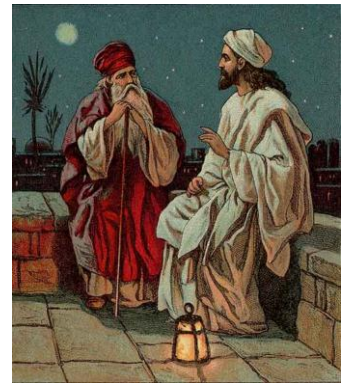


YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

(Gospel of John 3:1-7, 16-18)

-Sermon by Dr. Paul Lee Tan



In 1977, U.S. President Richard Nixon resigned because of the “Watergate” incident. At the same time, one of Nixon’s chief advisors—Mr. Charles Colson—was indicted and went to prison.

While in prison, Mr. Colson came to know Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour. He came out of prison and wrote a book called “BORN AGAIN.” It became a best-seller in the United States.

In the book, he described how he, a successful man, high in government and influencing world affairs, could be suddenly brought so low as to be imprisoned. And then, how so low a man, could have met Christ—and be completely changed in his life’s goals and outlook, become a new creation—Born Again!

Suddenly, these 2 words, “*Born Again*,” became very well known in America. It was often mentioned in newspapers, over the TV programs, and even had a place in the Dictionary. According to *Time* magazine, “1 out of 4 Americans today say they are `Born Again.’”

Actually, the words “Born Again” came from the Bible. 2,000 years ago, Jesus said to an elderly man: “You must be born again.” And Jesus defined the meaning of Born Again in the Gospel of John chapter 3.

Let us turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 3, and we will study verses 1-7, then 16-18.

[1] There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. That was equal to today’s Ph.D. To become a Pharisee, one must have studied very, very diligently; researched OT rabbis’ writings, learned thousands of years of Jewish traditions, and the entire OT writings. There were only 3,000 Pharisees in all the Jewish nation.

And Nicodemus was a member of the Supreme Court in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin.

He was also a rich man (In John 19:39, Nicodemus brought a lot of ointment to anoint Jesus’ body).

Here was a very famous man, with high position, riches, and experience.

One day, he came to see Jesus...actually, it was at night...

[2] The same came to Jesus by night,

Most probably, he was afraid to come openly and in broad daylight.

But let him come, because this rich, famous elderly man needed to learn something important!

and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God:

Notice, Nicodemus called Jesus: a “Rabbi, a teacher, and (even) one “come from God.” He knew and acknowledged a lot of things about Jesus. But that was not enough!

Nicodemus was even willing to say that Jesus “came from God,” belonged to heaven, was different from other founders of religious.” If so, he was very near God’s kingdom, he was just one step away from believing in Christ.

How near, yet so far!

Today, many people acknowledge Jesus as the greatest teacher, the best philosopher, even the greatest prophet sent from God. BUT they only know Christ as teacher, not as the Saviour.

Jesus did not come to teach us to be good. He came to save us. “*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*” (Luke 19:10)

If you were in the ocean and could not swim, what do you need? You do not need someone to teach you how to swim, or to stand on the shore and condemn you. No, you need someone who would quietly jump in and first drag you out of the water—then teach you to swim later.

And if you are lost in sin, you do not need a teacher. You need the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

Nicodemus was flattering Jesus, admiring Him and praising His miracles. He said: “Jesus, you performed a lot of miracles; turned water into wine, caused the blind to see, walked on the sea, and even raised the dead.

Nicodemus certainly knew a lot about the life of Christ. But what was wrong?

He knew it only in his head, not in his heart. Nicodemus knew a lot, yet he did not personally receive Christ into his heart.

Many years ago, they put a strong rope over the Niagara Falls, and a man was entertaining the crowds by balancing himself as he walked across the Falls on the rope.

The people were all clapping their hands and yelling: “You can do it, we believe you, do it again.” The man successfully went over the Falls again, And the crowd yelled louder: “Do it again, we believe you can do it!”

“NOW,” the man said: “Since you believe I can do it again—who wants to volunteer to climb on my back, and let me take you to the other side?” None volunteered.

The people knew in their head that that man could cross Niagara Falls on the rope—but they did not trust him in their hearts.

