

I don't mind if he gets a bit of religion – as long as he doesn't become one of those "born again" Christians.....

Have you heard a phrase like that? I bet you have (at some time), either in real life, or on the TV.

The born again Christian – they're the worst possible kind aren't they? A born again Christian starts coming towards you, and you know you've got to escape. You're in their sights, and they're going to evangelise you..... That's the image we have of "born again Christians", but of course, there is only one kind of Christian – You're either a born again Christian or not a Christian at all... Jesus said, "**I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**" That's the truth of the matter. **no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."**

You might **call** yourself Christian, and **think** that you're a Christian because it's the dominant religion in our country and so you were **born** to Christianity, (Just as if you were born in Pakistan you'd be born to be a Muslim). *But living in a "Christian" country doesn't make you a Christian any more than living in a shearing shed would make you a sheep.* Having Christian parents and Christian grandparents doesn't make us a Christian either. We must be born again.

So are you?.. **Are** you born again?

*One day, a lady shared with me, a story that's quite a common story – it's a story that **I** have in common with her, and I suspect a number of you may as well.*

*She grew up in a Christian family and she began to attend church from the time she was a babe-in-arms. The faith that she was taught as a child, over time, matured. She physically matured from a baby to a child to a teenager to an adult. And as she physically matured, so too did her faith. Her relationship with Jesus developed to become a **mature** faith, and a real faith, **but**..... there was never one big deciding moment “Right, I’m going to become a Christian now.”*

*She had always had this faith. She had always had this belief.... And somewhere along the line she had moved from being under the umbrella of her parent’s faith, to living by her own faith ,,,, but she couldn’t tell you the hour, the day or the year that it happened. And that’s similar to my story. My own experience is “My earliest childhood memories include following the minister in the prayers, every time he prayed, asking Jesus to be the Lord of my life – **and meaning it.**”*

And, over the years, some other Christians have made that lady feel terribly inadequate, and at times, they have caused her to question whether she is even saved, for the simple reason she cannot put her finger on a date and a time when she first decided to follow Jesus. For her it was a gradual process rather than a defining moment. There was never a time when she didn’t believe in Jesus...

And I guess the question that she was really asking that day is “Am I born again?”

Because there had been no distinct dividing line between “before Jesus” and “after Jesus”, how could she tell if she had been born again.

I've heard some wonderful testimonies of what God has done in people's lives. Murderers, drug addicts, rapists, lives filled with hatred and bitterness, transformed into disciples of Jesus. With such people, it's **easy** for them to know, that they've been born.... They were far from God, and then they were saved.

But what if you're not far from God? What if you've been brought up in the Christian faith?

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- Just because I was born into a Christian family, does that mean that I'm automatically going to be saved? No it doesn't...
- Just because I was brought up in the church, learnt the stories of Jesus and took on the morals of a good Christian life, does that make me born again?.... No it doesn't.
- What about if my parents brought me as a child to be baptised? Or (let's take it one step further) What if I decided myself, to be baptised??? Does that make me born again? No, it doesn't...

Is it possible for a person to attend church all their life, live an exemplary life, and not be born again? What do you think?.... is it possible? Well, I hope I'm not bursting anybody's bubble, but I have to tell you, it's not only possible – it's actually quite probable.

The test of whether you're born again or not is not a test of one defining moment. Nor is it a test of going to church every Sunday. Nor is it a test as to whether we were baptised at some point... It's a test of the Spirit.

And we learn this, with this interaction between Jesus and Nicodemus.

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Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and in general, the Pharisees didn't have much time for Jesus, which is probably why Nicodemus came in the dead of the night...

Now, as a Pharisee, Nicodemus always tried to do the right thing. Morals and law were big for Pharisees. And when Nicodemus came to see Jesus that night, he said "Look I know you're from God – the miracles tell me that." OK, so:

- Nicodemus was a person who tried harder than most, to always do 'the right thing';
- He knew Jesus was from God; and
- He respected Jesus....

Was that enough for Nicodemus?

No. Jesus said "You've got to be born again." Merely doing the right thing, and merely knowing who Jesus is didn't make Nicodemus a Christian. Nor does it make you or I a Christian. Nicodemus needed to be born again, and you and I, must also be born again.

So, what does it take to be born again? Nicodemus asked that. Surely I can't go in and come out again.⁵ **Jesus answered,** "I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

Now, some people say "being born of water represents the first birth – our physical birth". The water is the amniotic fluid that breaks during the birthing process (quite a messy business really). But in the Gospel John, water plays a prominent role.

- The baptism of John the Baptist was a baptism, in water, for repentance from sin, and the baptism of repentance, is a topic taken up both before, and immediately after this passage.
- In the Gospel of John, we cannot **read** the word "water" **without** linking it to baptism, which is a baptism of repentance of sin...

But water represents even more than that.

In the Gospel of John, "Water" and "Spirit", are a unified whole. Jesus has come to bring about a new kingdom – not a kingdom to be based on law and distance from a Holy God. That's the sort of kingdom the Pharisees had in mind, but Jesus had a new kingdom principle. Jesus had a kingdom principle of a God who is near – Jesus had a kingdom principle of a God who actually lives within. Jesus had a kingdom principle of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

Jesus came and ushered in a new era. **John 1:**¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Alright, right from the early verses of John, we're learning there's something new

happening here. The law through Moses – grace and truth through Jesus Christ.

And let's dig in to this water language some more.... **John 7:**³⁷ Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit,..... Do you see how "Water" and "The Spirit" go together?

