Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church

John 3:4-8 | Born Again: Part Two

Sunday November 1, 2026

WELCOME:

- Announcements
  - Thanksgiving Potluck signup
  - Women's Ministry: Lunch a month

CALL TO WORSHIP:

• Prayer: Psalm 96:1-4

• Music

REVIEW:

Last week we studied one of the most famous passages in all of Scripture—a conversation that the Lord Jesus had with a religious leader named Nicodemus.

LW KEYPOINT 2:

We must see Nicodemus as a human representative standing before God.

Not only a human representative, but the best of the best.

Nic is a GOAT! Greatest of all time.

Nicodemus is a spiritual Michael Jordan, Tom Brady, and Wayne Gretzky.

Nobody has a better spiritual resume—maybe Saul of Tarsus could give him a run for his money, but Saul isn't on the scene yet.

Nicodemus came from a prominent, wealthy family, was highly educated, and belonged to the most respected religious group of the day: the Pharisees.

He was also a politician and a member of the Sanhedrin.

In other words, Nicodemus was the model of morality—mankind's "man of the year."

In that conversation, Jesus introduced a new term to us—"Born again."

The theological term for *born again* is "regeneration."
It's important for us to know this term—to be "regenerate" compared to "unregenerate."

LW KEYPOINT #3:
Regeneration is when the Holy Spirit transforms someone from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Regeneration is divine rebirth.

Scripture teaches that this divine act of being born again is monergistic.

Mono means "one/single."

Monergism means God alone performs this spiritual transformation from spiritual death to spiritual life in someone's life.

Think about it: we didn't choose to be physically born.

We also didn't choose our parents or the era of history in which we were born.

And if it's impossible to choose those physical things, how much more impossible is it to choose spiritual things?

Therefore, the Scripture teaches…

LW KEYPOINT 4:
We are physically born spiritually dead.

We've examined several verses that teach exactly that.

Since we are *physically born spiritually dead*, we are passive in the act of regeneration/being born again.

- Just as Adam and Eve didn't create themselves.
- Just as we didn't choose our parents
- Just as Lazarus couldn't raise himself from the dead— nor can we.

What Jesus is teaching Nicodemus in this conversation is…

KEYPOINT 5:
Your religious résumé and "good works" cannot give you spiritual life.

God doesn't weigh your good deeds and bad deeds on a scale.

God also doesn't grade us on a curve—God gives spiritual life by His amazing grace.

In one sentence, the Lord swept away everything Nicodemus stood for.

You must be born again—this is one of the greatest statements of the Bible.

Yet, it's so misunderstood because of our human pride.

It is so simple a child can understand, and so profound that mankind's "man of the year"—Nicodemus— is flabbergasted.

KEYPOINT 6:
According to Jesus, the starting point of the Christian life is being born again.

So, if regeneration is a gift from God—does that mean we don't have any responsibility? No.

Our responsibility is to "believe."

Belief is a major theme in John's Gospel.

The Apostle Paul says it this way:

Romans 10:9—*If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Romans 10:10—*One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.*

Romans 10:11—*For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame,*

INTRODUCTION:

Today is part two of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus about being *born again*.

We'll see Nicodemus ask two questions, and Jesus answers both in a way that Nicodemus, as a Jewish Pharisee and theologian who has a Ph.D. in OT studies—he's a scholar and teacher— should understand—but doesn't.

How do Nicodemus' questions impact you?

What about Jesus' answer? Let's find out together.

Please stand to read and honor God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

John 3:4—*"How can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked him. "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"*

John 3:5—*Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

John 3:6—*Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

John 3:7—*Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again.*

John 3:8—*The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."*

May the Lord bless the reading of His Holy Word.

PRAY:

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your gracious Spirit lead me on level ground. (Psalm 143:10)

EXEGESIS:

John 3:1—*There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*

John 3:2—*This man came to him at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him."*

John 3:3—*Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

John 3:4—*"How can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked him.*

Nicodemus was flabbergasted/baffled/rattled.

In Nic's words, this "teacher from God" gives the teacher of Israel a teaching he doesn't understand.

Notice that Nicodemus didn't say "born <u>again</u>"—he only said, "born."

How can anyone be born when he's old?

He still doesn't realize that Jesus's <u>necessary precondition</u> is to be born "from above."

That's what "born-again" means—to be born from above.

Nicodemus doesn't realize that he is spiritually dead.

