

## 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

This past month, four members and friends of our church passed onto eternal life. Their loss impacted me so much that one night I got sick. It also made me realize the importance of faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. As pastor of the congregation, it is my duty to get you ready for eternal life to be in the presence of God. The question is if you die tonight, will you be in Heaven? That's what we are going to talk about this morning: Are you ready for Heaven when you leave the earth?

## Content

Let's face it. Not everyone in the world will make it 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. One thing I want to make it clear to everyone is this: It is not God who rejects certain individuals but, rather, it is people who reject God. Such as those who deny God's existence, those who can't stand God in their lives, those who don't want anything to do with God, and those who follow the devil and choose to live in darkness instead of light and truth. Since they'd rather not be in the presence of God, the only logical place left for them is Hell. That's the place they choose to be for eternity along with the devil and his minions. God never pushes anyone to Hell. People voluntarily walk into this eternally dark place (C.S. Lewis).

That's why the teaching of Universalism doesn't cut it (they deny an everlasting damnation and the existence of Hell). E.g., 1. Oprah Winfrey has been promoting that there's no Hell and everyone goes to Heaven. E.g., 2. There was a black man in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who was just emancipated from his cruel master. He happened to be a believer in Christ. One universalist told this man that his former master too, as cruel as he was, would be in Heaven.

Then the black man said, *if that's what your Christianity teaches, I don't want to be any part of it.* God's Word clearly says that Heaven and Hell exist.

Now, you can safely say that God wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9). He indeed wants everyone to be in Heaven. However, that doesn't mean that everyone will be in Heaven automatically.

So, this morning, we will listen to Jesus who points out three prerequisites for God's Kingdom. Jesus says, 1) unless you are born again, 2) unless you are like a child, and 3) unless you live out God's will, you will not see or enter God's Kingdom. We'd better pay our utmost attention to Him on this eternal matter.

First, in order to be in Heaven, **you must be born again/anew.** You heard this expression before. E.g., The phrase of "born-again" has been misused and abused in the American politics and journalism. Especially, around the presidential election season. No politician ought to abuse this phrase 'born again' for their political gains.

I am going to explain to you once and for all what it means to be 'born again.' Listen carefully. Jesus coined the phrase: Born again. It means 'born a second time,' or 'born from above.' It means 'not born of a mother second time, but born of the Spirit of God.' It means a complete transformation from the life of the flesh to the life of the Spirit. E.g., One night, a Jewish rabbi Nicodemus came to Jesus for a 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, "you must be born again and born of water and the Spirit."

First, 'born of water' means repentance and forgiveness through water baptism. 'Born of the Spirit' means the spiritual renewal initiated by God's Spirit (Titus 3:5). It means to stop living in your own desires (the Bible calls it 'the flesh') and to start living a new life guided by the Spirit of God in you. Your old self has gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Your spiritual rebirth takes place when you first believe in Jesus and invite Him into your heart (some of us remember a specific date and time, others like me don't. What really matters is that you took Jesus as your Savior and Lord). There's a difference in your spirit's condition before and after you accept Jesus as your Savior. Before you accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord, your spirit is dead in your sins and trespasses (Ephesians 2:1).

As soon as you believe in Him, the Spirit of God quickens your dead spirit (John 6:63) and your spirit starts communicating with the Lord. Remember the meaning of baptism? Going into the water means 'dead to self.' Coming out of the water means 'alive to God.' Being born again means "Dead to the flesh" and "Alive to God."

Let me repeat 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 living in sin and still in the flesh; if you live in sin, 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. Unless you are born again, you cannot see or be in the Kingdom of God. Be born again.

Next, if you want to be in God's Kingdom, **you ought to be like a child.** 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, "<sup>17</sup> 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. (Greek grammar: ου μη: double negation. Emphatic denial). ---Never ever.

That means, do not even think about entering God's kingdom a) unless you become like a child, and b) unless you receive God's Kingdom 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 humble means not arrogant or conceited. Arrogance makes you think you are better than others. Believing you are better than others, you become unteachable. If you are unteachable, you don't even listen to God, either.

Did you know that if you are arrogant, you are inviting God to be your 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 your enemy! May it never be! You cannot be in Heaven while you have God as your enemy. Therefore, be humble under His mighty hand (1 Peter 5:5). Be like a child.

The last warning from Jesus is this: if you want to be in God's Kingdom, **do the will of Your Heavenly Father.** Jesus says, "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. 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. *The question itself is flawed.* Of course, Jesus is not or will never be in Hell. However, the teacher was making a point of not taking advantage of Jesus but following Him wherever He leads, even if it means a hard place like Hell.

It is a solemn warning to folks who are only interested in getting what they want from Jesus, yet never desire to do His will. E.g., Some folks still live a life of greed, which is idol-worship. Others still hate their enemies even though they attend church services. More others have no intention of forgiving or loving their enemies, even when God commands them to do so. Such people will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven, unless they repent, Jesus says.

Consider 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, serving in all the committees), we can be denied at Heaven’s gate. Let me repeat. What are the criteria to enter Heaven? Whether or not we have done the will of the Father in Heaven, isn’t it?

This is a solemn warning for me as well. As pastor, the Lord has given me the privilege of gaining insight, preaching the gospel, and receiving the heavenly blessings from God. However, if I fail to do God’s will in my daily life, even after all these years of serving the Lord sacrificially, and preaching thousands of sermons, I too will be denied on that Day. Same goes with you. May it never be!

## **Conclusion**

Do you want to be in the Kingdom of God? Then, be born again, Jesus says. Make sure that you walk in the Spirit of truth and light. Do not follow your fleshly desires. Also, be like a child. Be humble and teachable. Finally, 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.