

John 3:1-21

- I. Who Needs New Birth
 - a. Popular thoughts
 - i. Social media search on “born again”
 1. “More than ¾ of the Mississippi electorate is white evangelical or born again Christian.”
 - ii. It’s a deeply emotional experience for people who have really wrecked their lives.
 - iii. It’s mainly for those people who really need strict moral structure and rules which allows them to look down on those who aren’t “born again”
 - b. Profile of Nicodemus
 - i. He was most likely a relatively rich member of the ruling class in Israel
 - ii. He was morally upright—a Pharisee
 1. Pharisees—Spiritual fathers of modern Judaism
 2. Meaning of the term is uncertain but many believe the root comes from the word separate or detach.
 3. They held that the oral law and traditions of Israel had equal importance as the Torah (the written law).
 4. They were ultra-conservative, maintained a simple life-style, were respectful of elders/teachers, maintained good relationships with others, were actually quite popular with the people--Josephus.
 5. They believed in separation from the gentiles and that God rewards those that serve him and punishes the wicked.
 6. Modern American equivalent—middle to upper class, white, conservative, church-going, tithe giving, mission-supporting, well respected.
 - iii. He may not have even been seeking Jesus as savior, but more likely as a teacher. (John 3:2 “We know you are a teacher come from God”)
 - iv. Over and over throughout scripture Jesus uses descriptors of himself such as “living water”, or “bread of life” to describe this process to those who the world would see as poor and/or needy. Why does he use the example of new birth for someone who seemingly has his life put together? Nicodemus is a nice person!
 - c. Jesus thoughts
 - i. The really “sinful” people who have really wrecked their lives and the morally upright, conservative, normal church-going are all starting in the same spot. (John 3:3—“*Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*”)
 - ii. Jesus definition of sin must be different. (John 3:19-20) “*And this is the judgement: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does*

wicked things hates the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God”

- iii. Keller—*Most people define sin primarily as breaking divine rules...the very first of the Ten Commandments is to “have no other gods before me”. So according to the Bible, the primary way to define sin is not just the doing of bad things, but the making of good things into ultimate things. It is seeking to establish a sense of self by making something else more central to your significance, purpose, and happiness than your relationship to God”.*
- iv. It is trying to justify your existence: Chariots of Fire—“I have ten lonely seconds to justify my existence”.
- v. Thomas Oden writes: *Suppose my god is sex or my physical health or the Democratic Party. If I experience any of these under genuine threat, then I feel myself shaken to the depths. Guilt becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values...Suppose I value my ability to teach and communicate clearly...If clear communication has become an absolute value for me, a center of value that makes all my other values valuable...then if I fail I am stricken with neurotic guilt. Bitterness becomes neurotically intensified when someone or something stands between me and something that is my ultimate value.*
- vi. What is it in my life that I am afraid of losing the most? What am I afraid of being exposed?
- vii. Until I can see myself clearly and see my sin clearly, I cannot come to the light, in fact, I will hate the light.
- viii. So...how do we see?

II. What is the New Birth

a. What the new birth is not

- i. An emotional experience where you “get right with God” and start to clean up your act
- ii. A list of moral commands and structure or “lingo” by which we thus prove ourselves to be “good Christians” so God will be proud of us and reward us.
- iii. It’s not attending church, going to GC, feeding the homeless at the Glory Hole, taking communion, serving in the kids’ ministry, or even standing up in front on Sunday and speaking God’s word.

