

## INTRODUCTION

This is kid's day! I love being around children. Kids can really be funny. A group of kids were asked to complete some popular proverbs and here are my ten favorites.

1. Strike while the Bug is close.
2. It's always darkest before Daylight Savings Time.
3. Don't bite the hand that looks dirty.
4. No news is Impossible.
5. A miss is as good as a Mister.
6. The pen is mightier than the pigs.
7. A penny saved is not much.
8. Don't put off till tomorrow what you put on to go to bed.
9. There is none so blind as Stevie Wonder.
10. If at first you don't succeed get new batteries!

Since this is kid's day, I am preaching a message that is so simple, even a six-year-old can understand so hopefully the rest of you will get it as well. We have come to one of the greatest chapters in the Bible. If all the rest of the Bible was lost except John 3, there would be enough truth in John 3 so that everyone could go to heaven.

In 1976 I was a student at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Gerald Ford was serving as President after Nixon's resignation. In the general election, Ford was running against the Democratic Nominee, Jimmy Carter, a peanut farmer from Plains, Georgia. I didn't know much about politics, but when I learned that Jimmy Carter claimed to be a born-again Christian I was fascinated. So in 1976 I voted for Jimmy Carter mainly because he claimed to be born again. I've since learned that we don't need a Pastor-in-chief in the White House, we need a Commander-in-chief.

But during the campaign, reporters kept hounding Jimmy Carter about what he meant when he said he was a born-again Christian. He issued a statement where he said: "We believe that the first time we're born as children, it's human life given to us; and when we accept Jesus as our Savior, it's a new life. That's what 'born again' means." You can argue with what kind of President he was, but you can't argue with the fact that Jimmy Carter understands what it means to be born again.

Let me start by asking, "How many of you have been born physically and know your physical birthday, raise your hands." Well, that's most of you! Now, when I asked that question, I don't think any of you thought, "Gee, I'm not real sure I have been born." You know for certain and you can write down the date of your physical birthday. For me, I was born in Ruston, Louisiana on January 16, 1953. If you're doing the math, I'm 65 years old.

Now, don't raise your hand, but I'm wondering how many of you have also been born again and know your spiritual birthday? If you do, write it down in the blank. I happen to know that I was born again on the evening of March 11, 1962 at First Baptist Church of Florala, Alabama.

Now if you can't write down a date, that doesn't mean that you haven't been born again, I'll talk about that later. But if you can't write down a date because you haven't been born again, this message will tell you HOW you can be born again.

Here in John 3, we read about the first recorded personal encounter that Jesus has with someone seeking the truth. Jesus had been in Jerusalem, and performed miracles, most of which are not recorded in the Bible, so that's the reason this man named Nicodemus comes to inquire about Jesus.

John 3:1-13 CSB. "There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to him at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him.'

Jesus replied, 'Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'

'How can anyone be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked him. 'Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?'

Jesus answered, 'Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.' 'How can these things be?' asked Nicodemus.

'Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?' Jesus replied. 'Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man.'"

Try to imagine the scene that night in Jerusalem. Nicodemus arranged a night meeting with Jesus. That was the first episode of Nick at Night. Why did they meet at night? It was probably because Nicodemus, who was a member of the ruling Sanhedrin, was afraid the other members the Sanhedrin would be appalled if they saw him speaking to this rabble-rousing rabbi from Galilee. But he came because he realized God was responsible for the miracles Jesus had been performing.

Nicodemus came to ask Jesus about His miracles. Jesus told him, "Nicodemus, you need a miracle yourself. And that miracle is being born again." In essence, Jesus said, "It doesn't matter how religious you are; or how educated you are; or how many good deeds you do, Nicodemus, you MUST be born again."

There are not many times in the Gospel accounts where Jesus insists we MUST do something. He makes it an imperative. When it comes to being born again, just as He told Nicodemus, we MUST be born again. Jesus gives us two good reasons WHY we must be born again:

## **I. You must be born again to see God's Kingdom.**

I mentioned in the last message that there are twenty-five times in John's account where Jesus prefaces a remark with "Amen Amen." In the KJV it is translated as "verily verily." Every time Jesus said, "Amen, Amen" we must pay close attention, because He is saying something profound. In John 3:3 Jesus said, "Truly I tell you [Amen Amen], unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3 CSB)

Nicodemus was confused. He asked Jesus, "Can a man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" Later he would ask Jesus, "How can this be?" Just as Nicodemus was confused, there are many confused people today. If you went around our city asking people how to get from Tyler, Texas to heaven, you'd get a lot of confusing answers. Let me share with you five ways people think they can get to heaven, but they are mistaken.

### **A. Salvation is not by generation.**

Nicodemus and all the Jews knew which tribe they were from. Their genealogy gave them spiritual status in Israel. For us it means you aren't saved by being born into a human family. Some people think they are a Christian because they are born in a Christian home. Years ago Billy Graham was in Great Britain and he asked a man if he was a Christian. The man said, "I'm from Ireland and Ireland is a Christian nation, so I'm a Christian." Billy Graham said, "Not necessarily. I heard of some kittens that were born in a bread basket, but that didn't make them biscuits!"

