

Reborn

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"Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' "

We don't need a *better* version of our old life. Our *self* is not good. Our flesh is exactly what the Bible says it is. *It's evil*. The Bible says our hearts are "desperately wicked." That means our hearts have not been transformed. Unless we're born again - we experience rebirth - then we're going to continue to operate out of old flesh patterns, off of an old heart - it's not about our physical ticker - it's about the person we are on the inside, who we *really* are. If we strip all the "stuff" away, we'll continue to operate out of that old mindset, the old patterns, with all the damage, all the brokenness, all the sin, and the weight of sin in our lives. If we are not born again, we can come to church and say the right words - we can wear the t-shirt - but at the end of the day, if we're not spiritually re-birthed, then we will not be changed.

We should be praying for Dr. Fauci - for his salvation, because here's the deal - if he dies before he's born again, he will live, but he will wake up in a devil's hell. We shouldn't wish that on anybody, no matter how angry we are, or how mad we are at that individual. How many times are we supposed to forgive somebody who has sinned against us? It's actually an infinite number when we break it down. Infinity. Jesus disappointed his disciples on that one. They were hoping for an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth. If we're not careful, we'll go back into that flesh to get what we want - a pound of flesh for everything they took.

But, we need to be praying for their *salvation*. It doesn't always get a rousing response, but, religion can't do what *re-birth* can. Nicodemus was one of the great leaders in Jerusalem, and had been visiting one of the other synagogues. He was doing his apostolic duty as a leader, going up there and sitting with them and pontificating with younger Pharisees, helping them and teaching them. Nicodemus was a teacher of teachers - a very important and influential man. As portrayed in *The Chosen*, something happens to him where he is trying to cast demons out of Mary of Magdala who was completely possessed with seven or more demons. He's trying to cast them out, but nothing's working - and he's wondering *why not*.

Sometime later Nicodemus runs into her in the marketplace and she's completely whole. *Why? Because she had an encounter with Jesus of Nazareth. In that meeting, she says very simply, "I used to be this way, but now I'm this way. I don't even know how to explain it. I met a man..."* Now Nicodemus is curious. He's wondering how can this teacher from Nazareth of all places - this unlearned, unscholarly, non-seminary trained man - how can he cast out the devils? Nicodemus could *not*, and it shook him up. In the scene from that, Jesus said, *"I did not come to deliver the people from Rome, but from sin - from spiritual death."*

"God loves the world in this way: that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. So this has nothing to do with what's 'wrong.' It's all about sin. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, Nicodemus. He sent him to save it through him. It's as simple as Moses' serpent on the pole. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already. Have you ever heard anything like this before?"

That's where John is listening and they're intimating that's where the book of John came from. He was listening and writing everything down, and we have John chapter three because of that encounter. That was Jesus talking to Nicodemus, whose first thought was, *"So it's about sin and not about Rome?"* The Jews had thought the whole reason why Messiah was going to come back was to deliver them from the hammer of Rome - the weight and the oppression of bad government. Isn't that interesting how we want God to rescue us from bad government, but God doesn't always *rescue* us from bad government. He raises up good people in the midst of that who are on fire with the presence of *God*.

Jesus was saying, *"No, no, no. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."* He was saying, *"I'm here - I'm this - and this is that,"* so that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life. He didn't come to *condemn* the world, but he came to save the world through Christ. That's what he was telling Nicodemus. Sometimes, we as Christians can get real arrogant and start to condemn the world, but he was saying, *"Look, God loves the world so much that he sent Jesus."* And loving the world is not just participating in all of the things of the world. It's loving the world in spite of the things of the world.

So, we *engage*. We're *in* the world, but we're not of the world. We're of another *kingdom*. We are all right here, citizens of another kingdom, and we're just here on borrowed time. This is boot camp. This is Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth - B-I-B-L-E. We're *learning*. We're getting ready. John 3:1 says, *"Now, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the miraculous signs you were doing if God were not with him.'"*

Nicodemus was like, "*This is real. I know this is real. Something's happening.*" In reply, Jesus declared, "*I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*" That statement right there is the defining statement and a defining moment. "*You must be born again*" in order to see and experience the kingdom of God. Nicodemus asked, "*How can a man be born again when he's old? Surely he can't enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born.*" His mind is spinning. He just saw a woman who was filled with demons be completely set free, and he's thinking that everything he thought about the world in reality is shifting right now.

