

# You Must Be Born Again!

## John 3:1-10 (text: v.3-8)

13 June 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 a.m.  
(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

### Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

I will never forget the shocking thing a preacher said some six years ago at a funeral service in Levin.<sup>1</sup>

You see, this vicar read John 14:6 where our Lord Jesus says, ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”***<sup>2</sup> Then this preacher commented, “Now, I don’t think that when Jesus said, ‘...***no one can come to the Father except through me,***’ He meant it exclusively!” “No,” said this preacher, “Jesus simply meant that, just as people could be led to God by any other spiritually equipped person, so could people also be led to God by Him (by Jesus).”

Wow!!

Why did this preacher so twist Christ’s words? Yes, why did this preacher ignore the words “No one” and “except”? Why did this preacher choose to publicly “water down” the words of the Son of God!?

I can only think of one reason, i.e., that this preacher did not want to offend some funeral goers who were not (not yet) professing Christians.

So, for that preacher, the pure Gospel was foolishness! Indeed, for him Jesus was an embarrassment – a stumbling block!<sup>3</sup>

My brother & sister, sadly, this preacher is not the only one who is ashamed of the Gospel and of Christ!

You see, the culture within which you & I live here in New Zealand, knows many people for whom Jesus is a stumbling block – for whom Jesus is not the only way to God – and so were the Pharisees of old, of whom Nicodemus was one.<sup>4</sup>

But Nicodemus, the Pharisee, was on a journey – a spiritual journey that would eventually see him become a follower of Jesus – yes, a follower of Jesus *on God’s terms and for God’s glory!*<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, Nicodemus would eventually grasp the main message of our text,<sup>6</sup> i.e., “If you want to enter the Kingdom of God, you must be born again – yes, born from above!”

Dear Wainui member, are you born again? Have you been born from above?

Well, here are three short points to prayerfully consider:

- What Does Born-Again Mean?
- How Do I Become Born-Again?

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<sup>1</sup> On Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015 at 1.00 pm in St Mary’s Anglican Church, Cambridge Street, Levin. The funeral letter is still in my possession.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New International Version\*](#). (1984). (Jn 14:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 1:22-24, ***Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*** (NIV 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. John 3:1 ***Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews*** (NASB).

<sup>5</sup> “Later in the story we find him defending Jesus among his fellow Pharisees (7:50–52) and assisting Joseph of Arimathea in burying Jesus (19:38–42). He will end the story as a disciple, but here at the beginning he is something less” (Whitacre, R. A. (1999). [\*John\*](#) (Vol. 4, pp. 86–100). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. e.g., John 7:45-52 (esp.50-52) and John 19:38-42

- How Will I Know That I Am Born-Again?

### What Does Born-Again Mean?

Dear Brother & Sister (and dear Boys & Girls), “born-again” means that you will, with your head and all your heart, believe that Jesus of Nazareth is who He said He is – i.e., that Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God whom God, in the greatest show of love ever, has sent into the world to pay for the sins of God’s loved ones and so to save them from the wrath of God; and that you will understand and with all your heart believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father, and that apart from faith in Jesus Christ, no one (however nice that person might be), will see<sup>7</sup> – let alone enter<sup>8</sup> – the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps someone will ask, “But, Pastor, how do you know that ‘born-again’ means to have a head-heart faith in Jesus Christ?”

Well, John’s first chapter says it (Jn 1:12-13), “...*to all who received him* (i.e., Jesus Christ), *to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”<sup>9</sup>*

See? See what Jn1:12-13 says: *Those who believe in Jesus as the only way to God – they are the ones who have been born of God!*

This means that, apart from having been born from Mum & Dad as far as their bodies are concerned, those who believe in Jesus have had a *spiritual* birth – a birth worked by God; indeed, they have been born again (from above)!

And how eternally blessed are you if that’s you! For, you see, *many* people have heard of Jesus – some in His days have even seen/heard Him in person – but they did not believe in Him.

It’s exactly as Jn 1:11 says, “**He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.**”<sup>10</sup>

Well, I think we are now ready to hear the next point...

### How Do I Become Born-Again?

In verse 5 Jesus gives the answer, i.e., that we become born-again by *water and the Spirit* – which means by water, *that is* the Spirit!

You see, in Old-Testament language, water – especially running water – was often used as a symbol to describe the blessed & infilling work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the little

<sup>7</sup> John 3:3 *Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (NASB).

<sup>8</sup> John 3:5 *Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”* (NASB).

<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 1:12–13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 1:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>11</sup> “Jesus explains being born from above in terms of being born *of water and the Spirit* (3:5). The water of baptism and the coming of the Spirit have already been associated in this Gospel (1:31–33), and cleansing by water and new life from the Spirit were already associated with one another in the Old Testament, especially in Ezekiel 36:25–28:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

word “and” in “...*water and the Spirit*...” means, “that is” – in other words, “*water, that is the Spirit.*”<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps you ask, but how does the Holy Spirit work this rebirth in my heart?

Well, in v.8 our Lord Jesus kindly gives us an illustration – the illustration of wind!

