

Because I'm pretty old, (and maybe also, because I grew up in the bush {I mean, society seems to degrade a little bit slower in the bush}), I grew up on the tail-end of what's known as "Christendom".

Today, in our culture we are very much "**post-Christendom**". "Christendom" no longer exists in Australia.

"What is Christendom?", I hear you ask, ,, well, I'm glad you asked...

Christendom was an era where our culture generally believed it was Christian.

- It's when it was the "done thing" to go to church,, (Well, at least once a month)...
- The laws of the land were founded in God's Law, and that was fine;
- It was normal for couples to get married **before** they moved in together, and nearly every wedding ceremony was performed in a church.

It's a time when:

- Men were men;
- Women were women;
- And we didn't pretend to be the other.

- And even if you almost never went to a church, you still knew which church you belonged to, because that's the one your grandfather went to.

So, the general attitude, was *“Well, I’m a Christian, because my parents are Christians, and I was born in a Christian country – what else would I be???”*

And so I was born into a culture where being a “Christian” was “normal” but there was nothing more obnoxious than one of them blasted “born-again” Christians...

- It’s like **they** were from another planet;
- Always joyful;
- Always praising God;
- Always talking about Jesus; and
- singing songs and choruses about Jesus (even when they **weren’t** in church);

- They take the religion thing way too seriously – as if they really believe it...

- And they’re obnoxious, because they assumed everybody else wasn’t a Christian, because they were worldly and didn’t give Jesus the honour that He was due...

You see, there was a massive divide between having “religion” and being “born again”.

If you’re familiar with “The Simpsons”, it’s the difference between “Rev LoveJoy (and most of his congregation {including Homer}), and Ned Flanders.

But the thing is, Biblically, and according to Jesus, there is no such thing as a Christian, who has **not** been “born again”...
To be saved – to be a Christian, you **must** be born again...

And Christendom didn't get that. It was living a lie – the lie that everybody was a Christian, even though their faith wasn't real. And some may have believed about Jesus (in fact, most believed about Jesus), but their faith did not practically translate, into a life totally committed to God... They were living a lie.

And now, we look back over the past, and we wonder why there were so many abuses committed within the Christian church during that period... And it's all because the “cultural Christian” had not been born again...

Today, many Christians lament the fact that we've left Christendom behind (our society is less Christianised),,, , but in a way, I reckon it's a good thing, because our churches are no longer, largely filled with “cultural Christians” who are living a lie...

So, let's stop thinking about the past, and let's talk about today:

We are now in a different era. Christendom, and even “**post-Christendom**”, is long-gone. So much so, our culture is now largely either “atheist” (believe there is no god), or anti-theist (those who are **against** God – anti-Christians – anti-Christ....) – Not just believing there **is** no god, but **hating** those who **do** honour God... (That's where we've gotten to).

And so, the New Testament, really speaks to us in our day, because the books of the New Testament were written at a

time when the early church were living in a culture that was firmly anti-Christian and anti-Christ.

- The Jewish religious establishment were against them;
- The Greek Hellenistic pagan culture were against them;
- The Roman Empire were against them, because you give a greater allegiance to Jesus than what you give to the Emperor...

So, there was a Pharisee named “Nicodemus”. Now, the Pharisees, were a sect within Judaism – a group with their own particular focus. And their focus, was a holiness/purity movement. They focused very much on holiness and law-keeping...

And as we read the Gospels, it becomes very obvious, that the Pharisees seemed to be always at loggerheads with Jesus, and I’ll tell you why. It’s because their focus was on an outward show of purity.

- praying in a way that people would see them praying and hear their prayers, and go “Oh, aren’t they very holy”.
- Tithing – giving of their offerings in a way that everybody knew that they were being generous;
- They had their ceremonial washings, so that everybody could see their: “Cleanliness is next to Godliness, you know”...

But Jesus could see beyond the outward show of holiness, and He could see, to the depths the heart... And this is how Chapter 2 ended last week – Jesus knows what’s in a man/woman...

