

Born Again

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The text for our lesson is found in John 3:1-8

“There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘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.’ 3 Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ 4 Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ 5 Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 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.’”
(NKJV)



You must be Born Again!

Jesus tells a Pharisee named Nicodemus that he must be born again. Nicodemus is confused at this saying because this is something very new to those living under the law of Moses at that time in history. Nicodemus knows that Jesus came from God because of the miracles He had been performing. When Nicodemus heard Jesus say that he had to be born again, he naturally thought Jesus was talking about a physical rebirth which is impossible. So he asks Jesus about that in verse 4 and then in verse 5 Jesus explains to him that the rebirth is not a physical one, but a spiritual one. One’s first birth is of the flesh, but the rebirth that Jesus is teaching about is of the spirit. He compares this spiritual rebirth to the wind blowing. It’s something that cannot be seen but it is real.

And we see in verse 5 that this spiritual rebirth is also associated with water. In speaking about this rebirth, Jesus says it must be of water and spirit before one can enter the kingdom of God. One’s first birth is a birth of the flesh. But the rebirth Jesus is teaching is of water and spirit. So we know from this text that the rebirth of water and spirit is a necessary condition for entrance into the kingdom of God.

Jesus used the term “born again” in this lesson. This idea of being born again is found in elsewhere in scripture using different terms. In Titus 3:4-7, Paul wrote, *“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

Paul used the words “washing of regeneration”. One who has been regenerated has been generated again. Born again and generated again. Both of these are terms which signify a new beginning. That’s what it means to be spiritually born again, or regenerated. We have a new beginning. And in order to understand how this new beginning takes place, we need to take notice of the reference to “washing of regeneration”. Washing is done with water. The connection between washing and the rebirth of water and of the spirit cannot be ignored. Water and washing are a part of the rebirth, regeneration, new beginning process. And Jesus said that unless one is reborn he or she cannot enter the kingdom of God.

What about this washing? How does one wash oneself? In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul spoke of being washed when he wrote. *“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”* (NIV).

These Christians in Corinth were engaging in all kinds of sinful behavior but they were washed. They had a new beginning. So how were they washed? We are given the answer to that in Acts 22:16, when Paul was setting out in his new beginning. He had been persecuting Christians and was on his way to Damascus to find more of them and put them in prison when Jesus appeared to him and let him know that he was wrong to oppose Christianity. Paul had been blinded during this and he was staying in Damascus when a Christian named Ananias came to him and told him how to wash his sins away, *“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”*. Paul had a new beginning. His former life was over and from that point in his life he was one of the most dedicated Christians that ever lived on earth. *“Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins...”*. The Christians in Corinth had been washed and they stopped doing those things that would keep them out of the kingdom of God.

There is a connection between washing, the new beginning, water and baptism. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he explained this in detail.

Romans 6:1-4, *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* (NKJV)

Those who have been baptized are buried with Jesus into death. And when they are taken up out of the water of baptism, they are raised to walk in newness of life. This newness of life is the new beginning. The rebirth. This resurrection from the watery grave of baptism is the point at which one is born again. This is how one is born of the water and of the Spirit as Jesus explained to Nicodemus. It is not a physical rebirth. It is a spiritual rebirth where one's sins are washed away and then they go on from there to walk a new life with a new beginning.

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