In verse five, Jesus answered, "*I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit.*" That's not water baptism, but it means *physical birth*. It's *water birth* - and *spiritual birth*. Jesus answered, "*You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'*" Nicodemus had knowledge and he had influence. He had morality and religion. Yet, Jesus told him, "*You must be born again.*" He was telling Nicodemus that none of his awards or accomplishments - none of the degrees hanging on his wall - were worth *anything*. "*All that means nothing. You must be born again - and I'm saying this to you because I love you.*"

And, to everybody else, he's saying the same thing: "*You must be born again.*" There are, sadly, traditions within the Church in America that don't teach this. Why would they lead us up to the trough and then say, "*But you can't drink. You can't enjoy. You can't partake. We'll teach you all the history about it. We'll teach you what it looks like and what Jesus said, but you can't partake of that and get in it. You can't drink of it.*" That's awful, and it's criminal to not lead people into the new birth, into the spiritual birth, into being *reborn*.

We can attend church and still miss *Jesus*. We can't just come, and by osmosis, because we're attending, we're serving, and we're involved - come to a Wednesday night study or a men's event or a women's event - and by osmosis get in. On that day, when we stand before the Lord in the judgment seat of Christ, there will be people there we thought *weren't* going to be there. And yet there will be people we attended church with our whole life that are not there. We can't just assume everybody's in. We can't afford to make assumptions because life and death are at stake.

We don't go to McDonald's and just by osmosis become a Big Mac. It doesn't happen that way in life. Why do we think God would do it differently? No, we need to believe in Jesus, and we can believe *in* something, but it doesn't mean we've believed into. To *believe* means *to rest in, trust in, and to put our full weight upon*. That's what we do when we get on an airplane. We're trusting the pilot's not inebriated, that he's actually had his thousands of required hours of school and training, and we're trusting every mechanic that touches that plane or any of the million *parts* of the airplane.

When we get on that airplane and click the little seat belt like that's going to save us, we're putting a lot of faith and trust in something - we're putting our weight on it. And Jesus says, "*Don't just believe that I'm real.*" The Bible says we have to believe *into* Christ, not just about him, that he was a real historical figure. We *do* have the documents that he was an actual human being who walked the planet. He is real. That's been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. But, we can attend church, and still miss *Jesus*. Good behavior is not the same as the new birth. Jesus didn't just leave heaven, come to this earth and walk among us. As Eugene Peterson in the Message Bible says, "*God has moved into the neighborhood and made his home with us.*"

He didn't do all of that to make us nice. or just so we could do some good stuff. Good behavior is not the same. Christianity isn't self-improvement. It's spiritual transformation. We're talking about a spiritual *re-birth* where we literally become new. We are *re-created* in him. The word *religion*, in our founding documents, is spoken of in a positive way. They're talking about *faith*, but it has since come to take on different connotations. In a negative sense it infers *external performance*. It's just something we *do*, not someone we are. When Christians speak negatively about religion or being religious, they usually mean *rules without relationship*. In other words, just do *this*, but don't do that, and we'll be okay. We'll "score points" with God. But, God's not keeping count. He's not up there handing out awards.

Ritual without reality is just *ceremony*, and ceremony will not get us into the kingdom of God. Rules alone will not get us into the kingdom of God. Tradition without truth - performance without transformation - will not. God is looking for a new birth. Just because we've done something that way forever doesn't mean it's true or right - just because it's tradition and ingrained and assumed knowledge. We can know all *about* Jesus and not know him. The Greek word is *gnosko*. It means *to know intimately by experience*. We can know *about* him but not experience him - *and that's where a lot of people are*.

