

How Can A Man Be Born When He Is Old? **John 3:1-17**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Nicodemus comes to Jesus, there is something special about Jesus, knowing that the signs which Jesus is doing, he could not be doing, if God were not with him.

Jesus' response to this flattery is to tell him that a man must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Even after explaining it, Nicodemus does not get it, "How can these things be?"

So, Jesus asks him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"

Nicodemus is Pharisee, one of those thought of at the time to be an expert in the Law of Moses. Yes, a Pharisee, one of the religious elite of the people of Israel. But he had come to Jesus at night, for he was afraid of what people would think if he was to be seen going to this Galilean miracle man and preacher. His interest is piqued, but he is not understanding.

How can a man be born when he is old? The answer is given by Jesus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"

How many of you here are 'born again' Christians? I know, some of you are afraid to raise your hand because you have heard some of the talk about those who push being 'born again.' But, do not be confused with that group that labels themselves 'born again Christians' and that which Jesus is talking about in our text.

Yes, some of those today who talk about being 'born again' talk about a special baptism in the Spirit. In fact, they will often claim that their special Spirit baptism is being evidenced by the things they do – that they can speak in tongues, or have holy laughter, or handle poisonous snakes.

But if you mention that you were born again by water baptism, especially if you say it happened when you were an infant, they will poo-poo that as meaningless. Then they will ask you if you ever made a decision for Jesus. "No, I did not! I was dead in trespasses and sins, unable to do anything. Jesus came to me, sought me out, and by the miracle of Holy Baptism He made me a new creature."

Or they ask you for evidence that you were born again, "Can you speak in tongues like I can?" Did you notice who they are pointing to? Is it Christ? No! They like to point at themselves and the marvelous things they do.

Jesus does not leave us guessing, He gave us a little more information about being born again, and He says (and by the way, since He is God, I would say He is a better authority than the 'born

again' crowd), that man must be born of **WATER** and the Spirit. What is more, in the last chapter of Matthew He instructs His disciples how to make disciples of all nations. He tells them to baptize go out and baptize all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the **Holy Spirit**. You are baptized into one God, and that God is Father, Son, **AND** Holy Spirit. So, I guess you could tell those folks that, yes, you are baptized in the Spirit.

But do not expect this to make a difference with those who talk about being born again, they will claim that what Jesus instructed the disciples to do in Matthew, had nothing to do with Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus in our text. Why? Because, they are too busy pointing at themselves and what they can do – they are the ones who have made a decision for Jesus, it was their work to be born again.

Let me ask a couple quick questions. How many of you were born? Were any of you who were born, involved in that decision? Did any of you ask to be born? I would guess that even your parents may not have been involved in that decision, but that God decided when you would be conceived and born.

To claim the Holy Spirit's work as your own is to rob God of the glory that is due His name, to His glory, for it belongs to His Spirit.

Dear friends in Christ, who are you? Are you a child of the kingdom? Do you understand what Jesus is all about? Before Nicodemus came to talk to Him, Jesus had already thrown the sellers of animals and the moneychangers out of the temple the first time. And when asked by what authority He was doing these things, He had told them, "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They thought He was talking about the physical building of the temple, because they did not get it.

The reason they did not get it, is because that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. That which is born of flesh is flesh. Only those of the Spirit can understand the things of the Spirit, and it is for this reason they did not understand.

Nicodemus and the others were stuck in a rut – they were caught up thinking in terms of the things of the world. The physical temple was what mattered most to them, that and the keeping of the law. Outward appearances of holiness were important. Everything they did counted, at least according to their way of thinking, for they were trying to save themselves by their works.

Today's born again-ers are much the same, they want you to look at them and their works, at what they are doing, and it is what they do which makes them such good Christians. They trust in themselves so very greatly, and if you are not sure, just ask them, they will tell you what good Christians they are. But do not ever suggest that they are still sinners who still sin. Trust me on this one, I know from personal experience – they will deny they do such reprehensible things anymore.

Nicodemus does not get this whole 'kingdom of God' thing either, but Jesus gives Nicodemus all sorts of hints in our text. Jesus refers to the text for our sermon a couple weeks back – about the Son of Man being lifted up, just as Moses made the bronze serpent and lifted it up in the

wilderness – and that those who believe in the Son of Man will have eternal life.

And of course there is John 3:16, where Jesus gives the most oft-quoted Bible passage in Scripture, that which is called “the Gospel in the nutshell,” “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” In the very next sentence, Jesus also gives the reason why this is true, “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 was lifted up on the wood of the cross, to give His life as the ransom, the full and complete payment for the sinfulness of all mankind.

But too often, just like the Pharisees, we are also caught up in the things of this world – the things that happen in our daily life – the things that we can see and touch. Or, to say it as Jesus does, that which born of the flesh is flesh. And our flesh is so easily tempted and led astray. We love the things of the flesh, the things we can see and touch.

Jesus talks about the eternal temple of His body, but the Jews are caught up in the earthly temple built with human hands and was destroyed in 70 AD.

Jesus talks about being born again, and Nicodemus scratches his head wondering how to crawl back into his mother’s womb.

We look at the church and wonder what will happen to Zion and St. Peter and St. John? The church for which Christ was raised upon the cursed tree is not a building made of wood and brick and stone, but is made up of those who believe in Him, and trust in His saving work upon the cross.

Dearly loved saints of God, today we celebrate Holy Trinity. It is good, right, and salutary that we do so. For God loved the world so that He gave His only begotten Son to die for it, and the Son sends us the Holy Spirit to work faith in our hearts, so that you and I might believe in Him and be saved.

Arabelle is being brought to the font by her parents so that she might be born again. This is not some decision she is making, but God’s Spirit led her parents to bring her to the font. She is born again of water and spirit, granted forgiveness and a new life in Christ – born again in Christ.

God comes to you that you might be born again – even today. Every time you put to death your sins and drown them, along with all your evil desires in repentance, and trust in Christ’s death and resurrection, you are raised to new life, the life Christ’s Spirit lives within you. This is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God’s grace, not of your own works, but an act of the Holy Spirit within you.

You are born anew when by the Word, God’s Spirit works repentant faith in your heart, so that you trust not in yourselves, but believe in Christ.

God’s kingdom comes to you. The Father delivers the work of His Son to you in Word and Sacrament by faith, which is the work of the Holy Spirit in you. And by faith you cling to

Christ's life and make it your very own. Now, in Christ Jesus, as a part of that kingdom, God's Spirit moves you to give thanks to the Father for the work of His Son.

Blessed be the Holy Trinity, who again brought you to new life today unto life everlasting.
Amen.