

Reborn - Part 2

John 3:3

Look at yourself - really. Too tired. Too scared. Too hurt. Too much. But - who told you that? The doubt - the fear - the shame - the noise? Can we really begin again? Rebellious - reckless - reclusive - retreating - relapsing - repeating - regretting. Look again. Realizing - recognizing - releasing - recovering - relenting - responding - reaching closer - rebuilding - repairing - restarting - retrying - returning - reconciling. Don't give up now! Received - reclaimed - renewed - redeemed - revived - remade - remembered ...Reborn.

We tend to assume things - that because we all show up to church, that we're all reborn - *born again*. As Jesus told Nicodemus, "*You must be born again.*" God is doing something across the world. He's moving all over in amazing ways, not just here in the United States, where we're seeing massive revival among young people, especially young men who are coming to Jesus. They want something substantial, and they're going after *him*. And we get to be a part of that. We want to continue to pour fuel on that fire, but listen, we're not going to leave anybody out. Everybody here gets an opportunity to say *Yes* to Jesus.

Maybe we just need to *re-up*, and say, "*I'm going to stay in. I'm not gonna retire yet. I'm going to re-up.*" Today, we may know Jesus, but maybe we've been a little *ambivalent*. Maybe we've gotten *distracted*. Maybe we've gotten *tired*. Maybe we've gotten *discouraged*. Well, now we're getting an opportunity to not only be reborn, if that's our need, but also to *re-up* and re-engage him.

Every day, we should pray, "*Lord, give us favor. Open doors of opportunity for us to share the gospel everywhere we go. Lord, give us opportunities to share the good news. May we fill up our buckets so that wherever we go, we can leak out, and be leaky buckets.*" Every day when we get up, we should say, "*We get to do this.*" Then, wherever we are, and whoever we meet, the Lord will grease the runway and say, "*I'm teeing this up for you. Now, pick up your driver and swing. I'm putting this person in your path today for a reason.*"

Wherever we are, even at our job, we can pray for people as they're coming through the line - that mom with three screaming kids, and we're feeling sorry for her, or we're hoping she'll hurry - we can pray for her under our breath. We don't have to say it out loud. Just pray for her. And we can know the Holy Spirit will do something there. We can practice the presence of God right there in that moment, wherever we are.

We have to be *carriers* of the *good news of Jesus Christ*. That's our mission. Jesus said, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.*" But, in the actual language in Greek it's, "*As you are going, disciple nations.*" That's what it literally says, "*As you are going...*" In other words, we think we have to go on a mission trip or show up at an event to be "evangelistic." But at the end of the day, we're called to be evangelistic "as we go." That doesn't mean just on Sunday. That means every day, even on Monday, we will meet people, and God - *through us* - will draw them to Jesus, and he will reveal himself to them.

This idea of what it means to be *reborn*, means that we who are reborn, if we said Yes and are followers of Jesus - we're on "team Jesus" - then we have a mission assignment to go out, and *as we go*, we're to share the gospel with others. The really good news for us today is that when we do that, we're not on our own - we have a *Helper*. His name is *the Holy Spirit*.

Jesus, in the book of John, said, "*I'm going to go away, but the Holy Spirit is going to come to you and be in you. He's going to live through you, and you will not be on your own. He is a helper. He's a counselor. He's a comforter. He's a friend. He's an intercessor and an advocate for you, and he will enable you and empower you to do what you cannot do in and of yourself.*" That's the person of the Holy Spirit.

When we step out into this adventure and say, "*Lord, would you open doors for me to share the gospel - the good news - to share Jesus with somebody?*" - lots of times when we talk about witnessing and sharing our faith, we have in our mindset, "*I have to know everything.*" No, we need to know one thing. And the one thing we need to know is not a *thing*, it's a Who. We need to know Jesus. If we know *Jesus*, we're light-years ahead of anybody else. We're sharing our faith with someone who *doesn't*. So, there's no excuse.

We can throw that out the window and check that box. We don't have to have a degree in theology. We don't have to have a Master's of Divinity, be an accredited theologian, or a Bible scholar to say this: "*I used to be here and now I'm here.*" Religion can't do what *re-birth can*. *Religion is rules and regulations*. It's interesting how, through the years, the early Jewish scholars as they came up, had the Levitical laws that were given in the Old Testament - the Law - capital "L." But, men came along and took the laws and then added *more* laws upon those laws that were *not God's laws*. They were *man's laws* - but they *treated* them like God's laws.

