**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**The New Birth**

In John 3:1-12 Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus about being born again. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews, and a Pharisee. He comes to Jesus by night and says, *“‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”* Nicodemus, evidently had the typical Jewish view of the kingdom that was to come, an earthly kingdom. Therefore, this idea of being “born again” to see the kingdom confused him. He said to Jesus, *"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"* Jesus said, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.* (vs. 2-5)

What Jesus said about being “born again” has been the subject of much debate in the religious world. Some of the questions that are debated about this passage are: 1) Does *“born of the Spirit”* mean a direct, miraculously moving of the Holy Spirit on the heart, or does it mean the Holy Spirit moving on the heart of man through the word which He has revealed? 2) Does *“born of water”* refer to water baptism, or does it mean a physical birth, or something else?

These are some of the questions we want to consider in our study today as we study “The New Birth.”

First of all, note how Jesus makes the new birth a necessity. He says, *“unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* Also He said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* In verse 7 He said, *“You must be born again.”* In order to see or enter the kingdom of God the new birth is necessary.

Now, what is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in the person of Jesus Christ. After His death, Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God. There He is reigning as king over His kingdom. In Col. 1:13 we read of people who were delivered from the power of darkness and were conveyed or transferred into the kingdom of Christ. Jesus is reigning now and people who submit to His rule are transferred into His kingdom. It is a spiritual kingdom, not of this world, as Jesus said in John 18:36. It is a kingdom where Jesus rules in the hearts of men. The kingdom then is made up of faithful subjects, all those who have submitted their hearts and lives to the reign of the king, Jesus Christ.

But the Bible also makes mention of a kingdom in the future. Peter says to Christians in 2 Peter 1:10-11, *“…for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”* This everlasting kingdom will be that which we will enter into in the future. This is when Christ comes and He will usher His people into heaven.

Let me ask you, do you desire to be in the kingdom now and hereafter? You must be born again! There are many blessings in the kingdom of God, but to enjoy those blessings, you must be born again.

What does it mean to be “born again?” “Born again” is a figure of speech. Birth is the bringing forth of a new life in a new environment. When one becomes a Christian he becomes a new creature, entering into a new life. Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:17, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”* Paul says in Romans 6:3-4 that at baptism one dies to sin and should then walk in newness of life. The change wrought in becoming a Christian is so great in both the mind and the conduct of the individual, and in his relationship with God, that one may say “He is born again.”

It is a spiritual change, a spiritual birth into a spiritual kingdom. Nicodemus is thinking of a fleshly birth and an earthly kingdom, and so he is puzzled. Jesus shows him that it was the spiritual part of man, not the fleshly that was to be born again. He says, “*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.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*  Jesus illustrates by introducing the wind that blows, but it cannot be seen. We do not know from where it comes, or where it goes. We can hear its sound and see its effects, but we cannot see the wind. Jesus says, “so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” It is the spirit that is unseen, and not the flesh, that is born of the Spirit of God. We do not see the actual birth inside the individual, but we do see its effects in his manner of life. He is a new creature. Again this is a spiritual birth into a spiritual kingdom. Nicodemus needed to understand that, and so do we.

In verse 3 Jesus said *“unless one is born again…”* Jesus explains being born again in verse 5 when He says, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* “*Born again*” in verse 3 is parallel with “*born of water and the Spirit*” in verse 5. The new birth is a birth of both water and of the Spirit. There are not two new births, one of the water and one of the Spirit, but one. Both elements – water and the Spirit – are required in the one new birth.

Some interpret the passage to be saying that “born of water” has reference to the natural birth, and “the Spirit” has reference to the new birth. We have an American expression that we say just before a baby is born, “the woman’s water breaks.” The baby is in that sac of fluid in his mother’s womb, that water breaks, the baby is born, and so we think it can be said, the baby is born of water. A problem with this view is the Jews didn’t call that fluid “water.” They didn’t have that colloquial expression for that fluid that we have, calling it "water." They didn’t call natural birth being born of water. So we can’t read some kind of Americanism into that expression. “Born of water” was never used among the Jews when referring to a physical birth. And keep in mind Jesus is talking about what is essential for man, who is already born physically, to enter the kingdom of God. It doesn’t seem reasonable that Jesus would say you must be born physically since they were already born physically. No, there is one birth that Jesus is talking about, and it is being born of water and the Spirit.

