

## Dressed In Royalty: *New Clothes From The King*

When I was 17 I helped lead a group of early teens spelunking in a cave in northern Alabama. We spent the entire weekend living in this cave that went for miles under - ground with some vast 280 feet high rooms, narrow passages and a small stream. It was completely dark except for the light we brought in with us. We had a lantern comically named the “sun”, which was only lit during daylight hours and another the “moon”, which of course shown at night. These lanterns were the only way of telling the difference between day and night in the cave.

We had a blast exploring the underground caverns and mysteries of the cave, but when we finally popped out again on Sunday none of us realized how filthy we were until visible in the naked light of day. With hundreds of miles to travel before arriving back home we began looking for a way to clean up before the long trek back. Someone got the bright idea of renting a motel room so we could all take a shower and put on fresh clothes. We left an extra tip for the maid, but I cannot remember appreciating a shower more in my life. Clods of red Alabama mud washed off our bodies and down the drain leaving us fresh and clean for the first time in three days.

The message of John the Baptist was that everyone in comparison to Jesus is dirty. John called everyone – high and low to baptism, a kind of ritual bath in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus continued John’s theme when he pressed a well-respected, notable Pharisee named Nicodemus that he too must be washed or immersed in order to enter God’s kingdom. In fact, Jesus said he needed a “new birth” of water and Spirit before seeing the kingdom.

### Journeying Together:

- 1). Describe the dirtiest you have ever been.
- 2). What is the best part about being clean?
- 3). Imagine being washed in the Spirit. What would that feel like?

### Road Map: John 3:1-15

4). What does baptism by water and Spirit have to do with God’s kingdom? Why does Jesus say that Nicodemus will never “see” the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit?

5). Why is the new birth of the Spirit so difficult for Nicodemus to understand and accept? What might water and Spirit represent in Jesus’ message to the Pharisee?

6). How would you describe your own “new birth?” How does it feel to be washed clean by baptism and the Spirit’s indwelling? What does baptism and new birth in the Spirit reveal to you about life in God’s kingdom?

**Read:** Revelation 21:1-8. *Revelation 21 talks about a new heaven and earth filled with new people. The key word here of course is “new.” God is making everything new by introducing the principles of his government – his authority, forgiveness and justice like we read and studied together last week. These principles are working their way in the world like leaven rising in the dough and changing the world from the inside out. But now he talks about birth – a new life in him cleansed by water and Spirit. New people transformed by his Spirit are the way Jesus kingdom is at hand.*

7). What do these additional scripture references tell you about living clean in God’s kingdom?

8). What is the relationship between being washed, new birth and God making all things new in his kingdom? How do the realities of *God’s new authority, forgiveness, justice and new birth* in our lives help clarify the kingdom of God in real and practical terms for us today? How is God making these things real in your life right now?

**Note:** In John Bunyan’s famous book *Pilgrims Progress*, Pilgrim is on a journey away from the “City of Destruction” to the “Celestial City.” Pilgrim goes through many experiences and life-transforming events that help him better understand his journey and his new life under the lordship of Christ.

9). We are going to look more into the process of entering God’s kingdom and how the life of Jesus becomes ours. Still, new birth in and through Jesus is how our life in Christ begins. How is Jesus washing and making you a new person every day – in your heart, your mind and in your relationships with others?

10). What questions do you still have about being “born again?” How would you explain what being born again is like to others?

11). What further questions do you have from this week’s reading and discussion?

12). How can this group pray for you right now?

### My Journey:

1). How has God used the discussion on being washed clean in your life this week?

2). We are looking more into the process of entering God’s kingdom and how the life of Jesus becomes ours. Still, new birth is the beginning of our life in Christ. How is Jesus washing and making you a new person every day – in your thought’s, in your heart, in your relationships with others?

3). What further questions do you have from this week's reading?

4). How can this group pray for you right now?

**Back Story:** Preparation for Jesus' kingdom comes in the form of a bath. The message to Nicodemus and for all of us is – no matter who we are, what pedigree we come from or even how religious, as in the case of this dignified Pharisee – in comparison with Jesus we are all unfit for the kingdom. This was not an easy message for Nicodemus to hear. The entire conversation gets turned upside down since it begins with what Nicodemus knows – “We know you are - a teacher sent from God or how else would you be able to be doing the miraculous things you are doing,” to “How can this be?” The mikvah, or ceremonial bath was for converts and those who had defiled themselves by touching blood or something unclean. The Pharisees kept themselves clean by refraining from contact with defiled things and through constant washings. Suggesting that Nicodemus needed a mikvah was out of the question.

There are a couple of word associations with water, spirit and new birth here. The first is the obvious connection between John the Baptist and Jesus. The baptism/repentance ministry of John, preceded the baptism of the spirit through Jesus - thus, the water & Spirit connection. We might also see a human birth analogy that Nicodemus picks up on. All of us come from a watery state in the mother's amniotic fluid as we burst into life. When Nicodemus questions how to get back to our mother's womb, Jesus responds with “we must be born of water *and* Spirit”. The normal human/physical birth is not enough. We must be born physically, but we must also be born spiritually. This is a recurring theme in John's writings. We find it right from the beginning in John 1:12, 13.

*“to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”*

We see it again in I John 5:6-8 where we read:

*“This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.”*

Baptism becomes the way into the kingdom – baptism first of water which leads to baptism of the Spirit. This is so important that an issue in the book of Acts (Acts 18, 19), concerning Apollos' practice of baptizing new converts in water, after the manner of John the Baptist, but with no reference to the Spirit

demands clarification and correction. Paul meets new converts that have only received baptism by water without being baptized in the Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). Consequently, Paul lays hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. Here baptism of the Spirit is a kind of bathing of the Spirit as John was washing people in water.

The point is – in the fall of Adam, the human race lost its connection with God and we became “flesh” devoid of “Spirit”. Before the fall we were made in God's image and were spiritual beings robed in a garment of light that may have been the “physical” or tangible presence of the Spirit. When Adam and Eve sinned their first realization was nakedness. All that was left after the fall was flesh. The Spirit had left them. Since the fall the Spirit works upon man, but does not inhabit us. The Spirit comes upon people, but does not dwell within them. This was the hope of the new covenant spoken of in the prophet Jeremiah where God would write his laws in our hearts and we would all “know” the Lord (Jeremiah 31:33).

Jesus is a brand new species – a new order of humanity. Our humanity in Adam has been deformed. We are a mutation from God's original creation. We were made in the image of God, but that image has been marred by sin. This is why at Jesus' baptism the heavens open up and the Father proclaims, “You are my Son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11). The last time God said that about anyone or anything was in Genesis 1:31 where we read, “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.”

Jesus is the new creation, new humanity. In Him, we all begin again. This is why we must put our old life in Adam to death (water baptism) and be raised in our new life in Christ (Baptism of the Spirit). We must see ourselves as “spiritual beings” in the light of the new life we have in the Spirit through Christ. As God is making a new heaven and new earth, he is populating it with new people – individuals that have died to their life in Adam and are now living a new life in Christ. God has given us every illustration and metaphor available to let us know that we have already passed from death to life in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. (Ephesians 2:1-10). He wants us to see ourselves as God sees us - as new creatures in Christ. We are to live no longer in the mutated form of sin, but in the newly formed life of the Spirit. The best summation of this new life in Christ is Romans 8 where Paul goes into great detail about life in the Spirit – but that's for next week! For now, let's enjoy the new birth process of being formed in the image of God's Son!