

5/24/2020 - John 3:1-15 - "Born of water and Spirit"

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[0 : 00] Welcome. It is such a blessing to be back here together with all of you and a few new faces, so I'm really excited to be here to study God's Word together as we move into John chapter 3, verses 1 through 15 today, which is an interaction between Jesus and Nicodemus.

And we'll learn a little bit more about Nicodemus, but before we jump into the text, I want to kind of take us back to the beginning of John and kind of look at how John has, through his narrative, got us to this point and let that kind of inform the text.

So, we began, or John began his narrative with describing how Jesus was with God in the beginning, and he was God, and that was the first sermon we heard from Brent on John.

And then we see an interaction with John the Baptist. There's a lot of Johns, so it's hard to keep track of, but this one is John the Baptist, and John testified of Jesus being the Son of God, right, of being of God.

And actually, the Pharisees sent some of their representatives, the Levites and priests, to ask John who he was and why he was there, and one of the leaders of this group would have been Nicodemus, if not their chief leader.

[1 : 28] And so, he sent the Levites there to ask John why he was there, and John said, no, I'm not the Christ, but he's amongst you, right?

And he's the one who John saw the Spirit descending on, and God testifying that he was the Son of Man, and that he had come to baptize in the Holy Spirit.

And then, as John proceeds in his narrative, he introduces us to the disciples who Jesus called out of many. He chose them to be his disciples. And then, he began his earthly ministry with the first miracle that we learned about a few weeks ago, when Jesus turned water into wine, right?

And this was a miracle pointing to a new and better covenant, a new covenant that was to come.

And then, in Lex's sermon last week, we learned about Jesus cleansing the temple, which was another sign of Jesus coming to cleanse our hearts, to prepare the way for a new temple to take place within us, where the Spirit would dwell.

And then, John ended it with a description of how Jesus didn't entrust himself to all. Some had believed on him because of his signs, but not for who he was, not because of his witness.

[2 : 51] And then, John says that Jesus knows the hearts of all people. He knows what is in people. And as an illustration of that, John continues with this interaction between Jesus and Nicodemus.

And so, we get to this point, John wants us to see how Jesus knew the hearts of his people. And also, he wanted to use it as one of the great teaching points of his ministry.

And so, at this point, Jesus is confronted by Nicodemus on the roof of a house at night, where Nicodemus could have come in hiding and met him on the roof of the house.

In their culture, you could get to the roof from a staircase outside. And so, no one would have known of this interaction, perhaps. We're not told specifically why he came by night or why he came and met him in this way.

But he came to ask Jesus to get word from him of who he was. So, before we move into this interaction, I want to open by reading John chapter 3, verses 1 through 15.

[4 : 01] So, if you want to open in your Bible, I'm going to be reading it in the ESV. The beginning of John chapter 3, and we'll end on 15, right before perhaps the most memorable verse in Scripture, right?

John 3, 16. But we'll leave that one for next week, and Brent gets to preach on that one. So, let's see what goes on between Nicodemus and Jesus. Now, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

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? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again.

[5 : 10] 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. Nicodemus said to him, How can these things be?

Jesus answered him, Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 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.

If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one ascends into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. Amen.

So let's pray before we jump into this. Heavenly Father, thank you for this beautiful, sunny Sunday morning to gather together again, to fellowship with one another, to praise and worship you.

[6 : 16] Father, to be washed in your word and regenerated by your Spirit, and I pray that you will guide our hearts to see the imperative and the truth of what you said here.

And Lord, that we would be humbled and come before you to worship you for who you are and what you've done. We love you and praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Right? So, the conversation begins in verse 1 with Nicodemus coming by night. Right? I spoke of this already. To meet Jesus in an upper room. Probably a one-on-one conversation.

We're not really sure, but that's what it, the picture it sets in my mind. Right? And this may be indicating he didn't want to be seen by others. He was a leader of the Jews, and he wasn't sure what they would think of him going to meet Jesus.

So, he wanted to do so where no one would know of this interaction. He didn't want to compromise his dignity or perhaps his safety. Right? So, that's the scene that we have here.