There's nothing hidden from Jesus. Jesus knows you and me, better than we know ourselves. And yet He still loves us. It is while we were still sinners, that Christ died for the ungodly... In fact, that's **why** He died for us, because He knows everything that we are so ashamed of, that if it ever got out, we'd be devastated, as to what people might think of us...

And Jesus doesn't want us to have to live with that. It is for those sins, that Jesus was nailed to the cross, for you,,, and for me...

Alright, so Chapter 2 ended with a heap of people believing in Jesus because of the miraculous signs and wonders He did... But Jesus could see past their excitement/their embrace of Him (& His signs & Wonders), and He didn't like what He saw.

He saw a belief that was deficient. It was deficient, because He could see their hearts, and their hearts remained the same...

Enter: Nicodemus.

Not only was Nicodemus a pharisee. He was also **a ruler of the Jews**. That means he was probably a member of the Sanhedrin – very much a man of authority at the temple...

And Nicodemus visits Jesus at night. Now, to me, that gives me the impression that “He's breaking ranks here” – and we see a few glimpses of Nicodemus throughout the Gospel of John, and it seems that He's aligning himself with Jesus, but

never throws his hat in with Him... – he's on the fringes; getting close; but not really an insider.

In Chapter 7, the Pharisees are wanting to condemn Jesus, and Nicodemus sticks up for Him, “The Law says we've gotta give him a hearing first, and learn about what He does...” And they turned on Nicodemus for him saying that...

And in Chapter 19 (after the crucifixion), Nicodemus provided the embalming creams and was one of the few who carried Jesus' body, and prepared it for His burial...

And so, we get the picture of Nicodemus being drawn to Jesus and His teaching, but he never expresses his faith... Did Nicodemus eventually become a Disciple of Jesus? I don't know. Maybe... That depends if, at some point, he was born again, because on the night he visited Jesus, he was not born again – He didn't even know what it meant...

Anyway, Nicodemus seems to have a respect for Jesus, the other Pharisees do not. He comes to Jesus at night, and he refers to Jesus as “Rabbi” (Teacher) – it's a title of respect – he is recognising the authority of Jesus to teach him (himself, a teacher).

And it's like he's giving Jesus some inside information on the Pharisees “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”

Now, have you caught on to what's happening here?
Nicodemus, is a living, breathing example of someone Jesus would **NOT** entrust Himself to...

2:23 ... many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

Oww, that's what Nicodemus is saying, "We know you're from God, because of the signs you do..."

2:23 ... many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people....

Nicodemus says, "We know you're from God, because of the signs you do..."

And Jesus looks into His heart, and there is something deficient... Something is missing...

He says, "Truly, Truly"...

The Greek word here ἀμὴν (amēn) isn't actually a Greek word. It's a transliteration of a Hebrew word (spelling out in the Greek, how it sounds in the Hebrew).

And so Jesus would say "amēn, amēn". It is to show ones-self as "firm", "dependable", "secure", and so it means "certain" – **"True"**...

And Jesus does the double-up..... “amēn, amēn” “truly, truly”,,,, the doubl-up means there is absolutely zero doubt about this – There is no way around this...

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Who can see the Kingdom of God without being born again? No one. There is no doubt about it.

And so, when (what I’m going to call) “a cultural Christian” says, “I believe in Jesus, but I can’t stand them pesky born-again Christians”, they’ve lost the whole point... There is no way around this. Jesus says: **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**

Now, what does that mean, To be “born again”? This is a critical question... If I cannot see the Kingdom of God unless I am “born again”, then it’s pretty important to know what it means to be “born again”...

Now:
Some theological traditions like to talk about being “re-generated”, because the Greek word behind this is γεννηθῆναι (gennēthē) which is part of the word group (Genesis, generation),,, And maybe that might fit their theology better. But the best and most accurate way to translate this to English, is to “be born”. And in this case, to be “born again”.

We know exactly what Jesus is saying because of Nicodemus' response:

"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

And then He goes on to explain what that means. He's not talking about a physical, fleshly birth... "Nicodemus, you're not thinking Spiritually"... You have to be born of the Water and the Spirit.

⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

No Nicodemus, you don't have to back into your mum and get squeezed out again. That's the physical birth. (You've already had one of them, and I think that one was quite enough).