He is a highly intelligent man who is highly deceived.

Notice Nicodemus did not ask, "*Why* should a man be born when he is old?"

He asked, "*How* can a man be born when he is old?"

"How " and " why " are two completely different questions.

The "why" points to the <u>reason</u> or the <u>purpose</u> of being born again.

He's trying to make sense of something he cannot accomplish.

In other words, "Why should I believe this?"

A "why" question tries to understand the reason behind the reality.

ILLUSTRATION:

Imagine walking outside one morning and discovering that your car won't start.

*You might ask, '**How** do I get it running?' That question is looking for a solution.*

*But you might also ask, '**Why** won't it start?'*

"Why" asks for the reason behind the problem.

- *Is the battery dead?*
- *Is the starter broken?*
- *Did somebody leave the lights on all night?*

Both questions matter, but they're asking different things. 'How' looks for the way something happens; 'why' looks for the reason behind it."

Nicodemus doesn't ask "why should a man be born again" because he doesn't see the need.

He's a Jew, Pharisee, member of the Sanhedrin who has kept (in his mind at least) the Mosaic Law.

Nicodemus is quite proud of his spiritual resume—he thinks he knows the answer to "why?"

So he asks, "how."

The "how" points to the means/mode/manner.

Nicodemus wants to know the process/method/mechanism of being "born-again."

He wants to know the steps—he's a logical guy.

It's very similiar to how churches teach today:

- Raise your hand
- Sign the pledge card
- Walk the aisle
- Pray the sinner's prayer

Regardless, Nicodemus immediately thinks of physical rebirth—but Jesus is teaching of spiritual regeneration.

They're on completely different pages—they are not singing from the same hymnbook.

John 3:4—*"Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"*

We don't know the tone.

Is Nicodemus using sarcasm? Is he baffled? Maybe he's irritated and condescending.

One thing is clear: he's thinking about physical birth, while Jesus is talking about a spiritual birth."

1 Corinthians 2:14—*But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually.*

If regeneration, like physical rebirth, was impossible from a human standpoint, then where did that leave Nicodemus?

It leaves him condemned and guilty before a holy God.

We'll get to that in verse 18.

Here, the Lord tries to soften Nicodemus' heart, but Nic already has it all figured out.

It's like people who read the Bible once and don't see a need to re-read or study because they "get it."

Nicodemus is going to believe what he's always believed.

By calling him to be born again, Jesus calls him to repentance and belief—just like everyone else.

When it comes to being born again, everyone is on level ground.

We're all spiritually dead people who are slaves to sin.

John 3:5—*Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you,*

He says for the second time, "Truly/Verily/Amen.

Have you ever tried to explain something important, and the person listening couldn't understand what you meant?

Nicodemus seems to be listening, but he's thinking in a fleshly, human way.

John 3:5—*Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, <u>unless</u> someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

Jesus repeats that universal, necessary precondition—"unless."

He used it in verse 3—***"Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."***

In other words, there are no "if's, and's, or but's."

This is how regeneration must happen.

Then Jesus goes on to say…

John 3:5*—Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit,*

This part is tricky.

Some people believe that Jesus is pointing Nicodemus to be baptized.

The problem with this view is that this conversation takes place years before the Lord institutes baptism as we know it today.

What about John the Baptizer's baptism?

Yes, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptizer, but that was out of obedience to fulfill the Father's law.

Jesus's baptism symbolized his identification with humanity—though sinless, Jesus aligned himself with sinners, which foreshadowed his role as the Lamb of God who takes away sin.

So Jesus had no reason to expect a Pharisee to understand that water baptism.

Let's also keep in mind that baptism isn't required for salvation, but being born again is.

So what is Jesus talking about?

Let's remember that Jesus is talking to a scholar of the OT—so Jesus now speaks to Nicodemus in his own scholarly language that he should understand.

To understand what Jesus means, we have to look at the OT use of *water and Spirit.*

There are several passages, but I'm only going to show you one:

Ezekiel 36:25—*I will also sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols.*

There's the reference to water.

Ezekiel 36:26—*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

There's the reference to the human spirit.

Ezekiel 36:27—*I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.*

There's the reference to the Holy Spirit—capital S.

Ezekiel 36:29—*I will save you from all your uncleanness (sin).*

According to Ezekiel, God's people needed three things:
1. New heart
2. New spirit
3. The Holy Spirit

We see this threefold emphasis in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus.

