

Big Idea: God gives us new birth into the Kingdom of his Son through his Spirit.

In 1966 Cliff Richard became a born again Christian at a Billy Graham meeting. This caused lots of fuss and questions. (You may remember it and be able to describe it better than my research did).

He was 26 and growing into the British Elvis that so excited everyone.

It was described as 'a shame' and 'a waste'.

And if you want to put a brick through the conversational window at a party just call yourself a 'born again Christian'.

As someone once put it – it sounds unnecessarily enthusiastic.

What is it to be born again? – is it necessary?

Jesus says 'You must be born again.'

One of the great conversations Jesus has is with this Jewish religious teacher called 'Nicodemus' in John ch3 and in it there is something which should be obvious to him but which isn't. (v10)

It is that to see and enter the kingdom of God you must be born again of the Spirit of God. (READ v3 & v5) The kingdom of God is the same thing as becoming one of God's people, having eternal life or being saved, or becoming a Christian. There are different ways of saying that one thing.

So to connect with God something must happen to us and its this thing called 'being born again'. That's what the word Regeneration refers to – hence our title.

1. Everyone born once Sins.

Being born again (being born from above) is clearly different than being born. Every human being is special in that we are made

in God's image. Every person we might ever meet is special and is known to God.

However God also says that we are also now very unlike him, We like things that are wrong. Even worse we decide what is right and wrong (rather than accepting God's moral perfection) Even worse than that we reject God's authority & refuse to glorify him in everything. Although God is always King, as human beings we are not in his Kingdom. Put simply – everyone born sins.

v4 & 6 shows us that it is a second and spiritual birth that is very different than just being born human. (v4 - not childbirth, v6 - not physical)

Illustration:

Car is made and rolls off the production line. Is it a car? Yes its made to be a car but actually it's a careful arrangement of metal and rubber. Its not until the driver gets in and turns the engine and

roars off that it's a car in the sense it was made to be.

If that never happens it might as well just be a pile of metal and rubber.

2. Spiritual Birth by the Spirit

Being born again is different and Spiritual in that it is something the Holy Spirit does in us.

Spiritual. Not moral. Not religious. Worth saying clearly.

Jesus is talking to one of Israel's teachers – if it was a matter of religion then they wouldn't be having this conversation. Not moral – the Pharisees were moral and Jesus skewers them. Even the rich young ruler who says he has kept all the commandments since he was a child is not told he's ok.

Spiritual Birth requires the Spirit of God – v6

Being born again is Spiritual and Essential – READ v5. Without it we are not alive to God. No such thing as Christians and born

again Christians. Either you are a born again Christian or you are not a Christian. There is no middle ground.

3. Spiritual Birth is by faith in Jesus as saviour

V15 tells us that it comes by believing in Jesus.

Important - v16 Repeats it for us.

Being born again into this eternal life in God's kingdom requires us to believe in Jesus.

So its going to involve a realisation about Jesus and a trust in him. It does often seem to come in a context where people are hearing about Jesus. Reading the bible. Talking about him. Praying, etc... It doesn't have to be any one particular thing – but it does have to be about trusting Jesus.

So I would always want to encourage people to centre themselves on Jesus – come to a bible talk, read about Jesus in the Bible or go on a Christianity Explored course – the course isn't God blessed in some way that means it makes people Christians but it does show people Jesus and explain what he has done really clearly. So I'm less surprised (not less delighted) when someone becomes a Christian through that course.

But its not knowledge about Jesus. If it was then it would be a work of our brains rather than a work of God's Spirit. It's a belief (trust) in him as the one who can save us from the punishment of sin and give us eternal life. But even that comes from God too.

Turn to Ephesians on page ch2v4-5
God making us alive (eternal life/kingdom of God) by his grace – God's grace means he is giving us what we don't deserve.

V8-9 READ Being saved is a gift from God. Faith in Jesus is a gift from God. Being made alive is a gift from God. Being saved from transgressions (sin) is a gift from God.

Let me put it this way – it all comes wrapped in the same ribbon.

I can't be saved from sin and God's justice for my wrongdoing without being born again into a new and eternal life with God. And I can't be given new life without the Spirit. And this new life comes about through faith in Jesus. Which I don't have unless God gives it to me.

This isn't the fine print – this is a wonderful package of blessing from God. Comes as one gift.

