

Topic	Born Again: The Ultimate Spiritual Makeover
Reference	John 3:1 – 15
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‘Born Again’ is a very common phrase, many of us heard it when we first became a Christian. A lot of people have taken this phrase out of context. When the Datsun became the Nissan, it was called the ‘Born Again Car’. When the Land Rover re-did itself, it was also Born Again. We even have the daredevil come back again as a ‘Born Again Daredevil.’

- A. Why must we be born again
- B. What does being born again mean
- C. How can we be born again

A. WHY MUST WE BE BORN AGAIN?

John 3:1-3 (ESV) Now 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 him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The Pharisees were elite group in Israel. At the time of this writing there were only 6000 of them and they were totally committed to obeying the law. Actually the word Pharisee comes from the Hebrew word ‘Pharas’ which means set apart. They were people set apart who really love God, who really wanted to obey every single bit of the law, in fact they want to help construct some laws that would protect the 10 commandments as it were. So they were a special breed of people held with high regard. To be a Pharisee was something special in Israel at that particular time. This Pharisee name was Nicodemus, actually means ‘one who overcomes’ and he is actually a ruler of the Jews. The ruler of the Jews means although the roman governor ruled the land of philistine at that time, there were 70 of them who were in the Sanhedrin. This is like the parliament, they actually made up the rules and control much of the religious life of the whole of Israel. So therefore, he wasn’t just an ordinary Pharisee, he was an elite Pharisee; he was a member of the parliament. He was a ruler from the top echelon of the society and this man came to Jesus at night.

Why Nicodemus came at night?

Some people say, he was shy, he was afraid to be caught with Jesus, which is possible but if you actually look in the scripture, you find that in John

John 7:50-51 (ESV) Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, 51 “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”

Nicodemus stands up against all the other Pharisees and say, look got to give this guy a chance. Does this sound like a coward? Doesn't sound like a coward. When Jesus died

John 19:39 (ESV) Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.

He was not afraid to be seen at the tomb dressing Jesus up. He doesn't sound like a coward. If you look at the way John writes you will understand why he writes, Nicodemus who had come to Jesus by night. John uses the motifs of light and darkness. Here we have in chapter 1

*John 1:4-5 (ESV) In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in **the darkness**, and the **darkness** has not overcome it.*

John is trying to play with words, 'darkness' means unbelief and rejection, light means Jesus Christ, the illumination and revelation of God. We also see

*John 3:19-20 (ESV) And this is the judgment: the **light** has come into the world, and people loved the **darkness** rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*

So Nicodemus comes from the darkness. He comes from a place of unbelief and this is really astounding, because he is a Pharisee. If anybody to be saved, is the guy who goes to church, a member of the council, probably an elder, he is the one who should be saved, he is the one who should see the kingdom of God and yet he comes to Jesus and he says, “**Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God.**” So therefore he wants to come and discuss theology, but Jesus stops him in his tract and says,

3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Now the number one aim of a Pharisee is to see the kingdom of God, to be saved, to be in heaven. First thing you come in and he says, 'you cannot see the kingdom'. They were so religious and yet it is astounding, he drills right down, it cuts through all that protective layer of religiosity and he tells them, you aren't going to be saved. Paul, another Pharisee says

Philippians 3:4-6 (ESV) If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless

These are his qualifications and yet on Damascus road God cuts him down. He writes

*Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV) And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

Paul says we are dead. You need to be born again because you are actually dead. How can we be dead, we are alive and we are walking around? We have this term nowadays called brain dead, because when you are actually dead you are not dead because we can keep you alive through medical science. We can put you on a respirator, we can breathe for you, if you can't pass water we will put a tube and drain your urine for you, but one day you might pull out the plug and when we pull out the plug you actually die. So the state of human beings has now got three stages,

- you can be awake and aware,
- you are awake and unaware
- you are unawake and unaware, this is dead.