[7 : 20] And then, he asked Jesus three questions. And I'm kind of stretching here. The first one's not really a question, but I'm going to phrase it as a question. So, I'm going to break the sermon up into three questions.

The first one is really a statement. But, as we all know, you can make a statement in the form of a question. Or a question in the form of a statement. Right? There's a hidden meaning to what you're saying that's really getting at something deeper.

And so, he kind of opens in an interesting way. He says, Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God. For no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.

Right? So, perhaps not a question. But, he's asking within these words, are you from God? And if so, how are you from God?

Are you a prophet? Are you a teacher? Are you God? Right? That's what he really wants to know. So, that's why I'm writing it as a question. And it's interesting that he opens with the word Rabbi.

[8 : 20] Right? This was the same title of endearment that Jesus' own disciples called him. It means teacher. And so, Nicodemus calls on Jesus as Rabbi. Which, to me, means that he had some respect for Jesus.

He knew there was something more to him than just a man. And then he says, we, rather than I. Meaning, he's representing others when he speaks.

And he's representing the Sanhedrin. The highest ruling class in Israel. When he speaks. He says, we know you are a teacher. Because no one can do these things apart from God.

And then Jesus replies. And it seems slightly disconnected from what Nicodemus says. But he says, truly, or truly, truly, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Right? Right? And to us who have heard this term many times, perhaps we have some understanding of what it means to be born again. But to Nicodemus, this would sound pretty strange.

[9 : 24] Right? He would have some idea from his learnings of what Jesus is getting at. But he would be mildly confused, I think. And so I think this verse on its own has been preached on entire sermons just on this one verse.

But I want to take a moment to dig into this verse before we move into the others. Firstly, looking at the second half of what he says. To see the kingdom.

What does it mean to see the kingdom? Does he mean literally see it? Figuratively see it? But the word see here implies to take part in. And so Jesus is saying you will have no part in the kingdom unless you're born again.

Right? So there is some weight to what he is saying. And so this statement is essentially saying you can take no part in the kingdom of God unless you're born again. And so perhaps you've heard the term born again.

Or maybe in some of your translations it reads born from above. Which I think gives a little bit more light to the meaning. It means born from above. Born from heaven.

[10 : 28] It implies or the implication here of this statement is therefore the difference between an eternity worshipping before God in heaven.

Or an eternity in outer darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. This statement that Jesus makes here is the difference between life and death. Right? So he responds with a sobering statement that would have opened Nicodemus' mind to think on these things.

So what does it mean then to be born again or born from above? And I think the best illustrations I've heard of this begin by speaking on what we're born out of.

So I want to read some things that remind us what we were born out of, where we came from, and why we need to be born again. Those who have not been born again.

We loved darkness rather than the light. We were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. We were haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents.

[11 : 38] Interesting that that one's thrown in there, right? Foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. And that's the picture scripture teaches of those who have not been born again. We may not paint ourself with that same picture, but that's the reality of what we are before God apart from being born from above.

None of us were righteous, not one. None sought for God. There was no fear of God before our eyes. We were dead in the trespass of our sins in which we once walked.

We all once lived in the passion of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

We're by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. So that is the picture scripture teaches of who we were before we were born again, or who we are if we have not been born again.

The reality of sin is that it reflects spiritual death, right? In God's eyes, there is spiritual death. No spiritual life in a sinner. No desire for God or for his righteousness.

The sinner is totally wicked and a child of wrath. Perhaps we wouldn't describe ourselves that way, but that is the way we are described in scripture apart from God.

[12 : 51] And so, perhaps that's sobering, but the reality is the only escape from this is to be born from above with a new heart and a new spirit.

And so, there's great encouragement in these words to be born from above. Ephesians 2.4-8.

Ephesians 2.4-8. We, who were dead in our trespasses and uncircumcision of our flesh, God made alive together with him.

Right? Colossians 2.13. So, I think this transition from death to life can be seen most vividly. And actually, we will see that this text is actually pointing Nicodemus back to Ezekiel 36 and 37.

