

The New Birth – Part 4
How do we know it has happened?
John 3:4-8
The Gospel According to John
Series #16

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in John chapter 3, the Gospel of John, chapter 3. We have the wonderful joy of coming back one more time this morning to consider the New Birth from John 3. There is nothing more important for the individual human soul than the New Birth – which is why we have spent so much time on it. Jesus tells Nicodemus loud and clear in John 3 that no one will enter into the kingdom of God if they are not born from above, or born again. This means that there will be no eternal life in Heaven without this new birth. This means then, that the most important reality for your soul is the New Birth. You must be born again! It is as George Whitefield said to a lady after one of his sermons. In the course of conversation, she said to him, “Why is it that you always tell us we must be born again?” To which Whitefield responded, “Because, ma’am, you must be born again!” That is the earth shattering and paradigm shifting message that Jesus delivered to Nicodemus in this late-night conversation in John 3. If anyone in 1st Century Judaism could get into the Kingdom of God by any other means than the new birth, it was Nicodemus – but Jesus shocks him and us all with this clear statement – Nicodemus, your good works will not get you in, your being a blessed son of Abraham will not get you in, your being the teacher in Israel will not get you in, your being on the governing board of the Jews will not get you in – Nicodemus there is only one way into the Kingdom of God and that is through this new birth. You must be totally remade by the powerful working of the Spirit of God upon you and given spiritual life which you cannot earn or secure, but which must be secured for you by Jesus. Without this spiritual birth from above, there is no hope. So, I say to you again, there is no more important topic for the individual soul than this one – the new birth! Let’s read John 3:1-8 again.

In recent weeks we have tried to answer several key questions about this birth from above in John 3. We have asked: What is the New Birth? Why is it necessary? How does it happen? We discovered that this new birth is the instantaneous imparting of spiritual life into the human soul in accordance with the sovereign will of our gracious God. It is entirely His doing and is never a work we can manipulate, mandate, control, or predict. And we saw that it is necessary because we are dead in our trespasses and sins and have no hope of bringing life to our spiritually dead souls. If there is going to be spiritual life in us, it must be given to us from outside of us, and it is in this work of regeneration that God does exactly that! He brings our spiritually dead souls to life through the new birth – or this birth of water and the spirit. We are washed clean from our unrighteousness and spiritual filth, and we are born anew by the power of God’s Spirit. And this happens supernaturally – it is completely of the Spirit, the flesh is no help at all. And it happens Scripturally – meaning it is the Word of Christ brought to bear upon

the sinner's heart which convicts of sin and brings repentance and faith and conversion to Christ which are all evidence of regeneration. As Romans 10 so clearly says, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. And we saw that this new birth also happens mercifully. We deserve nothing but God's righteous wrath, but in the work of regeneration we are given God's mercy and we are brought from death to life. And this happens through Christ Jesus our Lord. This whole work of regeneration in us is entirely dependent upon Jesus' work of redemption for us. His death, burial and resurrection purchased our forgiveness and freed us from sin's power and penalty and one day its presence. And it is in regeneration that this work of Christ in our place is specifically applied to us and we are given the eternal life that he purchased by his blood on the cruel cross of Calvary. So, to be born again means that you have been brought from death to life by the merciful kindness of God extended to you through His Son and supernaturally applied to you by His Spirit according to the Word of God.

So, if you are thinking logically about any of this, then you must be wondering, well, how would we know if we were born again? If it is this mysterious and supernatural work of God where we are given spiritual life, then, how would we know if we have this spiritual life? Well, how do you know if there is physical life? You look for telltale signs of life, right? You check the body for a pulse which shows that the heart is beating. You put your hand in front of the mouth to see if any air is coming in or out as evidence of breathing. If there is life, then there will be clear evidences of that life. So, is the same thing true in the spiritual realm? If there is spiritual life, namely, this life from above that is brought to us by the Spirit of God, then will there be evidences of that life? Well, what does the Scripture say?

