

Born Again Into the Kingdom

Ye Must Be Born Again - Part One

H.E. Phillips

The profound effect that Jesus had upon many of his day, even among his bitter enemies of the ruling sect of the Pharisees, is emphasized in some of the conversations he had with them and some of the works he did in their presence. His manner of teaching the divine message was both astonishing and effective, and is marvelous to all who read it today.

The Church and The Kingdom

The church is composed only of those who are "called out" of darkness into the marvelous light of Christ (1 Peter 2:9). The kingdom of God, over whom Christ is the King, includes only those who are delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son (Colossians 1:13). One can enter the kingdom only by being born again, the birth of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5).

Jesus predicted the establishment of his church upon the "rock" which he identified as the truth confessed by Simon Peter: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Upon this rock he would build his church, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven . . ." What he said he would build was the kingdom, which is the same as the church. He said Peter would be given the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" to loose and bind upon earth as it was bound in heaven. In this passage in John 3 the terms of entering this kingdom are clearly stated. Without this being "born again" one cannot "see" the kingdom of God. In John 3:5 one cannot "enter" the kingdom except by being "born again."

The kingdom of which the prophets spoke, and Christ and his apostles preached upon earth is the same as the church. Those who enter the church are those who hear, believe, and obey the gospel of Christ. The Lord adds these to the church day by day (Acts 2:47). But who will enter the everlasting kingdom, i.e., the church received up into glory?

Most who know anything about Christ and the kingdom of heaven have some understanding about who and when one enters the kingdom. To enter the kingdom of heaven is equivalent to entering into eternal life. Many expressions in the New Testament support that fact.

Born Again To Enter The Kingdom

Among religious people of America and Europe it is almost universally accepted that one must be "born again" in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. The big problem is that there are several ideas of what constitutes the "new birth." The Bible plainly teaches that being born again is the means by which one enters the kingdom of God. Not many religious people will argue that the new birth is non-essential to salvation and eternal life.

No doubt the thought in the mind of Nicodemus was: "What must a man do in order to enter the kingdom of God?" The response of Jesus was directed at such a question. This demanded that one who is "born again" must enter upon a new life, unlike the old. He must abandon all reliance upon the law of Moses, and upon the rituals and ceremonies of the Pharisees and become a citizen of the kingdom of God. By a new birth he was to enter upon a new and different way of life.

Who Was Nicodemus?

The account of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night is found in John 3:1-13. We are told that he was a wealthy Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, a teacher of the law, and was a ruler of the Jews, which may explain his zeal to approach Christ at night. He was obviously a believer in Jesus, but had not obeyed him at the time he approached him at night as recorded in John 3:1-2. There is no explanation why the Holy Spirit said he came to Jesus by night. It may be that it was his best opportunity to come to Jesus without a mob of people. It is a fact stated in the scriptures. What he wanted from Jesus must be inferred from the statement Jesus made to him, otherwise, we have absolutely no idea why he came to Jesus that night. He did not seem to be asking for anything; he simply acknowledged him as a teacher from God because of the mighty miracles which he did. Nearly every reader of the Bible knows that fact. But Jesus knew the hearts of men, and he knew what was in the heart of Nicodemus.

Nicodemus is mentioned three times in the gospel of John. First, John 3:1-3, when he came to Jesus by night. Second, John 7:50-51, when the Pharisees wanted to arrest Jesus, but did not do so because of his teaching. Nicodemus, who is identified as "he that came to Jesus by night" and "being one of them" (a Pharisee) spoke on behalf of Christ and said: "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" Third, John 19:39-40, after the death of Jesus on the cross, Joseph of Arimathaea, a disciple of Jesus, asked Pilate for his body to bury it, and Pilate gave him permission. "And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury."

It will be noticed that in all three passages Nicodemus is identified as "he that came to Jesus by night."

Jesus Speaks To Nicodemus

Nicodemus addressed Jesus as "Rabbi" and said, "we know that thou art a teacher come from God," and cited the miracles which he had done as proof that he came from God. Jesus did not acknowledge the compliment of Nicodemus, but immediately got to the point by saying unto him, ". . . Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). That is explicit! It is precise and simple. It is absolute and emphatic. No man can see the kingdom of God unless he has been **born again! No man!** But Nicodemus did not understand what he meant. He asked Jesus, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born again?" (John 3:4). Of course, that is absurd! A physical birth the second time is not possible, so Nicodemus did not understand what

Jesus meant. We may infer from the statement of Jesus that Nicodemus had something in mind about the kingdom of which Jesus was teaching and how he could be a part of it.