So, I want to read a little part of Ezekiel 37, which I've summarized a little bit because I don't want to read the whole chapter. But, it says, The Spirit of the Lord set me down in the middle of the valley.

[14 : 11] It was full of bones. There were many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. He said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? I answered, O Lord God, you know.

Implying he knows that they can, if God is willing. Perhaps over these bones, or sorry, prophesy over these bones and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord God to these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter you. You shall live, and I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live.

You shall know that I am the Lord. So, I prophesied as he commanded me. And the breath came into them. They lived and stood on their feet in an exceedingly great army.

I don't want to take away from what I'm going to speak later, but the important thing to note here is that in the Hebrew and the Greek, the words for spirit, breath, and wind were the same.

[15:13] So, we'll look into that in a moment. But this is the reality of what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus. The new birth requires a new heart, a new life, and that it requires the breath or the word of God to breathe a new creation where none existed.

It's therefore a supernatural work of God, a new life brought about through, we'll see, the conviction of sin and by faith, from Ephesians 2, Timothy 2, and John chapter 1.

A new heart which responds in repentance and faith, as we can see in Acts 20, 21, Romans 3, 20, and Hebrews 6, 1. As the spirit, as we'll learn, this implies the Holy Spirit and also the Spirit of God works in the very depths of our spirit and speaks into existence something new so that there is a new person within us, a new person of God.

Right? So, that is what Jesus is saying when he says, you must be born from above. However, Nicodemus responds in a way that I think makes me laugh sometimes when I read it.

But I don't think he was being insincere when he said, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Right?

[16:39] And perhaps we read that literally as though that's what Nicodemus thought when he heard Jesus' words. But I think what he's really meaning is, surely this cannot be so.

Surely this is impossible that someone can be born from above. How can a person start over? How can we undo our past mistakes and start afresh?

It's not possible. We don't get a second chance. Right? But the issue is, Nicodemus is understanding a new birth as a second beginning. A fresh start. Rather than, what Jesus is meaning, a spiritual beginning.

Beginning of a spiritual life in him. Right? And so Jesus responds with a clarification. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Right? So now he says that you need to be born of water and Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. So what does this mean? What does it mean to be born of water and Spirit?

[17:46] Right? And I'm sure you could find at least three or four different interpretations of what these two words mean. But I think Jesus used these two words very specifically to speak to the heart of Nicodemus.

A man who knew the Old Testament far better than anyone in his day, perhaps anyone today. He used these two words to bring to Nicodemus' mind a very specific passage.

Before we get into that passage, though, I want to look at the two words, water and Spirit. Water, sometimes thought to mean physical baptism or to represent birth.

Right? Some people read it there. But here, it most likely refers to the washing of regeneration and the washing of the word that are spoken of in Titus 3, verses 5, and Ephesians 5, verses 25 through 26.

So this water is representing a washing and a regeneration. And the word Spirit here is capitalized, but it comes from the Greek word pneuma, which I think is the same prefix for pneumonia, but I'm not sure about that.

[19:03] Right? But it means wind or breath. Pneumonia is a big thing in the news these days, so it came to mind, right? Yeah. But pneuma, it means wind or breath.

And it's important because it's the breath of life. We can't live without breath. The same is true of the Spirit. We can't live without the Spirit.

We can't have spiritual life apart from the renewal brought about by the Holy Spirit. So this is not simply a regenerated human spirit, but the Spirit of God himself within us.

We'll look at that more in a moment. But the passage that Jesus wants to come to Nicodemus' mind is Ezekiel 36, verses 25 through 27, where the Lord through Ezekiel prophesies and says, I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean.

Skipping down a few verses. I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you, will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, give you a heart of flesh, and put my spirit within you.

[20:14] This spirit will cause you to walk in my statutes, to be careful to obey my rules. Right? Don't skip over that where it says, I will put my spirit within you.

And then we see this reaffirmed in Titus verse 3. He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. So, Titus, or Paul 2 Titus is clarifying here that this water and spirit are the washing of regeneration by the water and the renewal of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. And so, Jesus' two responses in question 1 and question 2 are really parallel to one another. They're not two different meanings, they mean the same thing.