Dead people are very safe, you will be safer in a cemetery than a mall, because the thing about dead people is that they cannot touch you, they are not responsive to you. Spiritual deaths take a bit longer, 70 years before you actually die spiritually. When we talk about spiritual death, it is someone who is not responsive to spiritual values. He is not even able to do so and there is no insight over the fact that he is actually dead. Dead people have no insight the fact that they are dead, they think they are still alive but they are actually dead because they are not responsive.

There are various orders of life, which are vegetative, animal or human and the reason why we divide the orders of life, each order of life has the appreciation of reality. If you would have a piece of apple and seed it down here today and you come here and you have a famous violinist playing for it. The apple cannot appreciate it, because it doesn't take in that reality. There is no reaction at all, the apple remains an apple. Same thing with human, they have a physical side but they also have a spiritual side, when you are spiritually dead, I could come to tell you about the gospel of Jesus Christ die and you will tell me, so what a lot of people die, every day people die.

The point is they are not spiritually alive, they cannot respond spiritually. Jesus said after chasing people out of the temple

*John 2:23-25 (ESV) Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many **believed** in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part did not **entrust** himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*

Believing in Jesus may not mean that you are actually born again, Jesus even knew that. So we know why we must be born again because we are separated from God. When you are separated from God, you actually have no propensity for God, you have no sensitivity to God, you don't appreciate his grace.

What does being born again mean

*John 3:4-8 (ESV) 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, "Truly, truly, 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 its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

It is not physical, it is something to do with the spiritual nature, it is like presenting a lion with a salad or steak. The lion will choose the steak because it is in his nature. What about us, do we use God or do we serve God. It is our nature to use God. Most religions go into offer sacrifices and you can find these things in churches too. They give a big amount because they need something from God. It is our nature to use God rather than to serve God and this is what Paul writes.

*When we are spiritually dead we follow the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and were by **nature** children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*

He describes who we are talking about we once lived in the passions of our flesh. The trouble is when you actually talk about flesh, the Greeks have this idea of flesh means your physical body and they seem to think they divide sins of the flesh. Some are worse, if you murder, rape, robbery, violent and not so bad if you are hypocrite, you gossip a bit, full of pride. What it means by flesh is

*Romans 8:7-8 (ESV) For the mind that is set on the flesh is **hostile to God**, for it does not **submit to God's law**; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Why did Jesus come and when he talked to the Pharisees, he said to them, I know you say you don't commit adultery but if you look at a woman you have already committed adultery. Under those standards, you think anybody will pass? Nobody will pass because it shows you that our mind connected to the flesh cannot please God, no matter how holy you are. This is going back to Genesis

Genesis 3:4-5 (ESV) But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

The passion of flesh is that the issue is, the whole issue boils down that we want to be like God, we want to be God out of every aspect of our life. The flesh is therefore the aspect of your life that wants to be God. So you are talking about carrying out the desires of the body and the mind in order not to serve God. What you actually have is natural and desirable. For example, all of us need food, we need comfort, we need sex, we need to be useful and competent, we have love and affection and we need power. When the Bible talks about natural desires, these are the things that we naturally need, all of us need. In fact, if you look at other religions like Buddhist, they got it completely wrong. They say, all desire is evil. So therefore we must empty our minds, emptying our minds is devaluation of the human nature of the beauty of humanity which God has given us. If you look at the same garden of Eden in chapter 1 to 3, he tells man to have dominion. When you tell man to have dominion, it means he wants man to have power. When he tells man to work in the garden, it means he is talking about food, comfort and competency. When he tells man to relate to each other, we are talking about love and affection. These are natural desires built into human beings that make us human, but when you come into flesh normal desires for comfort, sex, competency, love and affection, they are all subverted to strategies of a life without God. We use normal desires, the desires to be loved, everybody wants to be loved, it is a holy desire but if we do in order not to love God, it is a strategy to live a life without God.