That's how - in a negative sense - *religion* was born, where it's about ritual, and *not* about doing the right thing. It's about *not* feeding your goat on Sunday or rescuing your lamb that fell in a well. All these silly things that were put on people that no one could live up to - that's "religion." But we do it today, too - in church where we're told we can't - we can't - we can't. And we can't and don't even think about that. Many of us have been there, done that, and sat there, and just felt guilty for breathing. "*I'm sorry I'm alive - that I have a pulse - because I'm guilty as charged.*"

Faith in Jesus, walking with Jesus, and living in authentic Christianity is actually what we *do* - It's what we get to do. It's what's *possible*. There are no lids or limits on our life. and we "get to" go out and leak out this life that's in us. But we're not alone - we have a Helper and a Friend. In John chapter three, Nicodemus wants to talk to Jesus, so he sneaks around back because he didn't want to be seen. So, he meets up with Jesus who tells him straight up, "*Nicodemus, you must be born again,*" and Nicodemus goes, "*What? How can a man enter the womb - his mother's womb a second time - and be born again?*"

He just has a fit because he can't wrap his mind around it. Then Jesus clarifies, "*This is not about being saved from your sin, it's about spiritual rebirth. You must be born again.*" Religion can't do what rebirth *can*. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. That's what Jesus told Nicodemus. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.*" That means he's not a way, a truth, or a life. People today would try to convince us, "*Oh, there are many ways to get to God.*" No, there's not. Jesus said, "*You have to come through Me because I am The Way.*" And he meant that he's the only way. Isn't that being "*exclusive?*" Not intentionally - it's just that it's a *narrow gate* we have to go through.

The Holy Spirit produces what we *cannot*. This is such good news, because when we run out of steam and get to the end of ourselves, that's actually the best place we can be because it's at that point the Holy Spirit says, "*I've got you. I've got this!*" When we get in a conversation and feel like somebody knows their *atheism* better than we know our *theism* - better than we know our own faith - *no worries*. The Holy Spirit is there with us. We may stumble and think, "*Man, that did not land. What I said just did not land.*" And yet, God lets *us* draw the bow, release the arrow, and then he moves the target, and gets it *exactly* where it needs to be.

That's the Holy Spirit coming along-side to help us. He produces what we *can't*. In John 3:8, Jesus is still with Nicodemus and tells him, "*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.*" In other words, "*Nicodemus, you're thinking way too hard. You're trying to figure it out and know something that may not be knowable.*" There's something that we know in our spirit, but we may not know it in our rational mind, and this is where people hit a choke point.

Jesus is telling this very smart, high-level leader, a member of the Sanhedrin who governed both religiously and civically in Jerusalem, "*You're not as smart as you think you are. You're thinking too much.*" Nicodemus said, "*How can this be?*" And Jesus says, "*You are Israel's teacher, and do you not understand these things?*" Jesus later said in another gospel, "*If you're going to enter into the kingdom of heaven, you have to become like a child.*" Now he's saying, "*You're too smart for your own good. You're a teacher of Israel, and you don't even see it. You can't even get it.*"

Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth. We speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen. But still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not 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, the Son of man."* Now Jesus is beginning to reveal himself as the Son of man who has been with the Father. *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of man must be lifted up."* He's talking about the cross - as the Son of Man, who must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

The new birth is a work of the Holy Spirit. We all needed to make a decision - to declare with our mouth, and believe in our heart that Jesus is Lord - because we wanted to be saved. And we did it. That was not just *us* making a decision. That was the Holy Spirit *helping* us make a decision. He clears a path for us to hear the gospel. And guess what? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God - literally, *by the message of Christ*. When we preach the gospel - a clear gospel message - something rises up in us. *Faith*. That's why we can be saved thirty years and somebody preaches a gospel message and something in us still gets stirred up. It happens because it's the *Holy Spirit*. Faith comes when we hear the message of Christ.

In *The Chosen*, Nicodemus meets Mary in the marketplace, and asks her how Jesus delivered her from demons. She replies, *"I don't understand it myself, but here is what I can tell you. I was one way, and now I am completely different. And the thing that happened in-between was him."* This is what it means to share the gospel. We think sharing the gospel is us having all our points figured out - having all of our arguments figured out - but at the end of the day, we don't need to know anything but him. That's where we start. The moment we start sharing our faith with somebody who doesn't know Jesus, we are light-years ahead of them. We're already on down the road, and we already know more than they do.