The birth from above is the birth by water and spirit. He's simply clarifying for Nicodemus what he means by this birth from above.

Right? So, to summarize, the spiritual birth is an inward, new creation in which the spirit of God is breathed into dead flesh and new life begins.

[21 : 28] And it's only through the new birth, the spiritual birth, that we gain sight and take part of, fellowship with, the present body, the kingdom of God here and now, and the spiritual eternal kingdom of God.

Right? And I really like the way MacArthur puts it. I'm a John MacArthur fan if you're not aware. But the way he succinctly states it is, without the spiritual washing of the soul, a cleansing accomplished only by the Holy Spirit, through the word of God, no one can enter God's kingdom.

Right? And I think the two things that, from Titus 3 and Ephesians 5, 26, that should stand out is, it's the cleansing by the Holy Spirit, brought about by God, and through the washing of the word of God, as we see in Ephesians 5, 26.

So this washing, although it is initiated by the Holy Spirit, it is accomplished through the word of God, through reading, meditating on, understanding, and knowing his word.

Right? So continuing on in verses 6 and 7, Jesus continues to clarify, the kingdom of heaven is more than flesh and blood, it's spirit. Those who are born in our current present state of fallen, sinful human nature can only bear, or bring to being, more human nature.

[22 : 56] Only the Holy Spirit can bear, or bring to being, spiritual life, or spiritual transformation. And with this new life, the fruit, the Spirit imparts a heavenly belief, while the flesh, a fallen one.

Right? And so these two states, the flesh and the Spirit, they're infinitely separated, as is heaven and earth. Right? And only a divine act of the Holy Spirit can create a new spirit.

As Jesus says in John 6, 63, it is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all. The words that I've spoken to you are spirit and life.

His words are provided, originated by the Holy Spirit, the word of God, and his word is life to us. Right?

So I think there's great encouragement in that. In verse 8, he clarifies through an illustration. So Jesus here uses an illustration, and he says the words that I think sometimes we as pastors try to avoid.

[24 : 05] He says, spirit is like the wind. Right? I think we try to avoid that because our illustrations sometimes fall short of the reality. But Jesus here, he likens the Spirit to the wind.

And I believe, as he is God, he does so perfectly. Right? And he says that the Spirit is perceived by its effect. I think of fruit when I think of the effect of the Spirit.

Not by sense, by understanding, or by reasoning. Right? The wind blows freely. No one can alter its course, as is the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit, it moves in accord with the Father and the Son. Right? It moves independently of human will or perception. And so the point Jesus is making, I believe, is that the voice of the wind, the sound we hear, is heard, and yet the wind itself is invisible.

The effect of the wind is evident, even if we can't see or perceive where it originates from. And second, that the wind cannot be controlled. Right? We may be able to harness the wind for flight, for power, for many things, but we can't control the wind.

[25 : 17] It's outside of our control. And so is the birth from above. It is out of human control. The sovereign work of regeneration in the human heart cannot be controlled, initiated, or predicted by human will.

The things of the Spirit are made evident by the transformed lives of those who are born in the Spirit. And so Jesus likens the new birth to this. Right? And I'll speak more on how we can receive this new birth if it is in fact a thing that originates from God.

But the last point I want to make from this passage here is that Jesus is the ladder between heaven and earth in verses 9 through 15.

And so in this we see another question from Nicodemus. Even with all of Jesus' explanation, Nicodemus responds with another question. How can these things be? How is this possible? Right? How can these things be brought to be? And so he's confronted by a reality, a harsh reality, that despite his authority as this great teacher in Israel, despite his status as a member of the Pharisees, his righteousness in the law was not enough.

[26 : 30] And so he asks, how can these things be? How could I have missed this? How have I fallen short? Right? And so Jesus gently rebukes him for his lack of understanding, his perception of these truths.

But he doesn't rebuke just him. No, because Nicodemus began, he came to him representing the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, and Israel.

And so Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and Israel for their lack of belief. Why does he rebuke them? The Old Testament prophets spoke of the new era and the working of the Spirit.

