

Vi. Be Born Again!

by John Sung

To be born again means to have a spiritual rebirth, where one receives the Holy Spirit and is transformed by God's love.

Scripture: John 3:3-21

Topics: "New Birth", "Salvation"

Description

John Sung emphasizes the necessity of being born again, using Nicodemus as an example of a religious man who, despite his good deeds and knowledge, was not truly saved. He explains that being born again is not merely about religious practices, good behavior, or belief in God, but involves a transformative experience through the Holy Spirit. Sung outlines the steps to being born again, which include repentance, faith in Jesus, and obedience to the Holy Spirit, stressing that this new birth is essential for entering the kingdom of God. He passionately calls for self-examination among listeners, urging them to ensure they have experienced this vital rebirth to attain eternal life.

Transcript

(John 3)

I. What It Is to be Born Again

Vs. 1. "There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." What kind of man? A Pharisee. Pharisees were very religious people, who delighted to pray and to make their prayers long. They knew their Bible and could repeat Scripture by heart. They had Bible verses written on their garments and wore them. They diligently kept the Sabbath and never missed Church. They occupied the first seats. This man, being a Pharisee, did all that has been mentioned --- going to Church, studying the Bible, making frequent prayers. But he was not born again.

1) To be born again is not praying or worshipping. You may practise all these, but you may not be born again.

2) To be born again is not trying to do good. His name is Nicodemus which means a "good person." Indeed, he is a good person, not a bad one. Often when the world praises a man, it regards him to be a good person. Once when I went to a village they said to me, "You are a good person." Often we hear people say, "So-and-so, he really is a good fellow." The world respects a good person, but merely being

good is not to be equated with being saved.

This man is a ruler of the Jews. Only a good great man could be a ruler of the Jews. No doubt he is good, but he is not born again, let us not be mistaken. A good man is not necessarily born again.

Vs. 2. "The same came to Jesus by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

3) To be born again is not believing there is a God. Nicodemus was truly humble, coming at night to see the Lord. Though a ruler, he knocked on the teacher's door to seek enlightenment, not an easy thing to do. He came up to see Jesus, knowing He was one sent from God. Though Nicodemus believed in God and knew of God, yet he did not know what it was to be born again.

4) To be born again is not imitating Jesus. There are many who preach the good character of Jesus and the high example He sets us, like Nicodemus who said of Jesus, "You are a teacher come from God."

5) To be born again is not to recover from illness. Once I asked a little village girl, "Are you born again?" She said, "I had a stomachache once. I prayed and I got well again." To be born again is not to be cured.

Nicodemus was a good man on every count. He read the Bible, he prayed, he believed in God. He followed Christ's example. He even believed in Jesus' miracles. Now there are many Nicodemuses in the Church. They can pray . . . and believe it is Jesus who heals them of their sicknesses. Brothers and sisters, I hope you don't make this mistake that to perform religious actions means to be born again. Nicodemus had the above mentioned five items to his credit, but he was not born again.

II. The Need of Being Born Again

It is utterly necessary that a Christian be born again!

Vs. 3. "Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Will you repeat this verse after me "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Whether you are man, woman, old, young, everyone in the world needs to be born again if he wants to see God's kingdom.

1) An unborn again person is blind. If I am not born again and preach to you, I am blind. A theological student not born again becomes a blind leader of the blind when he graduates. Will not both of them fall into the ditch? Jesus says, "A man not born again is a blind man!"

Vs. 4. "Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Nicodemus said, "Alas, I'm old. I'm quite toothless and my hair is white. How can I be born again? What talk is this? A joke?" He heard but he did not understand. How many sermon tasters are also unintelligible like him.

2) Not to be born again is to be deaf. So many sermon hearers find no interest because the words they hear do not enter their ear. So they leave. Why? Because they are deaf.

3) Not to be born again is to come to a dead end. Nicodemus said , "I'm old!" Old temper, old bad mouth, old pilferer, old critic, old liar. All these old stuffs can never change till death. How pitiful! They cannot change. They cannot improve. They cannot be rejuvenated. But the Lord can!