Junaid Ahmed takes 200 pictures a day. He puts it up there

"When I post a picture, in the first minute or two I'll probably get 100 likes and I love it, my phone goes crazy, it's just amazing"

Any picture of his that gets 600 likes or less he deletes, everything must have more than 600. Why, because it is a normal desire to be wanting to be loved, but it goes overboard because his

whole life is focused on this, so therefore he doesn't have time for God. It is a normal desire but it subverted and this is what he writes

"Years ago I never used to look like this. I used to be quite natural. But I just think with the obsession with social media... I want to upgrade myself now. "I've had my teeth veneered, chin filler, cheek filler, jawline filler, lip filler, botox under the eyes and on the head, tattooed eyebrows and fat freezing."

There are more people killed by selfies than shark, one third more. Selfies come out of a normal desire to be recognized, to be loved, to be cared for, to be popular and then it has been subverted to a way of life without God. So we actually have work, career, business, performance, everything else that God has given us is right and true, but the flesh is we use these things to live apart from God, we fight over them, we are obsessed with them.

Letitia Wright is one of the stars in the Black Panther. She writes, *"I was going through a lot, a very difficult time in my life and I just needed to take a break from acting because I really idolized it. So I came off from it and I went on a journey to discover God and my relationship with God and I became a Christian. It really just gave me so much love and light within myself. I felt secure and I felt like I didn't need validation from anyone else or from getting a part. My happiness wasn't dependent on that; it was dependent on my relationship with God."*

This is precisely on the dot, the same desire for recognition and love now comes from God because if we continually focus to get our recognition and self-esteem from another person and from a job or from even your family, they are going to let you down one day. What about Nicodemus? He was very religious but Paul says,

*Romans 8:7-8 (ESV) For the mind that is set on the flesh is **hostile to God**, for it does not **submit to God's law**; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Religious people are hard that's why people get turn off coming to church. You have got religiosity but actually there is a wolf inside. We are proud of our self-righteousness, we are very moral, we are all hard working, we have got integrity, we got good works and then whenever you try to criticize this people, the first thing they do is defense. They do this to protect their self-esteem which is built on religiosity. Then what happens to people is that they gossip, the criticize because the more you gossip about other people, the better you feel about yourself, because it is a ranking system. This is basically religious ways of avoiding God. So you actually have a man who is full of himself and self-righteous and a prostitute who walks on the streets, they are actually in the same boat, because he uses morality to save himself and she use sex to save herself, to be independent of God. They are both in the same boat as it were in bondage.

So now what is the solution?

John 3:1-5 (ESV) 1 Now 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 him, "Truly, truly, 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, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

There are two parallel verses, one is born again and one is born again of the water and the spirit, they mean the same thing. The first thing we talk about being born of the water and spirit, baptism comes into our mind, but the problem is that there is a bit of anachronism. Because when the time Jesus was talking about being born of water baptism wasn't instituted in the church, it is a regular feature until years after Jesus died. At the time of Jesus, when they were actually baptized was a community out in the sticks and they baptize people who wanted to become Jews and that was very rarely done and then we have got the baptism of John, which is baptism of repentance. So it is very unlikely to be baptism. Because if you look at the historical writing of the gospel. The most likely is the Old Testament reference

V10 "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"

The professor will know that our passages in the Old Testament that actually have water and the spirit together and that gives you a clue.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 (ESV) I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

This is a passage, he should have known this passage. It is there. There are other passages as well.

Ezekiel 37:9-10 (ESV) Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

There is this metaphor of the wind as well. So we are talking about born of the spirit and water, is the time when God will come and God will cleanse and God will put His spirit. It is a work entirely of God. We don't have any part, because we are already like bones. To reemphasize this, it says,

John 3:7-8 (ESV) Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

So being born of spirit is uncertain. You cannot see it, you probably can feel it and see its effects but you cannot predict it and it is a work of entirely due to God. So if you want to be born again, it is a work of God. You cannot decide that you want to get born again and then order God to make you born again, because you are dead. Dead people cannot respond. Dead people cannot initiate any action. New birth is something that only God can do, which means you cannot do anything on your own, because what is born of the flesh is flesh, what is born of the spirit is spirit.

