

ALDERSGATE UMC OF BUTTE, MT
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May 30, 2021 - Trinity Sunday

Message

“Are You Born From Above?”

Have you ever been asked the question, “**Are you born again?**” Back a few decades ago, I was hit up on a street corner in downtown Denver with this question. I just looked at this young man and smiled. Not everyone has a born again experience because some have told me they have simply grown up in the church and have always made a decision to follow Christ. For some, this decision to be a Christian has always been a part of them and it did not come as a mountain top experience. This is important because no two experiences are the same.

For some of the rest of us, however, we can pretty much pinpoint the day and time of our experience, whether you call it a conversion or a born again experience. Mine was at the age of 17 after hearing a sermon on the need for God. It was clear to me and I have felt this experience ever since. I have cherished this new beginning and this feeling of being born from above. This feeling of being born again has never left me. But this doesn't mean that I have never been sad, melancholy or depressed. More on this in a bit.

So what exactly does this mean to be born from above or to be born again?

In our text for today, Jesus makes it clear that being religious and going to the temple is not enough.

Hear these words from Yeshua once again:

SLIDE # 1

⁵Jesus answered, *Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above."*

END OF SLIDE

What does it mean to be born again? Jesus says, *"You must be born from above."*

One of the members of the Mid Week Reflections group used the word *"awaken"* when describing being born from above. Yes, we need to awaken to this reality of the *kingdom of God* that is right here, right now, in our midst. Unfortunately or however you wish to look at it -- for many they are not awake, but instead are asleep to this reality.

When I asked the Mid-Week Reflections group to describe the *kingdom of God* this week, they pretty much agreed that it was a place where our souls go after death, **but** also that the *kingdom of God* was in the here and now. Hear Yeshua speaking to the Pharisees in the Gospel of Luke:

SLIDE # 2

The Coming of the Kingdom

20 Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; ²¹nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.' Luke 17:20,21

END OF SLIDE

I believe that once we experience this reality that the *kingdom of God* is within us and all around us, we can indeed be born from above. Instead of just going through the rituals of religion, we can experience the fullness of God, right here, right now!

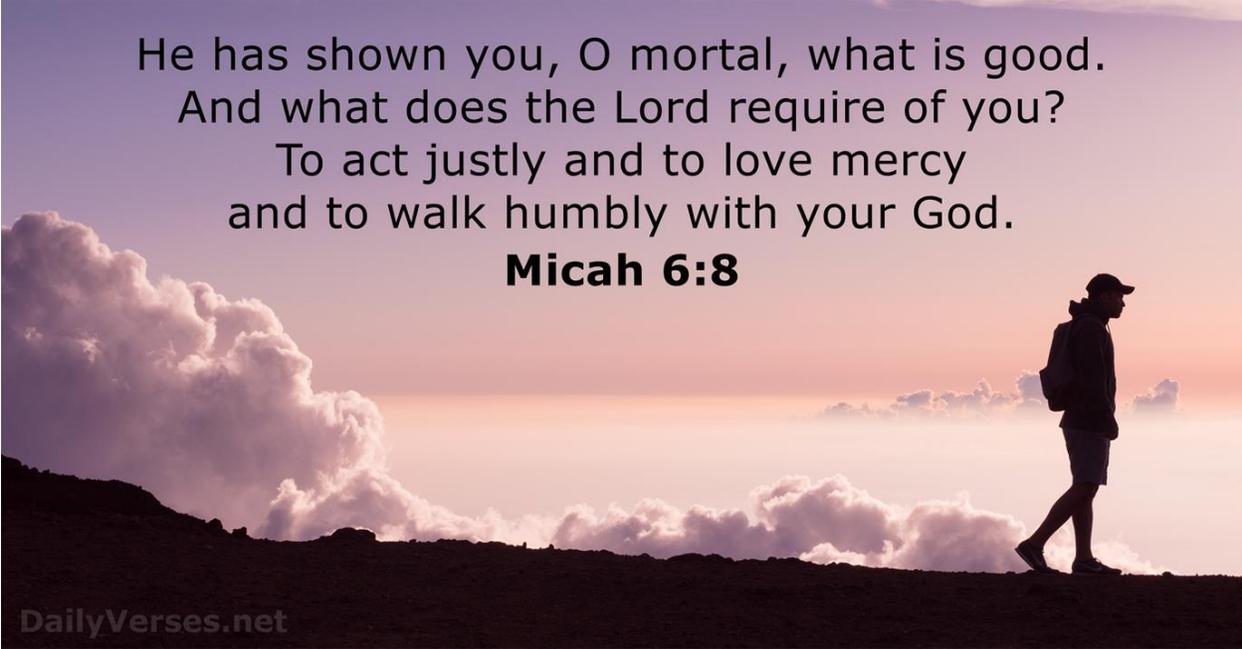
Is this what Nicodemus was after? Here is a religious leader of the Pharisees coming to Jesus for some answers. The Pharisees happen to have believed in an afterlife which the Sadducees did not. But here is a prominent and well to do religious leader coming to Jesus by night so as not to be embarrassed to be seen with this rebel Rabbi who hung out with lepers and outcasts of all kinds. After all, these people were unclean.