To be born-again, is a spiritual birth. And in V5, we get a bit of a picture of what this is about.

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

What does it mean? Well, it's building on what has already been revealed in the Gospel of John. I mean, we're only just

starting on Chapter 3 – there's only 2 chapters been yet. And in those 2 chapters, John has been laying the groundwork, for where we get to today.

In 1:6, it introduces John the Baptist. And he is a witness, to bear witness about the Light. Who's the Light? Jesus.

And Jesus came to His own people, but his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Alright, so the role of John the Baptist, was to point to Jesus, Who:

- if we receive Him;
- if we believe in His Name;

He gives us the right to become Children of God. Not a physical birth, but born of God...

So, what does it mean to be “born of water”? Well, John the Baptist baptised with water. But remember, John the Baptist told us 2 things about Jesus:

1. He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world; and
2. He would baptise with the Holy Spirit...

You see, Baptism (a water Baptism), is a symbol of something that happens in the Spirit.

When John the Baptist preached, his message, was a call to repentance – to turn away from sin, and to turn to God. And the baptism of John, was a baptism of repentance.

And that's what Baptism is about.

When the person goes down under the water, this is a symbol of them dying. The old sinful life/person/nature, has been put to death. Dead; **Buried** under the waters of Baptism...

And then when we come up out of the water, it's a symbol of being born again, to a new life. You've left the old sinful self behind, and you've been raised up (a new creation) – no longer a child of darkness, but a child of light/God...

And I'm going to say what I have said many times before: Becoming a Christian isn't just adding a bit of Jesus to your life. Becoming a Christian is something so radical, that Jesus described it as "being born again"... Born of the Spirit.

You see, the act of Baptism itself, saved no one. There are millions of "cultural Christians" who were baptised (sure-enough), and yet they died in their sin, because they were not born again.

Likewise, there are millions of people today, who are like Nicodemus. They believe in Jesus (sure enough). And they've been attracted to Him for some reason (maybe because they want to share in some of the physical benefits)... They might be:

- all enthused about the signs & wonders & miracles;
- searching for physical blessings;
- desperate for a healing;
- longing for a broken relationship to be restored...

And they come in search of these things and add a bit of Jesus to their life, but they are not born again...

There is something very deficient, in the way the Gospel is being proclaimed in many churches today... A key element of being born again, (for me) is a putting to death, of the old sinful Michael. The person that I once was, is not fit for the Kingdom of God. I once was that person, but I turn from what I once was, and I turn toward Christ.

The old life to me (the old Michael), is dead; buried... And I'm born again, a new person (Pure; Holy; In Christ Jesus)...

Many churches today, have a new type of "cultural Christianity" – it too, is living a lie.

You see, the **true** Gospel is offensive. It's offensive, because it tells me, that without being completely changed, I'm not fit for the Kingdom of God... Therefore, I have to be born again. And so, in some churches, you will not hear the message, to repent of sin.

It may be:

- affirmation, and not conviction;
- blessing, and not the sacrifice;

- a promise of joy, without the mourning for our sinfulness;
- a promise of eternal life, without the being “born again”...

We’re taking this message over 2 or 3 weeks, and so we’ll spend more time on this later, but when we get to V19

19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

The call to be born again, is offensive to those who like things, the way they are. It’s offensive, for those who enjoy the evil they currently do...

But when Jesus shines the light, there are some who love the light, and I pray that’s you... When the Holy Spirit convicts us, we realise, “I don’t want to keep doing the wrong that I’ve been doing. I don’t want to have this inclination towards evil, that I know is living within me... I want it gone; dead; buried. I want to be born again, into the Spirit of God...

If you love the light, come to the light.

Righto:

Well, that's all very good, but how is this new-birth even possible?

You see, Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and out of everybody, the Pharisees were fastidious in trying to please God with their holiness... If Nicodemus couldn't achieve this, what hope have we got?

In Christ, we have every hope.

You see, the Pharisees, were living a lie. They set out to achieve righteousness through their very careful law-keeping. But it's impossible. Even if they did manage to do everything right, and just on one count, to fail, how would they atone for that???