In our text in John 3, we have two small statements of this truth that there is going to be observable and identifiable evidence of this spiritual life. And these small evidences are like acorns out of which we will discover the great oak of truth about the evidence of spiritual life. Notice in verse 6 that Jesus says, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. He means that fleshly efforts cannot produce spiritual life. But we can also deduce that where the Spirit brings this new birth there will be something born of the Spirit which we be identifiable – something we can rightly say, “look, this must be of the Spirit.” That is the first small evidence in this text. And then, look in verse 8 where the work of the Spirit is likened to the blowing of the wind. Jesus tells Nicodemus that the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. Can you see the wind? No. Can you control the wind? No. Can you predict with perfect accuracy where the next gust will blow? No. But can you see evidence that the wind blew? Of course you can! Leaves sway on the trees (or if you are in Kansas, the whole tree moves =)), and dust is kicked up, and you feel the air move across your face, and birds are moved along in their flight, and a myriad of other evidences. So, we deduce that it is no different with the Spirit of God. If he has supernaturally and mysteriously blown upon a human soul to bring spiritual life, then there will be evidence of His work, right? There will be signs of spiritual life. And these signs will be many, but let me just focus on five that are clearly linked in the Scriptures with being born again. And they are all found in the writings of John. In fact, you might rightly call John the apostle of the New Birth. He introduces us to this glorious truth here in John 3, and then he expands upon this truth in his first letter. John wants you to know that you must be born again. And he wants you to know if you have indeed been

born again by the merciful work of God. So, what signs of life will we find of the new birth? How will we know if it has truly happened?

1. Faith in Jesus Christ – 1 John 5:1

- a. Well, the first and preeminent result of the new birth is faith in Jesus Christ. This is the logical order of things. The human soul is dead in trespasses and sins – alienated from God and wanting nothing to do with the light of truth as seen so clearly in the person and work of Jesus Christ. They must turn from this rebellious unbelief and find peace with God through Christ, but they cannot unless God graciously causes them to be spiritually reborn. And once reborn, they will necessarily and joyfully cling to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith. This is why John wrote this Gospel account, remember? He wrote so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that by believing we may have life in his name. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.
- b. But does faith come first and then regeneration, or does regeneration come first and then faith? Well, that is a massive question which occupies theologians for a long time in their various writings. But, I think the Scriptures are clear here that regeneration must precede the expression of faith. We can see this logically from all that we have learned about the New Birth from Scripture. If indeed it is the supernatural work of God upon the spiritually dead soul to bring spiritual life, then it cannot be that person's faith which brings about the new birth, but that person's faith which is the first and primary evidence that they have been born again. And we are not talking chronologically here – but logically. In other words, in our experience and understanding the two things happen simultaneously and instantaneously – we are born again by the power of the Spirit of God and we express faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. Like in human birth, the baby exits the birth canal and takes its first breath. It cannot breathe before it is out of the canal, but once it is birthed it must breathe as evidence of life. This is regeneration and faith. You are spiritually brought to life and then you breathe your first breath of spiritual life which is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And lest you think I am just making this up to fit into some system, let's turn to 1 John 5, 1 John chapter 5. In John's Gospel, the call to believe is laid forcefully upon us – we must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ so that we may have eternal life. And from the human perspective this is how it goes. We don't have conscious knowledge of being born again by the Spirit, but we do know that we are believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, the Scriptures call us to believe because that is what we are conscious of having happen.
- c. But that call to believe that John gives in his Gospel is only effective in the heart of one who has been born again. This explains the difference between those who heard and did not respond and those who heard and responded. The spiritual eyes of some were opened, while most remained closed. Some were born again, and others were not. And this is what John explains in his first letter. He is writing so that his readers can know that they have eternal life – that they have been born from above. He is, in essence, giving them the evidence of spiritual life

that will be present in them if they have been born from above. These are the vital signs for spiritual life that will be evident in those who have been born again by the Spirit of God. And the preeminent vital sign is faith in Jesus Christ. This is what we find in 1 John 5:1. *Read 5:1.*