Vs. 5. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Has an unborn again person any hope of seeing God's kingdom?

4) Not to be born again is to be shut outside the door. How many are outside-the-door novices. They know not God. They know not the doctrine.

5) Not to be born again is to be lame. Imagine such a man --- he has a big head and five big organs inside a fat body, but with limping legs. Can he walk well? How does he look? So, you may be attending Church for years. But you are lame. Jesus says, "You must be born again be born again."

III. How To Be Born Again

"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit. . ."

The first step in the rebirth is "of water." What does this mean? Suppose here's a brother who comes to listen to the Gospel. In his heart are many devils --- gambling devil, opium devil, concubine devil, bad-temper devil ... He weeps, "O Lord, I have committed all these sins. I deserve to die. O Lord, have mercy on me!" He repents. He weeps. He is baptised, signifying his willingness to wash his sins away. This is the first step.

The second step: "and of the Spirit." When a man receives the Holy Spirit, the devil is cast away. When the devil departs, the Holy Spirit comes into the heart to stay. He becomes the Lord of his heart. Thank the Lord! When you are born again the Holy Spirit dwells in your heart like a bell. And when you sin that bell immediately rings a-ting-ting!

In the third step, you must obey the Holy Spirit. You're not only born again by the Holy Spirit. You're to obey and be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Vs. 6. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. A person not born again is under control of the flesh. For example, here is an opium smoker. Without opium, his flesh cannot keep up. It falls apart under the crush of opium. Or, suppose here is a sister under the grip of gambling. She becomes a slave to the evil habit. The drunkard is under the power of alcohol --- how terrible! These are all under control of the flesh. And how about those gripped by a bad temper, by tobacco, etc.? These often come to me and say, "Mr. Sung, I want to get rid of smoking, now and forever!" But in no time those with bad temper lose their temper as before, the smokers return to smoking --- slaves terribly held by their own sins.

However, when they become born again, the devil will leave them and the Holy Spirit will come in. Who is now in control? The Holy Spirit. Once you fall into sin the Holy Spirit in your heart will ring "ting-ting, ting-ting, you deserve to die!"

Once when I was preaching in Peking there was a sister who despised to come to my meetings because she said my sermons were too shallow, fit only for children. At last she came under the pressure of her family. She sat in the back row. When the Holy Spirit moved at the meeting, her heart became troubled until she repented of her sins and signed her name to the fact of her being born again. From that hour, she came without a break to the meetings. She bought a Bible and requested my autograph.

Later some one took her to the cinema. The Holy Spirit like a bell ting-linged in her heart. She stopped cinema going. No matter how they enticed her, she dared not go. Before her new birth she could well

afford to lose her temper and to go to the cinema. After her new birth, to lose temper and go to the cinema would set her heart "pili-polo." Before her new birth she would happily not read the Bible. After her new birth, not to read Bible would find her heart "pili-polo!" Before the new birth the devil was king in her heart. After the new birth, the Holy Spirit became Lord and ruled over her. Now she lived not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Vs. 7 & 8. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound of it, but canst not tell from where it cometh, and where it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." Jesus says, "Ye must be born again." Every one must, must! This is not to be marvelled at. Have you seen the wind? What is its shape? No one has seen the wind, but everyone has felt it. Similarly after a person is born-again, he knows of a certainty, not haphazardly, the control of the Holy Spirit. The steps of being born again are 1) of water 2) of the Holy Spirit 3) in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Every Christian must know what it is to be born again.

IV. To Be Born Again is of Greatest Importance.

Vs. 9. "Nicodemus answered, and said unto him, How can these things be?" Nicodemus could not take it in. "Who are you?" he questioned. "I'm an old man. I've never heard of such a thing." Nicodemus wondered immensely. Was there really such a thing as the new birth?

Vs. 10. "Jesus answered, and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things." You are a teacher of Israel, a ruler, a preacher, a leader, and you still do not know what it is to be born again. How sad! To be born again is of the greatest importance. 1) Everyone must know. 2) Everyone must experience. To be born again is not something that can be slured over but something that must be vividly experienced.