Ever bought a cruise? Flights, accommodation, food, entertainment, tours, activities are all included. No one goes into a travel agents and buys just the meals do they? That would be crazy.

We may not experience it all in one go. We may not be aware of it all – perhaps until years later. But either it all happens or none of it really happens.

How am I born again?

Faith in Jesus. One simple answer.

Augustine vs CS Lewis

How do I experience being born again?

You might have an experience of God which is emotional or even physical in some way. Or you might look back and see the evidence of God at work in you in ways which are outside of you.

How do you tell the wind blows tomorrow? Well you might be out in it and feel a big gust of it. Or you might find that your washing is dry and there are leaves all over your garden.

No one action or reaction means you have been born again. The only good thing to see is that you are trusting Jesus to save you. And Galatians 5 shows us that over time we'll see the fruit of walking in step with God's Spirit in our characters.

But its not shaking or speaking in tongues or seeing visions that means the Holy Spirit has given us new life. And some people describe very spiritual experiences but don't seem to bear the fruit of the Spirit in their character. Makes me wonder.

Sometimes we might wish for big signs of God at work in us. Ask him. If its helpful he'll do it and if its not then he won't. That's the wonderful thing about God – always works for our good. Ask him and then trust him for the right answer.

Some people point to things in the book of Acts as describing the normal birth of Christians and how it looks – special &

selective, describes what happens rather than tells us what should happen. (descriptive not prescriptive.) It might happen that way – great. It might not.

God often works in our situation and moves us from where we are to where he wants us to be. That can be in really small steps. Or one big one. It may be imperceptible. Or he may need to wrench us out of something all in one go.

I think I would want to say that if we are never excited by God's word, never feel love for Jesus, never desire to express God's goodness in praise - what 1 Peter 1 calls our inexpressible and glorious joy - if there is never any of these things then I would suggest you talk through whether you are born again with a wise and mature Christian friend or minister.

Danger is that you've become a Christian-clone. Enough of the gospel has come your

way to make you pretty sure that you are a Christian. And you look like one and talk like one so no one really questions it. You can even go on and become a church of England minister! But actually you are missing trust in Jesus as Saviour. You've never given up your life to Jesus. Never humbled yourself before him and admitted your sin. Sought and accepted his forgiveness.

If that is you then please do talk to someone. That's like thinking you are fed because you are standing in a kitchen. You are surrounded by a rich feast but just not eating it.

How do I Predict/Encourage Spiritual Birth?

There is lots about this work of God's Spirit that can't be explained. Jesus likens it to the wind in v8 (READ v8) It is not something that you can predict or determine. When I

felt the cool breeze yesterday morning I couldn't tell you where it started and I couldn't tell you where it would end up. I can't make it. I can't stop it. I was grateful for it on a hot day.

Well its like that with God's Spirit. I can't behave in a certain way or think in a certain way that will make being born again more likely to happen. I can't look at people's lives, or intelligence or church attendance or background and say – 'Yes these people will be born again and these won't be'. Neither can you.

Because this is something that God does with people. Not something that people get God to do to them. Being Born again is God not me. Remember its grace.

Now you might say 'Well what's that point of trying then?' I need to be careful here.

Regeneration – being born again – is something that God does independent of our moral status or religious sincerity. It can happen at any time to anyone. No one can make it happen or make it more likely to happen to them.

Sanctification – being made holy - is a continuation of God's good work in us and is always cooperative. God wants to make us holy and works with us. God changes us so that we willingly and naturally think and feel and act differently. Its not natural and we aren't always willing but God is making us more Christ-like. Not by cloning Jesus and forcing it upon us. But by walking with us and working in us. So Sanctification is cooperative. Still God's work – but he calls us to walk with him.

I can't earn my salvation from God but I can work out my salvation.

If we ignore this then ...

- Fall into works and pride/fear
- Religious Moralism
- Evangelism: we might be temped to dress up Jesus or the Christian life or our church.
- We will encourage people to believe they are Christians when they aren't.

If we grasp this then ...

- Assurance of what God has begun 'He who begun a good work in you will carry it on to the day of completion.'
- Living is cooperation with what God is doing rather than earning credit to ask him to do something in us.
- Awesome thankfulness for our life in Jesus ... God gets the glory for doing it from first to last.

- Evangelism is firstly prayer.
'Can he not make descendants of Abraham out of the dust of the earth?'

Born once – Die twice

Born twice – Die once