

WHERE'S YOUR BIRTHPLACE?

John 3:1-17 Text vs. 3 *“Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.’”*

I'm often asked where I was born, or where I came from, and I ask, “Why do you want to know?” “Because of your accent.” “Oh!” So, I tell them I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. “That’s what I thought.”

But it's different when you read in our lesson today about *“a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council, who came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. No one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with Him.’”* Jesus told him, *“No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”* Now, *“born again”* in Greek means, *from above*. But that Pharisee didn't get it! He asked, ⁴ *“How can someone be born when they are old? Surely, they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!”* Jesus answered, ⁵ *“No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh. But the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’”* When Jesus said, that He used the Hebrew word *ruach*, meaning breath, wind, or spirit. ⁸ *The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*

In 1976, Jimmy Carter was running against President Gerald Ford for the Presidency and said openly he was a *born-again* Christian. That caused quite a sensation and was used about him repeatedly. But the fact is, if you *are* a Christian, then you *are* born again. There's no such thing as a *non-born-again* Christian. However, some people who attend church say they *are* Christian, but when asked to explain what being Christian means, or why they are a Christian, they can't give a clear answer. Some think they're a Christian because they joined a church. That doesn't prove they're a Christian. Some think they're Christian because they live a moral life and live by the Golden Rule. That's good but doesn't quite do it. Some say following the Ten Commandments does it. Some think they're a Christian because they *“feel”* they are saved. The church can't make you a Christian! You can't be made a Christian just by living “right”! You can't be made a Christian by “feeling” like one! Being a Christian is between you and God. A Christian must have faith in Jesus knowing that God loved sinners so much that He gave the world His only begotten Son, and that the only way to be a Christian is to come to Jesus by being born again. ⁹ *“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰ Jesus said, ‘You are Israel's teacher, and you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know. And we testify to what we have seen. But still, you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe. How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the One who came from heaven—the Son of Man ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.’”*

The Old Testament book of Numbers records the incident to which Jesus referred. (Numbers 21:4–9) It's a clear picture of how salvation would be brought to the world by Jesus being raised on a cross. During the Exodus from Egypt, the people of Israel were attacked by poisonous snakes because of their disobedience. They went to Moses for help. He consulted God who instructed Moses to make an image of a snake and put it up on a pole. Anyone who looked up at the snake was cured from their bite and lived. The idea of being healed simply by looking up at the bronze snake left no doubt it was God's power, not their own, that brought healing. In the same way, people suffer because of sin. (Romans 5:12) The result is spiritual death. (Romans 6:23) The only hope is to trust in something beyond yourself. And that shows salvation comes entirely by faith. You can't *earn* your redemption. (Titus 3:5) But those who refuse to look up at the cross are going to miss out on being rescued. ¹⁶ *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him”.*

Billy Graham said repeatedly, *“To be born again is to have the Holy Spirit change your heart from indifference and resentment toward God, to a love of God, and a desire for righteousness and holiness. The only way to come to God and experience what it means to be “born again” is through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ. To be born from above!”* Tim Clay wrote a hit song together with Burt Bacharach, that was number 61 of the top 100 on February 14, 1971. The words of the song are, *“What the world needs now, is love sweet love, not just for some, but for everyone.”* It makes you wonder if Tim Clay ever read John 3:16? Because the love gift provided by God for the world was Jesus Christ. By Him we have been given love in abundance. All the love we need can be found at the cross! Love to save. Love to heal. Love that brings peace with God. Love that brings peace with others. It's not possible to love anyone apart from the love of God. Wives can't completely love their husbands apart from the love of God. Husbands can't completely love their wives apart from the love of God. Mothers and fathers can't completely love their children apart from the love of God. Children can't completely love their parents apart from the love of God. Brother and sisters can't completely love each other apart

from the love of God. It's in God's love that we learn how to love each other. In reality, "*What the world has now, is love.*"
¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Love is not content to simply *exist*. Love must *act*. Love is a *verb*. It's a word of *action*. Love proves it's self by what it does. Love that does *not* serve, is only temptation. Love that does *not* listen, is just a lie. Love that does *not* provide, is phony. Love that does *not* fulfill, is fake. Love that does *not* give, is a gimmick. "*God so loved the world that He gave!*" That's action! He didn't give because the world was worthy of His love. He gave because He loved! And that's God's grace! In His act of love you have the example of Divine Giving. The single reason for His giving you His love is for you to give Him your time, your talent, your testimony, and your tithe because you love Him! You should be singing, "*O how I love Jesus, O how I love Jesus, O how I love Jesus, because He first loved me.*"

Where's your birthplace? It's in the Kingdom of God! You're a born-again child of God! You're called to be a child of God and joint heir with Christ. Just as you had no part in your natural birth, you can't create yourself into being born into God's family by doing good deeds or producing a faith of your own. God is the only One who "*gives you the right*" to become a child of God, according to His gracious will. "*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!*" (1 John 3:1).

A child grows up to look like his parents. God wants His children to become more and more like Jesus. But only in heaven will you become a *perfect* child of God. John, the son of Zebedee and one of the twelve apostles, wrote the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. He said, "*Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him. He cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are, and who the children of the devil are. Anyone who does not do what is right, is not a child of God. Nor is anyone who does not love his brother.*" (1 John 3:7–10).

Make no mistake about it, a child of God cannot be "*disowned*" by sinning. But if you consistently engage in it, and enjoy sin without listening to Jesus and His Word, it shows you were never born again. Jesus told such people, "*You belong to your father the devil. And you want to carry out his desire.*" (John 8:44) The child of God no longer needs the satisfaction of sin. The child of God desires to know love and how to glorify God the Father. The rewards of being a child of God are huge. As God's child you're a part of His family, the church. As God's child you're promised a home in heaven. And as God's child you're given the right to speak to God in prayer. (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Peter 1:3–6; Romans 8:15). Respond to God's call. Look up to the cross! Repent of your sin! Believe in Jesus and become a child of God today. Then you will know where your birthplace is. It's not Oklahoma! It's not Kansas! It's Heaven. AMEN