b. What the new birth is

- i. It's birth! The process of becoming an entirely different sort of being. (John 3:6) *"That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of spirit is spirit."*
- ii. It's the antithesis of almost everything about our natural selves. *"The two kinds of life are now only different (they would have always been that) but actually opposed. The natural life in each of us is something self-centered, something that wants to be petted and admired, to take advantage of other lives, to exploit the whole universe. And especially it wants to be left to itself: to keep well away from anything better or stronger or higher than it, anything that might make it feel small. It is afraid of the light and air of the spiritual world, just as people who have been brought up dirty are afraid of a bath. And in a sense it is quite right. It knows that if the spiritual life gets hold of it, all its self-centeredness and self-will are going to be killed and it is going to fight tooth and nail to avoid that."*—C.S. Lewis
- iii. Remember our definition of sin from above? Everything on which we base our lives that is not Jesus has to die.
- iv. It's sharing in the life of Jesus (John 1:12) *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."*
- v. John Stott: *The essence of sin is we human beings substituting ourselves for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for us. We...put ourselves where only God deserves to be; God...puts himself where we deserve to be.*
- vi. It's more real than anything else on earth. John 3:16-17 *"For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."* Jesus thought it of such great importance that he saw fit not to solve all the physical pain and suffering on this earth (yet) when He sent His Son...and yet He calls it "saving the world". This is life or death stuff at its most real level.
- vii. N.T. Wright says this about the resurrection of Jesus: *The message of the resurrection is that this world matters! That the injustices and pains of this present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won...If the resurrection means that Jesus Christ is raised only in the physical sense—then it is only about me, and finding a new dimension in my personal spiritual life. But if Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity becomes good news for the whole world—news which warms our hearts precisely because it isn't just about warming hearts. The resurrection means that in a world where injustice, violence and degradation are endemic, God is not prepared to tolerate such things---and that we will work and plan, with all the energy of God, to implement the victory of Jesus over them all. Take away*

the resurrection and Karl Marx was probably right to accuse Christianity of ignoring the problems of the material world. Take it away and Freud was probably right to say Christianity is wish-fulfillment. Take it away and Nietzsche probably was right to say it was for wimps.

viii. The new birth is not just the most fundamentally important thing for you and me personally, its foundationally important for changing the world...for changing Juneau.

ix. It allows us to see (John 3:3) *“Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* It allows us to see us for who we really are, see Jesus for who He really is, and see the world and all its brokenness for what it really is. When we see clearly, we walk confidently.

III. How we are Born Again

a. It’s something that we have no part in. A baby really doesn’t have anything to do with its own birth!

b. It is only accomplished through someone else carrying our weight, through someone else’s pain.

c. We are re-made and re-created when we “believe into” and gaze at Jesus. John 3:14-15. *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.”* John 3:16-18. Num 21:4-9 *“From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke out against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and loathe this worthless food.’ Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he may take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.”*

d. We are re-made when our natural “self” dies with Christ. Gal 2: 19-20 *“For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

- e. We are re-made through and ONLY through faith...at the expense of repenting of our good works, moral behavior and EVERYTHING we have done to this point. What does this look like?
- f. Phil 3:4-11 *“though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead”*

IV. Where do we go from here?

- a. 4 types of responses to a message about being “born again”.
 - i. The Nice Person. You think this is a great message for someone you know. (Probably what Nicodemus was thinking).
 - 1. Your natural niceness is not your gift to God, it is his gift to you. What Jesus has in mind for you is so much more than that!
 - 2. Jesus gave Nicodemus one obscure story in the Old Testament to mull over. John 3:14-15
 - 3. I ask you to simply think on Him. I believe he may call you like he called Nicodemus. It may take a while. John 7:45-52 *“Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them (the Pharisees) ‘Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?’* John 19:39-40 *“Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths and spices as was the burial custom of the Jews.”*
 - ii. The Rule Follower: You know this intellectually, but you don’t feel new. Maybe angry that you’re not where you want to be? Maybe you have tried really hard to walk in the “Christian life” and are failing.
 - 1. Repent of your good works. Remember the “Lost Sons?” Luke 15:29-30 *“but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have slaved for you and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed*

the fattened calf for him!' The older son just wanted the father's stuff and the father's approval, but he wanted it on his terms, by his efforts.

2. Stop "trying". You are a son. The Father already looks at you as if you were a "little Christ". The Holy Spirit is inside you to turn you into one. Phil 1:4-5, 13-14 *"even as He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."*
3. Start "knowing" John 17:25 *"Oh righteous father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me."* John 10:14 *"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as my Father knows me and I know my Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."*

iii. The Baggage Carrier

1. Being born again means my anger and bitterness have to die
2. Being born again means my personal comfort may die
3. Being born again means my need for control has to die.
4. Being born again means my need for others to respect me or love me has to die.
5. Jesus says this: *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*³⁰ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*—Matthew 11:28-30

iv. The Lost: You know this is what you need. This is it. This makes sense to you for the first time. John 6:35 *"Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."*, John 4 (Woman at the well).

1. To you Jesus says "Come". Lose your life and find it again. *"He will make even the feeblest and filthiest of us into a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said"*—C. S. Lewis