

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
April 3, 2016

New Life by the Word

1 Peter 1:22-25

1:22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,
1:23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;
1:24 for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,
1:25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

You all know the word “Born Again” right? It means “born again” or “born to change”. It is also called “new life” or “regeneration”. By combining this word with “Christian”, we use “Born Again Christian”. “Born Again Christian” means Christian who is born and changed, but what does it mean to us?

1. Necessity of Born-again

“Born Again” and “Being Christian” is the same thing. We are born again and become Christian and the Bible clearly teaches this.

Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:3, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus was surprised and said Jesus “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” As Nicodemus said, it is impossible for a human to be born again as a baby. What Jesus meant by “born again” is that we are not born again physically, but we are born again spiritually. Jesus

said in John 3:5-6, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” As John 4:24 says, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” God is Spirit. God has only Spirit, but human has both spirit and flesh and use Spirit to have a fellowship with God, the Spirit. Flesh also refers to human instinct and emotion, which is not eternal and perishes eventually. As the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:50, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable,” unless we are born from the Spirit and become the Spirit, we cannot inherit the Kingdom of God which belongs to the Spirit. “Born Again” means our spirits, which are central to our inner self, become alive.

The Bible describes the spiritual state before we believe in Jesus Christ as follows in Ephesians 2:1 “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins”. You were spiritually dead. Since you were spiritually dead in the relation with God, you could not understand the truth of God or feel the love of God. Even if your relationship with God is dead, you can still find the reason to live and enjoy your life. But because your Spirit is not satisfied, you still feel anxious and afraid. You still feel lonely and empty. Since God is the one who can satisfy your spirit, all you have to do is to go back to God. But we tend to satisfy ourselves with something other than God and we separate ourselves from God. If you remain separated from God, you are dead in sins and die against God. That is why we have to be born again in Spirit.

Nicodemus was a Jewish leader. In Jewish religion, they teach that

you can enter the kingdom of God by obeying laws. But if “obeying laws” is something we accomplish by making our own efforts, then it means we enter the spiritual Kingdom of God by flesh, and flesh cannot inherit the Spirit. Likewise, if a person who disobeys the law mends his/her ways and keeps obeying thereafter, he/she still ends up the life with human efforts. What Jesus said was not behave as if you were born again but you truly become born again. It is impossible to be born again by human efforts but God can. Jesus Christ with His power of resurrection, he can make our spirit born again. Someone said he saw everything so shining when he experienced “born again”. It certainly differs among people, but those who have experienced “born again” must have felt that something central in your existence was lit up and started to move. When our spirits are alive and satisfied, our heart, our body and our life is born again and become satisfied. This is the grace of regeneration.

2. Way of Born-again

Then, how are we born again? In English, you passively express where you have been given birth; like “I was born in New York.” Neither one could choose in which generation nor location you will be born, and nor by which couple you will be born. There’s no room for choice about your birth. However, you do have a room for choice when you are born again. God will give us birth, but at the same time, God allows us to choose, or we need to choose in other words. In John 1:12-13, says, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of

God.” In this verse, “Him” means Jesus Christ, and John says those who receive and believe in Jesus Christ are born again of the Spirit not of flesh. The one who gives us birth is God, but He consigned the choice of receiving Jesus as our Savior and living by trust unto Him, to our side. The Bible calls this “choice” “Faith.”

Then, where does faith to believe in Jesus come from? In Rome 10:17, says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Yes, faith comes from Jesus’ words, the words of God. In this generation, everyone knows something about Jesus Christ. Uncountable literature, artwork, sculpture, or music has been created in the motif of Jesus Christ. Most people would know Jesus was born from Virgin Mary, and crucified, then resurrected. Such “knowledge” is useful but doesn’t guide people to faith. People may come close to faith through that knowledge, but only the word of God can give faith. We are led to faith through listening to the word that God personally speak to each of us. And we experienced to be born again through that faith. That’s why Peter says, “Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” God’s word gives faith, and faith brings “born again.” I Peter 1:23 shortened this and say, “We are born again through God’s word.” God’s word is what delivers the life of God to us, the word of life.

So, what we shall do is to cherish His word at church, and learn them in any opportunities, and share that each other. We may utilize mass-media if we just would like to spread the knowledge about Jesus Christ, but people are saved only through listening to the God’s word as the word spoken by God. Therefore, we need to talk the word of

God personally, to share it with others. God invites each of us to the salvation. By listening this invitation in His words, we are finally guided to the determination of faith. We will trust Him by His promised words of salvation. Regardless of how much knowledge you have, or how less, you will be born again through listening. We knew nothing about our parents when we were born; and while they brought us up, we gradually knew about them. Likewise, we will know about God while living after born again. God would love us to receive His word of Love, Promise, and Invitation. Those words will give us birth again, and give us life, the word of “Born Again.”

3. Confidence of Born-again

Therefore “Born Again Christians” means “persons who believe in Jesus Christ and have the confidence that they were born from God.” This definition came from the Revival Movement of America. The United States was started as a Christian country, and the Christianity is the main religion. Then, people thought that they were Christians since they were born and believed that they are Christians because they went to churches and spent their moral life. The Revival Movement taught that we become Christians through hearing God’s words, believing in Jesus Christ, experiencing “born-again.”

If the word of “born-again Christians” means the persons who have the confidence that they have been reborn and children of God by the faith in Jesus Christ, all of us should be “born again” Christians. This confidence comes from the Holy Spirit. According to Roma 8:14-16, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,

but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” The Holy Spirit give us the confidence of “born again”, and the scripture tells us about it. We learn and understand the work of the Holy Spirit through the scripture. We hear the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we can say that the words of God bring “new born” and “confidence” for the new born.

Words of human will disappear, no matter how famous they are or popular. However, the words of God are forever. “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.” (1 Peter 1:24-25) The perishable can not inherit the imperishable. The words of God, which are imperishable and forever will give us new life, its confidence, its growth, and the inheritance of God's Kingdom. With this word of God, let us walk in the joy and confidence of “born again”.

(Prayer)

Dear father in heaven, you gave us your words and the blessing of new life. Let us understand this blessing, have a confidence for it, and look for more your words in order to live with new life you gave us. Please help us experience the joy and power of life with your words in our daily life. In the name of Lord Jesus, Amen.