There are examples in Isaiah 32, the examples we've seen in Ezekiel 36, examples in Joel 2.28, and there's examples throughout Scripture of how the Old Testament prophets were pointing to Christ, to this new birth.

I think Ezekiel 36, 20 through 29 is one of my favorite passages to look at in speaking of this.

Reading in Ezekiel 36, verse 22, the word says, Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God, It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

[27 : 53] I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, in which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God. When through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes, I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, from all your idols. I will cleanse you, will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. So he speaks clearly of this new spirit that he's now come to bring about.

And in verse 11 we see that Nicodemus, he was somehow ignorant of this spiritual reality. He represented literally and figuratively the unbelief and lack of understanding of the Sanhedrin and of the people of Israel.

They did not believe Jesus' witness, they didn't believe his testimony, and they rejected him. And so Jesus says, 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.

So as I said a moment ago, Jesus is answering Nicodemus' opening statement when he says, we know you're a teacher. And so he's addressing the unbelief of Israel, not just Nicodemus.

[29 : 14] In verse 12, since Nicodemus had failed to understand or to understand the analogy, sorry, that Jesus offered of the wind, right?

How is he going to understand now these things of the Spirit? If he can't understand earthly things, how is he going to understand heavenly things? And that is what Jesus says to him.

The heavenly things Jesus is referring to in verse 12 are the mysteries of redemption that Jesus has come into the world to bring about. He's speaking of his death and resurrection, and he came from heaven to earth to bear witness of what he had seen and heard from God.

Those who have been born of the Spirit have eternal life and know God, the Father, and Jesus who sent him as we see in 1 John 2.20. But those who have not do not recognize him, right?

In verse 13, we see another illustration of how Jesus is the ladder between heaven and earth. He is the connection between heaven and earth. No one has ever gone into heaven and then come back except the Son of Man.

[30 : 24] Jesus is the lone exception of one who knows both earth and heaven. And sometimes I think we might rebut that statement and say, well, what about those in the Old Testament who went up into heaven with God, right?

We see examples of people in the Old Testament who were brought up into heaven in visions and literally, but none of them came back. None of them knew heaven and then earth.

Some of them knew earth and then heaven, but not the other way. Jesus was the only exception of one who understood both the things of the flesh and the things of the Spirit. And I like John 3.31-36, which Jesus says, He who comes from above is above all.

He who is as if the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in earthly ways. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what He has seen and heard, yet no one receives His testimony.

Whoever receives His testimony sets His seal to this, right? This is His testimony. God is true, for He who God has sent utters the words of God.

[31 : 30] He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand, so that whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on Him.

Right? Those are the things, the witness, that Nicodemus and the Sanhedrin had failed to understand. And then in verse 14 and 15, Jesus concludes by saying, The Son of Man must be lifted up, right?

This is in accordance with the will of God. Christ must be lifted on the cross and glorified so that whoever believes in Him and His testimony would have eternal life.

Right? And this illustration of Moses that Jesus is speaking of is meant to point back to Numbers, chapter 21, verses 4 and 9, where Israel was complaining about being in the wilderness and saying that they were going to die and that it would have been better that they had stayed in Egypt and died.

And so, because of their impatience and complaining, God judged them. He sent serpents, fiery serpents, that were biting at their heels and the venom was killing them.

[32 : 48] And so they cried out to God in repentance. They prayed and God revealed to Moses that He needed to build a brass serpent and set it on a pole and hold it up. Right? Many of us are familiar with this symbol.

It's the symbol that's on the side of most ambulances and represents medicine right? But if He held it up and they looked to it, they would be saved. Right? And the same is true of Christ.

He is held up on the cross, on the wooden pole and only those who look to Him will be saved.

Right? So although Israel and their leaders had the Old Testament and devoted their lives to studying it, living the law, they failed to see the witness, the scriptures, the Old Testament themselves bear about Christ and they failed to look to Him for eternal life.

Instead, they had been looking to their own righteousness found in the law and they had counted on being Abraham's descendants for their salvation. Jesus rebuked them, actually, in John 5, 39 through 40 when He said to them, You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

However, it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

Right? So in conclusion on this passage here, as a teacher of Israel, Nicodemus should have understood how God, by a sovereign act of grace, could give someone a new heart.

