

How to Become a Child of God



Walking Through the Land of God's Promises (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue this week's conducted tour through the land of God's promises. Each day this week I'm dealing with some need or problem that commonly arises in our lives and I'm showing you in a practical way how we can meet that need or solve that problem by locating and claiming the specific promises of God's Word that are appropriate for that particular situation.

Yesterday I dealt with the problem of sin. How can we be sure that God will forgive us? Today I'm going to deal with another question that's basic to our spiritual life, "How to become a child of God." We'll turn, first of all, to a conversation between Jesus and a religious leader of His day, a Pharisee named Nicodemus. This conversation is recorded in John's gospel, chapter 3, verses 1-11, and I'm going to read the record of the conversation:

"Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 'The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is every one who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus answered and said to Him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?' 'Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and you do not

receive our witness.'" (NAS)

Well, that was a remarkable conversation. And it's interesting that though Nicodemus was obviously a sincere and a good and intelligent and an educated man, he just could not understand what Jesus was talking about. And yet, obviously Jesus was talking about one of the most important things in life. He was talking about an experience that He describes as being "born again" or "born from above" or "born anew." All those are legitimate translations.

This experience is so important that Jesus declares to Nicodemus, unless a person has this experience, unless he has been born again, he cannot see and he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Of course, this statement shocked Nicodemus greatly and he tried to find out what Jesus meant by it. Jesus explained to him, in essence, there are two different types of nature. There is a fleshly nature, a physical nature, and then there's a spiritual nature. He says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of Spirit is spirit." Nicodemus somehow thought that he would have to go back again into his mother's womb and be born as a little child. Jesus says, "That's not what I'm speaking about. I'm not speaking about a birth that produces a fleshly nature that you already have." But He said, in essence, "I'm speaking about a birth that produces a spiritual nature that you have not yet had." And Jesus gave an example of this from the wind, from one of the most familiar things in our physical world. Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is every one who is born of the Spirit."

We need to bear in mind that both in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and in the Greek of the New Testament, the same word means wind or breath or spirit. So when Jesus talks about the wind as an example, He's also directing us to that which the example illustrates, which is the behavior of the Holy Spirit. And He says, "The Holy Spirit is like the wind. Nobody tells the wind where to blow. It comes into our lives; we don't know where it comes from and we don't know where it's going to." And Jesus said, "That's what the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth is like." We don't know where the Spirit comes from, we don't know where it goes to, but we know what it does.

You see, none of us has ever seen the wind. I was talking once to a man who was very argumentative and he said, "Well, I don't believe in anything I can't see!"

"Well," I said to him, "that's ridiculous! You've never seen the wind, but you believe in the wind, don't you?" And he was stumped for an answer.

How do we know where the wind is working? Not because we see the wind but because we see what it does. What do we see? We see the clouds scudding across the sky; we maybe see the dust rising up in the street; the trees bending; maybe a lady has a hat or a scarf that's blown off her head and she goes running after it. All these and many other events indicate that the wind is operating in a certain area. Well, that's how it is when a person is born again. The Spirit of God comes into his life, he doesn't know where it comes from, he doesn't know where it's going to, but he's aware that certain things happen.

I remember once, many years ago, when I was a pastor in London, a young lady from Denmark who was just, I would say, a nominal church-goer, came to our home to find out more about this experience and my first wife and I instructed her and explained to her what she had to do to be born again (and I'm going to explain that before this message closes today). And then I led her in a very simple prayer in which she did what God required of her. Now she was a rather, I would say, formal type of person, not in any sense emotional (Danish people, by and large, are not a very highly emotional group of people), and after she'd said the prayer that she said just sitting in a chair in our living room, she sat up and two large tear drops appeared in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. So she dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, rather self-consciously, and two more tears appeared and trickled down her cheeks. And she said, "I don't know why I'm crying." And I said, "You see, the wind just started to blow." So there's one of the evidences that the Holy Spirit is at work. A sense of tenderness, a sense of relief, a sense of joy that she couldn't explain, she didn't understand. She was almost embarrassed. But it was so real, she couldn't hide it.

Now the particular case that's recorded in the conversation in John 3 is with Nicodemus. I'm sure that Jesus said the same thing to many people, but I believe the conversation with Nicodemus is recorded for a special reason. Because if there was anything else that would do instead of the new birth, Nicodemus had it all. He was a religious man, he was an educated man, he had high social position, and he belonged to a race (the Jewish race) which God had set apart for special purposes. But notice this, neither religion, nor education, nor social position, nor racial superiority are any substitute for the new birth.

I've been explaining to you two things: the necessity of being born again and the nature of what happens. There remains one more very important question. How can a person be born again? That's what I'm going to tell you just now. Listen carefully. In John's gospel, chapter 1, verses 11-13, John says

this about Jesus:

> "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." (NAS)

Jesus came as a Jew to the Jewish people and, as a nation, not as individuals, but as a nation collectively, they rejected Him who was their Messiah. But thank God there's a "but" after that verse.

> "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (NAS)

What's the key transaction that leads to being born of God and that's the same as being born again or born anew? What have these people to do who desire to be born of God? It's a very simple statement. "As many as received Him [Jesus]." What's the one thing you have to do to be born again? You have to receive Him [Jesus] as your personal Savior, confess Him as your Lord. When you do that, He gives you the right, the authority to become a child of God. You do it through faith, through believing in His name. Not through any religious good works or any claim you may have of your own righteousness, but simply through believing in His name. And the result is you are born of God.

Now in that verse John excludes three other possibilities that we might think of. He says it's "not of blood." In other words, it's not by natural descent. No matter how good your father and mother were, that doesn't make you good in this sense. You have to have a new spiritual birth, a new nature.

Secondly, he says it's not "of the will of the flesh." It's not the satisfaction of some natural, carnal desire or appetite.

Thirdly, he says it's not "of the will of man." The Greek word is that of the word for husband. It's not the result of the natural sexual relationship between husband and wife. It's in a different plane. It's not physical, it's spiritual.

Now I want to give you in closing, a promise that you can lay hold of if you desire to be born again. It's given by Jesus in Revelation 3:20. He says this:

> "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me." (NAS)

That word is for you, if you desire to be born again. Jesus is standing right outside now of your heart's door, knocking. He's a gentleman. He won't force His way in. If you want Him in, you'll have to invite Him in. But if you invite Him in, be sure He'll come because He is a gentleman and He keeps His word. He says, "I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me." You give Jesus your dinner first, then He shares His dinner with you. What do you have to do? You have to invite Him in, you have to yield to Him, and then in faith you have to thank Him that He has come in. Remember, it's by faith in His name.

All right. Our time is up for today but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be dealing with one of the commonest problems of our age, the problem of mental torment. I'll be explaining how to obtain relief from this kind of torment.

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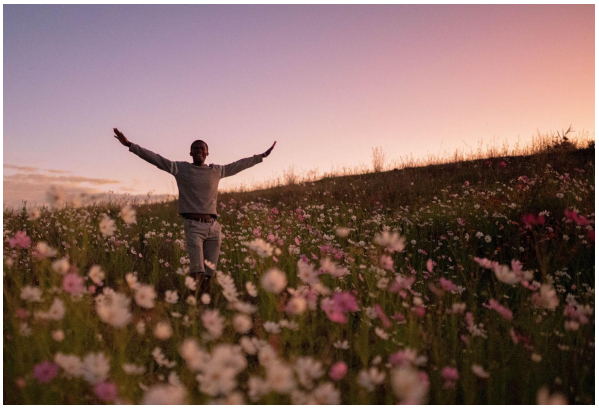
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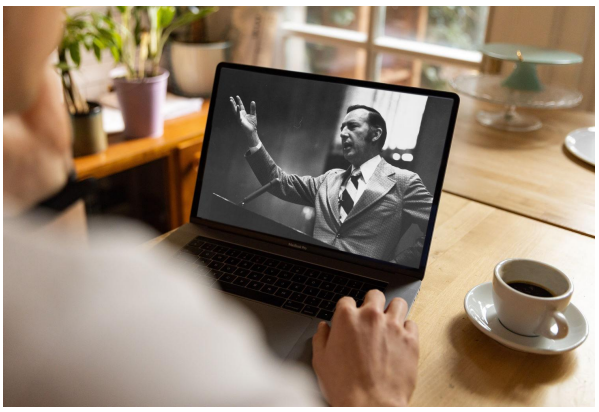
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