- d. Humor me for a minute and consider the grammar here in this verse. And you'll have to take my word for it, unless of course, you happened to bring your Greek New Testament with you. The verb translated as "believes" is a present active participle. This means that this is a present and ongoing belief. This is a belief that did not just express itself in the past, but is an ongoing and right now present belief. So, everyone who right now, present ongoing active participle, believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.
- e. Then the next verb translated as "has been born of God" is a perfect passive indicative verb. This means it is the main verb of the sentence because it is being used to indicate, or teach, a truth to us. And this means that it is communicating by its perfect tense that it is something that happened in the past and has an ongoing reality and effect. And the fact that it is in the passive voice means that this is something that we do not do to ourselves, but is something done to us – we are not the actor of the verb, but the receiver. So, everyone who has present active belief that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. The present faith in Jesus as the Christ is the present result of this perfect passive verb – "has been born of God." In other words, present belief in Jesus is evidence of a past regeneration.
- f. Some good Bible scholars would still disagree with this and would say that this verse is not speaking to the order of regeneration and faith, but that it is speaking to the simple reality that they are connected, that faith and regeneration always go together. And indeed, they do. But I believe that the grammar really matters here to communicate that faith is the logical outworking of being born of God. This same grammar is used in several other texts in 1 John. And we'll look at these all more closely in a minute, but just listen to them.
 - i. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness (*present active participle*) has been born of him (*perfect passive indicative*). – 1 John 2:29
 - ii. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves (*present active participle*) has been born of God (*perfect passive indicative*) and knows God. – 1 John 4:7
 - iii. For everyone who has been born of God (*perfect passive participle*) overcomes (*present active indicative*) the world. – 1 John 5:4a
- g. So, if we are going to say that faith precedes regeneration then we must also say that practicing righteousness must precede being born of God, and loving one another must precede being born of God, and overcoming the world precedes being born of God. The grammar and the truths communicated are clear, I think. They make known to us that we must be born from God before we believe. And if we have been born of God, we will have saving belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. So,

if you have constant, ongoing belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, this is evidence of spiritual life – of being born from above.

2. Practice of Righteousness – 1 John 2:28-29

- a. This first and primary vital sign of spiritual life is followed by a few other very important ones as well. Flip over to chapter 2 in 1 John and look at verses 28-29 for the next vital sign. *Read 2:28-29.*
- b. The practicing of righteousness is a present active reality which is the result of that perfect passive reality of being born of God. This practicing of righteousness is paralleled in verse 28 with abiding in Christ so that when he appears, we will not have to shrink back from him in fear. He is righteous, and so therefore, everyone who is in Christ will practice righteousness. If God is righteous then those who are born of God's will and are born of God's seed will also be righteous – not just in their legal position, but also in their practice. If we have the righteous life of God in us through the new birth, then this righteous life will come out of us in righteous living. This does not mean that we will be perfect and free from all sin, but it means that we will be consistently progressing away from sin and toward righteousness. We will no longer revel in our sin and despise truth and righteousness. Having peace with God through the sacrifice of His Son, we will not be at peace with our sin any longer.
- c. To state it the other way around, look down at 3:9-10.
- d. And then look at 5:18.
- e. So, those who have been born of God will make it their practice to walk in righteousness as they progressively grow in saying no to sin and walking in Christ-likeness. If sin is the deadly virus which has caused our spiritual death, then grace is the antidote that gives us the sure and steadfast cure. This cure will be known in its totality when we pass from this earthly life in this sin-cursed world to the eternal life in the world to come. But this cure of grace is constantly at work in our spiritual man to fight the virus of sin. The antibodies of grace are constantly attacking sin in the bloodstream of the child of God and they are to be growing spiritually stronger and healthier day by day as they stop practicing sin and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are truly born of God, then you will hate sin in you and you will delight in righteousness as you pursue more and more of Christ.

