

“Born Again”

Every now and then, I listen to a popular denominational preacher on the radio. He is the one who preaches the so-called “prosperity gospel” with which I strongly disagree. He always seems to end each sermon with a prayer that he encourages everyone to repeat. Afterwards, he says something like this: “I believe that if you prayed that prayer you were born again. Now go find yourself a Bible-believing church.”

I couldn't believe my ears. Saying a prayer of contrition makes you “born again?” Really? Let's go to the passage of scripture where Jesus utters the words **“You must be born again.”** In **John 3**, Jesus visits with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council. Nicodemus states that he recognizes that Jesus is from God, and Jesus volunteers the information he came to Earth to give—how to enter into God's kingdom. Jesus said: **“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”** (**John 3:3**) Nicodemus is confused, asking Jesus how a grown man can reenter his mother's womb and be born again. Jesus tells him: **“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”** (**John 3:5-6**) A change must take place in the spirit inside of Nicodemus. Water is involved. It is symbolic of the washing of the spirit and the indwelling of the new Spirit of God. A simple penitent prayer, no matter how sincere, cannot replace the water.

After this, in the same chapter, Jesus is baptized with the baptism of John. John was making disciples to follow him, telling them that their washing in water was preparing them for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus spoke of His own baptism, different from John's, in what we call His Great Commission. In **Mark 16:15-16**, Jesus told His apostles to:

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Matthew 28:19-20 says that they are to:

“...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And that is just what they did. Beginning in **Acts 2**, there are many instances where belief, repentance, and baptism comprise what Jesus had called being **“born again”** and **“born of the water and the Spirit.”** The Messiah's baptism, after the establishment of the church on Pentecost, would be a baptism powerful enough to cleanse the believer's spirit and replace it with the gift of the Holy Spirit. (**Acts 2:38**) The forgiveness of sins, salvation, and the fulfillment of the promise of a home with God could only be possible for those whose sins had been washed away.

In every example in Acts, those who believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God were baptized. Paul was possibly the best example of all. In **Acts 22**, Paul tells of his conversion: He says that Ananias told him:

“The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:14-16)

Luke tells us what Paul did in response to Ananias' words:

“He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.” (Acts 9:18-19)

If anyone doubts the “nonessential” act of baptism in water, remember Paul (then called Saul) had been blind and had not eaten for three days.

There are many more things to say about baptism and its being the way a person can be born again. Time and space do not permit—I'll continue in next week's *NEWSLETTER*.

---Johnny Stephens