Think about this, Nicodemus had some deep spiritual questions, but did not feel he could go to Jesus by day to talk. Nicodemus was afraid to let the public know he was receiving spiritual direction from this controversial teacher and preacher. Nicodemus simply did not want folks to know he was associating with Yeshua, so he kept it secret and private.

I got to thinking about this in my own life. **Are there situations where I am embarrassed to let folks know that I associate with Jesus? Are there situations in your life where you are afraid to let folks know you associate with Jesus?**

Each of us may have a bit of Nicodemus in us for one reason or another. However, if we are born from above, if we are born again, we are less afraid of being seen as a Christian. If we are born from above, we will do what is required as told by the prophet Micah some 2,500 years ago or so:

SLIDE # 3



He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

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END OF SLIDE

If we are born from above, we will not be embarrassed to be a witness for justice, or to love those who seem impossible to love and we do this so that we can walk humbly with God!

Furthermore, if we are born from above, we are not only courageous in our witness for Christ, we pray seriously the words from the Lord's Prayer, "*thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" We think and feel differently about our possessions and our money. We know where our priorities are. We know that material things will not bring us happiness, much less joy. Yeshua spoke to us about priorities in Luke 12:34:

SLIDE # 4



END OF SLIDE

If you are indeed born from above, then your treasure is bringing the kingdom of God to earth.

If you are indeed born from above, we share generously not only our spiritual gifts in the work of the church, but we strive towards tithing, one step, one percentage point at a time. Churches whose members are taking steps towards tithing, year after year, generally do not have financial troubles. These churches understand that it is our need to give, our desire to give to build the kingdom of God here on earth.

The same way we take steps towards tithing and beyond is to know what our spiritual gifts are. If you do not know what your spiritual gifts are, please take the time to discern what they are. When you exercise your spiritual gifts, the Spirit and Presence of God flows through you in service to others.

Lastly is that for me being born again is not a one time event. I was asked some years ago on another occasion if I was born again and I said, "Every day!"

Being born again is not a one time event. Some of us suffer from spiritual amnesia and wake up in the morning and need to be reminded to begin everyday breathing in the breath of God ... being filled with the Light, the Love, the Peace and the Joy of God.

As I have shared with some of you before, I pray this parable everyday to be born again:

SLIDE # 5

The disciple came to the Master and asked, "What has grace brought you?" The Master replied, "Each morning when I awaken, I feel like a man who doesn't know whether or not he will live until evening."
"But doesn't everyone know this," asked the disciple.
"Yes," said the Master, "but not everyone feels it."

END OF SLIDE

I strive to **not** get out of bed in the morning until I feel it in my very bones, in my very soul that this day could be my last. **How do I want to live it?**
When I actually feel that this day could be my very last, I am born again!
When I actually feel that this could be my very last day on earth I live it to the fullest. **How is this possible?** By the grace of God!

By the grace of God whether you have had a born again experience or whether you have felt that you were always Christian, we are new creatures in Christ as illustrated in this verse from II Corinthians:

SLIDE # 6



END OF SLIDE

Let us pray as well as sing this hymn in preparation of Holy Communion:
"Fill My Cup, Lord. Fill my cup and make me whole."