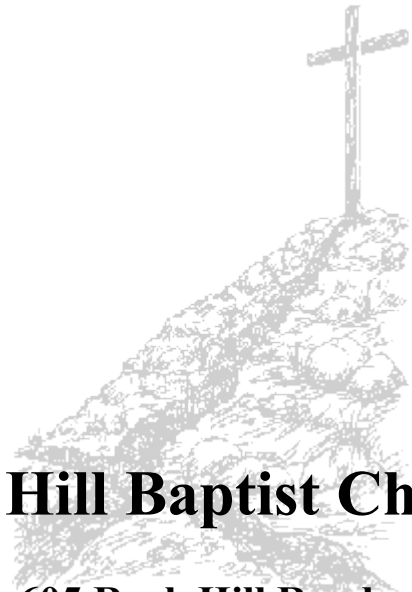


# You Must Be Born Of The Spirit

John 3:5-15



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**FOCAL** (John 3:5-15 KJV) "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. {6} That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. {7} Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. {8} The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. {9} Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? {10} Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? {11} Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. {12} If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? {13} And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. {14} And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: {15} That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

**Introduce & Illustrate:** When a person is hungry - I mean, really hungry, that person needs food that has *substance*. You don't want cotton candy to eat. You may like cotton candy when you go to the state fair, or candied apples, or popcorn, but Beloved, when you're hungry you want *hearty food*. You want *steak and potatoes*, some good vegetables, something that will - as momma used to say - stick to your ribs.

When we come to Church we need to feed on meat, not cotton candy. We need to feed on meat because - quite frankly - this life is very short. A survey was done a few years ago and it was discovered to everyone's amazement that ten out of ten people will *ultimately die*. Even with the advances of modern medicine, and the increase of the average lifespan, ten out of ten people will, at some time in their lives, suffer *physical death*. It will happen to you, dear friend, and it will happen to me. So we need to feed on meat from God's Word. What we're doing here is *not seeking entertainment*, but we're seeking God's face. Only One - Jesus Christ our Lord - has come from Heaven and returned to Heaven. He is the Only Witness Who resurrected from the grave. He is the One with the answers we need.

Nicodemus, a Ruler among the Pharisees, a *righteous man* by every human standard - a good and moral person - came to Jesus because he needed *meat*. He came with flattery, he came by night, but before that night would end this dear man would leave with *more than cotton candy*. He would leave with the very *key* to eternal life.

### 1. What Is The Key To Eternal Life?

We begin by reading,

**FOCAL** (John 3:5 KJV) "Jesus answered, **Verily, verily**, I say unto thee.... "

Jesus started out by saying **verily, verily** or **amen, amen**. This emphasized that what was coming was to be an *absolute truth applicable to every person in this*

*room, nay, to every person who has ever lived*. Our Lord went on:

**FOCAL** (John 3:5 KJV) "... Except a man **be born of water and of the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

What did Jesus mean by **except a man be born of water AND of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God**. Some have taken this text to refer to **water baptism** and **spirit baptism**. That is, unless a person is **born of water [baptism] and of Spirit [baptism]**, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. The biggest problem with this interpretation is that it *does not follow the context*. Listen Beloved, Jesus Christ was addressing His remarks to Nicodemus, a *master-teacher* of the *Sanhedrin*. This man understood many things. If our Lord was talking about water *baptism*, I think that He would have referred to water *baptism* - baptizo - as Jesus *is* a Master Teacher. God our Savior knows every word that has ever been invented. He could have plainly stated "water baptism" if the New Birth included such a ritual. I want you to *compare* verses 5 and 6, and this will begin to make sense. Look at the following table:

John 3:5	John 3:6
".. Except a man be <b>born of water and</b>	"That which is <b>born of the flesh is flesh;</b>
<b>of the Spirit,</b>	and that which is
he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."	<b>born of the Spirit is spirit."</b>

Our Lord Jesus explains what He means by *born of water* in the very next verse - it is to be *born of the flesh*. The baby in its mother survives in a sack full of amniotic fluid or water. Prior to the birth of the baby we say *the mother's water breaks* - that fluid sack bursts. The baby is **born of<sup>1</sup> water**, or **born out of water**. This refers to *physical birth*. You must also be **born** - not ek, or out of the Spirit - but *by* the Spirit. I want you to notice if you have a King James Version that the word *of* is italicized in the phrase *of the Spirit*. You are not born *out of* the Spirit, but you are born *by* the work of the Spirit.

