

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 30

John 3:7 ***“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. ⁸***
The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound
thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth:
so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”John 3:7-8)

MARVEL NOT!

INTRODUCTION

Jesus has introduced a requirement that was totally unknown to Nicodemus. The saying, *“Ye must be born again,”* was more than his intellect could process. It remains to be a very difficult saying for most professing Christians. O, they know of the expression *“born again,”* but they have very little understanding of what it means. That is why the following expressions are so common among professing “Christians.” “We are only human,” “No one is perfect,” “God accepts us as we are, warts and all.” “The only difference between us and the world is that we are forgiven.” “You cannot teach an old dog new tricks.” “Statistics confirm that those who are not saved by the time they are twelve, are less likely to be converted.” All such sayings are just the Twentieth Century way of saying, *“How can a man be born when he is old?”* They are nothing more than the crystallization of unbelief. Being Himself *“the Truth”* (John 14:6), and *“the Faithful Witness”* (Rev 1:5), Jesus cannot lie, exaggerate, overstate, prevaricate, misrepresent or falsify. If he could do so, there could be no such thing as salvation, recovery from the fall, or justification from all things – **for they all hang on the veracity of the Word of God.** Further, there is a human condition that prohibits the Lord from speaking with **obvious** clarity. With Nicodemus, he had been taught to think in a manner that was not God-centered. This had not thoroughly stifled his interest in the truth, but had accentuated the natural impotence of his understanding. Where there is religious confusion and inaccuracy, it causes the truth to be more difficult to receive than if the person was not religious at all. This condition is why it is generally very difficult to persuade “church people” of the truth of God. This was also demonstrated extensively in Israel. When they were under the leadership of false priests and prophets, they became more hard-hearted and stiff-necked, and pushed the truth of God even further from themselves. This is why it is such a hindrance to be ignorant of Babylon the great – a religion of form that is lacking in power. Even though the church is admonished to note Israel’s unbelief, it has been extremely slow to do so. In fact, few have been taught to do so (1 Cor 10).

MARVEL NOT!

John 3:7A ***“Marvel not . . .”*** Other versions read, *“Do not marvel,”* ^{NKJV} *“you should not be surprised,”* ^{NIV} *“Do not be astonished,”* ^{NRSV} *“Stop being amazed,”* ^{CJB} *“Do not wonder,”* ^{DARBY} *“Never wonder,”* ^{WILLIAMS} *“Thou mayest not wonder,”* ^{YLT} and *“Marvel not [do not be surprised, astonished].”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

When Jesus speaks, marveling, being surprised, amazed, and being astonished are not acceptable reactions. A person must recover from such a state before the truth can be known, and freedom experienced (John 8:32). The Gospels contain the following references: 16 times people are said to have "marveled" at what Jesus said or did; 13 times they were "amazed"; 15 times they were "astonished"; 8 times they "wondered." All of these words contain the element of being arrested by the stark contrast between what Jesus said and did and the ordinary. No one ever heard Jesus speak or beheld Him working, and compared Him to some contemporary. It is true that some thought He was John the Baptist returned from the dead (Mk 6:16), or Elijah or one of the prophets (Mk 8:28). It was observed, "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt 7:29). His disciples observed, "What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!" (Matt 8:27).

Now, Nicodemus has heard Jesus speak, and it was certainly not like anyone else he had ever heard. He has heard Jesus speak of being "born again," and of seeing the Kingdom of God (John 3:3). Like other Jews, he probably thought that when the Kingdom came it would be so evident no one would miss it. Daniel had spoken of a Kingdom God would "set up" that would "break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan 2:44). How could anyone fail to see something of that magnitude? Believe it or not, there are still people who view the Kingdom of God in that manner – something that is evident to flesh and blood. However, it is as true today as it was when Nicodemus heard Jesus speak: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Jesus forbids Nicodemus to marvel, be surprised, be amazed, or wonder. Marveling belongs to the equation of unbelief. On another occasion, when Jesus spoke of raising the dead spiritually (essentially, the same thing as being "born again"), Jesus said, "**Marvel not at this:** for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice" (John 5:28). John the apostle also employed this kind of language when he wrote of the world hating the people of God: "**Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you**" (1 John 3:13). Jesus also referred to two of the sisters of marveling – fear and being troubled: "**Be not afraid**" (Matt 14:27; Matt 17:7; Matt 28:10; Mk 5:36; Lk 12:4; John 6:20). "**Be ye not troubled**" (Matt 24:6; Mk 6:50; John 14:27). Another word that speaks of this debilitating stance is "staggered." There were those in Israel who staggered about, but not with strong drink (Isa 29:9). It was the result of being baffled and dismayed by the word of the Lord. Confirming that this is not the stance of faith, it is said of Abraham, "**He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God**" (Rom 4:20).

Viewed from yet another perspective, these words speak of stumbling – of tripping over what God has done, so that no profit is gained. "*Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that Stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a Stumblingstone and Rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed*" (Rom 9:32-33). Believing on Him is tied to being "born again." When this happens the kingdom is not only seen, or perceived, but an entrance into it is beheld.