[34 : 14] Right? There were examples of this in 1 Samuel 10, Jeremiah 31. And Nicodemus, he was a great leader of Israel and as a member of the Pharisees, he had likely memorized great portions of the Old Testament.

Some of them had memorized books of the Old Testament. He knew the law better than anyone.

Right? And so, for us, especially with how harshly Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, I think it's easy for us to judge them and say, how could they have failed?

Right? We look back and we see these truths as revealed to us through Christ, through His Word, and yet sometimes we forget. Right? He was a pious, a devout, and a religious man who had devoted his entire self to studying and knowing God.

Right? And what this really reveals is that through the greatest exertion of human determination, he could not attain the righteousness of God.

Right? He could not bring about the birth from above by the greatest determination of human effort. Apart from God's sovereign will, nothing can bring about the birth from above.

[35 : 24] Just some encouragement, we may not know Nicodemus' fate, but he is spoken of again in John chapter 7, and John, the very end of the book of John, I didn't write down the reference here, but in John 7, he actually defends Jesus before the Pharisees, and they ridicule him for it.

They call him a Gentile, or they ask him if he too is from where Jesus is from. But then later, he actually provides myrrh and aloes, 75 pounds of it, for Jesus' burial.

So he was there, he was the one who helped to bury Jesus. Right? So it shows that he perhaps was convinced of Jesus' testimony, and maybe through repentance and faith, through the working

of the Spirit, that he did experience this birth from above.

Right? So, that was a lot of verses to go through, but I want to clarify the main point for you from this passage. Salvation requires the creation of a new life, a second birth in which the dead in spirit is breathed to life by the working of God's Spirit, a transformation of the inner person, a new life in relation to God, with a new manner of thinking, of feeling, and of acting.

And this comes from a heart of repentance and faith. Right? But I don't want to leave you with that perhaps abstract thought. I want to take a moment in closing to ask a series of questions.

[36 : 58] Maybe some of us have experienced this new birth from above, but I find it always encouraging to be reminded of the reality of that new birth. And if there's anyone here watching that has not experienced this reality, I want to take a moment to implore you to seek God and experience it.

So the first question I want to ask is why should we be born from above? Why? Right? And I think this passage makes that clear, but I want to take a moment to open your eyes to the rest of Scripture.

We were created by God in His image and we bear His image. We were created and meant to point to God. However, when sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, we were corrupted, right? We were corrupted flesh. We had fallen short. And apart from a new birth from above, there's no hope of salvation. However, from the very beginning in Genesis 3.15, God promised a Christ, a Messiah, a Savior of the world.

And it is only through belief, faith in Christ, in His witness that anyone will enter His kingdom. Right? Unless you're born of water and spirit, the washing and regeneration, renewal of the Holy Spirit, you cannot receive this eternal life.

[38 : 19] This is because apart from the Spirit, replacing the heart of stone that is within our flesh, there is no desire within us for true repentance and faith. And so God is holy.

He's set apart. He's perfect in righteousness, glorious, beautiful, precious, of immeasurable value and much to be desired. There's no greater motivation to receive His kingdom than simply to be with God.

Right? It's like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered. And in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys the field like a merchant in search of fine pearls who, finding one of great value, sold all he had and bought it.

So nothing in life can compare to God. The most righteous, glorious, beautiful things of this life only point to God. Right? They're only a shadow or a glimpse of who He is.

All of nature sings of His glory. Psalm 19.1 and should create a desire in us to be with God. We should overflow with praise because He's righteous, glorious, and worthy of all praise.

[39 : 32] Without being born again, oops, my laptop's going crazy, without being born again, we continue in the flesh and ultimately perish with the flesh.

So what does it mean, my second question, to be born from above? It begins with a realization of our sinful nature and depravity. To acknowledge we were dead in our sin and separated from God, it's to realize God is perfect in righteousness and set apart and that no sin can be in His presence. Most would admit that we fall short, right? That we have sin in our lives. However, apart from a deeper appreciation of God's holiness and glory, we can never really understand the magnitude of our sinfulness in God's eyes.