They can throw up their reasons and arguments of why this isn't true. *"I can't really see it. I can't really feel it. I don't really hear. Is it even real? I mean, I pray and it doesn't feel like it's going anywhere."* In prayer there's no feedback loop like on the internet where we say something we get comments. When we pray, we trust and believe, we have faith, and then we give God thanks that we believe we receive what we prayed for. That's how that works. God does not always instantly answer our prayers. We have to trust by faith. It's that way when we come to faith in him, and it's the same way when we share our faith about him to others. And we can say what Mary said, *"I don't really know. I don't understand. But here's what I can tell you. I used to be this way and now I'm this way - and what happened in between was him."*

If they say, *"Well, who created God?"* We just have to say, *"I have no idea. I don't know, and I don't need to."* The essence of faith is trust, and the essence of trust is the idea that we will put our weight on something. We will step out into it trusting it will support us. That's what trust, belief, and faith means - to rely on, to believe in, and to put our full weight into something. The scripture says we must believe in Jesus. The word *"in"* is a primary preposition which doesn't just mean *in*, it literally means *"into."* That means we put our full and whole weight *into* him. So, when we believe *in* Jesus, we're believing into Jesus. We're coming *into* Christ - not just believing *in* him, but we're putting the whole of who we are *onto* him and trusting that he's got us.

When we make that decision, we're no longer the same human being - we become reborn. And, if we look just the same as *before* we were saved, then *something* didn't "take" - and maybe we didn't actually believe into him, but we merely believed things about him - from a *distance*. And that will not get it. Would we risk our eternity to believe *in or about* somebody as opposed to placing our *full* weight *onto* them? Would we risk our *eternity* for that? When we put the weight of our life onto Jesus, we are *united with* him. When we put the whole of our trust in Jesus, then we can enjoy "the Bride" - the community we have in the Church. We can enjoy it, but that's not our primary purpose - it's *Jesus* - it's him. Let's get it in the right order.

Titus 3:4-7 NIV

"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

It's the work of the Holy Spirit. We can't earn it, manufacture it, buy it, get it by being good or doing good deeds, or obtain it because our *parents* were born again. We receive it as a gift by faith. We say, *"Lord, I may not understand everything or how all of this works, but by faith, I receive the free gift of eternal life. I place my life upon You. I want to believe "into" Jesus, not just believe "in" Jesus. I put the whole of my weight into this, and I give You my life. I give You my past. I give You my present. I give You my future. Take my life and use me for Your honor and Your glory and I'll live the rest of my life getting to know You a little bit better every day."*

Romans 10:8-10,13 NIV

"But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved... for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

Paul's saying the message of Christ is *near* us. It's in our mouth and in our heart. That's the word of faith - the message of faith. When we believe *into* our heart that God raised him from the dead, We will be "saved." Saved from what? We're saved from hell, from the sin that we've committed, and the sin we will commit, so that we can live *free*. That's the whole point - that we don't have to walk around with this backpack full of lead - the weight of our sin - our mistakes, our poor choices, our ignorance or our disdain. Jesus took it all on himself on the cross. It's *done*. Tetelestai - which means "*it is finished*" in Greek. So, anyone who *believes* can receive eternal life. "Religion" says, *do more*. Jesus says, "*Believe in what I've already done.*"

Jesus already took the whip for us. He took the lashes. Then he was crucified on a cross for us. He paid the penalty that we owed. That was on *us* - our sin put him there. If Jesus was willing to die for us, the least we can do is *live for him*. The least we can say is, "*Thank You that You did that for me. I'll quit being worried about what someone thinks about me if I tell them I'm a follower of Jesus unashamedly, and I'll not be ashamed of the gospel because of what Jesus did for me. He took the lashes. He took the cross. My sin put him there, and if he's willing to die for me, the least I can do is live for him - for his honor, and for his glory - to share his good news, to do exactly what he told me to do - as I'm going - not just on Sunday ...but out there where I live, work, and play.*"

Prayer - Lord Jesus, we confess we need you. God, we can't save ourself. Jesus, You're the only One who can save us. So Jesus, we put the full weight of our life, ourself, and everything that we are, into and onto You by faith right now, Lord Jesus. Holy Spirit, We ask, would You please come live on the inside of us, fill us, and baptize us in all that You are? Jesus, We confess and renounce all of our sin - everything that separates us from the Father - we reject it and renounce it. We lay it at the foot of the cross by faith right now. We ask that You would heal, cleanse, and remove it by the finished work of the Cross. And Lord Jesus, we pray that You wouldn't just be our Savior, You would be our Lord, our Master, and that we would be Your son or daughter. And God, that we would, by Your grace, follow You every single day for the rest of our life. Lord Jesus, we thank You that You caused us to be born again. We're new on the inside because of You. We'll never be the same because of the miracle-working power of the cross alive in us. We receive it right now by faith. And God, we pray for every one of us who has known You but who's walked away, and who's drifted - we come back all the way right now by faith. We run to you, God. We need you. We cling to you, Lord. Revive our hearts and our spirits that we might know You and walk with you. In the mighty name of Jesus. Amen