Through the years I've talked to people about their personal faith and sometimes they'll say something like, "Well my grandfather was a Methodist preacher." It's as if they think they will get to heaven because of the faith of their grandfather. But remember, God has no grandchildren, only children.

### **B. Salvation is not by perspiration.**

Nicodemus performed acts of kindness every day as part of his religion. You may earn a living by the sweat of your brow, but you cannot work your way into heaven. My dad taught me the value of working hard. He quit school at age 12 when his father died and he went to work at two jobs to support his mother and four sisters. He worked two jobs until he joined the Navy to fight in WWII. He taught me the value of hard work, but he also taught me that I can't work my way into heaven. Some people think that because they give money to the United Way or deliver meals to shut-ins that they are adding up brownie points with God. The only spiritual wages we earn are the wages of sin—and that is death. But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **C. Salvation is not by inspiration.**

Some people think they must be saved because they once had some emotional experience where they got warm around the heart and tears in their eyes. They had some kind of

emotional spasm, and think that was salvation. Remember, your emotions are the shallowest part of your nature. And Salvation is God's deepest work in your life. Don't trust some emotional experience you had years ago as proof of your salvation. It's not how high you jump when you get saved, it's how straight you walk when you come down.

#### **D. Salvation is not by education.**

Nicodemus was highly educated. He could quote the first five books of the Old Testament. Education is wonderful and you should get all you can and never stop learning. But you can't learn your way into heaven. Jesus spoke about people who are ever learning but never come to the knowledge of the truth. Vance Havner used to say that he knew some people who were educated beyond their intelligence. Education can help you get a good job, and earn degrees, but it won't get you into heaven. You can have more degrees behind your name than a thermometer, but if you aren't born again that just means you'll go to hell as an educated person, one who never found the truth.

#### **E. Salvation is not by imitation.**

I grew up reading biographies of famous people. One of my favorites was about John Paul Jones, our Naval Commander during the Revolutionary War. Although he commanded only a few small ships fighting against the greatest naval force on the planet, he had many strategic victories. In one particular sea battle, his ship was on fire, and the British Commander called for him to surrender. John Paul Jones said, "I have not yet begun to fight!" Those are famous words, and his ship eventually captured the British ship. Reading that as a child instilled in me an attitude persistence to never give up. We can imitate the good qualities of great men and women. But when it comes to Jesus, we can't imitate Him. He lived a sinless life and we're all sinners. He died on the cross for our sins—we can't imitate that. Salvation is not by imitation.

Just as Nicodemus was confused about salvation, so are many people today. To understand what it means to be born again, let's examine the second reason Jesus said we *must* be born again.

### **II. You must be born again to enter God's Kingdom.**

You must be born again to see God's Kingdom. And more importantly you must be born again to enter God's Kingdom. Here's the second "Amen Amen" statement Jesus spoke to Nicodemus: "Truly I tell you [Amen Amen], unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5 CSB)

So, what does it mean to be born of water and born of the Spirit? There have been some strange interpretations of what it means to be born of water. Some have said that refers to physical birth, as when an expectant mother has her water to break. But that's a stretch. And in the next birth Jesus does compare physical and spiritual birth. He says, "that which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." So, the water here doesn't mean physical birth.

I've even read where a few commentators have suggested that being born of water means being baptized. But that won't fly because Jesus wasn't baptizing people. And baptism is a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection—not a birth.

So, what does the water refer to? It is a clear reference to the Word of God. Jesus told the disciples in John 13, "Now you are clean through the WORD I have spoken unto you." Being born again is a three-fold miracle. It involves the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and our will.

### **A. God's Word washes us.**

When Paul was comparing how a husband should love his wife, he shows us that we are cleansed by God's Word. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word." (Ephesians 5:25-26 CSB)

Once you understand that the water represents God's Word we can begin to understand what it means to be born again.

Let's compare it to physical birth. For a physical birth to occur, two parents have to come together for there to be a conception. Over 66 years ago, my parents, Orlo and Bess Dykes, came together and I was conceived in the womb of my mother. Life was created. And even physical birth is a miracle from God. In Psalm 139:13 David says of God, "You knit me together in my mother's womb."

To follow this analogy, every time a person is born again, there are two parents, two forces at work together. There is the Word of God and the Spirit of God. So what is the work of the Spirit?

### **B. God's Spirit renews us.**

The Bible says, "He saved us—not by works of righteousness [that's perspiration] that we had done, but according to his mercy—through the washing of regeneration [that's the Word] and renewal by the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5 CSB)

The Word of God washes us as the first step of regeneration and then the Holy Spirit miraculously renews us; He gives us a new birth.

