

The Story Church - 5.14.23

Down to the River: *The Purpose and Power of Baptism*

Part 2 of 4: ***Are You Born Again?***

SERIES INTRO: “By baptism, we enter into a covenant with God, an everlasting covenant, we are admitted into the church, made members of Christ, made children of God. By the water of baptism, we are born again.” - John Wesley

The movement of Jesus that has swept over the entire world was born in blood and water. For thousands of years, believers from every nation and race, whether rich or poor, male or female, young or old, having been redeemed by the blood of Christ, were initiated into Christ’s Church through this mysterious water rite called baptism. What is the meaning of this strange, ancient ritual, and why does it still matter today? Join The Story through the month of May as we explore the purpose and power of baptism!

REFLECTION QUESTION: Do you consider yourself a “born-again Christian”? If not, why not? If so, do you acknowledge your born-again identity publicly? Why or why not?

Do you believe that everyone who’s been baptized is “born again”?
Has everyone who is “born again” been baptized?

Let’s talk about the intersection of baptism and born-again Christianity by reading John’s Gospel.

John 3:1-2 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Who were the Pharisees? Who was Nicodemus? Why might he have come to see Jesus at night?

John 3:3-8 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ 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.”

How did Nicodemus’ super-literal retort to Jesus expose the state of his heart? What was he missing?

What did Jesus most likely mean when he said “...unless they are born of water and the Spirit”? How do other passages from Scripture support this?

Ezekiel 36:25-27 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.

Biblically speaking, what does God do to us with WATER? ...and with SPIRIT?

Putting aside modern-day stereotypes, what does it actually mean to be *born-again* according to Jesus and to the entirety of God's Word?

2 Corinthians 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

1 Peter 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

James 1:17-18 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth...

What is so important to understand about the idea of being BORN (versus being *good*, for example)?

John 3:9-18 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Why would Jesus' message of salvation by grace through faith have been so shocking to Nicodemus?

What do we know about Nicodemus' life after this late-night encounter with Jesus? (see *John 7:45-52 and John 19:38-39*) Do you think he was born-again? Why or why not?

What difference does it make in a person's life when God makes them a new creation?

How has this message, these Bible passages, and/or God's Spirit changed your understanding of what it means to be a born-again believer? If you haven't considered yourself "born again" in the past, are you open to being born again by water and the Spirit? Why or why not?

*Who has seen the wind? Neither I nor you.
But when the leaves hang trembling, the wind is passing through.
Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I.
But when the trees bow their heads, the wind is passing by.*
- from ***Who Has Seen the Wind?*** by Christina Rossetti (1872) based on John 3:8

Your Notes: