

In our world today it shouldn't matter where a person is born. You don't have to be born in a palace or a mansion to be important. If you work hard enough, you should be able to make a mark in this world ... or so the theory goes. The reality ... it does matter where you're born. It has a big impact on your future ... whether a more challenging life, or a much easier life.

Maybe you've felt that way too. Life would have been much easier if you had been born into a family with lots of money. Someone could make your meals and your bed and pick up after you. Or, if you had been born into a family that has lots of athletic talent – you could have been a professional athlete and made lots of money. But what's done is done. You can't be born again into another family ... or, can you?

Our summer sermon series moves to the section of the Apostles' Creed which confesses our faith in the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. And we're going to find out from God's Word how someone can be born into another family, and why: **"We Need a Better Birth, if We Want a Better Future!"**

Listen to the words of Jesus in our lesson: **"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."** **"How can someone be born when they are old?"** Nicodemus asked. **"Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"** Jesus answered, **"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."**

10 verses later, our Bible Story includes the famous passage in the Bible, John 3:16. Do you remember the setting when Jesus spoke it?

Jesus was speaking to a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a respected religious leader among the Jews. He had devoted his life to a study of the Old Testament. He tried to live a God-pleasing life. Although his fellow Pharisees

were hostile to Jesus, Nicodemus was curious about this rabbi or *"teacher"* from Nazareth.

So, instead of taking his co-workers word for what Jesus was all about, Nicodemus arranged a meeting with Jesus. But it had to be at night otherwise his co-workers would see him. Nicodemus came to find out more about Jesus, but he learned a lot more about himself.

Nicodemus' example is worth following. Unfortunately, many people are content to believe what some famous person or supposed expert has to say about Jesus and the Bible. Before you draw any conclusions, go to the source of Christianity. Investigate what the Bible says and find out whether or not this religion is worth following.

It was Jesus who got the conversation going by responding to Nicodemus' unspoken questions: *"How do I get to heaven? Where does faith come from?"* Jesus' answer? **"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."**

You can tell Jesus' answer thoroughly confused Nicodemus, by his question: **"How can someone be born when they are old?"** What did Jesus mean by being *"born again?"* All kinds of thoughts popped up for Nicodemus: *"How can I climb back into my mom's tummy? Why was this even necessary? I was born Jewish. I'm one of God's chosen people by birth. Isn't heaven automatically in my future?"*

What Nicodemus and his fellow Jewish leaders failed to realize is that your first birth doesn't count for anything. We need that reminder as well. Sure, our first birth determines whether we have blue eyes or brown eyes ... whether we can draw ... whether we can sing ... whether we can throw a baseball or shoot a basketball.

Your first birth also guarantees that you come into this world as an enemy of God. That's what Jesus meant when he said: **"Flesh gives birth to flesh."**

The word **“flesh”** doesn't just mean people with flesh and bones give birth to babies with flesh and bones. It also means sinful people give birth to sinful babies. A polluted spring can only produce polluted water.

This shouldn't have come as a shock to Nicodemus, who was an OT scholar. In Psalm 51, King David wrote: **“Surely I was sinful from birth; sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** In Genesis God spoke these words after the flood: **“Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.”**

Is that what you believe? Or have you gone through life thinking that babies are innocent and that they only become sinful by imitating others? Nicodemus was no baby, but on any day ...

- How many people in need had Nicodemus walked by without stopping to help?
- How many unkind thoughts had passed through his mind when he thought about his co-workers?
- How often did he grumble at something his wife did or didn't do?
- How often did he do something nice only because he expected the kindness to be returned sometime down the road?

Because of his birth, Nicodemus, like us, gave undeniable proof that he was a born sinner. That's why Jesus could have said: **“No one [not even you, Nicodemus] can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”**

What Nicodemus needed was a better birth. What we need is a better birth if we want to be part of God's family. And God himself provides that better birth through **water and the Spirit**. Jesus was making a clear reference to Baptism.

Baptism isn't just a nice ceremony. The power of God the Holy Spirit is active in Baptism. He creates a new life, a better birth. Someone once called Baptism *“A re-enactment of Creation Day.”* How's that? Think of the opening verses of Genesis: **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty,**

darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Just as the Holy Spirit was active at creation hovering over those waters, so the Holy Spirit is just as active in creating faith as he hovered over the water of our Baptism.

Just as we had nothing to do with the first time we were born, so we had nothing to do with the time we were born again. Conversion is entirely the Holy Spirit's work. He's the one who causes us to be born again into another family, a better family, God's family. We now have a better future. We stand to receive an inheritance which includes: an eternal life of peace and joy in heaven, all because Baptism forgives our sins.

Many wonder: *“Did Nicodemus come to believe in Jesus?”* Yes! 3 years later he, and Joseph of Arimathea, were the two men who took Jesus' body off the cross and prepared it for burial. This clearly marked Nicodemus as a follower of Jesus, but it also made him an enemy of his co-workers who hated Jesus enough to protest for his crucifixion.

Parents often save the little tiny bracelet as a memento of their child's birth. The child's name is on it, along with a barcode that matches the barcode on the bracelet mom wore. Hospitals do that so that babies go home with the right families.

Did you know that if there would have been something in that barcode to identify you spiritually, it would have read *“Enemy of God”*? Because of the sin we inherit from our parents our eternal destination should be hell! But in Baptism the Holy Spirit changed that. He changed the barcode's information and gave you a new name: *“Forgiven child of God,”* and a new destiny: *“Heaven.”*

Each time you see this baptismal font may it remind you of your better birth, along with your better future - a future with God in heaven thanks to Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit in Baptism.