3. Purifying Hope – 1 John 3:2-3

- a. And then the third vital sign of this new birth is a purifying hope. Look at the beginning of chapter 3, and particularly verses 2-3.
- b. John affirms their status as God's children, and then he lays before them the hope that every true child of God has – that we will one day see him and when we see him, we will be like him. This hope of eternal life is preeminently a hope of full communion with the Triune God. A hope that we will see Him in all His glory and we will worship Him as He is and we will be like Him in glorious perfection on that day – that our sanctification will finally give way to the fullness of glorification. This is the hope that is resident in every child who has been born of God. And this hope is not an undetached wish about something that might

happen, but rather it is a settled confidence about something that will soon happen. And this causes every child of God to purify himself as God is pure. If we will be fully conformed to Him when we see Him, then we long to be more and more conformed to him now, in anticipation of that day when we will see him. What we will experience in completion then, we long to experience in part now. We long for his purity and his righteousness to be made more complete in us. This is not a hope that can be attributed to a natural man, a man who is still dead in sin. They might have a religious zeal about purifying themselves, much like Nicodemus did, but it is not a purity which is driven by hope. It is a purity driven by self-righteousness and self-effort to appease God and earn eternal life. It is a dreadful and miserable existence. It fights sin and seeks after righteousness for its own attainment of salvation. And it never finds it and loses more and more hope.

- c. But when one has been born of God, there is a new hope that is gripped by seeing Christ. And it is therefore driven to seek to be pure more and more until that glorious day of seeing Christ. If you are born of God, you will have this purifying hope.

4. Love for God's Family – 1 John 4:7

- a. Then the next vital sign of spiritual life is a love for God's family. Look over at chapter 4 of John's letter. This is a theme and a truth that is all throughout this short letter, but 4:7 is the clearest expression of it. *Read 4:7.*
- b. If love is from God, and if you have been born of God, then it follows that you will love. If God is love, which John says in verse 8, then if you do not love you cannot be of God and you cannot truly know God. But if you know God by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus, then you will love. And in particular you will love God's family – your spiritual brothers and sisters. There is a new affection and sacrificial commitment found in the heart of the one who has been born from God for the others who have also been born from God.
- c. And this only makes sense, right? I mean, Christ loved the church as His bride so much that he was willing to give his very life for her. He held nothing back and gave himself up for her. So, if God loves his children like that, doesn't it stand to reason that if we have been born of God and his life abides in us then we also will love what he loves and hate what he hates? Doesn't it stand to reason that those things which matter most to Christ will also matter most to us? That those things for which Christ laid down the greatest sacrifice will also beckon us to an undying commitment as well? That is what John is saying here.
- d. In fact he says it negatively in 3:10 – “By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”
- e. And again in 3:14-15 John says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.
¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” And do you know how we know if we love the brothers? Well, the text goes on in verse 16 to make that clear. “By this we know

love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

- f. So, if you are born of God, one of the clear vital signs of his life in you will be that you love God’s family. And this love will be made evident by your willing giving of yourself for the sake of your brothers and sisters in the faith. You will have a sacrificial commitment and loyalty to them which will mimic the great love which God has shown to us through Christ.
- 5. Overcoming Faith – 1 John 5:4-5**
- a. And then the last vital sign we’ll consider this morning is found in chapter 5, verses 4-5. *Read 5:4-5.*
 - b. If you are born of God, you are victorious over the world. The world cannot overthrow you or destroy you. You have passed from the darkness of the world to the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter 2, John told us that we must not love the world, neither the things in the world. And then he tells us what is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life – all of that is from the world – the sinful and rebellious way of thinking which dominates the spiritual darkness of the present evil age.
 - c. And the only victory over that world and all of its darkness is the victory given to those born of God. If you are born of God, John says, you have overcome the world. And the victory by which you have overcome the world is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – that He is indeed the Son of God! This ties a red bow on top of the truth presented about the new birth. The vital signs of the new birth are belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, a practice of righteousness, a purifying hope, a love for God’s family, and ultimately – a victory over this present evil world with all of its lusts of the flesh and lusts of the eyes and the pride of life. This new life in Jesus is seen primarily in saving faith in Jesus Christ, and then it ends ultimately with the glorious victory over the world.
 - d. This is so true that John can say in 4:4 - Little children, you are from God and have overcome them (speaking of false teachers), for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.
 - e. He is in you because you have been born of Him, and his life is in you, therefore you have overcome and will fully and finally overcome them. It is done and it will be proven to be done through the course of the battle. You are on the winning side if you are in Christ by grace through faith. You do not fight for victory, but from victory – therefore, you need not fear the battle in front of you. You need not sheepishly give in to the temptations of the world and roll over to the urges of your sinful flesh. Rather, if you are born of God, you have the victory through faith in Jesus Christ. And if you are born of God you know this victory – it is not a proposed and promised victory yet to come, but it is a victory you daily experience as you walk in the power of the resurrected life of your Savior, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: So, why does all of this matter to you today? Well, as I said at the beginning – there is no more important subject for your soul than the new birth. Which means that there is no