Until He opens our eyes and removes the heart of stone, we cannot see the reality of our sin. True repentance is to despise our sin and to come before a holy God with a broken and contrite spirit as we see in Psalm 51.

It's to reach out with a cry. If only I can touch the hem of His robe, I would be made whole. To be made whole is to be made righteous before God.

[40 : 55] That's the reality of it, right? Not just... Right? It is to be made righteous before God, before a loving, gracious, beautiful God, not just in eternity, but here and now.

To be born of water and spirit is to repent and believe, to receive the Holy Spirit, the helper, the spirit of truth, the spirit of God who was with the Father and the Son in the beginning.

Right? The Holy Spirit is God's spirit as we learn in Romans 8, verse 9. The Holy Spirit is God's own spirit. Those who've been born of the Spirit have the Father.

They have his spirit and they have the Spirit of the Son working within their hearts to bring about this repentance and faith. That Holy, precious God of creation is working and dwelling within those

who have his spirit.

And so, with his spirit, we're no longer in the flesh, but in the spirit if the spirit of God dwells in us. Anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

[42 : 07] If now Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you.

Romans 8, verses 9 through 11. So, next question. Who should be born from above? You, your family, your friends, your co-workers, your neighbors, your enemies, your pets, maybe not the last one.

All right? As we'll learn from Brent next week as we get into John 3, 16, the new birth is a gift, a free gift of grace to all, presented to all.

God desires all people to be saved and come to knowledge of him as we see in Timothy 2, 2, Romans 10, 5 through 13. Right? When, next question, when should you be born from above? How about now? How about here? How about today? Life is fleeting. This could be your calling to receive salvation. Right?

[43 : 20] God is waiting. Christ has been lifted up. His propitiation, right, his atonement was acceptable before God. He was raised from the dead.

His gift of grace has been offered and extended. Here and now, it's being extended to you. Right? And finally, how should you be born from above?

Right? If you don't know how, how should you be born from above? First, pray. Acknowledge your sin, your brokenness with a contrite heart. Call on him. Believe his promises.

Believe that Jesus is the Christ. He is the son of man. Believe he is fully God. Believe he bore the wrath of God poured out on him for our sin.

Believe his sacrifice was acceptable before God. Believe he was raised from the dead. He walked among us for 40 days and then he ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of God the Father, interceding on our behalf.

[44 : 26] Believe his word, his promises, and receive the kingdom of God. next, read his word, know him, learn of his nature, love him, love and desire him more.

And so finally, in closing, what does the life of one who is born again look like? What does it look like to have this birth from above? First, there's fruit, right?

Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.22. Our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and against such things there is no law.

Those who belong to Christ, Jesus, have been crucified and the flesh, or rather, have crucified the flesh with his passions and desires. So by the working of Christ, we are able to put to death the things of the flesh and to bring to life the things of the Spirit.

Next, it is love, right? In Romans 5.5, God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit has been given to you and therefore, by his Spirit, we should overflow in love, right?

[45 : 42] This is the message you have heard from the beginning. We should love one another. 1 John 2.5. In Romans 8.15-16, we learn that we're adopted children of God.

You who have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit we are children of God. So to have the Spirit within you is to have a Spirit that testifies to you that you are of God.

And then we have a heart of praise. As John Piper put it, the heart transformed by the Holy Spirit will stop magnifying self and start magnifying God. Heartfelt praise and worship are the mark of real experience of the Holy Spirit.

We will overflow with praise and worship. And finally, we learn obedience. When the object of your worship changes from self to God, your obedience changes from self-serving to God-serving.

when the Lord permeates your heart with a new sense of his glory, you will have a new desire and new ability to obey his statutes as he said and promised he would give in Ezekiel 36, 27.

[46 : 56] Or as we see in John chapter 14, verses 15 through 17, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. I will ask the Father. He will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, who the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him.

You know him. For he dwells with you and will be with you. Amen. And so, I implore you, you must be born of water and spirit to enter the kingdom of God.

Let's pray.