Jesus further 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" (John 3:5). This is what Jesus meant by being "born again." He did not mean the physical birth which brings every man and woman into this world would enter them into the kingdom of God. "Except a man be born again he cannot **see** the kingdom of God:" he cannot **enter** into the kingdom of God. I do not see how language could be more direct and to the point. The word "Except" is used in both verses and it allows no alternative if one enters into the kingdom of God. He **MUST** be "born again" or "born of water and the Spirit" in order to **SEE** or **ENTER** into the kingdom of God.

What Does Born Again Mean?

At the time Jesus made this statement to Nicodemus, the great commission of Christ had not been given. The baptism of John was required of all Jews. However, after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the great commission of Christ was given and is applicable to all, Jew and Gentile alike, to be baptized for the remission of sins, upon their faith in Christ as the Son of God, their true repentance, and confession of their faith that Christ is the Son of God.

"Born again" is a second birth in contrast to the physical birth or the first birth. "Born again" necessarily implies a first birth. Anyone born again must have been born a first time. Nicodemus understood the physical birth, but he did not understand the second birth of which Jesus spoke, thus he inquired how one could enter the second time in his mother's womb and be born. The confused language of many today indicates they do not understand what Jesus meant by being "born again."

Meaning of Born of Water and the Spirit

The context of John 3:3-13 shows that Jesus was speaking of entering the kingdom of God upon this earth, and Nicodemus so understood that. He did not understand the nature of the birth of water and the Spirit, but he understood that Jesus was talking about entering the kingdom here upon earth while man lives. Jesus distinguished this from a physical birth and that is what confused Nicodemus.

We can understand from other passages from the word of God the nature of being "born again" or being "born of water and of the Spirit" by the figures the Holy Spirit used to describe the entrance into the church or kingdom, which began on the Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

One must be born again to enter the kingdom. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). What is the "washing of regeneration" and "renewing of the Holy Spirit" but being "born of water and of the Spirit"? **Regeneration** means to generate again, or be born again. **Renewing of the Holy Spirit** is the faith produced by the Spirit in the word of God that makes us new again to God through Christ.

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23). The seed is the word of God, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, which requires every penitent believer to be baptized in water for the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15-16).

The inspired apostle John said that Jesus came to his own and they received him not, but as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God. ". . .Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). "But of God" signifies a spiritual birth in contrast to the physical birth. Jesus spoke of ONE birth, not two. One birth of water and the Spirit, not a physical birth.

Other expressions in the New Testament help us understand the significance of the birth of water and the Spirit into the kingdom of God. The germ of life is in the seed. Jesus said, ". . . the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). Peter said, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Peter 1:23). The seed is the word of God (Luke 8:11). "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18). Paul said to the Corinthians, ". . . I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15).

Parallel Passages to John 3:3-5

There are parallel passages to John 3:3-5 which make the meaning clear. Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26). That statement is equal to "birth of water and of the Spirit." In the New Testament there is no cleansing or sanctifying by washing of water except by baptism of a penitent believer.

Another is Titus 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." The washing of regeneration is the washing of rebirth. The renewing of the Holy Spirit is the effect of the work of the Spirit through the word. "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ." (Romans 12:2). The renewing of the mind comes from the teaching of the Spirit by the word.

Stating it plainly: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). The word is the work of the Spirit which produces faith (Romans 10:17), and baptism is the only washing of water authorized in the New Testament for cleansing anyone. "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

The new birth which inducts one into the kingdom of God is exactly the same as that which brings one to be added to the church. It all occurs in the same way and brings the individual to the same place in relation to Christ and the remission of sins (Acts 2:38,47; 16:31-34; Romans 6:3:6; Colossians 2:12-13). These conditions reconcile one to God through Christ in one body

(Ephesians 2:15-16). We get into one body by baptism as directed by one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). There is no other way! Since there is only one Spirit, one baptism and one body (Ephesians 4:3,4), the only way to get into that one body is by baptism as directed by that one Spirit through the word of God. That equals "he that believeth and is baptized" (Mark 16:16), and "born again of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5).

Credit H.E. Phillips and HEPhillips.org
Preacher of the Word (Vol. II, August, 1997, # 8)
For copyright information see www.HEPhillips.org/copyright.