And that **shouldn't** have been a shock to Nicodemus, because this new era of grace, and being filled with The Spirit, it didn't just come out of the blue – it was foretold. **Ezekiel 36:**²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

To be born of water and of the Spirit means to enter into this new kingdom that Christ has inaugurated. It means to lose our heart of stone and to receive a tender heart. **John 3:**⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Now, if there's one theological concept we need to understand, it's this. The flesh and the Spirit are in opposition to each other. There is a war going on inside of you – did you know that? When the Bible talks about “the flesh” it's not just talking about our human body – it's talking about the human sinful inclination. It's talking about the natural desires of the human heart, that are in opposition to the Spirit. And there is only one way that I can be rescued from my captivity of the flesh, and that is through the blood of Jesus, and His filling me up with The Holy Spirit.

It doesn't matter how many years any of us have gone to church on a Sunday, we can still be captive to the flesh. A person may be a church leader, a Sunday School teacher – They may even be a pastor of a church , and still be captive to the flesh.

And it's important that we understand, that this war – the war between the Spirit and the flesh is not a war that ends as soon as we become a Christian. It'll continue.....

6 **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.** I can try and try, by my own goodness, to be the best that I can be. Is that a work of the flesh or a work of the spirit. It's a work of the flesh. Flesh gives birth to flesh.

Isaiah 64:6 all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; Does that mean God doesn't like righteous acts??? No. No. What we need to learn, is without Christ, and without being born again, even our righteous acts, **aren't righteous enough....** I can do the very best that I can, and it's like me saying, “God, look what I have done”, and holding out to him

a nappy that I have dirtied. The only way to be born again is through the Spirit.....

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How The Spirit and when The Spirit gives birth to Spirit is not a time that we can tell. There's a real play on words here that we miss in the English. In Greek, the word for "Spirit" is the same word as "Wind". It's "Pneuma", from which we get our word "pneumatic" (pneumatic tools, pneumatic tyres – powered by air pressure). So John 3:8 says,⁸ **The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."**

I don't know if you've realised it yet or not, but God isn't tied down to your expectations. Guess what? He doesn't even ask me before He acts either.

- Why do some people who have been brought up in the church have this transition to being born again – to having the Spirit within them, and others don't?
- How can some go through all of the same programs, and sit through all of the same services, go to church every Sunday, and to them it just continues to be a work of the flesh, instead of the Spirit being born inside of them? ...
- And likewise, why is it that somebody's **own** experience of having a sudden conversion leads them to believe that everybody else must have the **same** experience?

Nobody knows when God is going to do His work in somebody's life. Just as the wind blows, and we don't know where it's come from or where it's going, we can't predict how or when God is going to touch someone's life. We can't set up a certain program say "Right, so and so is going to give his life to The Lord on this certain day." That's out of our domain.

How God, and when God chooses to bring people to Him, is **God's** business. We just have to get on board with what God is doing.

And I pray, that God might be doing that today... We're still in the early stages of our series in the Gospel of Mark,,, And I hate getting distracted – once I start a series, I want to finish it...

But Celie (did you know Celie's in Warrawee now?)... Anyway, I took the service at Warrawee on Wednesday, and Celie specifically asked if I could give a message on John 3...

And I did, but after I finished preparing that message, I really felt God saying, "You have to give that same message on Sunday"... And so here we are... We're going to leave Mark, until next week... And I pray, that the Spirit of God, is going to move today in someone's life, and that somebody who isn't yet born again, **will** be born again, by the end of today...

So, let's come back to the original question – “Am I born again?” If it's not a test of whether we've had a “sudden defining moment” experience or not, the evidence is this:

Is my life being controlled by the flesh, or is my life being controlled by the Spirit of God?

I'm not asking if we still have daily battles between the Spiritual nature and the Fleshly, sinful nature – we're always going to have those. I'm asking, if you have yielded yourself to God.

I said earlier that the only way to be set free from the captivity of the flesh is through the blood of Jesus, and His filling me up with The Holy Spirit. This is where I personally repent of my sin, yield myself to God, and allow **Him** to take control of my life.

Romans 8 says this: ⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in

you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

Friends, this is important. Are you born again? Have you yielded yourself to God, and are therefore controlled by The Spirit? Or do you refuse to submit to The Lord, and therefore are controlled by the flesh?

- You know, some people think that being a Christian, is all about being a good person. No. Neither you, nor I, could ever be good enough.
- Some people think that all you have to do, is believe in Jesus, and you'll be a Christian... No. Even the devil believes in Jesus...

Robyn and I just got back from holidays, and while we were away, we spent a night with Robyn's aunt and uncle in Tumut. And Uncle Ron has been a preacher, and mainly an evangelist to children (for many years)... and we were talking about what it means, for Jesus to be Lord... And the very simple way that he explains it to the children, is like this: It's to make Jesus your boss... For Jesus to be Lord, is to make Jesus your boss...

His message to adults is, “To give yourself to Jesus”...

You know, it's become very fashionable these days (certainly within evangelical circles), to talk about “receiving Jesus”, to become a Christian... And you know, people accept this as

“I’ve just got to add a bit of Jesus to my life, and I’m saved.”.... But the biblical concept of “being saved”, has no such easy-believism....

As far as I can find, there is only one place¹ (in the whole of the New Testament), where it mentions “receiving Jesus” as being saved, and there, it specifically talks about receiving Him “as Lord”.... And to receive Jesus as Lord, is more about giving ourselves to Him...

To be born again means to give ourselves to God, and to believe in The Lord Jesus Christ. It means to be born through the waters of repentance and baptism, into a life where we are controlled by The Spirit, and to there, receive life and peace.

Are you born again? This is so very important. Don’t leave here today until you know that you are born again.

Is your life evidenced by the rule and reign of the Spirit of God, where Jesus is truly Lord... - that’s the evidence of being born again...

And if you want to be born again, you tell me so... And we’ll spend some time with God, so that you can have that assurance – that you are born again...

ⁱ Colossians 2:5-7 (ESV)

⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.