

## Born of the Spirit (John 3:1-17)

(Summary notes)

Have you ever been asked: 'What type of Christian are you?' Or 'Are you a born again Christian?' Is there any other sort of Christian?

Nicodemus was a prominent Jewish religious leader and teacher (v1). He is curious, respectful, open as comes to Jesus (v2). But coming at night implies secrecy (theme in John's Gospel). Perhaps concerned for his reputation.

Jesus answer (v3) is rather abrupt and cryptic.

Kingdom of God is a theme central to Jesus' teaching. Can be summarized as 'the kingly rule of God', cf 'your kingdom come, your will be done ...'. Individuals can 'enter', 'see' or 'receive' the kingdom.

'born again' (v3,7 KJV/NIV) vs 'born from above' (NRSV). Translate Greek *anōthen*, which has both meanings.

Nicodemus misunderstands. Common trope in John, where Jesus uses metaphor, and listeners misunderstand and take it literally. E.g. 'destroy this temple' (2:19), 'living water' (4:10). Nicodemus interprets literal physical second birth, but Jesus means born 'from above' or 'born of the Spirit'; a spiritual birth, new spiritual life.

To enter this unseen realm of the kingly rule of God, you can't enter as you are. Must first experience spiritual birth.

How do I experience this spiritual birth? UK citizenship can be hereditary, or gained/earned. But not the Kingdom of God:

- It's not hereditary. No-one is born a Christian.
- It's not earned. Can't be achieved by adherence to rules or outward conformity. Being a 'good person' doesn't help.

So how? Must be 'born of water and Spirit' (v5). Water here is symbolic of baptism. Cf Church of England baptism service: *'Water is also a sign of new life, as we are born again by water and the Spirit'*.

- What's the key? A commitment, a decision, a promise. Our baptism / confirmation vows: *Do you turn away from sin, reject evil, turn to Christ as Saviour, trust in him as Lord?* Cf 'sinner's prayer': repentance and confession of faith in Jesus.
- Is it as simple as that? Yes, but: (a) it's a big decision, which takes time; (b) it's internal; only you and God really know.

Key take aways:

1. Spiritual birth (or born again) is part of the normal Christian experience.
  - Yes, you must be born again! But no 'basic' vs 'born again' Christians.
  - Let's not get hung up on the phrase. 'born from above' is probably a better translation, and Jesus' (and NT writers) used a variety of descriptions for becoming a disciple of Jesus.
2. It requires a commitment, as reflected in our baptism vows.
  - It's not automatic, not hereditary, not earned.
  - Must turn from sin, accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.
  - Have you?