**Are there other interpretations to this text?** Yes, there are several other interpretations that good Biblical scholars have proffered. **Thomas Constable** said in his commentary<sup>2</sup>:

"The Old Testament often used water metaphorically to symbolize spiritual cleansing and renewal (Numbers. 19:17-19; Isa. 55:1-3; cf. Psalm. 51:10; Jeremiah. 2:13; 17:13; Zechariah. 14:8). God's spirit (or Spirit) in the Old Testament represents God's life (Gen. 1:2; 2:7; 6:3; Job 34:14). God promised that He would pour out His spirit on people as water (Isa. 32:15-16; Joel 2:28-29). The result of that outpouring would be a new heart for those on whom the spirit came (Jeremiah. 31:31-34). Thus the revelation that God would bring cleansing and renewal as water by His Spirit was clear in the Old Testament. Jesus evidently meant that unless a person has experienced spiritual cleansing and renewal from God's spirit (or Spirit) he or she cannot enter the kingdom. This is what He meant by being born from above or again (cf. 1 Corinthians. 6:11)..... Another popular view is that "water" refers to the written Word of God and "spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit. This

1 greek ek, out of or away from

2 soniclight.org commentary on John, pages 56-57

figurative use of "water" does exist in the New Testament (cf. Ephesians. 5:26), but it is uncommon in the Old Testament. It is unlikely that Nicodemus would have associated water with the Word of God, and it would have been unfair for Jesus to rebuke him for not having done so. This view, as the former one, also specifies two separate entities whereas the Greek text implies only one as the source of regeneration."

So we have *three viable* views of this passage, and the one I favor is that Jesus was referring to **physical and spiritual birth**. This seems to fit the context, and also makes sense in the larger Biblical context. You see, Jesus Christ *did not die for the sins of the angels*, but died for man only. Jesus died to make payment for *Adam's sin*, not for *Lucifer's sin*:

**(1 Corinthians 15:22-23 KJV) "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. {23} But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."**

Hell was *prepared* specifically for Satan and his kind, not for humanity:

**(Matthew 25:41 KJV) "... Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:"**

Angels are not born physically, but are spiritual beings. Man alone is *born of water* and by the Spirit.

Could it be possible that Jesus spoke of *water baptism* and *Spiritual Birth* in these texts? I don't think so, because the *greater context of Scripture* stands firm

against such a testimony.

**FOCAL** (John 3:6-7 KJV) "...That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, **Ye must be born again.**"

The key to eternal life is not in water baptism, nor in any ritual. The key to eternal life is *faith alone in Christ alone*. Now listen, Beloved - those who are *born again* will *want* to obey the Lord. In fact, Jesus said:

(John 10:26-28 KJV) "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. {27} **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: {28} And I give unto them eternal life;** and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

that "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me". A Christian, someone who is *born again* by faith in Christ will follow the Great Shepherd.

**Listen Beloved - those who belong to Jesus do not need to be chased.**

No Beloved, Jesus' Sheep **hear His voice, and He knows them, and they follow Him**. They consider it an honor and a privilege to follow the Master, for His sheep - born again every one - are in love with Him. **That which is born of the flesh is flesh** - and that which is

merely **born of water**, that is, physically born into this life, *does not love Jesus*. But those who love Jesus *know* Him, and want to serve Him. When Jesus Christ gave His Great Commission and ordered us to ..

(Matthew 28:19 HCSB) "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"

... then **it was His command that we baptize new believers in water**. New believers should want to follow this commandment because it is that which He has ordered. But the Bible makes it plain that *no ritual saves a soul*.

#### **a. No Ritual In The Law Saves A Soul**

(Galatians 2:16 KJV) "Knowing that **a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

The key to salvation is *not a ritual*, for man is not justified or declared righteous by the works of the Law. How then is a person saved? **By the faith of Jesus Christ .... for by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified or declared righteous**. If no ritual of the Mosaic Law could save Israel, why do you believe that *any ritual* could save anyone? It cannot! If you are saved

you will follow Christ in baptism, but if you are lost no amount of water will wash away your sins.