Vs. 11. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that which we do know, and testify to that which we have seen; and ye receive riot our witness. Jesus said, "What I said I have seen and experienced." Let us all say together, "To be born again is to be understood, to be experienced by all!" Not only to be experienced, but it is the foundation of doctrine.

Vs. 12. "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?" Aya!

3) The new birth is the foundation of doctrine! You don't understand when I tell you earthly things. If you don't know your primary school lessons how can you understand if I lecture you on the university level? If you don't know what it is to be born again what other doctrine can you understand?

Vs. 13. "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven."

(4) The New birth is passport to heaven. Jesus says to you, "To enter heaven, you must have a passport." To go to Southeast Asia, one must first get a passport. Recently I went to Indo-China. I had to have my passport. To enter heaven we must also obtain our passport. Moreover the door of heaven is a narrow one. If a pastor wants to enter heaven and he knocks on heaven's door and there sounds a voice asking, "Who are you?" And the pastor answers, "I am a pastor, I, I . . . and he carries no passport. "No!" comes the reply! Suddenly there comes a little child knocking and the same voice asks, "Who are you? Are you born again?" The little child replies, "I can sing, Jesus loves me this I know. I don't know if I'm born again!"

Then an evangelist comes knocking to which the voice questions, "Are you born again? Have you a passport?" He answers, "I'm an evangelist. I can read the Bible. But I have no passport!" Then comes a theological student, "I can read the Bible. I'm half born again." A church worker comes up sheepishly, "I did confess my sin once before." The voice from inside asks, "Have you a passport?" "Passport? Passport is it?" A university student comes rushing up and knocks, "I want to enter heaven. I am..... a specialist in chemistry!" The voice inside asks, "Who are you? I don't know you! Do you have the passport to enter heaven?" Aya, these all have not got the passport, and yet they want to get into heaven. One by one gets dropped into hell! Finally a little girl comes smartly to heaven's door. She knocks, "I heard the Gospel on such and such a day, I was moved and confessed by sins. Praise the Lord, I was born again. He gave me the new birth. After I was born again I would not get angry when Mother chided me. When I got angry the Holy Spirit in my heart rebuked me with a ting-a-ling-ting." She was born again for sure. She entered heaven. The new birth requires 1) understanding 2) experience and is 3) the foundation of doctrine, 4) passport to heaven. Have you been born again? If not, how said!

V. The Way to Being Born Again.

A person is born again not by his own prowess or merit, nor by any effort he can exert. It is the work and seal of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Vs. 14, 15. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

1) Trusting in the Son, in the merit of His shed blood, in the grace of redemption in His bearing all our sins. When the Israelites sinned in the wilderness and were bitten by fiery serpents, Moses made a brazen serpent and hanged it high on a pole. All who were bitten were told to look upon that brazen serpent for healing. We also deserve to die by our sins of speaking evil of others, of theft, lying, jealousy, gambling, yes, sins of all description. We deserve doubly to die. Thanks be to Jesus. He died in our place. By His death we are saved alive. As Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, to die for us. We deserve to die by what we have done with our hands and mouth. Christ was nailed for us on the cross, shedding His precious blood --- for us, for us. For the waywardness of our feet, Christ's feet were crucified. For the evil and malicious thoughts of our mind, Christ had to wear the crown of thorns --- that we might fearlessly stand before God's throne of grace. We deserve to die by our covetous hearts, but Christ sorrowed in His heart for us even to be beaten and pierced in bitter suffering for all the sins of our bodies.

Once there was a mother who braved a blazing fire to save her son. In so doing she was burned beyond recognition. She gave her life to save her son. Even so, our Lord Jesus was crucified that by His stripes we might be healed. By His death, we are saved alive.

Vs. 16. "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Our new birth is not only by virtue of the Son but also 2) of the Father. It is by the Father's love that His son is freely given us. Who loved us? God the Father whose love made Him to give us His only begotten son to die our death on the cross to save us.