A powerless form of godliness is one that promotes marveling, astonishment, amazement, and eventually stumbling. The things of the Spirit of God are "foolishness" to "the natural man," which is the man who is **not** born again (1 Cor 2:14). That is what causes such a person to "marvel," be "astonished, or "amazed." Such "things" are simply

outside the scope of human understanding being of another order. Therefore, Jesus tells Nicodemus, *"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."* That carries the same idea as the word Jesus declared to Jairus, when a messenger came to him and said, "Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?" (Mark 5:35). At that time, Jesus said to the man, *"Be not afraid, only believe"* (Mark 5:36). That, in effect, is the same thing as saying, *"Marvel not!"*

There is a great need in our day for this kind of admonition. Men must be wooed away, so to speak, from carnal responses to the words and works of Jesus. **The antidote for marveling and wondering is believing.** It is when men are *"strong on faith"* that they give *"glory to God"* (Rom 4:20), or present evidence that God is working with and within them. Jesus said that the hour was coming when the spiritually *"dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live, For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; and hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man."* He quickly added: ***"Marvel not at this"*** (John 5:25-28). The reason men are not to marvel at this, is because such marveling tends to obscure the truth, so that it cannot be seen.

YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

^{7B} *" . . . that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

I SAID UNTO THEE. Jesus referred to His own words in this way (*"I said"*) sixteen times:—i.e. *"As I said," "because I said," "I said unto thee," "I said unto you," "I said it," "as I said," "how I said," "these things I said," "what I said"* (John 1:50; 3:7; 6:36; 8:24,25; 10:26; 10:36; 11:42; 13:33; 14:28; 15:20; 16:4,19,20; 18:21). The Gospels record Jesus saying *"I say"* one hundred and forty-six times. He mentioned *"My words"* eleven times. Concerning His words, Jesus said, *"My words shall not pass away"* (Matt 24:35), *"the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life"* (John 6:63). He affirmed that He would be ashamed of everyone who was ashamed of His words (Mk 8:38). He said the one who did not receive His words, would be judged by His word (John 12:47). He declared that the person who loved Him would keep His words (John 14:23). He announced that those who continued in His Word were His *"disciples indeed"* (John 8:31).

What Jesus says is always truth. His words are always weighty. A person is judged upon the basis of how he responds to what Jesus says. No word of Jesus will pass away or become obsolete. A serious departure from the faith has taken place when the words of Jesus are not regularly proclaimed, kept, and pondered. It is no wonder that Jesus said to Nicodemus, *"Marvel not that I said unto thee . . ."* He was telling Nicodemus not to stagger at His words, but to press in to know them.

YE MUST. Here is a saying that a self-seeking and self-indulging generation cannot receive. Such a people do not like to be told what they *"must"* do – but this is the way Jesus speaks. For example, He said that new wine *"must be put into new bottles"* (Mk 2:22). He affirmed that hearing of wars and rumors of wars *"must be"* (Mk 13:7). He announced that the Scriptures *"must be fulfilled"* (Mk 14:49). He said that those worshipping God *"must worship Him in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:24). From Acts through Revelation, the word *"must"* occurs forty-seven times. It is the word of a Sovereign Lord, and it testifies to His unquestionable Sovereignty. Men *"must"* do what God and Christ require. Men must conform to God's will, rather than seeking for God to conform to their will. Jesus set the standard for us in this matter. When referring to His own mission and

appointed death He consistently mentioned what He *"must"* do: *"I must be about My Father's business"* (Lk 2:49), *"I must preach the Kingdom of God"* (Lk 4:43), *"I must walk today"* (Lk 13:33), *"I must work the works of Him that sent Me"* (John 9:4), and *"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring"* (John 10:16). In referring to His sacrifice He said such things as *"the Son of Man must suffer many things,"* *"the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men,"* and *"even so must the Son of Man be lifted up"* (Mk 8:31; Lk 24:7; John 3:14).

This kind of language speaks of Divine purpose, determination, and revelation, as opposed to human reasoning. This is talking about the government of God which is upon Christ's shoulder (Isa 9:6-7), and a standard to which men are held without any deviation. Instead of marveling at this requirement, man are to make inquiry into it, seeking to comprehend it.

BE BORN AGAIN. It is because of the total rejection of Adam and his seed that being *"born again"* is an unwavering requirement. God does not and cannot accept men without this new birth taking place. **By using the expression *"born again,"* the accent is placed upon what God does.** Man cannot be the primary person in being born again, as even Nicodemus recognized. **So far as our generation is concerned, some of what took place when a *"falling away"* came, was the removal of an accent on the working of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.** The *"must"* factor was turned to the interest of the institution, which developed its own requirements. Today, one is hard pressed to find a professing church that teaches the necessity of the new birth **as Jesus here taught.** There must be an **observable** new beginning. In the new birth *"old things pass away, and all things become new"* (2 Cor 5:17). Souls are *"purified,"* the truth is obeyed, and an unfeigned love for the brethren commences (1 Pet 1:23). The person is *"delivered from the power of darkness"* (Col 1:13), and is made *"free indeed"* (John 8:36). These are very **real** conditions because being *"born again"* is a very **real** occurrence. There is such a thing as being *"born of God"* (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18).

