

EAST CAMBRIDGE CHURCH OF CHRIST

“A first century church in the 21st century”

Bible Reading Plan

Week 12

- Deut 6-9; *Luke 7*
- Deut 10-14; Ps 5; *Lk 8*
- Deut 15-18; Ps 115; *Lk 9*
- Deut 19-22; Ps 6; *Lk 10*
- Deut 23-26; *Lk 11*

Leading Services

Announcements: Mike V.

Morning:

Song Leader: Bill G.

Opening Prayer: Richard L.

Lord's Table: Larry L.

Asst By:

Closing Prayer: Zack V.

Evening: No Services

Song Leader:

Opening Prayer:

Closing Prayer:

Scripture Reading:
(Zephaniah 3.8-13)

Sermons:

AM: Two Differing Attitudes

PM:



Kingdom of God

When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, convinced that He was “a teacher come from God,” he was astonished to hear Jesus say, “Verily, verily I say unto you, except a man be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:3). Nicodemus was not amazed to hear Jesus mention the kingdom; he had been taught all his life that a kingdom was coming. His amazement was that to enter that kingdom or to be part of it, he must be born anew. He asked Jesus how it was possible for a man who was old to be born anew. Jesus responded, “Verily, verily I say unto you, except a man be born of the water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). John had warned those who came to hear him, “Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father, for God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt. 3:9). A natural birth has never qualified a man entrance into the kingdom of God. A spiritual birth — transformation of life and purpose — is demanded of he who would be in God’s kingdom.

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Entering The Kingdom of God

Jesus said one must be born of water and the Spirit to enter His kingdom. All sorts of explanation are given how a man is “born of the Spirit,” but if one is on safe ground, the only safe explanation is that given by those who heard Jesus and were moved by the Holy Spirit to accurately give Jesus’ message to others. Consider three men, early disciples, inspired by the Holy Spirit and their understanding of what it meant to be “born of the Spirit.” First, listen to Peter who was a disciple of Jesus from the baptism of John: “Having been begotten (born) again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God which liveth and abideth” (1 Pet. 1:23). Now, ponder the words of James (likely the brother of Jesus) when he wrote “of his own will he begat (brought us forth, KJV) by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first creatures unto him” (James 1:18). To the testimony of these two must be added that of Paul: “In Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15).

Notice the perfect agreement of all three. First, all three refer to a birth (just as Jesus did). Peter said, “Having been begotten again.” James said, “Of his own will he begat us.” Paul said, “Through Christ Jesus, I begat you.” Second, see the perfect agreement of these men as to what the seed was by which each of these were “begotten.” Peter said, “incorruptible seed, the word of God.” James said, “begat ... by the word of truth.” Paul said, “begat — by the gospel.” Why did these men all understand that the working of the Holy Spirit was through the word? They understood because that was what Jesus taught them. It was Jesus who said, “It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63). Perfect harmony between Peter, James, and Paul. Perfect understanding because that was what Jesus taught them. To be born of the Spirit is to become a believer in Jesus by the Spirit’s word. There is nothing mystical here, no “better felt than told feeling.” It’s just a simple fact: “So then, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

The second item of the new birth expressed by Jesus is water. He said, “Born of water.” The natural understanding of “born of water” is a reference to water baptism. Jesus commanded the disciples that they were to baptize. They were to “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus not only commanded baptism, He gave the reason why men were to be baptized: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ...” (Mk. 16:16). How did Peter understand Jesus’ words to him? In Acts 2:37 many were pricked in their hearts and said, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter’s response was “Repent ye and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins” (Acts 2:38). In his first epistle he wrote, “Baptism doth also now save you” (1 Pet. 3:21). Peter had heard Jesus say, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” and what he said in Acts 2:38 and 1 Pet. 3:21 was his understanding of Jesus’ words, guided by the Spirit Jesus promised to give him (John 16:8-13).

Paul was not among the original twelve, but his understanding of why Jesus commanded men to be baptized was identical to what Peter understood. He wrote Titus “that we are saved, not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). He wrote the Ephesians that Christ had “cleansed (saved) His church through the washing of water, with the word” (Eph. 5:26). Paul was so convinced, first because God’s messenger to him (Ananais) came as he was praying and said, “And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, as wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16). Apparently Paul understand Ananais’ words for the record says that he “arose and was baptized” (Acts 9:18). Whenever Paul wrote of the purpose of baptism, he said it was to put one into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27), to put one in contact with the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4), to cleanse (Eph. 5:26), or to save (Titus 3:5). Never did Paul say baptism was not essential to salvation. On the contrary, he always taught that it was.

One enters the kingdom of God today by a new birth, just as Jesus told Nicodemus 2,000 years ago. The new birth consists today of the same thing it consisted of then: Faith in Christ and His word, repentance of one’s sins, a confession of one’s faith that Jesus is God’s Son, and baptism in water for (in order to receive) the remission of one’s sins. Have you been born again?

- by Jim McDonald