In the Old Testament, water and spirit both symbolize spiritual renewal and cleansing.

All that to say this—we're not to see water and spirit as different.

Instead, both water and the Spirit represent the same image—regeneration/being born again.

We see this concept of water symbolizing the Spirit in the Gospels.

John 7:38—*The one who believes in me… will have streams of living water flow from deep within him."*

What exactly are the *streams of living water*?

John 7:39—*He said this about the Spirit.*

Later, the Apostle Paul will go on to write:

Titus 3:5—*he saved us—not by works of righteousness (good works) that we had done, but according to his mercy—through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*

Lastly, the Greek grammatical structure of "water and the Spirit" also confirms "water and spirit" as a single event, not two.

Jesus continues to show how regeneration happens.

John 3:6—*Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

In the Bible, the word "flesh" can refer to several different things.

We see this in the creation account where it means skin—Adam sees Eve for the first time.

Genesis 2:23—*This one, at last, is bone of my bone*
and flesh of my flesh;
this one will be called "woman,"
for she was taken from man.

Jesus even refers to this creation account.

Matthew 19:6—*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."*

After the fall of man, the word "flesh" (depending on context) conveys a completely different meaning.

Spiritually speaking, "flesh" also refers to the human constitution—body, soul, and spirit.

When used spiritually, it's used in a negative way— "flesh" refers to our entire person being contaminated and dominated by sin.

Where we really see the impact of this term in Romans:

Romans 7:18—*For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it.*

Romans 7:19—*For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do.*

Romans 8:5— *For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit.*

Romans 8:6—*Now the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace.*

Romans 8:7—*The mindset of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so.*

Romans 8:8—*Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*
And now Jesus says…

John 3:5—*Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot <u>enter</u> the kingdom of God.*

In verse 3 from last week, Jesus said, "he cannot <u>see</u> the Kingdom of God," but now Jesus says, "cannot <u>enter</u> the kingdom of God."

So, what's going on?

Are "entering" and "seeing" the kingdom of God the same thing? Similar to "water" and "spirit."

No, what Jesus is doing is layering his explanation for Nicodemus—he's building on what he previously said.

Verse 3 addresses human perception—a statement about ability—"can't see" physically.

In verse 5, Jesus addresses the requirements for spiritual entrance.

John 3:6—*Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh,*

In a purely physical sense, Jesus is showing Nicodemus that "-likes produce likes/ flesh produces flesh/skin produces skin."

For example, dogs reproduce and have more dogs—not javelina.

Cats produce cats. Horses produce horses. Plants produce plants.

In the same way, the fleshly man only produces other fleshly people.

In other words, sinners reproduce sinners.

<u>KEYPOINT 1:</u>
No one evolves from flesh to spirit.

It's impossible for man to produce anything spiritual. Why?

Psalm 51:5 NLT—*For I was born a sinner—*
Yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.

No one is born a Christian.

This was a common error among the Jewish people.

They thought that because they were Jews, being descendants of Abraham, they were automatically in the kingdom of God.

But the OT prophets and teachers had to show them this wasn't the case.

We also see this with the Apostles:

Ephesians 2:1—*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.*

In other words, we are all born spiritually dead—Jew and Gentile.

That's not fair! How did that happen?

Romans 5:12 NLT—*When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.*

Think of sin as a spiritual disease that has been passed down to you from Adam and Eve.

Due to that inherited sinful nature, we are corrupted and carnal.

Which means that we think, act, and behave out of that sinful nature—it's who we are.

Jesus is teaching Nicodemus that he is not a good person who sometimes sins.

Jesus is teaching that Nicodemus is a sinner who can only sin.

That doesn't mean that he can't do anything good.

Nicodemus can do many things that appear good—and some that truly benefit other people.

But he could not give himself a new heart—and he can't raise himself from the dead.

So, God the Father sent God the Son, and God the Son sent God the Holy Spirit.

John 3:6*—and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

Notice the capital S in Spirit—Who is the Holy Spirit?

- Is God,
- Our Comforter, Guide, Counselor, and Advocate
- Convicter of Sin
- Leads and consoles believers
- Seal and Deposit—He is God's down payment guaranteeing entrance into the Kingdom of God.
- The spiritual Author of Scripture—the Spirit breathed into the Apostles' hearts and minds what to write.