Karl Marx wrote, *"It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusion about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions"*

He is telling us that religion created by man is an illusion, because man is so needy, he needs to create an illusion, life is like crap. It is horrible, it is unfair, there is no control so therefore I must go to church and sing songs and feel happy and Karl Marx thinks that's an illusion, but it is an illusion that you need but if you get the illusion there is a big problem because the demand to give up the illusion and his condition is a demand to give our condition, we need illusion, your condition actually needs illusions. So human beings are on a terrible state, you got religion also bad, you don't have religion also bad, which is right, because Jesus says what is born of the flesh is of the flesh, which is born of the spirit is a spirit. So God can come into your life. They are not hopeless cases; you will be amazed. There are people in the world, you never expect to become Christians, suddenly one day they walk in and they tell you they are Christians.

John 3:9-13 (ESV) Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."

So Jesus is telling him, has anybody gone up to heaven, talk to God and come down, no one, there is only one person, the son of man. The son of man comes from heaven and he comes down. The son of man is the term that Jesus uses himself. Jesus is saying, you don't believe me, are you kidding, have you gone up, do you know anybody who have gone to heaven. There is no one. ***The born again concept is revelation, not discovery. Going back to God is God revealing, is not you discovering because you cannot discover, you cannot respond, you know why, you are dead that is why you need to be born again.***

The time of Moses when he got the children of Israel out from Egypt and they were there and every day they eat manna, for meat they eat quail. Now they are complaining for eating it every day. When Moses went up to the mountain to get revelation, they got busy...

Exodus 32:4 And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" 5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord."

He put a cow there and he called it Yahweh. They were worshiping Yahweh, which means there right was in the right place, but their method was wrong. We don't like to wait for revelation, we want to discover God on ourselves. So many people like gays decided to reinterpret scripture according to the way they see it. So we look at all sorts of religions, this is the kind of God that I can believe in and often what the problem is with Nicodemus is that he come judging God. The whole idea of being born again is basically revelation, it is not discovery.

Jessie Golem is a writer from Huffington Post. She was a very staunch Christian youth leader and she actually had a very bad experience, she was very silly, somewhat she accepted an invitation from a friend to go up to Vancouver and then she stayed with her friend and the friend is male and he raped her and ever since that she left the faith and this is what she writes,

Our "eternal life" is wholly dependent on us loving God. There's no choice. How can that be true love? "Love God, or go to hell"? How cruel is that? It doesn't matter to me whether God exists or not -- it more matters as to why he didn't do anything when I needed him

When she was there on the bed being raped she cried out to Jesus repeatedly and Jesus didn't lift a finger. That's why she is no longer a Christian today. She further writes,

I no longer want to feel like I'm incapable, or inherently flawed, or unable to do things without God. It feels more empowering, great, and wonderful to believe in myself, and know I can do things because I can. And that I'm not a product of sin, but a human being with wishes, hopes and dreams. I have infinite possibilities, not because of a god allows it to be so

This is a woman who has made God in her own image. If I am in trouble, God must answer on the spot. So it is not revelation. If we decide what our God is going to be like. She is echoing Nicodemus, **“How can these things be?”**

Lydia was in Philippi and Luke writes

*Acts 16: 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord **opened her heart** to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 15 And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.*

The born again process is that you preach the gospel and God opens our heart and when God opens our hearts then suddenly you believe. It is not the other way around. You listen and then you decide to believe. No actually you need God to open your heart first. You can't conjure up emotional feelings, you can't conjure up faith, the Lord has to open up your heart.

Being born again is a work of God, you don't have any hand in getting born again. The metaphor of birth is a crisis and it describes a battle and the woman are actually warriors because of the life and death struggle, which every woman goes through and she survives and the baby also. It is a struggle, crisis for both. It is a crisis where you actually have to leave your own life, the life where you live in as God and then give up your life to Jesus, it is a crisis.