Vs. 17 to 21. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their

deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Our new birth depends not only on the Son and the Father but 3) also on the Holy Spirit. The light of the Holy Spirit shines upon us and shows up all our filth. God does not condemn us but sends the Holy Spirit to shine into us that we might know our sins. I myself never knew I could become a preacher. Often I have been reviled for my preaching. But I'm not afraid. is there sin in preaching? The Holy Spirit illumines me and I know how to judge between right and wrong, no matter how I am reviled and hated. The world hates the light because their deeds are evil. They hate the light without realising it. So they need the light of the Holy Spirit to show up their darkness. Only then will they confess to their own evil.

When I was a child, Mother said, "When your father was a student at the theological college, he was born again." So I asked Father, "How can one be born again?" Father said, "First you must confess your sins. Second, you must believe in Jesus." So, I knelt down and prayed, "O Lord, save me. Forgive me of my sins." Was I born again? Afterwards I went to USA to study. On one occasion I heard an American pastor speak on the doctrine of the New Birth. He asked me, "Are you born again? I thought to myself," I'm a pastor's son. Surely, I'm born again. But I did not see my many sins until 1927 when the Holy Spirit illumined me. So I said, "Men's work is only half, but God's work is to the uttermost." When I was being born again, it was a process of bitterness in the knowledge of my sins. My heart was heavy, I wept. I knelt and confessed my sins, "I have stolen father's money. I have talked evil of others. I have been full of pride. Lord, forgive me of my sins." It was after confessing these many sins that peace came to my heart. I got up, and yet I felt there were other sins. I knelt, "O God, O Jesus, I deserve to die. Please forgive me of my sins." I got up and felt peace. But human work is half-work. The Holy Spirit's work is to the uttermost. As I felt troubled with more sins unconfessed, I knelt again, "O Lord, forgive, I'm a hypocrite. At worship time I read other literature. Lord, forgive!" I got up, I felt peace. Man's work is half-work, but the Holy Spirit works to the uttermost. Any more sins? When the Holy Spirit worked, I felt troubled and my heart rang like a bell. I knelt down at once, "O Lord, forgive my sins. I trust in your precious shed blood to forgive my sins. Then all my sins were taken out and forgiven of the Lord. Now I got up and found real peace.

When I was in Amoy 1934 there was a sister named Tan Boon Seng whose father lived in Nanyang and she was studying in a Christian school in Amoy. She did not believe the Word nor did she attend Church. She stayed at home to study on the Lord's Day. She refused to come to my meetings, being highly prejudiced. Finally she came under her friend's coercion. Though she writhed under my preaching, the Holy Spirit moved in her heart. She confessed her sins and was born again.

In 1935 she was seriously struck down with meningitis. The doctor said there was no cure. She said to her mother, "Though my illness is serious, my heart is not troubled. What I worry about is Father in faraway Nanyang, without Christ. When he returns please exhort him." Mother said, "All right!" Seeing that her illness had got worse, the doctor wanted to give her an injection to allay her pains. She refused. When the principal came to see her, she said, "Principal, I'm happy and I thank the Lord Jesus. He has given me the new birth. Though I'm leaving the world soon, I have everlasting life." So saying, she departed this earth.

Once she was seen in a vision by her classmate. Her classmate was rather affrighted. But she said, "Don't be afraid! I have specially asked the Lord Jesus to come and see you. Thank the Lord Jesus! I repented and was born again. Now I have everlasting life. But my father is in Nanyang, unbelieving. He is soon returning from Nanyang. I beg of you to exhort him to believe in Jesus. And I hope while you are on earth you'll labour for the Lord. That's all!"

Brothers and sisters! Should God take your soul tonight, are you born again? Aye! You who are ignorant, are you born again? Do you know what it is to be born again? The Steps of being born again? And how to be born again? If you are not born again, then you do not have the everlasting life.

THEME SONG

"Ye must be born again,

Ye must be born again;

I verily, verily say unto thee,

Ye must be born again."

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