Lastly, the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

2 Corinthians 5:17*—if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!*

How do we know we've been born again and that we are a new creation?

We touched on this last week, but its important to realize that our remaining flesh struggles against our new spiritual nature.

The new nature can do nothing bad, while the old nature can do nothing good.

So obviously, there will be conflict and struggle for the rest of our lives—this conflict and struggle is called sanctification.

To be sanctified and purified by God Himself.

Purification requires God to turn up the heat.

While we are regenerated, we are still subject to ongoing spiritual transformation.

And that's how God intended it—God doesn't want us to be soft or spoiled brats.

Responding to tests and trials in a new godly way shows us we are *born again*.

Now, if there is no:
- Spiritual struggle in your life
- Repentance of sin
- Sorrow when you sin
- Change in how you treat people
- Desire for wrongs to be reconciled
- And no overall bearing of spiritual fruit in your life—

Those are signs that you haven't been born again.

John 3:7*—Do not be <u>amazed</u> that I told you that you must be born again.*

Why did the Lord tell Nicodemus not to be amazed/wonder/marvel/astonished?

Because he is!

Nicodemus is in spiritual shock—regeneration is the opposite of everything Nicodemus has ever known.

John 3:7—*Do not be amazed that I told you that <u>you</u> must be born again.*

What's interesting in the Greek is that the "you" is plural—referring not only to Nicodemus or the Sanhedrin, but everyone!

If Jesus were from Texas, he'd say, *All, ya'll" must be born again.*

Nicodemus wanted to know "how" being born again is possible.

Jesus told him plainly—and Nicodemus still doesn't get it.

As intelligent as he was, the Lord's answer still exceeded his human capacity to discern a basic spiritual law.

Although Jesus' words were based on Old Testament revelation, they ran completely contrary to everything Nicodemus had been taught.

All his life, he had believed salvation came through his own external merit.

Now he found it exceedingly difficult to think otherwise.

In other words, "You can't teach old dogs new tricks."

Despite his achievements and his prominence in education, politics, culture, and religion, Nicodemus had a great need.

He needed to believe in the Gospel that Jesus teaches.

John 3:8—*The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."*

Because Nicodemus still doesn't get it, Jesus uses an analogy.

At this point in their conversation, maybe a cool breeze arose as they were talking.

Jesus plays on the Greek word pneuma, which can mean three things: "wind," "breath," or "spirit."

He said, "You have to be born of the Spirit, and it's like the wind."

In other words, *the pneuma is like the pneuma.*

The wind, of course, blows wherever it wants, sometimes very powerfully.

But no matter how strongly the wind blows, nobody can see the actual wind.

Have you ever endured a hurricane? Or a haboob?

Nobody can see the wind blowing, but we do see trees bending and dust flying.

Likewise, we cannot see a spiritual birth, but we can observe its impact in our lives.

Like wind, the sovereign work of regeneration cannot be controlled or predicted.

Yet its effects can be seen.

Sometimes the Spirit's wind is a raging power.

Other times it blows so gently that it barely moves a leaf.

I think the Spirit's winds were roaring for Nicodemus.

APPLICATION:
How do Nicodemus' questions impact you today?

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

What about Jesus' answer?

Do you like the *necessary precondition* of being "born again"—this sovereign, monergistic action by God alone?

Today's lesson teaches:

KEYPOINT:
We can know Who accomplishes something and what it accomplishes— without fully/trully understanding how.

Is the wind of the Spirit at work in your life today?

Is the Spirit gently blowing, soothing your soul?

Or is the Spirit's wind raging in your life right now?

Is He comforting your anxiety? With you in the midst of your depression?

Is He teaching you His Scriptures?

Showing you how to apply the new fruits of the Spirit to your spiritual life through tests and trials?

If not, why do you think that is?

Is there unconfessed sin in your life?

Is there a secret sin that you won't let go of?

Is anger, bitterness, or jealousy in the way of your relationship with God?

I'd like to encourage you to think about those things this week and search the Scriptures for what they say about them.

I'd also like to invite you to Wednesday night's Bible study as we continue to talk about this passage in more detail.

BTW, it's also a great way to meet new friends.

LORD'S SUPPER:
PRAYER:
SONG:

BENEDICTION:

May the LORD bless you and protect you;

may the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

may the LORD look with favor on you
and give you peace." (Num. 6:24)

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