Like the natural birth, the new birth is accompanied by undeniable evidences. John puts it this way: *"If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him"* (1 John 2:29). Such a person is not known for sinning. As it is written, *"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God"* (1 John 3:9). And again, *"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God"* (1 John 4:7). And again, *"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments"* (1 John 5:2).

When we read of things that *"must"* be, we must not marvel like Nicodemus, or dare to treat such requirements as options, or even something that is merely parabolic, having no bearing upon reality.

SO IS EVERYONE THAT IS BORN OF THE SPIRIT

⁸ *"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."*

Jesus now confirms that something really taking place is accompanied by evidence. Thorough explanations may not be given, but that something has really happened cannot be denied, being confirmed by the effects caused.

THE WIND BLOWETH. God has employed *"wind"* on a variety of occasions. After the flood, a wind was used to cause the waters to assuage (Gen 8:1). When Moses stood

before Pharaoh and raised his rod to bring locusts over the land of Egypt, *"the Lord brought an east wind"* to bring them upon the land (Ex 10:13), and *"a strong west wind"* finally took them away (Ex 10:19). When Israel prepared to cross the Red Sea *"the Lord sent a strong east wind"* to divide the waters (Ex 14:21). When Pharaoh and his armies were in the midst of the Red Sea, the Lord *"blew with His wind,"* and the seas *"covered them"* (Ex 15:10). When the Lord sent quail to the Israelites, a *"wind from the Lord"* brought them in (Num 11:31). When the Lord passed by Elijah on the mount, *"a great and strong wind rent the mountains and break in pieces the rocks before the Lord"* (1 Kgs 19:11). On the day of Pentecost, there was *"a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind"* (Acts 2:2).

WHERE IT LISTETH. Other versions read, *"where it wishes,"* ^{NKJV} *"wherever it pleases,"* ^{NIV} *"where it chooses,"* ^{NRSV} *"where it wills,"* ^{RSV} *"where its pleasure takes it,"* ^{BBE} and *"where it wants to."* ^{CJB} The word translated *"listeth"* has the following lexical meaning: **"TO BE RESOLVED OR DETERMINED, TO PURPOSE: ABSOLUTELY."** ^{THAYER} The meaning here is that men have no control over the wind whatsoever. As illustrated in all of the above cases above, the wind itself could not be seen except by evidence. It could not be charted, or in any way controlled.

YOU CANNOT TELL. Where the wind is coming from cannot be seen, and where it is going to go cannot be seen or known ahead of time. If wind did not have a sound, and if something was not found stirring in its presence or discovered in its wake, men would never know it was there. The only proof of a tornado or cyclone, for example, is the sound of them and what they do. There is no way to learn enough about the wind to be able to control it, or harness it for human good.

SO IS EVERY ONE. Other versions read, *"so it is with everyone whose birth is from the Spirit,"* ^{BBE} *"so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit,"* ^{NLT} *"so it is with the Spirit. We do not know on whom He will next bestow this life from heaven."* ^{LIVING} *"That is the way with everyone who owes his birth to the Spirit."* ^{GOODSPEED}

The meaning is that it is not possible to explain HOW a person can be born again – which is what Nicodemus had asked. There is no codified procedure through which the new birth is accomplished. God is the One who determines who is going to be born again, and the Spirit carries out the new birth at the discretion of the Almighty. You cannot plan the new birth of anyone. Nor can you cause it to happen. God will use preaching, to be sure. There will be conviction, repenting, and believing, as well as obedience. However, men are impotent to cause any of these to happen.

When first explaining the conversion of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, Peter said, *"Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?"* The early church saw what had taken place, and when *"they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life"* (Acts 11:17-18).

Later, when there was a conference in Jerusalem over the issue of circumcision, Peter again reported the conversion of those at the house of Cornelius. Peter said the following: *"And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago **God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith"*** (Acts

15:7-9). At that time James responded, "*Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to **take out** of them a people for His name*" (Acts 15:14).

These were reports of people being "*born again,*" and the brethren knew it was something that could not possibly have been planned by men. The report was given of what the Lord was pleased to do – like the wind blowing wherever it wants to blow. One can read the reports of conversions in the book of Acts, and use them to outline how men are saved. That some of this can be done cannot be denied. However, it seems to me that a better understanding is possessed when the accounts are given to **confirm** how God saves people. They are reports of the Holy Spirit moving about as He wills, convicting, begetting, and implementing the will of the Lord. All of this is done in the context of preaching (1 Cor 1:21), and where men are "*given to believe*" (Phil 1:29). None of this can be planned or governed by men. It is all of God, and blessed are those who see it.