

Defining Moments:
Being Born Again
John 3:1-18

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Text Introduction: Our lives are sprinkled with defining moments—moments that shape the rest of our lives, moments that are so important that the rest of our lives hang in the balance of these moments. We are studying from Scripture some of these defining moments that dot our lives. You may not experience every single one of them, but you will experience most of them. Last week, we started with a moment that certainly we have all experienced—birth. If we are going to talk about moments in life that define us, it seems reasonable and practical to start with our births.

Today, we continue with that same thought of birth, but we move the conversation to the moment of our spiritual births. The Bible uses the phrase “born again” to describe that experience of placing one’s faith in Christ. Obviously, because the Bible uses that phrase, specifically that Jesus used the phrase, this is a phrase that communicates well. We desperately need to understand what is meant by the phrase, and if we have not had a born again experience, no other defining moment is as important as this one.

Let’s read the account in John 3 where Jesus used the phrase.

Text: There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.² This man came to Him at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him.”

³ Jesus replied, “I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

⁴ “But 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?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “I assure you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. 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.”

⁹ “How can these things be?” asked Nicodemus.

¹⁰ “Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things?” Jesus replied. ¹¹ “I assure you: We speak what We know and We testify to what We have seen, but you do not accept Our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about things that happen on earth and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about things of heaven? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸ Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.

Introduction: Nicodemus is a religious man—a Pharisee, which describes a particular sect of the Jews. He was a leader among that group. He has had some conversations about Jesus, most likely with other Pharisees, noted by the “we.” Nicodemus comes at night to visit Jesus. This, no doubt, expresses that he is trying to hide the fact that he is interested in finding more about Jesus. So, we know that Nicodemus has some religious background or heritage. We also know that Nicodemus has some right knowledge. Nicodemus has some right answers. But here is the big thing. Some right knowledge or even a lot of right knowledge is not a replacement for a personal relationship with Christ. And so, Jesus immediately brought the conversation to a specific point about the need to be born again.

The use of the phrase “born again” shows why salvation is the defining moment of our lives.

We said last week that if we are going to develop a list of the most defining moments of our lives, we must start with birth. To border on the absurdity of logic—if you are not born, then you will not have other defining moments. If we understand that, then we should also understand that our spiritual birth is the defining moment of the rest of our lives.

I understand that as Christians we can sometimes use some pretty peculiar language that maybe doesn't communicate well with those who most need to understand us, but understand that there is such value in some of those words and phrases to communicate the truth of the Gospel. The phrase “born again” is one such phrase.

The phrase “born again” speaks to the

Magnitude of being a Christian

This phrase speaks first to the magnitude, or importance, of being a Christian. Notice that this is not the question of Nicodemus, but it is the place where Jesus immediately takes him. Some of you have questions about life and about God. Actually, what we could say is that some of you have big, deep questions about God. Those questions are good and important, perhaps in time, but here is the most important question: How do you see the kingdom of God? How are you reconciled to God? How do you go to Heaven? How do you make sure that you will spend eternity with Him in Heaven? This is life's most important question. And so to describe the magnitude of that question, we have an experience of great magnitude to describe it—being born again.

There is a fable about a king who had two sons. The sons brought their father a question. “Is a gentleman born or made?” The father turned the question back on them. “What do you think?” One said a gentleman is made; the other indicated he believed a gentleman was born.

The father sent the sons off to find an example that proved their theory. The sons went off to find their proof. The son who thought that a gentleman was made found his example in a café. He found a cat in a café serving tables. The cat had been trained. He had a uniform. He could take an order, carry a tray,

and bring the order to the table. The first son had his example. If a cat could be trained to do that, couldn't a man be trained to be a gentleman?

The other son, the one who believed that a gentleman was born, was not so fortunate. Time drew near to make their presentation, and he had nothing. Worse yet, word had leaked about his brother's example. But just hours before their assigned time of presentation to their father, the second son saw something that made him smile.

The first son demonstrated first. The father and others watching were indeed impressed. The second son then stepped forward with sack in hand. Opening his sack, he released several mice into the court. Instantly the cat scampered after the mice. The cat's true nature was revealed. Tempted with the one thing that the cat could not resist, and the cat was proven to be a cat.