Now, when I was a pre-school child and I saw how wildly the branches of the almond and apricot trees in my parents’ backyard were moving in the wind, I thought it was the *trees* that made the wind – yes, that the *trees* decided to move their branches wildly in order to make wind!

Thankfully, later on, I discovered that things happened the other way around: it was the *wind* that caused the trees’ branches to move!

Well, the same is true for becoming born again. You and I cannot make the Holy Spirit to work rebirth in our hearts! No, the Holy Spirit does that by His own decision and in His own time!

Granted, you & I can by God’s grace prepare our minds & hearts for this by reading God’s Word and by training our children in God’s Word, for, after all, is it not so that the Holy Spirit uses God’s *Word* to work new birth in our hearts!? Yes, the Holy Spirit does not bypass our heads.

Perhaps you ask, “But, Pastor, can I see when the Holy Spirit comes to work this rebirth in my heart?” “And can I see with my eyes when the Holy Spirit comes to work rebirth in my loved-one’s heart?”

Jesus says, “No!”

Just as little as you and I can *see* the wind, so little can we *see* the Holy Spirit!

Granted, we can observe the *effects* of the wind – yes, with our ears we can hear its hissing, and with our eyes we can see how the trees’ branches/leaves bend in the wind, and how the strong winds of Wellington blow wheelie bins over on a rubbish collection day! But the wind *itself* – no, we cannot see it! Before modern technology, we could not see where the wind started and where its path would end.<sup>13</sup>

So, just as we can only see the effects of the wind – not the wind itself, so can we only see the effects of the Holy Spirit in someone’s life – which brings us to the last point...

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What follows in Ezekiel is the vision of the valley of dry bones in which the Spirit’s restoration of the people is described as bringing the dead to life (chap. 37). What is needed is a new heart and a new life; that is, the Spirit must give birth to spirit (Jn 3:7). Only those alive in the realm of the spirit by the Spirit will be able to recognize and enter that realm” (Whitacre, R. A. (1999). *John* (Vol. 4, pp. 86–100). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic).

<sup>12</sup> Already Calvin (1979:75) chose this way of interpreting ‘water-birth’ saying that elsewhere in Scripture water and/or fire is used symbolically of the work of the Holy Spirit. Calvin even explains the use of the little word ‘and’ as explicative, in other words, it needs to be translated not as ‘and’ but as ‘namely’: Ainsi donc, l’eau n’est autre chose que la purification intérieure et l’inspiration de vigueur, qui se font par le Saint-Esprit. De plus, ce n’est point une chose nouvelle que le mot *et* se prenne pour *c’est-à-dire*; à savoir quand le membre de phrase subsequent est la déclaration du précédent. ....

Also cf. Titus 3:5 ***He saved us through the washing of rebirth namely (i.e. – ‘and’) by the Holy Spirit***

Also cf. Jn 7:38-39 ***“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified*** (Emphasis mine).

Also cf. Burge, G. M. (2000). *John* (pp. 109–135). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>13</sup> John 3:8 ***“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”***

### **How Will I Know That I Am Born-Again?**

I will bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. My life will show that I really meant it when I said I want to live on God's terms and for His glory! My life will show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. In short: if I say I love Christ, I will be seen to live a Christ-like life!

Does this mean that I will now be/become unable to sin again?

No! Sadly, I will still sin! But it does mean that I will now no longer let sin reign over me – no longer let sin be my king; no longer will I be enslaved to sin.

Yes, realising that I will never in this life be able to shed my old sinful nature completely – indeed that, in this life, I will never be able to fully shed my old nature like a snake manages to fully shed its old skin – I am nevertheless always resolved to put off my old sinful nature, and follow my Lord Jesus as is fitting for those who bear His Name.

Dear Reuben & Sonya, this morning you have professed your faith before our congregation. And the elders and I have a clean conscience about it!

Why?

Well, because we have seen the effects of the Holy Spirit's rebirthing work in you!

Yes, we were not there when you were born from above, but suddenly we have experienced how you just love to talk of God and what He has done in you!

Indeed, it is not as if you were merely "parroting" words of faith which you have heard others say. No, suddenly we heard you talk from personal experience – not like spectators from the side-line, but as those who are now "right in it" with conviction; yes, with heart and soul; indeed, with joy and zeal!

See why the elders had no hesitation when you made it known to them that you would like to profess your faith!? See why we concur with your desire to, from now on, sit with us at the Lord's Table!?

Many have heard of Jesus Christ! Many have even completed their studies in Christian Theology! And some – like that preacher whom we mentioned before – even led (and are leading) others in worship. Yet, they have not really received Christ on His terms!

But *you* have!

And it is such ones whom our Lord welcomes at His table!

My brother & sister (dear visitor), I always pray that you & I will faithfully train ourselves and our growing-up children in the Word of God, for it is the Word of God which the Holy Spirit uses to work rebirth (a spiritual birth) in the hearts & lives of God's loved ones – just as He has done with Reuben & Sonya!

AMEN (1,629 words excluding footnotes)