

### It Ain't Just Heaven

In one sentence or less: What does it mean to be born again?

Some confuse saying a pre-manufactured prayer in the midst of an emotional moment to being saved. They catch a glimpse of hell and they sign up for a “get out of jail free” card in order to reserve a spot for themselves in heaven. It’s not always that superficial, but sometimes salvation is processed as a spiritual add-on as opposed to a total transformation.

So, what does it mean to be born again? Where did phrase come from and what should be different about that person once they’re truly saved?

Here’s the bottom line – I’ll state it here and then work backwards so it makes more sense: That which was dead has been made alive. And the resulting “resurrection” positions you in a way where you are now truly living rather than just existing.

In one word or less – what does it mean to be born again? Is it something that comes to bear only when you’re getting ready to check into a funeral parlor or is it something more?

### Where Did That Phrase Come From?

The term “born again” came for a conversation Jesus had with a religious expert by the name of Nicodemus. You can see a transcript of the whole exchange in John 3. In verse 3, Jesus says:

**In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (John 3:3 [NIV])**

The word “again” can also be translated “from above” and you see that in several translations.<sup>1</sup> The bottom line is that something is being initiated that wasn’t in place before. In this case, what’s being established is life.

### A Lifeless Starting Point

According to the Bible, when we’re born, we start out as a spiritual corpse. Yes, we’re breathing and walking around physically, but our spirit has no pulse.

**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...(Eph 2:1 [see also Ps 51:5])**

That may or may not make a whole lot of sense. After all, how can you tell if someone is dead spiritually? What does that even look like?

Fact is, you can't tell, other than the way it surfaces occasionally in terms of someone's outward behavior. Jesus talks about that as far as how you can tell what kind of tree you're looking at by the kind of fruit that it produces (Lk 6:44 [see also 1 Samuel 16:7]).

God, however, can see past the leaves, beyond the fruit and even beyond the bark. He sees what's going on inside and it's there where we have a hopeless situation.

Nobody likes to hear that, but it's simply a part of the human condition. Ever since Adam and Eve allowed themselves to be convinced that it would be OK to brush God aside and do the very thing He told them not to do, we've been swimming in a dirty pool. It's called sin and it's a deal breaker. Apart from God fixing what only He can repair, we're like a car with no fuel. We may look good, but we're not going anywhere.

### Pretty Little Distractions

It's a sobering reality - the fact that we're not breathing or moving spiritually. And while there's a gnawing sense of being incomplete, rather than accepting God's Remedy, we attempt to fill in the gaps with any one of a number of pretty little distractions. Everything from there is no God, to someone else is God to I am God. And what's tragic is that some never stop insisting that the problem doesn't exist or that it's being resolved through some man-made remedy. But in the end, our spiritual lives remain lifeless – the car continues to remain stationary (see Isaiah 64:6; Gal 3:1-3).

### So What Happens

There's a prophet in the Bible by the name of Ezekiel. At one point, God paints a mental picture for him in order to illustrate how He was planning on restoring the nation of Israel after having severely disciplined her.

It's in chapter 37. Up to this point, the situation is hopeless. Israel is beyond guilty. Her behavior has been nothing short of heinous and the wrath of God that has been poured out upon her is absolutely justified.

And frankly, that's where the story should've ended. God's people have betrayed their Heavenly King on every level and are now suffering the consequences. But God loves them too much to leave them destitute. So He engineers a solution that accomplishes something that is impossible – that which is dead is made alive.

In the book of Ezekiel, the result is the restoration of Israel as a sovereign nation. At that point, Israel was in exile, but they would be allowed to return and rebuild their city and their country. But the picture of the dead being made alive is purposefully used here in order to prime the pump for what's going to happen in the New Testament when Jesus says in John 5:24:

**I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. (Jn 5:24)**

What was dead is now breathing. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says the same kind of thing:

**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!  
(2 Cor 5:17)**

And if you go back to Ephesians 2, you can see the same resolution communicated in verse 4, only two verses after Paul has defined our initial lifeless spiritual status:

**<sup>4</sup>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. (Eph 2:4-5)**

### **Conclusion: It's Not Just Heaven**

2 Corinthians 5:17 is one of my favorite verses as far as the way the “born again” dynamic is portrayed in the phrase “new creation.”

When you accept Christ as Lord and Savior, the way that it's defined in Romans 10:9-10, you're not just setting yourself up with an insurance policy that guarantees you entry into Heaven. In John 17, Jesus defined eternal life, the phrase we often equate to salvation, as knowing God:

**Now this eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (Jn 17:3)**

Knowing God begins now. And while reading your Bible is part of that, it's not just studying for the sake of becoming familiar with its content. Rather, you're studying the “words of God” so you can better understand God's Instructions, the assets that He makes available and the wisdom He offers.

Ultimately, you and I were put on this earth to make a difference and not just an appearance. To be holy means to be whole. You're firing on all eight cylinders. Body, mind and spirit are now fully operational and you're now deploying His Energy, His Resources in the context of accomplish great things – all of which reflect well on Him (see Eph 2:10; Col 1:29; 1 Peter 4:11).

You're alive! You're not just a spiritual corpse going through life reaching for things that you want until they're yours and then you desire something else. It's a new paradigm – everything looks different because you're different.

It's not just Heaven. It's life - right here, right now. That which was dead has been made alive. That's what being born again is all about!

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