Let’s talk about the Spirit. The Spirit here is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit works in the new birth, but how? Some think that the Spirit works directly on the heart of the individual in some mysterious, better felt than told type of way to bring about the conversion and new birth of the individual. But never in the Bible do we read of the Holy Spirit working in that way to bring about the new birth. Peter says in 1 Peter 1:23, *“having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,”*  One passage says he is born of the Spirit. The other passage says he is born of the word of God. Is there a contradiction? No! The explanation is that the Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the word in affecting the new birth. When one hears the word, is convicted by it and then obeys it, he becomes a new creature and it can be said that He was born of the Spirit. In James 1:18, James says, *“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”* How are we brought forth? -- by the word of truth. So, the Holy Spirit begets by the word, the gospel.

What does “born of water” mean? It doesn’t mean physical birth as we have already shown. Others think that “water” is to be taken figuratively as in John 7:38-39 where Jesus says, that out of one’s heart “will flow rivers of living water.” It is acknowledged that “water” (“living water”) in John 7:38 is used symbolically, because a literal application of the language would make Christ’s words absurd. But there is no reason to take the word “water” figuratively in John 3:5. A well-known rule for interpreting literature states that a word is to be understood in its ordinary, literal sense unless something in the circumstances will not allow it. To do otherwise makes the Bible a book of nonsense in which every word might mean something else. What reason is there to claim that “water” in John 3:5 is figurative?

Does the literal application result in an absurdity? There is nothing in the circumstances of this passage that would prohibit us from interpreting “water” in its ordinary, literal sense. The reason many want to interpret “water” figuratively is because of their position on baptism. They know that if “water” is literal, then it must refer to baptism, and that would make baptism essential to entering the kingdom of God, which they do not believe. So they try to destroy the force of the passage with the arbitrary assertion, “Water in this passage is figurative.”

“Water” in this passage can refer to only one thing, and that is the water of baptism. In baptism one is buried in water, and then he emerges from it. In this manner it can be said he is born of water. In scripture baptism plays a very prominent role in the conversion and salvation of the sinner. Baptism was commanded to be saved from sin. Jesus said, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”* (Mark 16:16) Peter told the enquiring Jews on the day of Pentecost, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* (Acts 2:38) Saul of Tarsus was told, *“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”* (Acts 22:16) Peter, after mentioning that eight souls were saved through water said, *“There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”* (1 Peter 3:21) Baptism is essential for one to die to sin and to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4) Since baptism plays such a prominent role in one’s salvation is it not reasonable to conclude that “water” of John 3:5 refers to baptism?

Some may think that members of the church of Christ are the only ones who have ever thought that “water” in John 3:5 refers to baptism. This is not true. Consider the following quotations: William Wall, a church historian of the Church of England wrote: “There is not one Christian writer of any antiquity in any language but what understands it of baptism. And if it be not so understood, it is difficult to give an account how a person is born of water, any more than of wood.” (Wall’s History of Infant Baptism, Vol. I, p. 92) H. A. W. Meyer, a Greek scholar, said in his notes on John 3:5, “...the necessity of baptism in order to participation in the messianic kingdom (a doctrine against which Calvin in particular, and other expositors of the Reformed Church contend) has certainly its basis in this passage.” (*Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. III, p. 124) Albert Barnes, a Presbyterian, said of John 3:5, “By ‘water,’ here, is evidently signified ‘baptism.’ Thus the word is used in Eph 5:26; Titus 3:5.”

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One must be born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. When one hears the gospel, is convicted and believes in Jesus, repents of his sins, confesses his faith in Christ, and is baptized for the remission of sins, he is then born again. Have you been born again?

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