The Chinese know that Chinese food is the best food in the world—of course there is some bias! But actually, many do think Chinese food really looks good, smells good, and makes one happy.

But, how can one be sure? Not by just looking at Chinese food, or even smelling it. It is by tasting it that one knows if the meal is good or not.

The Bible says: “*O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.*” (Psalm 34:8). But we must not just say Jesus is good – we must receive Him into our hearts, and discover that He does what He said.

[3] Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Jesus told: “You call me greatest teacher, you read all about my life—but that’s not enough! You need to do one thing: be Born Again. Without that, nothing else matters. With it, you will have everything in life and eternity

Maybe Nicodemus thought for a minute and shook his head: “Impossible! How could a man be re-born, like going back into childhood, be turned back to a baby, and re-enter the mother’s womb?

[4] Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

No, Jesus did not mean that! Even if it were possible to be shrunk into a baby and reenter the womb, and come out a better person--yet one would still come out as a man again.

And this is precisely what other religions are saying. “Be a better person, do better next time, do your very best—and hope God will accept you.

Verse 6 says: “[6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

When God created this world, He divided it into several kingdoms. We do not mean dividing the world into America, China, and Africa. God divided the world more comprehensively—

- (a) Mineral Kingdom –such as stones, diamond
- (b) Plant Kingdom –trees, flowers
- (c) Animal Kingdom—dog, fish
- (d) Mankind—Man
- (e) God’s kingdom—children of God

Notice two things about these kingdoms—

(A) Every kingdom is clearly divided and unchangeable

A stone cannot become a cow; a plant to a fish; a man to God.

(B) The lower kingdom desires to become higher

A stone is stepped on, and surely wants to be a living Tree

A grass is eaten, and surely wants to be a Cow

A cow surely wants to be a Man

A man wants to be in God's kingdom

But there is no way to change into another "kingdom."

[6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

No matter how many times a man reenters his mother's womb, he is still "flesh," he still belongs to mankind, he cannot enter God's kingdom.

The Bible said: "**All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.**"

What is sin? Sin is not lying, hating, selfishness, ungrateful, disobedient to parents, uncaring of others, envious, bad thoughts, etc, etc.

Sin is not something you do, or something you think. Sin is something you are. You are a sinner, because you are born a man. We have sin nature, whether we admit it or not. We do wrong, we commit sins, we think bad thoughts—because we **are** born sinners.

There is a Chinese saying by Ming-Tzu: "In the beginning, man's nature is good." But that is not true. Even if you do not teach a baby to do bad things, he will do it. It is natural for a baby to cry and yell for attention, for food. He has no patience. That's because of his sin nature, as a member of the human race.

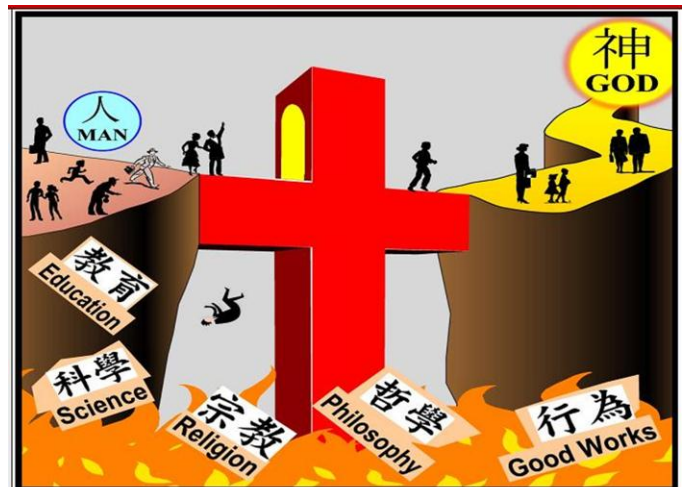
Very, very few people can say that they are perfect—that they have never ever sinned. All

persons on earth, to be honest, have to admit they are sinners. And sinners must go to Hell—there is no other way.

Someone has said: If there were no Hell, we would have to invent one. Because, even sinners realize that sin must be punished; for every action there must be a reaction.

