

## Prerequisites for God's Kingdom

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

*Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).*

*"Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).*

*"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS' (Matthew 7:21-23).*

## Introduction

Last Sunday, I spoke about one of the criminals who was crucified together with Jesus. To me, he was the most blessed man in God's kingdom history. Here's why: with one single confession statement to Jesus as his Savior and Lord, he was admitted into Paradise. On the same day. What a deal!

For this criminal, Satan messed up his entire life big time so that he ended up being crucified, but God turned the table around just a few hours before his death and enrolled one more soul in His kingdom. Praise the Lord. Our God is the Victor.

All that ends well is well, the English saying goes. We too want to be like that, don't we? No matter what happens in our lives, and how bad our lives can be messed up, in the end, we want to be in Heaven with our Heavenly Father forever!

The lesson of the criminal's story is this: it is not our own merits or goodness that get us into Heaven. Rather, it is Christ's merits and our faith in Him. Amazing is such God's grace for us!

## Content

Let's face it. Not everyone in the world will make into Heaven. You know that. So do I. Deep in our hearts we know that some people will not/should not be in Heaven. Like Stalin. Like Hitler. I also want to point out this: It is not God who rejects certain individuals but that they reject God. Such as those who deny God's existence, those who can't stand God, and those who follow the devil and choose to live in darkness instead of walking in the light and truth. They will not be in the presence of God, because they choose not to be.

That's why the teaching of Universal Unitarianism doesn't cut it. E.g. There was a black man who was just emancipated from his cruel master in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He happened to be a

believer in Christ. One universalist told this man that his former master as cruel as he was would be in Heaven as well. He said, *if that's what your Christianity teaches, I don't want to be any part of it.*

Yes, you can say that God does want everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) and be in Heaven. However, you cannot say that everyone will be there automatically. God gives us free will to choose where we want to be for eternity.

So, this morning, we will listen to Jesus who points out three things that we must pay attention to during our pilgrimage to our heavenly home. Neglected, they would endanger our entry to God's Kingdom. Jesus says, unless we are born again, unless we are like a child, and unless we live out God's will, we will not see or enter into God's Kingdom. We'd better pay attention to Jesus on this eternal matter.

First, **you must be born again/anew.** You heard this expression before. Every four years. Especially, around presidential election season. Please stop using 'born again' Christians. You are misusing and even abusing the term without even knowing what you mean by that.

I am going to explain to you once and for all what it means to be 'born again.' It means 'born of the Spirit of God.' It means a complete transition from the life of the flesh to the life of the Spirit. Listen. Jesus coined the phrase: Born again. E.g. One night, a Jewish rabbi Nicodemus came to Jesus for a nice chat. To him, Jesus said, **"Unless one is born again (anew), he cannot see the Kingdom of God"** (John 3:3). <sup>4</sup>Nicodemus \*said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.** <sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup>The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is **born of the Spirit"** (John 3:4-8).

If you are serious about getting into the Kingdom of God, Jesus says, "be born again and born of water and the Spirit."

The rebirth Jesus talks about here is not a physical one, of course. It is a spiritual one. To be born of water and the Spirit. Born of water means water baptism for repentance and forgiveness. Born of the Spirit means the renewal of the Spirit (Titus 3:5). It means to live a new life in Christ. Your old self and old life have gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Our spiritual rebirth (or born again) takes place when we first believe in Jesus and invite Him into our heart (some remember specific date and time, others don't. But it's OK as long as you took Jesus as your Savior and Lord). Did you know that, before you came to know Jesus as your Savior and Lord, your spirit was dead in your sins and trespasses (Ephesians 2:1)?

As soon as you believe in Him, your dead spirit becomes alive and starts communicating with the Lord. Remember the baptism? Going into the water means death to yourself. Coming out of the water means alive to God. Being born again means “Dead to the flesh” and “Alive again to God.”

Let me say it again what Jesus says: unless you are born again, born from above, and born anew of the Spirit, you cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God. Why? Because if you are not born again, you are still in the flesh and if you live in the flesh, you cannot please God (Romans 8:8). And if you cannot please God, you cannot be in His presence. Being born again means to walk in the Spirit not in the flesh. It means to consider yourself dead to sin but alive to God. It means to stop following sinful desires in your flesh, but to start walking in the Spirit of truth and light. Be born again.

Next, **we ought to be like children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.** Listen to Jesus again: *“Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 18:3). In Luke 18:17, He also says, *“Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it **at all.**”* Not at all?! Yes, not at all.

That means, do not even think about entering God’s kingdom unless you become like a child and unless you receive it like a child. By the way, Jesus is not talking about ‘childish.’ He is talking about ‘childlike.’

I wonder what Jesus means by being like a child. There can be many characteristics in a child such as *“the power to wonder, the power to forgive, the power to forget, innocence, and trust”* (Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 193, 194). However, I believe the most important characteristic of child is **humility** and **teachability**. Being not humble means being arrogant or conceited. Being arrogant means, we think we are better than others. Believing we are better than others, we become unteachable. If we are unteachable, we don’t even listen to God, either.

Did you know that if we are arrogant, we are inviting God to be our opponent? **“GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”** (James 4:6). Do you get it? Arrogance and pride make God our enemy! May it never be! We cannot be in Heaven while we have God as our enemy. Therefore, be humble under His mighty hand (1 Peter 5:5). Be like a child.

The last warning from Jesus is found in Matthew 7. **Do the will of Your Heavenly Father.** *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’* (Matthew 7:21-23).

It is self-explanatory. Not everyone who calls Jesus, *Lord, Lord*, will enter the kingdom of Heaven, Jesus warns. But only those who do the will of the Heavenly Father will. This is a solemn warning to those who are only interested in getting into Heaven without following Jesus as their Lord. E.g. One time, my Sunday School teacher asked us the kids, “Would you follow Jesus even though He is in Hell?” *What kind of question is that?* I thought. Of course, Jesus is not or will never be in Hell. However, the teacher was making a point of not taking advantage of Jesus. Rather, following Jesus wherever He is, even if it means Hell.

Matthew 7 is a solemn warning to folks out there who are only interested in getting what they want from Jesus, yet never desire to do His will. Such people live out their own desires and lusts with no interest in doing God’s will. E.g. They still hate their enemies even though they go to church services. They have no intention of forgiving or loving their enemies, even when God commands them to do so. They still cheat on their spouses even though they claim they are good standing Christians. Such people will not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus says.

Think about Jesus’ words in Matthew 7. “*I never knew you*” (Matthew 7:23). After doing all the wonders, signs, and great things in the name of Jesus (healing, casting out demons), we still can be denied. What are the criteria? Whether or not we have done the will of God in our lives.

This is a solemn warning for me as well. I am speaking as a pastor who has been given the privilege of insight, preaching the gospel and the blessings to know God in the Bible. Even after all these years of serving the Lord sacrificially, and preaching thousands of sermons, if I do not do God’s will in my daily life, I will be denied on that Day. Same goes with you. May it never be!

## **Conclusion**

Let’s make sure that we are born again. Let’s make sure that we walk in the Spirit of truth and light. Let us not follow our fleshly desires. Next, let us be like a child. Be humble and teachable. Finally, let us live out the will of our Heavenly Father. Every day. *Forgive, Pray, Read the Bible, Be joyful, Be thankful, Love your neighbor*, to name a few. Be sure to do these. Then, you will see the Kingdom of God. You will enter it in Jesus’ name. Amen.