

## **What Being Born Again Is**

John 3:1-15

Trinity Sunday, June 16, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. It cannot be any other way. That which is begotten of you is begotten of you. You cannot have it any other way. That which is begotten of you has your genetic characteristics. It cannot be any other way. No matter how much you may wish that it were another way, it is not another way. Things beget after themselves. That is true of you, the birds, the flowers, the plants, the trees, the dogs, the cats, the animals, the flesh, and the Spirit.

The oak tree bears acorns which bring more oak trees. The walnut tree bears walnuts which brings more walnut trees. The cats give birth to kittens. The dogs give birth to pups. Even earthworms beget other earthworms. That is the way that things are. No matter how much the cat may wish it, she will not give birth to a dog. No matter how much the walnut tree may covet it, it will not produce acorns.

No matter how much you may want your flesh to do so, it will not produce someone born of the spirit. It will only produce someone born of the flesh. No matter how arrogant you may be in thinking that you can produce or discipline your children into being born of the spirit, they are born of the flesh because they are born of you. They cannot escape their flesh any more than you can.

Your parents are of the flesh. They gave birth to you. Therefore you are of the flesh. No matter how pious and righteous your parents may have been they are of the flesh. Therefore you are of the flesh. No matter how pious and righteous your upbringing may have been and how good a job your parents may have done, you are still begotten according to the flesh. No matter how hard the flesh tries it gives birth to flesh. The flesh will never give birth to the Spirit. The flesh will never give birth to someone born of the Spirit.

That is why if you are going to be born of the Spirit, you must be born again.

Therefore being born again is not an emotional experience. It is not an emotional high. It is not a mountaintop experience by which somehow you feel close to God.

Therefore being born again is not something that can be manipulated out of anyone. No one else can produce in you an emotional response that qualifies as being born again. No matter how enthusiastic the preacher, no matter how emotional the songs, no matter what you feel about God and His attitude toward you, none of that is being born again.

Emotions are just as easily of the flesh as they are of the Spirit. Therefore in and of themselves your feelings do not indicate that you have been born again. The onset of feelings are not an indication that you are being born again. In our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus He never mentions Nicodemus' feelings nor does our Lord offer Nicodemus an amazing worship service designed to give Nicodemus an emotional response.

Your feelings are not being born again.

Being born again is not making a decision for Jesus.

When you make a decision for Jesus you are making a commitment to follow Him for the rest of your lives. It is more than simply signing your name on a piece of paper in a tract that you found or was mailed to you. It is more than praying to Him and asking Him for forgiveness and confessing your sin. It is more than simply turning over a new leaf. When you make a commitment to follow Jesus it means that you are telling Jesus that you will follow Him for the rest of your life. That means that you are promising Him that you will keep His commandments.

Jesus says, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My commandments." Anyone who has made a decision to follow Jesus surely loves Him. If you have made a decision to follow Jesus and you do not love Him, there is certainly something wrong with you. But if you have a made a decision to follow Jesus then you must keep His commandments. Otherwise your decision to follow Jesus is a sham. Your supposed faith is a façade.

Being born again is not a decision to follow Jesus. The flesh gives birth to flesh. Your flesh cannot decide to follow Jesus. Only a person born of the Spirit can do that. Therefore you cannot decide to follow Jesus any more than a walnut tree can decide to bear acorns.

If being born again meant making a decision for Jesus, Jesus would have requested a decision from Nicodemus that night. Jesus did not do so. That is not what being born again is all about.

Being born again is not turning your life over to Jesus.

If you turn your life over to Jesus, that means that you will obey His commands. If you turn your life over to Jesus, that means that you will pray without ceasing. You will depend upon Him for all good things. You will never feel worry or anxiety for the rest of your life. If you never feel worry and anxiety for the rest of your life, you will never be short-tempered. You will not put people down or try to manipulate them by talking bad about them or anything else.

But being born again is not turning your life over to Jesus. If it were, Jesus would have demanded that Nicodemus do so on the night when Nicodemus visited Jesus.

Being born again is not repenting of your sins. Or at least being born again is not about you repenting of yours sins. Or to put it another way, being born again is not about turning over a new leaf or reforming the way that you live your life.

When we reform our lives or start living our lives in a new way, we put away certain sins and we put on certain virtues. That is the only way that the flesh can do it. There is no other way for the flesh to do it. But if we start changing the way that we live our lives that is like a walnut tree growing an oak tree leaf here and there. When the walnut tree begins to grow a new oak leaf here and there does that make the walnut tree an oak tree?

Such an analogy is impossible. Walnut trees cannot bear oak leaves. That which is born of the flesh cannot suddenly bear the fruit of the Spirit in love, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, and self-control. Everything that does not proceed from faith is sin. Therefore even if you do shape up a little bit, unless you believe in Jesus it does not matter at all. All of your good deeds are just sin. God knows that you did them for yourself to get something from Him. The only way to do your good deeds for others before God is to be born again. There must be a brand new you.

And that is why the Lord instructs Nicodemus and you about what it means to be born again. That is why He points out that that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

The Spirit blows and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. When you are born according to the flesh everyone knows where you came from. You came from your mother. Your mother has a pretty good idea who your father is. When you are born of the Spirit no one can see where you came from. No one knows according to reason where you came from.

So when is a person born again? A person is born again when they are born of water and the Spirit. That is the Lord's own explanation and He knows what He is talking about. He testifies to the things that He has seen. He has seen where the people who are born of the Spirit come from. They are born of water and the Spirit.

The water and the Spirit come together in only one place: Holy Baptism. People have bent over backward to try to make the water mean something other than the water of baptism. One of the more common assumptions is that the Lord is talking about amniotic fluid. But the Greeks and Hebrews had words for amniotic fluid. Those words

are not used here. Here the Lord simply talks about water. He leaves Nicodemus wondering what He means, but He does not leave you wondering.

“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”  
“Be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Water and the Spirit go together. Water and the Spirit were together when the Lord Himself was baptized. The Spirit brooded over the water from the beginning of the creation. Water and the Spirit go together when a new creation comes and that is exactly what happens when you are born again. There is a new creation. When there is a new creation, there is a new you. There has to be a new you in order for there to be a person born of the Spirit. Otherwise you are simply born of the flesh.

“Just Baptism?” you say. Yup, just baptism.

If it is an emotional high or a mountain top experience then it is something that someone manufactured for you. The Bible nowhere describes such things. If it is your commitment to Jesus, then it is something that you did. But you cannot make yourself born the first time out of flesh, how much less can you make yourself born of the Spirit! Your decision for Jesus is also something that you did.

Baptism is not something that you did. It is something that God did to you. There are many people in our day and age who say that Baptism is something that you do. They say that Baptism is a public confession of your faith or something like that. Baptism is none of those things. Baptism is water and the Spirit. It is therefore the new birth. If it is the new birth, then by definition you did not do it. But that is how it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. Otherwise salvation would be by works and not by grace.

That’s boring. Well sure it is. It is boring because your flesh is not fascinated by it. But then your flesh has never been fascinated by that which is good. Your flesh is always fascinated by that which is evil. If your flesh is bored, that is good. You have been born again. If all it took was baptism, then that is good, you have been born again.

I would rather not be excited to go to hell. I would rather be bored and see the Kingdom of God.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.