The only solution is to be BORN AGAIN. To be born, not as a human being, but as a child of God, born into God's kingdom

How could one be "born again?"



[5] 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.

According to Jesus, there are 2 things one must do to be born again—

- (a) Born of water, and
- (b) Born of the Spirit.

"**Water**" refers to cleansing, renewal, repentance. At that time, John the Baptist was preaching "repentance from sin" and using baptism to signify repentance (Matt. 3:1-6).

The song "Amazing Grace" was written by the slave of a slave. He did everything bad. And then he repented

“**Spirit**” means the Holy Spirit; the work of the Holy Spirit. God must be working in the heart.

Ask God to work in your heart. He is there all the time for you.

Therefore, to be born again, one must Repent from sin, and accept the Holy Spirit’s work in your heart. One must receive the cleansing and spiritual renewal that comes from God.

[7] Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

Jesus re-emphasized the absolute necessity of the new birth. “Ye must be born again.” The word “must” (*dei*) means absolute necessity, an imperative

We now come to a verse in the Bible, which almost all Christians can memorize—John 3:16.



If all the Bible were destroyed except John 3:16, people could still be saved by reading just this verse.

Martin Luther said: John 3:16 is the heart of the Bible—the Gospel in miniature.” It is so simple, a child can understand it, yet it contains the most profound truths of redemption.

Let’s all read this verse together—

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

(John 3:16)

Someone has re-written this verse like this—

God – the greatest **Lover**
So loved— the greatest **Degree**
The world— the greatest **Number**
That He gave-- the greatest **Act**
His only begotten Son-- the greatest **Gift**
That whosoever-- the greatest **Invitation**
Believeth-- the greatest **Simplicity**
In Him— the greatest **Person**
Should not perish-- the greatest **Deliverance**
But-- the greatest **Difference**
Have-- the greatest **Certainty**
Everlasting Life— the greatest **Possession**

Another commentator observed: “It is very striking that, when God loves, He loves the world; and when God gives, He gives His Son.” This is the great love of God.

Let us notice the word “Whosoever.”

(3) that whosoever believeth in him

That means anyone and everyone. Thank God for this word “whosoever.” If God says that there is mercy for Paul Tan, I would think He meant another Paul Tan, because there is another Paul Tan in America (and he causes trouble for the police), and another Paul Tan in Asia who does not believe what I believe.

But this word “whosoever” means “everyone”—including YOU and Me.

(4) should not perish,

Perish means to live in Eternity without God, facing God’s judgment, being condemned and suffering forever in Hell.

What is hell? There are no words to fully describe hell.

If you can imagine a madman, in his wildest dream of horror and despair; or visit the most fearful volcano in eruption, the most violent murder scene possible on earth—and that does not even begin to describe what Hell is.

(5) but have everlasting life.

Dear friends, inside you is your soul, which will live forever. Is your soul going to live forever in hell or in heaven? That is your own choice.

Dr. Wernher von Braun, the famous scientist who helped started the U.S. Space program, says that he believed in Eternal Life—because of scientific reasons. He said:

“Science has found that nothing can disappear. The second law of thermodynamics says that ‘Nothing can be destroyed.’ Matter may be transformed and changed into another form, not never be extinct.. Therefore, the human soul—the centerpiece of God’s creation—also cannot be ended. The soul will live forever.”

Actually, the Bible uses the present tense to describe everlasting life. You already have eternal life, if you believe in Christ. You can now experience the peace and joy of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[17] For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

[18] He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

This verse should be read: Not as a policeman searching for a suspect, but as a loving Father looking for his lost son.

There is only one appropriate response to Christ:

=Believe in Jesus as Saviour.

Receive the free gift which God is offering you, and you will not be condemned but have everlasting life.

If you want to receive God’s free gift of salvation, below is a suggested PRAYER, which you might use to indicate your heart’s commitment—

Dear Jesus:

Thank you for dying for my sins. Please come into my heart, and forgive my sins.

I now believe in Jesus Christ, and trust in Him alone, as my personal Saviour.

Thank you, dear God, for giving me eternal life, and abundant life in Christ.

In Jesus’ Name, I pray, AMEN.