**Illustrate** Man's good deeds are ultimately a mockery to the Christ. Herod and his men put a *gorgeous robe* on Jesus<sup>3</sup>, but though this robe was beautiful by man's standards it was blasphemously given. It served no purpose other than that of mocking Christ. So it is with any ritual that man does to try and earn salvation. Christ alone paid the penalty for sin on the Cross of Calvary. When we try to put our own works into the *New Birth process* then we, like Herod, put a gorgeous robe on Jesus - but that robe exists only to mock His work!

### **b. No Ritual Saved The Thief On The Cross**

(Luke 23:42-43 KJV) "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. {43} And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, **To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.**"

If there were no other verse in the Scripture but this that stood against the idea that a ritual - even water baptism - saves, then this verse would be *more than sufficient*. Next to Jesus hung two men, one on the left and another on the right. One man joined in the crowd in mocking Jesus, but the other man repented and asked Jesus to "remember me when Thou comest into thy Kingdom".

This man who hung next to Christ was nailed to a tree.

3 Luke 23:11 - this illustration is from my son Matthew Buffaloe

His hands and feet were nailed. He could do no good works. He could give no alms to the poor. He could not go to Church, nor could he do any thing whatsoever. And yet Jesus Christ told him:

**"today shalt thou be with Me in paradise"**

This thief *died horribly* on the Cross, for his legs were later broken to speed up his death<sup>4</sup>. When did he have an opportunity to be baptized? Was he baptized in Heaven? No! Did Jesus lie, and make a false promise to this repentant man? No! Was he ever baptized? No! And yet Jesus promised him "**Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise**". Not *tomorrow after you are baptized*, but **today thou shalt be with Me in paradise**. What saved this man? Faith in Christ! He believed on Jesus Christ for salvation and he was born again even as he hung dying on that terrible tree!

And yet, do you still resist and demand that God *merely made an exception* in this case. That this was the *only man ever* to get to Heaven without being baptized? Here's another example.

### **c. No Ritual Saved Cornelius the Centurion**

(Acts 10:44-47 HCSB) "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded, because the **gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles** also. For they heard them

4 John 19:31-33

speaking in [other] languages and declaring the greatness of God. Then **Peter responded, "Can anyone withhold water and prevent these from being baptized,** who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

When Peter went and preached to Cornelius the Centurion's household the Spirit of God made His presence known in these new believers by allowing them to manifest one of the gifts of the Spirit. They **spoke in other languages, declaring the greatness of God.** These people had *not* been baptized as of yet, but they were surely *born again*. God the Holy Spirit had come to live inside of them, just as He lives inside of all of us who are Christ's sheep. It was not until Peter saw this manifestation of the Spirit that he *suggested they be baptized in water* in obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter said

**"Can anyone withhold water and prevent these from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit"**

I want you to notice that Peter testified that these men **have received** - past tense - **the Holy Spirit**. They were *born again* of the Spirit by faith in Christ *apart* from any water baptism - but following their new birth they were expect to *obey Christ's command* and be baptized. We are told by Peter:

**(1 Peter 3:21 NIV)<sup>5</sup> "...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of**

**dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God."**

Water baptism is a **pledge of a good conscience toward God**, an outward evidence of that inward new birth. It does not save, but it testifies that *you are saved*. Cornelius was saved by faith in Christ, and *because he was born again* Peter had him undergo water baptism. Salvation first, obedience second. Salvation by faith in Christ alone first, *working for Christ as a faithful servant* second.

I do not want to belabor this point, but I do want to settle this once and for all. So let's look at one more text.

#### **d. The Apostle *Thanked God* That He Had Baptized Few Of The Corinthians**

(1 Corinthians 1:14-17 KJV) **"I thank God that I baptized none of you,** but Crispus and Gaius; {15} Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. {16} And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. {17} For **Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel:** not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

If water baptism were a necessary ritual toward new birth, would Paul have *thanked God* that he baptized but a few of the Corinthians? Would Paul have said "**Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel**" if

both things are necessary for salvation? Wouldn't the Apostle have been better to say *Christ sent me to baptize AND to preach the Gospel* if salvation or new birth is *not complete* without water baptism?