You see, to be born again, isn't a physical striving, it is the work of the Spirit.

V8, Jesus said:

8 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."

We don't have power over the wind. Nor do we have the power to save ourselves. Without God's help, we cannot even tell what's going on spiritually.

If we want to know the things of heaven, we need someone from heaven to come and tell us. And that person is Jesus... I mean, Nicodemus here is representing the pharisees. They

knew the Old Testament Scriptures inside-out and back-to-front, but they didn't get it... And they **couldn't** get it. Why? Because they wouldn't listen to Jesus.

V11, Jesus says:

11 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.

I am amazed by the number of people in our culture, who seem to be on a quest to find spiritual meaning. And they investigate all sorts of mysticism; they go and buy various types of glistening stones and crystals, and hope they will receive some kind of spiritual enlightenment... But they won't listen to Jesus.

Jesus is the only one of authority. He's the one, who came from heaven. He knows heavenly things, because He's from Heaven. He reveals spiritual truth, because He is spiritual truth... He's the only one who can say "Amen; Amen; Truly; Truly, this is what's true."

So, how can we be born again?

Jesus gave an illustration to Nicodemus, that hopefully he would understand.

In the Old Testament book of Numbers, the people of Israel had sinned against God (as they seemed to often do), and so God sent fiery serpents (poisonous snakes), and those who were bitten, died.

And so they confessed their sin, and they asked Moses to pray for them, that they might be saved....

Numbers 21:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." ⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

And that was the end of the matter.

And Jesus says: V14.

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Whenever we're talking about "salvation", it always comes back to the cross. The Son of Man was lifted up – He was nailed to the cross, to save us from our sins.

And over the next few weeks as we continue on in Chapter 3, we've going to hear that wonderful verse: ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

You see, to be "born again", is not something I can do myself. And it's not something that you can achieve. Just as I was

powerless to achieve my first birth (my physical birth, 21/08/1969), we are powerless to achieve our second birth...

Jesus has done all the work. He has paid the price of our salvation. All we have to do, is “believe”.

- Believe in Jesus.
- Repent of sin – turn away from Sin; and
- Look to Jesus.

We look to Jesus, because He is the One who forgives our sins. It is by the work of the Holy Spirit, that as we believe, and as we turn to Him, everything that Baptism represents, takes place.

The old person; sin: Dead; Buried.

And we are born anew.

- Dead to sin;
- Alive in Christ.

- Wickedness removed;
- Filled with the Holy Spirit...

Are you born again?

Are you searching, and you're being drawn to believe, but you're not yet born again?

Or have you been “a cultural Christian”, and living a lie, because you haven't been born again?

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

To be fair dinkum with Jesus, is not a minor make-over... It's a complete new life.

Right at the end of the Gospel of John, he tells us why he wrote what He wrote:

so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

If you are not yet born again, what's holding you back?

We're going to pray now, and if you want to leave your old sinful existence behind, and be raised to a new spiritual life in Christ, pray with me.

Oh Lord,
How humbling it is,
to hear the words
of the One Who came from Heaven.

You are the only one who knows;
You are the only one who reveals
indisputable spiritual truth.

Lord,
I do not trust in man;

I do not trust in spiritual gurus;
I do not trust in any life-coach;
I do not trust in myself.

I place my trust and hope in You;
And in You alone.

Lord,
forgive me for all my wrong-doing.
Forgive me for my worst sin,
the sin of rejecting You.

I thank You, that Jesus died on the cross for me.
And I look to You, to be saved.

Lord, I ask that by the power of Your Holy Spirit,
You would put to death the old sinful me.

That You would bury the:

- pride;
- self-righteousness;
- greed;
- lust;

- hatred I have;
- bitterness I carry;
- unforgiveness I harbour

- old me, who dishonoured you...

And give birth to me, by Your spirit.
That You would raise me up,
a new creation,
a child of God...

Lord, help me to believe,
and help me to trust in You.

And I pray that You would continue
to transform and renew,
every one of us here,

For Your Glory,
in Jesus' Name,
Amen.