"Religious" can also mean *duty without delight where we're just doing it* - we're going through the motions. It's not joyful. It's not life-giving. It's just doing it and then wanting our "allowance." But God wants us to walk with him in relationship - with delight and with *joy*. Also, religious life can be *appearance without* authentic faith. We can wear the t-shirt and get the bracelet. We can put Jesus stuff on our car. We can put a Bridge Church Fredericksburg sticker on our car. If we do, though, we need to drive well and be accountable.

Pastor Josh Howardon of Lake Point Church tells a story of two Israelite dads the night before the first Passover. They both applied blood on their doorpost because the angel of death was coming to take all the firstborn sons. The first dad, hesitating, said, "*Just in case it's true, I'm going to slaughter a lamb and put the blood over my doorposts.*" But, the second dad said, "*Bring it on! I believe in the promises of God. My God will never fail me!*" So that night, with two very different levels of faith, both men slayed a lamb and put the blood over the doorpost - and the angel of death passed over both of them. Why? Because death did not pass over on the grounds of the *intensity* of their faith, but on the object of their faith.

It's not the *amount* of faith we have. As Pastor Josh said, it's not the intensity of our faith, it's the *object* of our faith that matters. Some of us have attended church our whole life. We were raised that way. We may have been baptized as an infant or maybe we went through all the classes and did everything we were supposed to do, but we've never actually said, *"I receive Jesus Christ as my Savior and I'm making him the Lord of my life."* I accept his sacrifice. I accept what he did on the cross for me, and I repent, because, without him, I'm a sinner and I need to be saved. And maybe we grew up in a church and in a tradition that never offered that to us.

We don't have to leave an opportunity where we say to Jesus, *"Yes. I was raised in church. I can quote the Apostles Creed, but I've never said Yes, and I want to be saved. I want to be born again. I want to know, so I'm going to "paint some blood over the door" because I'm putting my trust in him."* Because it's not the *intensity* of our faith, it's the *object* of our faith. And the object of our faith is putting our trust in Jesus to be saved *into* him. Not just believe *in* him, but *into* him where we become *one* with him. That's what we practice in communion, which is the picture of that - his body and his blood - the blood that covers *our doorpost*. as Josh was talking about.

Our prayer now is, *"Father, I accept the gift of eternal life by receiving Christ's sacrifice for my sins. Jesus, come and take up residence in my life. I want to be born again. I give You my life right now. I repent of my sins. I turn to You. Thank You for saving me. I will live the rest of my life on this earth getting to know You and living for Your glory and Your honor. In Jesus' name. Amen."* We're not talking about a tradition - religion - but about what the Bible says and what Jesus clearly stated. *"You must be born again."* There are no *if*, *ands*, or *buts*. There are no what-if's, maybe-so's, or hope-so's. No, he said, *"You must be born again or you cannot enter the kingdom of God."* Not one of us is guaranteed another breath. At the age some of us are right now, if we look around, our friends are dropping quickly - those around us and in our circle of influence. No one's guaranteed anything, so let's not leave this on the table today.

Let's ask the Holy Spirit to stir something in us that says, *"I want to know that I know. I want to know in my knower that I know that I am born again - that I am saved - that I've repented of my sins - that I've received the gift of salvation that Jesus offers: that God so loved the world he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have everlasting life. Today I want to know that I know."* Most of us have been in church for a long time, but now we're saying, *"I want to know that I know."*

If we make a decision today, let's put it into action right away and not sit on it. Don't keep it to ourself. We're called to do this life together, to walk with one another, to hold each other's arms up *...and that's what the Church is here for.*

Prayer

Father, we pray that You would seal the work that You've begun in our hearts today. We pray for every person who's opened their heart to You right now to be born again, to give You everything.

And Lord, would You bring Your transforming power and Your Holy Spirit to live on the inside of us right now in the name of Jesus - by Your power, Your mercy, and Your grace - flood our souls with all that You are. May we never be the same ever again - transformed from the inside out - not an old life made better, but a new life in Jesus Christ. Lord, thank You for the new life, the new birth, and that we get to be new creations because of the finished work of the Cross.

Lord, we pray and say thank You in the name of Jesus. Amen.