Pyongyang North Korea in 1907 and it describes spiritual rebirth suddenly coming upon them in a revival

Man after man would rise, confess his sins, break down and weep, and then throw himself to the floor and beat the floor with his fists in perfect agony of conviction. My own cook tried to make a confession, broke down in the midst of it, and cried to me across the room: “Pastor, tell me, is there any hope for me, can I be forgiven?” and then threw himself to the floor and wept and wept, and almost screamed in agony.

When the Holy Spirit comes and makes you born again, you are not going to say, okay I have sin, I decide to take Jesus Christ, no you will be acutely aware of your sin and the pain in your soul. It is not an emotional reaction, it is a crisis, because now you are going to handover your entire life to somebody else and that is a work of God.

How do we get born again?

John 3:14-15 (ESV) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

When we look in this passage, he looks back at Moses

Numbers 21:5 (ESV) And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.”

They murmured against God. So therefore God sent a plague of serpents and the serpents killed 1000s of them. In a sense their situation and Nicodemus situation is exactly the same, they both stood in judgment of God. Nicodemus said, how can this be so. People at that time says, how can this be so, you bring us out of the wilderness, no food, no wife, no astro, I am going to die. They complain and then they say I don't like the salvation that God is giving. Why are we coming through desert? Why can't we go through the sea there? We can catch some fish and prawns and all that. They don't like that, so therefore

Numbers 21:8-9 (ESV) And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

God put a serpent up because when you are actually dying, you are dying of thirst, your skin is burning up from where the bite is, you look up at the serpent and you see your sin. The reason he puts a serpent up there is a serpent that when you look up there, you look on the cross you will see your sin. It is your sin that puts you there. So every time you come to God, the first thing you need to see is your sin. He puts up the serpent so their awareness of the poison in their sole. Second thing is the thing that kills you will save you. You would never want to look at the same thing that kills you and here is asking you to look at the thing that actually kills you will actually save you. You got to face up to your sin, you got to face up to your spiritual death and he just said 'look'. Anyone can look, you are dying also you can look. It doesn't take any skill to look. So whoever believes in him have eternal life. So those who look to the serpent knew they were dying, dying of spiritual poison and I look at the serpent. Those who look at Jesus knew they were dying, dying because of sin and I am looking at Jesus who actually pays for your sin.

The point is when you actually have that bronze serpent, there is no work involved, all it takes for you to do is just look and when you look at the bronze serpent. The bronze serpent doesn't save you, it is a means of faith, it is God's grace that saves you. The only difference between a bronze serpent and Jesus Christ is that we can look at Jesus Christ directly and believe in him directly because the people at that time, they mistook the means of grace as to be the grace itself, which means they actually started to worship the bronze serpent.

For us when we look at Jesus and when we look and believe in him directly, here is a cross the reason for our salvation, our sin that brings Jesus there and this is the way we are saved and this paradigm changes us completely, why because we cannot save ourselves. The only thing that we can do, we are totally hopeless and helpless we are dead. When the Lord opens up your heart, all we have to do is look and with this dynamic it changes your whole economy of man's existence. What is up is down, what is down is up and all of us as Christians we are really born again, this is the kind of life that you live. You want to go up, you go down. You want to glorify God, you serve. You want to live a good life, you sacrifice. What is up is down.

Why did God give his son?

John 3:16-17 (ESV) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

You may be attending a church for many-many years of your life, but you may not have come to a situation where the cross seems beautiful, the grace of God seems wonderful, the experience of his word is exhilarating, maybe we are not born again and if that's the situation let me challenge you, it is not a moment of emotionalism but a decision to may be explore this. Come and join us, give yourself time and during that time God's spirit will touch your heart and change how you think, change how you feel. It will be a miracle and then you can just at Jesus Christ and believe in him and be saved.