How foolish are the meanderings of those who would add to the Grace of God! How hard we have to twist Scripture to make it fit a mold of *salvation by works!* The key to eternal life is *faith in Christ alone* - as the Scripture says:

(Ephesians 2:9 KJV) "**Not of works**, lest any man should boast."

We work the works of God *because* we are saved. We do not work the works of God *to be saved*.

## 2. The Key To Eternal Life Is The One Who Said "Amen, Amen"

**FOCAL** (John 3:5, 13-15 KJV) "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ... {13} And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. {14} And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: {15} That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

What is the key to eternal life? That key is Jesus Christ. That key is looking on Him and believing in Him. Jesus

amply illustrates this by paralleling a historical event in the life of Israel with His teaching on salvation. Jesus told Nicodemus:

**FOCAL** (John 3:14-15 KJV) "... And **as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: {15} That whosoever believeth in him should not perish**, but have eternal life."

What was Jesus talking about when He mentioned the **serpent in the wilderness**? He was talking about the children of Israel in **Numbers 21**. God had just blessed His people with mighty victories over the Canaanites. Now Israel *wanted to rest*, but God sent them to attack and overcome the Edomites. Look at what the Word says:

(Numbers 21:4-5 HCSB<sup>6</sup>) "... Then they set out from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea to bypass the land of Edom, but **the people became impatient because of the journey**. The people spoke against God and Moses: "Why have you led us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread or water, and we detest this wretched food!"

Rather than rejoice in the Grace that God gave them - the *manna* that He gave them in the desert, the *water* that He brought out of the Rock for their blessing - rather than praise Him they *cursed God*, they made *light* of His

mighty hand of Grace. Before we quickly condemn Israel, let's consider ourselves and how God has richly blessed us. We woke up this morning and had the privilege of going to any Church in America - or no Church at all. We drank water from a clean faucet, and most of us ate breakfast in freedom. God has allowed us the Grace to protect our worship services, and we enjoy Him without persecution. Not many Christians in the world today have the privileges we have, and yet we often grumble because we feel that we don't have enough. God help us! God protect us from ourselves!

Israel was *in the desert*, a place without water, having to rely on God by *faith alone*. God had provided their every need, but rather than praise Him they cursed Him. Look how God responded to their *trampling underfoot if His Grace*:

**(Numbers 21:6-8 HCSB) "Then the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and they bit them so that many Israelites died.**

**The people then came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Intercede with the LORD so that He will take the snakes away from us." And Moses interceded for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake [image] and mount it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will recover. So Moses made a bronze snake and mounted it on a pole. Whenever someone was bitten, and he looked at the bronze snake, he recovered."**

When the Israelite *spurned* the Grace of God, and made

light of the relationship that He had with them, the Lord sent *vipers*, terribly poisonous snakes into the camp to poison the people. The solution that God gave Israel was this. Moses would make a **bronze snake** and **mount it on a pole**. Those who were bitten need only - even if they were at death's door - look up and **see the bronze snake**. Seeing that snake they would then live.

Jesus used this *historical event* to describe New Birth. New Birth has *absolutely nothing* to do with any form of ritual or even of good works. The New Birth has to do with *looking up at Jesus*. Our Lord said:

**FOCAL (John 3:14-15 KJV) "... And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: {15} That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."**

We are saved by *looking at Jesus on the Cross*, by believing that He died for our sins. It is Grace that saves, not our works. We *look up* to be saved.

Just as Israel was *poisoned* by their sin, apart from Christ we are poisoned creatures. Sin poisons us. Self poisons us. We have no life within. We violate God's Law without guilt, for we are bit by the snake of sin. Baptismal water will not save us. Water did not save Israel that day they were punished by God. What saved Israel is the same thing that saves us.

We look upward and see the Jesus on the Cross. We see Him Who *became sin for us*, as the Scripture says:

(2 Corinthians 5:21 KJV) "**For [God] hath made [Jesus] to be sin for us**, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Because He became sin and suffered the penalty for me, and because I believe on Him, then I have eternal life. The promise of Scripture is sure:

**FOCAL** (John 3:15 KJV) "... That **whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.**"

Jesus Christ did not come to this earth to give us *more of earth's riches*, He came to this earth to give us *eternal life*. I pray that you know Him as both Lord and Savior!