more important question for you than this – have you been born again? And to answer that question you must look for signs of this spiritual life. If you have been spiritually reborn by God's grace, then you will have clear evidence of God's work in you. Do you right now believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? Do you trust in his finished work on Calvary to be the full payment for your sins and your only hope for eternal life? Do you believe that He alone, as your Savior, is worthy of all of your loyalty, affection, and submission as your Lord and your God? If you have this faith in Jesus, then this is the primary evidence of this spiritual life. But this primary evidence will also be accompanied by these other vital signs of life.

Do you make it your practice to walk in God's ways? Do you hate your sin and are you seeking to daily grow in your likeness to Jesus Christ? If you are at peace with your sin and yet claim to be born again, there is something wrong. Spiritual life from above and an ongoing, uninterrupted life of reveling in sin do not go together.

Do you have a settled hope in the soon return of our Lord which drives your pursuit to be more and more pure before the Lord? Spiritual life longs for the fullness of that life and it looks with great anticipation which purifies its present practice.

Do you love those who have been born of God? Do you have a commitment and loyalty to them which compels you to sacrifice time and effort and money and your very self for their benefit? Why is it that you serve in the body of Christ? Is it out of your love for them as evidence of your life in Christ? Or do you serve the family of God at all?

Do you walk in the overcoming faith that walks in victory over the world around us? Do you operate on a different plane of spiritual power and strength afforded you by the Lord Jesus? Do you know the power of Christ to say no to sin and yes to God?

And those are convicting questions, aren't they? But notice that there is not a quantity ascribed to this faith and practice of righteousness and purifying hope and love for God's family and overcoming faith. Just like in the physical realm, life and health are two different things, aren't they? You can be alive, and either be in great physical strength and health, or you can be alive and be in a very weakly and sickly physical state of that life. Also, life and growth are two different things, aren't they? You can be alive and be immature in your growth, or you can be alive and be mature in your growth. And God has designed this wonderful parallel between the physical and the spiritual realm to help us understand this. You can have spiritual life as we have described it this morning, but your vital signs of this life might be pretty faint and weak. And that could be either because you are sickly or because you are immature. Immaturity means that you are young in the faith and are needing to keep pursuing growth in God's grace. It means that these evidences of life are in you, but they are not that strong yet. Just like, a toddler is learning to walk and to run and to talk – they will grow through more and more practice, so too is the spiritually immature person – they need to grow up in this spiritual life given them in Christ. And the wonderful news is that they can, and they must! They have been given all the resources necessary to keep growing in Christ, and so their further maturity is right now available to them.

But there is also the truth that some are sickly in the faith. There is evidence of spiritual life, but the vital signs are weak because they have not eaten right and have not exercised their spiritual muscles and they have given into sin which like a deadly virus has knocked down their spiritual health. But there is life there! And the good news for them is the same as for the mature – there is everything you need for life and godliness provided for you in the great grace of our Savior, the Lord Jesus. You don't have to be sickly with weak vital signs. You don't have to be constantly in the spiritual ICU with the spiritual doctors and nurses tending to you to keep you going. No, you have all you need in Christ, and you can, by His grace and according to His Word and through the encouragement of the saints know the ever-increasing strengthening of this life.

So, which is true of you? If you do not have these vital signs of life, then you need to be born again. Look to Jesus and live! If you have these vital signs, then take an assessment of your spiritual health and maturity and seek to grow still more and more! Let's pray!