You Must Be Born Again

Nicodemus recognizes Jesus as a prophet; he wonders if He is the Messiah. If Jesus is the Messiah, then the kingdom of God is near (as John the Baptist has been declaring). This implied concern for the kingdom is the reason Jesus tells him all people must be born again in order to see (= to enter) the kingdom of God.

**1. Why you need to be born again?**

A. Because the kingdom of God is *spiritual*

B. Because you cannot *remake* yourself

C. Because you cannot *believe* the gospel

1 Corinthians 2:14-16

**2. How can you be born again?**

A. Not by gradual *improvement*

B. Not by an act of *your will*

John 1:12-13

C. Only by the *power of God*

**3. What happens when you are born again?**

A. You understand *spiritual truth*

B. You receive *eternal life*

C. You are a *mystery* to the world

**How can this doctrine be useful to you?**

A. It subdues your self-confident *pride*

B. It encourages you to *come* to Christ

[John 7:48-52; 19:38-42]

**For Private Meditation or Family Discussion**

1. How did the Lord speak to you through the message? Did He put His finger on any habits or attitudes that you need to change? Did He encourage you regarding some difficulty, move you to undertake some new challenge, or open your heart to some truth you hadn’t seen before?

2. Several suggestions have been made for the significance of water in the phrase “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5):

1. Water is a symbol for the word of God, which cleanses us (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26). This is highly unlikely because Nicodemus could not have been expected to make the connection. Jesus blamed Nicodemus for failing to understand (v. 10), which means that as a teacher of the law, he should have had sufficient background in the Old Testament to grasp what Jesus was saying.
2. Water refers to physical birth (=born of flesh, v. 6), perhaps referring to semen or to the breaking of a woman’s water. This is highly obscure and without precedent in the Old Testament.
3. Water refers to some specific kind of baptism or washing—Jewish, John the Baptist’s, or Christian (Titus 3:5). It cannot mean that Christian baptism is necessary for entering the kingdom of God, since that was not yet instituted; other baptisms and washings were not permanent parts of God’s plan for His people, so they could not have been essential for entering the kingdom.
4. Water is symbolic of the Holy Spirit’s renewing and refreshing as promised in the Old Testament (Isaiah 44:3-5; Ezekiel 36:25-27). Since these promises relate to the kingdom of Messiah, Nicodemus might have made the connection. This appears to be the best explanation. Therefore, “water” in v. 5 is not the same as “flesh” in v. 6 (which view “b” suggests). Understanding “water” as a symbol of the Holy Spirit allows for a secondary reference to ceremonial washings and baptisms in general, as pictures of the Spirit’s cleansing.