We are like that. You can dress us up, clean us up, work on our habits, and sit us in a church every Sunday. But, when confronted with that which we cannot resist, we will go back to our sin nature. We cannot change on our own. We must be born again! (Max Lucado, *A Gentle Thunder*, p. 105-106.)

Miracle of becoming a Christian

Secondly, this analogy points to a miracle. Just as physical birth is a miracle, our spiritual birth is just as miraculous. After a question from Nicodemus in verse 4 about how can this be, Jesus reiterates his theme in verses 5-6 about the importance of being born again. Then, in verses 7-8, it is as though Jesus says, "It is a miracle."

Childbirth is a miracle. I remember when our son Josh was born that some nursing students were viewing their very first childbirth. At the moment of birth, they began to cry. I thought something was wrong. They apologized and one said, "I've never seen something so beautiful and miraculous." They were caught up in the miracle of childbirth.

Manner in which we become Christians

This analogy of being born again helps us in a third way. We understand something about the manner in which we become Christians. Accompanying this analogy of a new birth, Jesus points to a familiar story in Jewish history that is recorded in Numbers 21. During the days of Israel wandering around in the wilderness, the people began to complain about the lack of food and water. "Why have you led us from Egypt out into this wilderness to die? We are tired of this wretched food!" God struck them with a plague of snakes. They repented, and Moses interceded. God instructed Moses to mount an image of a snake on a pole, and anyone who had been bitten could look at the snake and be healed.

One story is new and one story is old, but they both make the same point. Salvation is not about us; it is about God. He provides the way.

Maturity expected once we become Christians

We do not expect babies to stay babies, and God does not expect us to stay spiritual babies. Consider these verses from the writing of John in 1 John.

- 1 John 2:29--If you know that He is righteous, you know this as well: Everyone who does what is right has been born of Him.
- 1 John 3:9--Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because His seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God.
- 1 John 4:7--Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.
- 1 John 5:4--because whatever has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith.
- 1 John 5:18--We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin, but the One who is born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

Moment that we become Christians

Lastly, there is the issue of the moment that we become Christians. There is a moment that we are born. There is a moment that we are spiritually born.

Nicodemus comes at night. He hears Jesus. We don't really know Nicodemus' response. Or do we?

We see Nicodemus appear twice more in John.

John 7:40-52⁴⁰ When some from the crowd heard these words, they said, "This really is the Prophet!"
⁴¹ Others said, "This is the Messiah!" But some said, "Surely the Messiah doesn't come from Galilee, does He? ⁴² Doesn't the Scripture say that the Messiah comes from David's offspring and from the town of Bethlehem, where David once lived?" ⁴³ So a division occurred among the crowd because of Him.
⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

⁴⁵ Then the temple police came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why haven't you brought Him?"

⁴⁶ The police answered, "No man ever spoke like this!"

⁴⁷ Then the Pharisees responded to them: "Are you fooled too? ⁴⁸ Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed in Him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd, which doesn't know the law, is accursed!"

⁵⁰ Nicodemus—the one who came to Him previously, being one of them—said to them, ⁵¹ "Our law doesn't judge a man before it hears from him and knows what he's doing, does it?"

⁵² "You aren't from Galilee too, are you?" they replied. "Investigate and you will see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

Then, John 19:38-42³⁸ After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus—but secretly because of his fear of the Jews—asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus' body. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and took His body away. ³⁹ Nicodemus (who had previously come to Him at night) also came, bringing a mixture of about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. ⁴⁰ Then they took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the aromatic spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ There was a

garden in the place where He was crucified. A new tomb was in the garden; no one had yet been placed in it. ⁴²They placed Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation and since the tomb was nearby.

There was a moment in which Nicodemus believed. There was a moment in which we believe. We have a birthday. We must have a spiritual birthday. Sometimes I hear people say, "I have always been a Christian." Because of this analogy, we understand that cannot be. It may be true that you were born into a Christian family. It may be true that you have, from since you can remember, been exposed to Christian ideas. But the analogy of a new birth mandates that there must be a moment in which you believe for yourself and are born again.

I am going to call on you today to make such a declaration. No other defining moment matters unless you have this defining moment. Every other defining moment must be defined by the defining moment of your decision and declaration to trust and follow after Christ.