

What does it mean to be a born again Christian?

THE NEW BIRTH—[John 3:1-10](#)

[John 3:3 \(NASB\)](#)

³“Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

“Everybody talkin' about heaven ain't goin' there.” This line, from an old spiritual, accurately describes many in the church. Outwardly they identify with Christ, but inwardly they have never been genuinely converted. Because they cling to a false profession, they fool themselves into thinking they are on the narrow path leading to life, when in reality they are on the broad road that leads to destruction. To make matters worse, their self-deception is often reinforced by well-meaning but undiscerning Christians who naively embrace them as true believers. Such confusion stems from the watered-down pseudo-gospels that are propagated from far too many pulpits. Cheap grace, market-driven ministry, emotionalism, subjectivism, and an indiscriminate inclusivism have all infiltrated the church with devastating consequences. As a result, almost any profession of faith is affirmed as genuine—even from those whose lives manifest no signs of true fruit (e.g., [Luke 6:43-44](#)). For many, no one's faith is to be questioned. Meanwhile, key New Testament passages regarding the danger of false faith (e.g., [James 2:14-26](#)) and the need for self-examination (e.g., [2 Corinthians 13:5](#)) go unheeded.

The ministry of our Lord provides a stark contrast to the contemporary evangelical confusion. Christ was not interested in shallow responses or quick pseudo-conversions. He refused to compromise the truth or give anyone false hope. Instead of making it easy for people to believe, Jesus turned away more prospects than He received. The rich young ruler, for example, eagerly sought out Jesus and asked Him sincerely, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” ([Matthew 19:16](#)). Yet the Bible says that he went away grieving and unsaved ([Matthew 19:22](#)). To His shocked disciples Jesus later explained,

“Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” ([Matthew 19:23-26](#))

As a result of Christ's uncompromising demand for total commitment, “many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore” ([John 6:66](#)). He repeatedly warned His followers of the danger of spurious faith, even on the part of those who ministered in His name:

Matthew 7:21-23 (NASB)

²¹ “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*.”

²² “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?’”

²³ “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’”

Jesus also explained that being His disciple meant dying to self, declaring, “**If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me**” ([Luke 9:23](#)). Such a high cost was often too much for would-be disciples:

Luke 9:57-62 (NASB)

⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.”

⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

⁵⁹ And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰ But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹ Another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.”

⁶² But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Clearly, an emphasis on abandoning self and submitting to Him permeated Jesus’ evangelistic approach, both in His public ministry and in His private conversations. [John 3:1-10](#) recounts one of those private interactions, a nighttime meeting with the prominent Pharisee Nicodemus. Throughout their conversation, Jesus **refused to soften the truth** simply to gain the approval of this influential religious leader. Instead, He spoke with clarity and precision—confronting Nicodemus’ misconceptions and telling him exactly what he needed to hear.