

REGENERATION

Introduction

Jesus makes two amazing statements in John 3:3 and 7

“Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God”

“You must be born again.”

He is speaking about one of the most fundamental truths of the Bible

It is known as Regeneration. I am going to try and answer some questions:- What did He mean?

Why is it so necessary?

How does it happen?

What is the result?

How can we help others to experience it?

“Born Again” is a very misused phrase. “Born again Skoda” “Born again politicians, pop stars, businesses. Even “Born again Christian”.

(45% of all Americans claim to be “Born Again” but a recent survey showed that 26% thought premarital sex was not wrong, and they were just as likely to divorce as non-Christians)

We are not just talking about some religious change of mind, but a radical transformation of nature created by God and resulting in an entirely new lifestyle and future.

We will read several passages of scripture and then look at them carefully.

Ezekiel 36:23-27; John 3:1-21; 1Peter 1:10-25; Titus 3:1-7; 1John 2:29-3:10

Basing our study on John 3 we see

1. WHY IT IS NECESSARY TO BE BORN AGAIN

Look at who Jesus is speaking to! Nicodemus. He is described for us in v1 “pharisee”, (they were not all bad! They were descended from the Maccabees, upright, law abiding, religiously pure, expecting God’s kingdom,) “a ruler of the Jews”, (his name means ‘Victor of the People’) v10 “a teacher of Israel” (an Elder or leading politician, He knew his Law, see 7:50-51)

If such a man was told he must be born again, how necessary it is! Why?

i. Religious Convictions are not enough.

He had a great respect for Jesus

See v2 “Rabbi”, “teacher come from God”,

“Signs”, “God is with him (You)” He was perfectly correct!

But this is not enough. Muslims, Hindus, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses all have respect for Jesus but are NOT in the Kingdom of God.

See John 1:19-27 Was Nicodemus in that deputation?

See 2:23-25 Jesus did not commit Himself to them!

Jesus speaks of people who appeared to be alive but who were actually dead.

E.g. Lk 9:60 "Let the dead bury their dead"

Lk 15:24 "This my son was dead, and is alive again".

New Birth is NEW LIFE!

Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 2:1-5 "You were dead in trespasses and sins". The remedy v5 "But God...made us alive together with Christ"

ii. Human nature is totally inadequate

It cannot even understand the truth. See v4, v9-12

Jesus explains the truth by using the first of three illustrations

Firstly the O.T. imagery of Ezekiel 36 "Water and the Spirit"

What it does NOT mean! Not baptism!

Many people think that the sacrament of baptism produces the New Birth. R.C.

Church teaches this, as do some Anglican churches.

See Ezekiel 36:25 God promises He will sprinkle them with clean water and cleanse them from filthiness.

In v26 He says this will give them a new heart and a new spirit, taking away their heart of stone (hard) and giving them a heart of flesh (soft and sensitive)

In v27 this is when He will put His Spirit within them and cause them to walk in His statutes. In other words, a complete change of nature!

Paul says the same thing in Titus 3:5)

"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."

Now Jesus in John 3:6 states the same thing in other words

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh." The bible speaks in another way about "Flesh" meaning fallen, corrupt, failed, sinful nature. (Paul speaks of it in 1Corinthians 2:14 as "The natural Man")

Illus. Parents usually teach their children truths, but in this case it is the children who teach their parents! We often speak about "Innocent little children" but there is no such thing. We never teach our children to lie, steal, be rude, cruel, angry, they know these things from birth..

We are born with Adam's fallen, sinful nature. Romans 5:12

iii. Many things follow from us not being Born Again

John Piper in his book "Finally Alive" shows what is our condition Apart from the new birth :

1. We are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-2)
2. We are by nature children of wrath (Eph2:3)
3. We love darkness and hate the light (John 3:19-20)
4. Our hearts are hard as stone (Ezek 36:26)
5. We are unable to submit to God (Rom 8:7-8)
6. We are unable to accept the Gospel 1Cor 2:14)
7. We are unable to accept Jesus as Lord (1Cor 12:3)

8. We are slaves to sin (Rom 6:17)
9. We are slaves to Satan (Eph 2:1-2)
10. No good thing dwells within us (Rom 7:18, Eph 2:12)

Then there are positive things we will not enjoy without the New Birth:

We won't have saving faith but only unbelief (John 1:12, Eph 2:8-9)
We won't have Justification but only condemnation (Rom 8:1; 2Cor 5:21)
We won't be children of God but children of the devil (1John 3:9-10)
We won't bear fruit of love by the Spirit but only fruit to death (Gal 5:19-23)
We won't have eternal joy with God only eternal misery with Satan(Mat25:41)

So you see why we must be born again!

