

Service - 'Unless one is born of Water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God' (John 3:5).

(Hymns are all from Songs of Fellowship)

Intro: This verse, like many of Jesus' Words are difficult for us to understand, and today's Service is to try and make it easier for us to understand!

Let's start our Service by praising Jesus and singing:

290

JESUS IS LORD! Creation's voice proclaims it,
For by His power each tree and flower
Was planned and made.
Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it,
Sun, moon and stars in heaven
Cry, 'Jesus is Lord!'

*Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!
Praise Him with hallelujahs
For Jesus is Lord!*

Jesus is Lord! Yet from His throne eternal
In flesh He came to die in pain
On Calvary's tree.
Jesus is Lord! From Him all life proceeding,
Yet gave His life a ransom
Thus setting us free.

Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,
From death He rose, and all His foes
Shall own His name.
Jesus is Lord! God sent His Holy Spirit
To show by works of power
That Jesus is Lord.

Time for our Prayers

1st Reading: John 3:1-15

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

³ Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

⁴ "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!"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, 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.' 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."

⁹ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you 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."

129 – God forgave my sin in Jesus' Name

GOD FORGAVE MY SIN in Jesus'
name,
I've been born again in Jesus'
name;

And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His love as He told me
to.

*He said: 'Freely, freely, you have
received,
Freely, freely give;*

*Go in My name, and because you
believe
Others will know that I live.'*

All power is given in Jesus' name,
In earth and heaven in Jesus'
name;

And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His power as He told me
to.

. 2nd Reading – 1 Peter 1:1-25

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Praise to God for a Living Hope

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are

filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.^[b] ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For,

*"All people are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,
²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever."*

And this is the Word that was preached to you.

419

O LET THE SON OF GOD ENFOLD YOU

With His Spirit and His love,
Let Him fill your heart and satisfy
your soul.
O let Him have the things that
hold you,
And His Spirit like a dove
Will descend upon your life and
make you whole.

*Jesus, O Jesus,
Come and fill Your lambs.*

*Jesus, O Jesus,
Come and fill Your lambs.*

O come and sing this song with
gladness
As your hearts are filled with joy,
Lift your hands in sweet
surrender to His name.
O give Him all your tears and
sadness,
Give Him all your years of pain,
And you'll enter into life in Jesus'
name.

The Message

John Piper, who is the founder and teacher of the website: desiring God.org answers these questions:

I have a Bible question for you about the new birth. Peter wrote that believers are born again 'not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God' (1 Peter 1:23). In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, 'Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God' (John 3:5). Can you help me understand the truth that these verses are totally compatible? Romans 10:17 and James 1:21 also mention the saving power of the word heard and implanted, but surely not in a way that minimizes the work of the Holy Spirit. The question then follows: How do the Holy Spirit and the word of God collaborate in the new birth?"

John Piper answered, "Let's start by reminding ourselves that the reason we must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God, like Jesus says, is because by nature, by birth, we are all spiritually dead. This is the way Paul describes it in Ephesians 2:5: "Even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ." Now, that *making alive* is the same as the new birth, said in different language.

Every human being has fallen in Adam and comes into the world without any saving spiritual life at all. We are dead. We are by nature resistant to God. We do not submit to him by nature. We value things that he has made more than him by nature. And we do not have the spiritual capacities to see Christ as supremely valuable and true and better than anything in the world. Nothing of that do we have by nature. Unless we feel the weight of the lostness and fallenness and deadness of all humans, especially ourselves, nothing about the new birth is going to make sense in the New Testament. So, all of that means that if we're going to live, if we're going to know God, if we're going to be happy forever, we must have new life — that is, new birth, new creation.

So the question now is how the Spirit of God and the word of God function together to bring us out of this deadness into the new, eternal life of knowing and enjoying God forever. And we look to the words of Jesus in John 3:3, 6-8. Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I say to you, "You must be born again." 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.

To be born of the flesh is the first birth that we've all experienced. If you are alive, you were born. And he says that to be born first in that way is to be no more than a fallen human being. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." That's all it is. Something more must happen for us if we are to enter the kingdom of God, and Jesus describes that *more* as a birth by the Spirit.

And then He compares the work of the Spirit in the new birth to the blowing of the wind ([John 6:8](#)), which means the Spirit is as free and as mysterious in his regenerating new-birth work as the unseen wind. You don't control the wind. You don't make the wind come. You don't make the wind go. It just comes. It goes. It does what it does, and that's the way it is with God's sovereign Spirit in whom he makes alive and gives new birth.

"We didn't make our first birth. We don't make our second birth."
We didn't make our first birth. We don't make our second birth. We don't raise ourselves from the dead. We don't create new life in our souls. It is a gift. It's a miracle of God. We don't initiate it. We don't control it. It's the sovereign mysterious work of the Holy Spirit of God.

