesus? Or right in front of Nicodemus? Who is sitting right in front of him? Turn back a page or two to John chapter 1.

Who is sitting right in front of Nicodemus? And is Nicodemus really appreciating this? Look at verse 9. Chapter 1, verse 9. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

So who is Jesus? He's the light from God. He is the light. He's the heavenly light. That's what John means when it talks about the true light.

It means the real light, the heavenly light. So who is sitting right in front of Nicodemus in John chapter 3? Light, the light from heaven. It's like he's sitting there and a spiritual spotlight is going right into his eyeballs.

And Nicodemus doesn't, he doesn't see that. You're a teacher. He doesn't appreciate it. Not yet.

[24 : 42] Not yet. Nicodemus is going to get there. Men are blind. They can't see. They don't want to see.

Nicodemus' own, our own sinfulness and pride blind us. And that's why Jesus says, you must be born again. C.S. Lewis pictures man's willful blindness to what is right in front of them, to what is obvious.

in his book, The Last Battle. It's the last of the Chronicles of Narnia. And the scene shows this vast difference between those who are born again, who have eyes to see, and those who don't have eyes to see.

Seeing people and still blind people. And so it takes place after the very last battle and they are all in what was a stable. So there they are.

They're in what was a stable. But when they got into the stable, they were all pushed into the stable, they found that it was the doorway to heaven.

[25 : 50] It was the doorway to Aslan's country. And someone says, it's a lot bigger on the inside than it was on the outside. Because it's all there.

Sky, trees, wind, grass, for as far as you could see. And they say, it's a lot bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. And Lucy says, in our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.

I love, I'm just including that because that's one of my favorite lines. And so there they are. And sitting inside the stable too is a bunch of dwarfs.

And everyone else is seeing trees and feeling the wind and the sun is shining and everyone else is clean and happy. But these dwarfs are in the same place.

But for them, it's just a stable. It's still dark. It's still smelly. And Lucy says, Aslan, can't you do something for these poor dwarfs?

[26 : 59] And he shook his mane and instantly a glorious feast appeared on the dwarf's knees. And Lewis goes into this description. It's just all this delicious food everywhere.

And there's goblets of red wine on everyone's hands. And this is what he says, But it wasn't much use. They began eating and drinking greedily enough.

But it was clear that they were eating and drinking only the sort of things you might find in a stable. One said he was trying to eat hay. And another said he had got a bit of old turnip and cabbage leaves.

And they raised golden goblets of rich red wine to their lips and said, Ugh! Fancy drinking dirty water out of a trough that a donkey donkey's been at.

And then they started to think that some of the other dwarves had something better than they did. And so they began grabbing and snatching and went on quarreling until in a few minutes all the food was ruined and they were nursing black eyes and bloody noses.

[28 : 00] And they all said, Well, at any rate, there's no humbug here. We haven't let anyone take us in. We haven't let anyone fool us.

You see, said Aslan, they will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief.

Their prison is only in their own minds and yet they are in that prison and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out.

They're blind. And that's why you must be born again. Because you can't see the truth. You could be sitting right beside it.

The sun could be shining on your face. The gospel is in your right hand. It's there for you to have. Jesus is right there and you would miss it all.

Now the very thing, that very same thing was happening to you. It was happening to you until God gave you new life. And so we sing with John Newton, I was blind, but now I see.

[29 : 18] So why must you be born again? Because, well, men are blind and because men are powerless. So John chapter 3, verse 5, I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and of the spirit.

So men are powerless. They cannot. They cannot. Unable to enter. It's not just they will not, that's true, but it is they cannot.

The carnal mind is enmity with God. It can't obey God's commands. It does not submit to God's law nor can it do so.

By principle, we are against God. And so, you know what, the answer is, of course I don't want anything to do with the Lord. I will not close with him. I will not embrace him.

I will not bow down to him. I will not submit to him. I will not repent. I will not, it won't be a total surrender. I'll keep something back, because by principle that's, I cannot do anything else.

[30 : 32] So men are flesh, they are blind, and they are powerless. They are enslaved to their way of life. And so, we sing, thou must save and thou alone.

That's where regeneration leads us, to this realization that God must save me. So, as we close, what happens in regeneration?

What happens in regeneration? So that's, that's some pictures of it. that's why it's necessary, but like, what actually happens?

Well, to sort of sum it all up, we begin to live a new life. It's a new life. It's a new start. It's a new life. We're joined to Christ.

This is the picture in the Bible. God puts us into Christ, into the vine, and into his resurrection life. And his resurrection life begins to flow by the Spirit into our souls.

[31 : 41] And so, his life flows into our life, and so we begin a new life. And so, as Colossians says, Christ, who is our life. So, we begin this new life, and it's in Christ.

And what happens? Well, our minds are lit up. They're illuminated. We begin to see. We see the kingdom of God. We appreciate it. We recognize it. We see things like we've never seen before. Our minds are lit up. Our hearts are purified. Jesus says here that you must be born of water and of the Spirit. And I think when he's talking about the water, he's not talking about baptism.

He's not talking about natural birth. I believe what he is talking about is you must be born from a washing and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He's not talking about the forgiveness of sins, although I think that's pictured as washing.

It's talking about a purification. When God makes us new, he puts new tendencies, new dispositions, new attitudes.

[32 : 50] He writes his law on our hearts. And so, now the law is not out here on tablets of stone where, yeah, I'm supposed to do it, but my heart is hard and I don't want to do it.

Now, God puts that law inside my heart and so, I want to do it. That's the purification that we're talking about. And yeah, it's ongoing and it's growing, but it begins at this place of, now that is something I want to do.

So, once I could not submit to God's law, I would not, but now, it's what I want. That's the purification we're talking about.

The desires are renewed. I want God. I want his people. I want his word. I want things I hadn't wanted before.

So, we didn't have any taste for heaven's joys, but then your spirit gave me life, opened up your word to me. So, we were like those dwarfs.

[34 : 05] We despised heavenly food. We called it old turnips and trough water and now we say, direct me in the paths of your commands for there I find delight.

So, our hearts are purified and I think greatest of all, what happens in regeneration is we are alive to God now.

We're alive to God now. I'm now his child and he's now my father. So, he smiles at me and I smile back at him. He holds me. I hold him.

He frowns. I frown. He speaks. I listen. He loves. I love. The point is, is now we have this relationship with God. That's the great thing about regeneration.

We were once just dead to God but now I'm alive to God and this living relationship and so now he says to me, son, walk with me and I say, father, I'm coming.

[35 : 04] Let's go. And in regeneration, God gives us everything we need to receive him and, but from his point of view in regeneration, he recreates a son or a daughter to live with.

It's just like a regular birth because of a new birth, we get him and he gets us. So, think of that. We're happy to know him.

We're happy to finally make his acquaintance and I'm pretty sure I was happier to see each one of my children for the first time than they were to see me. That's what happens in birth.

It's a meeting of parents and child for the first time in a new way. So, in regeneration, we get life and the father gets a child and by, it's all by grace.

So, go in the joy of that, brothers and sisters. You're a child of God. You have him and he has you. Go in the joy of it. We're dismissed.