2. HOW THE NEW BIRTH COMES ABOUT

1. *It is something radically life -changing* v8-12 “born of the Spirit”
Nicodemus didn't know what it was because he hadn't experienced it for himself. It is a heavenly truth (v12)

Illust. I have a question for children to teach them this.

“How do you teach a caterpillar (grub) to fly? Do you make tissue wings and tie them on and throw it up in the air?”

They usually answer – “Wait till it changes into a butterfly!”

2. *It is something that only God can do for us.*

We don't decide to make it happen. A dead corpse cannot breathe itself back to life again. It is a miracle of the Spirit of God worked in our hearts

Illus. Remember the story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11

Jesus stood at the tomb and said, “Lazarus come out!” Lazarus DID participate in his resurrection but it was Christ Who raised him!

Illus. Ask your mother how much you did towards your natural birth?

The wind is a good illustration. It is out of our control, It moves us.

Yachts depend on it for movement . I saw a whole bay full of expensive boats on a calm sunny day. Millions of rupees worth but not going anywhere. Then the next day was dull and windy and they were all out on the sea sailing with no effort.

3. *It is linked with the Death and Resurrection of Christ .*

In v13 Jesus refers to Himself coming down from heaven. He is the Son of Man (His secret title for Himself as the Son of God).

In v14 he uses the O.T. illustration of the bronze serpent .

See Numbers 21:5-9 Bitten by snakes the Israelites are instructed to look at the serpent and whoever looked (in faith) lived. They could have argued that it would not work! They could have refused to believe God's word!

In v14-16, Jesus speaks of Him being lifted up on the cross as the object of faith. (Three times John speaks of "Believing" v15, 16, 18).

This brings "eternal life"; we are "saved"; we are "not condemned".

In 1Peter 1:3 Peter speaks of us being "begotten (born) again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".

See 1Peter 1:18-21 In God's sovereign purposes Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world for us so that believing in His blood (death) and resurrection we might have hope in God.

4. It is linked with the Word of God 1Peter 1:23

"Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, (imperishable) through the Word of God .

The Word of God is "imperishable" like the "precious blood of Christ" (v19), and like our inheritance.(v4)

That means that we cannot lose our new birth, our salvation, our eternal inheritance.

How does this Word of God come to us? (v25) By the Gospel!

5. It comes to us by God's Call

1Peter 1:14-15 "... as He who called you is holy, you also be holy..."

1Cor 1:22-24 "...but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God...for you see your calling..."

Everyone is called through the gospel ("General call") but this is the inward call of the Holy Spirit ("effective call") With this call comes the power to respond, (as with Lazarus)

What a wonder this is! See also Romans 8:29-31

3. WHAT THE NEW BIRTH DOES

The questions can be asked. Is a person born again? How do I know?

The first Letter of John includes many things that are the results of the New Birth. Look at them.

Those who are born of God:

- i. Keep His commandments' 1John 2:3-4
- ii. Walk as Christ walked , 1John 2:5-6
- iii. Don't hate others but love them, 1John 2:9; 3:14; 4:7-8
- iv. Don't love the world, 1John 2:15

- v. Confess the Son and receive Him, 1John 2:23; 4:15
- vi. Practice righteousness, 1John 2:29
- vii. Don't make a practice of sinning, 1John 3:9-10; 5:18
- viii. Possess the Spirit of God, 1John 3:24; 4:13
- ix. Listen submissively to the apostolic Word, 1John 4:6
- x. Believe that Jesus is the Christ, 1John 5:1
- xi. Overcome the world, 1John 5:4

4. HOW I CAN HELP OTHERS TO THE NEW BIRTH

The simple answer is Preach the Gospel. It is the method God uses to bring people to life spiritually.

Tell people how lost they are because of their sin.

Tell them that Christ Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost.

The Gospel is the Power of God Romans 1:16

Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, Romans 10:17

Seek the Holy Spirit's Power on your preaching, 1Thess 1:5; 1Cor 2:4

Pray for yourself and others who preach, Eph 6:18-19

Expect God to use YOU.

Illustration. When I was a young believer, I went as guest speaker to a youth camp. During the camp I gave a bible as a prize to a little girl. Forty years later I was going to my church one Sunday morning and found a couple standing outside waiting for the service to start. I welcomed them and asked if they were visitors. She replied, "You don't know me, do you? Then she opened her bag and pulled out a bible. She said, "Look inside that!" There I found in my own handwriting, the words "Presented to her (her name) Summer camp 1957"

We have a hymn with the words:

"O, use me Lord, use even me,
Just as you will, and when and where."