Our first conscious experience of this new birth is the arising in our hearts of faith in Christ. You might say that the first cry of the newborn Christian infant is the cry of faith. Instead of "waa, waa," the heart feels, "I see him; he's beautiful. I love him, I want him, I need him. He's my Savior!" That's the cry of the new birth. And Paul says, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" ([1 Corinthians 12:3](#)). So that baby cries, "Jesus is my Lord!" And he says that the evidence of the Holy Spirit coming into our lives is that we cry, "Abba, Father!" ([Romans 8:15](#); [Galatians 4:6](#)).

So, even though the work of the Holy Spirit is unseen and outside our control, the evidence of his work is manifest. We see the glory of Christ as desirable and believable, and we embrace him as our Savior, our Lord, our treasure. That's the evidence of the new birth in our life. Christ is now real, and precious, and trustworthy to us, and authoritative for us. We have been made alive, born again. That's the work of the Spirit. "Even though the work of the Holy Spirit is unseen and outside our control, the evidence of his work is manifest."

But now you can see right away, by the very nature of what's happened, that this implies something about the word. If we are now believing in Jesus because of our new birth, and that's the first cry of the newborn, and we are seeing him as true and real and valuable, where do we see him?

The Holy Spirit does not whisper the gospel in our ear. We have to hear about him in the gospel. Paul says in [Romans 10:17](#), "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." What we learn then is that faith is a work of the Holy Spirit in new birth ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)), and faith is the effect of hearing the word of God. Faith comes from the new birth by the Spirit, and faith comes from the word.

And that's where [1 Peter 1:23](#) comes in to connect word and Spirit in the new birth. Peter says, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable [that's the Spirit of God], through the living and abiding word of God." Born of the Spirit, born through the word. So, what we see is that the sovereign Spirit of God binds himself to the word of God because his primary work (as Jesus said in [John 16:14](#)) is to glorify the Son of God, who is manifest in the preaching of the word of God.

The Holy Spirit does not move willy-nilly, randomly, through the world, touching random people with the new birth who have never heard the gospel, without any reference to the word of God at all. No, he doesn't do that. He moves in tandem with the preaching of the gospel. And the reason he does is that his primary mission, according to [John 16:14](#), is to glorify the Son of God. And if he just made people alive who've never heard of the Son of God, they wouldn't be glorifying the Son of God with their new life. New life is bound to the word of God because new life is meant to glorify the Son of God, and we hear about the Son of God in the word of God, the gospel.

We see an example of this in [Acts 16:14](#), where Paul is preaching to Lydia and the other women there by the river. It says, "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." So, you have the word spoken, preached by a human being (Paul), and you have the divine work of God opening the heart to give heed and to give new life so that she can understand and receive the preciousness of the gospel.

So, the implication for us is that our essential role in salvation is to speak the word of God and then trust the Spirit of God to do the work, the heart-work called the new birth. We don't cause the new birth in ourselves or in anybody else, and we don't cause it in those we are preaching the gospel to. The role we have — and it is an absolutely essential role — is to speak faithfully the word of God.

Paul asks in [Romans 10:14](#), "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" He answers, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" ([Romans 10:17](#)).

So, my prayer for us is this:

May the Lord give us great boldness and faithfulness and confidence that when we speak the word of God, the Spirit of God will give life and glorify the Son of God through the awakening of faith, Amen.

A final thought:

I have an Apple I-Pad and sometimes it refuses to work, as it's mind is clogged up with too much stuff and then I have to give it a "Factory Reset. That is I have to press the "Home" Button and the OFF switch at the same time until the screen goes blank, then leave it for about a minute or so and then switch it back on using both buttons again. It then "reboots" as a Factory Reset and it is ok again.

In today's terms, to be Born Again is like a "Factory Reset", that is God our Maker is re-setting our minds to His ways of belief and thinking!

921 - Men of Faith rise up and sing

Men of faith, rise up and sing
Of the great and glorious King;
You are strong when you feel
weak,
In your brokenness complete.

*Shout to the north and the south,
Sing to the east and the west:
Jesus is Saviour to all,
Lord of heaven and earth.*

(Last time)
*Lord of heaven and earth,
Lord of heaven and earth,
Lord of heaven and earth.*

Rise up women of the truth,
Stand and sing to broken hearts,

Who can know the healing power
Of our glorious King of love.

We've been through fire,
We've been through rain;
We've been refined
By the power of His name.
We've fallen deeper in love with
You,
You've burned the truth on our
lips.

Rise up church with broken
wings;
Fill this place with songs again,
Of our God who reigns on high:
By His grace again we'll fly.

THE GRACE

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all for ever more, amen.

This Service has been prepared by: Christopher Stirling of West End Congregational Church, Haverhill, UK.
If you have been sent this Service by a friend and would like to receive a Service every month, please email your request, titled "Please add me to your Emailing List" to: yewtreehouse@btinternet.com

Sources: Hymns are from Songs of Fellowship .The Readings are from the NIV.
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