We need a new birth, because in our first birth we inherited the dangerous DNA of sin from Adam. The Bible says "that in Adam we all died." We were born into the wrong family—a family of sinners.

I recall Adrian Rogers telling the story about meeting a sophisticated lady in Memphis. She was really into tracing her genealogy. She said, "Dr. Rogers, I have traced my ancestors back for several centuries. You'll be happy to know that my family came over on the Mayflower." Adrian said, "Well, I've traced my ancestry farther back than that."

She said, "You did?"

He said, "Yes ma'am. I can trace my lineage all the way back to a crooked farmer and a drunken sailor. The farmer was Adam and the Sailor was Noah."

The reason we need a new birth is because our first birth put us the family of humanity. We are all sinners by nature and by choice.

In a physical birth there are two parents, and life is created. But there is another element in a spiritual birth.

### **C. Our will receives the new birth.**

The Bible says, "But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12 CSB) We didn't have a choice in our first birth. Sometimes you'll hear an angry teenager say something like, "Well, I didn't ask to be born in this family." Duh, of course you didn't. We didn't have a choice about our physical birth. But we DO have a choice when it comes to being born again. To use the analogy of parents again, the Word of God and the Spirit of God come together and spiritual life is created in the womb of faith. So we must receive and believe this gift of eternal life by faith.

Let me give you a simple Bible illustration that demonstrates the three-fold miracle of the New Birth. In Luke 1:28-38 the Angel Gabriel comes to visit a young virgin named Mary in Nazareth. He brings God's Word. He says, "Mary, you are so blessed. God has chosen you to give birth to His Son. You will call his name Jesus and He will save His people from their sins." There's God's Word. But Mary said, "How can this be? I am a virgin?" Gabriel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." There's the work of the Holy Spirit. But there was still one thing left to happen. Mary had to surrender her will to God. She had to choose for this to happen. So she said, "May it be done to me according to your Word." Only after she agreed did the Spirit do His work.

Have you been born again? You may ask, "Can the new birth occur to me and I didn't know it happened?" No, that's like saying, "Can I get married and not really know it happened?"

You can know that it happened and you can be certain about it. I mentioned earlier that I have two birthdays. Actually, I'm more certain about my second birthday than my first. I don't remember the first birth. I've seen a birth certificate saying I was born on January 16, but I have to take my parents' word for it. But I can still recall the night I was born again: March 11, 1962.

If you weren't able to fill in the date for your spiritual birthday, don't panic. There are some people who say that you have to know the exact date and time when you were saved or you aren't really saved. I don't agree. The main thing you need to know is that you are saved NOW. You need to know for certain that you have passed from death to life. But you may not recall the exact moment.

I've often used this illustration. Let's imagine both of us were traveling from Tyler to Oklahoma City. And we agreed to meet in front of the State Capital. I'm going to drive and you're going to fly. The next day we meet in Oklahoma City and I say, "Hey, I remember exactly when I crossed from Texas into Oklahoma there at the Red River. I saw a huge sign on I-35 that said, 'Welcome to Oklahoma.' Do you remember when you crossed the state line?" And you'd say, "No, I don't remember when it was because I was flying at 35,000 feet." Now we're both there for certain, but only one knows exactly when we passed from Texas to Oklahoma. But we're both in Oklahoma. Oklahoma isn't heaven, but both of us can be in heaven even if one of us can't recall the exact date and time we were born again.

Now I'm happy for you if you can remember when you were born again. But that's not a requirement. What is a requirement is for you know that Jesus has come into your life and you are trusting Him for salvation this very moment. It's not about a past remembrance, it's about a present reality.

Here's the Take Away Truth: If you are born once, you'll die twice. If you are born twice, you'll die once. If the Lord tarries we will all die once, physically. But the Bible speaks about another death for those who never accept God's free gift of eternal life. We read in Revelation 20, "Each one was judged according to their works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:13-15 CSB)

For those of us who have been born twice, we will only experience physical death and then we'll be in the presence of Jesus. So how many times have you been born?

If you've only been born physically here's how you can be born again. God's Word has already informed you that God loves you and He is not willing for any to perish but that all will come to repentance. That's the Word of God in operation. And right now the Spirit of God is convicting you of sin in your life. He wants to come into your life and change you from the inside. But God will not violate your will. Will you choose to accept God's gift of eternal life? You aren't saved by saying a prayer, but by expressing faith and trust. But many people have been born again by praying a simple prayer like this. You can pray it with me. "Father I admit that I'm a sinner. I can never be good enough to earn your forgiveness. I believe that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead. I receive Jesus into my heart through faith. Come into my life and make me new person. I love you and I will follow you for the rest of my life." Amen.

## OUTLINE

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Your spiritual birthday? \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

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B. Perspiration

C. Inspiration

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## TAKE AWAY TRUTH

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



David O. Dykes, Pastor  
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