

Swedenborgian Sunday School Notes for the Revised Common Lectionary

John 3:1–17 • New Life in the Spirit

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John 3:1–17

New life in the Spirit

Genesis 12:1–4

God calls Abram

Overview

As we continue our journey into Lent, our story gives us a fundamental teaching for the Lenten season: to be a part of God’s kingdom, we must be reborn in God’s image. Using physical birth as an analogy, we can talk to the children about what it means to be spiritually reborn—to gain a new life from the Lord. And shining through this teaching is the Lord’s great love for us in coming to show us the way.

Key Points

- To become good and heavenly people, we must change our feelings, thoughts, and actions.
- We do this by being spiritually “reborn,” which means accepting a new life from the Lord.
- God came to us because God loves us and wants to save us from all the wrong and hurtful things that we think, feel, and do.

Example for Teaching Children

In today’s story, a man named Nicodemus came to Jesus to learn. This was a brave thing to do, since Nicodemus was a leader of the Jewish people. Most of the leaders attacked Jesus because he did not agree with what they taught. They would have attacked Nicodemus, too, if they knew that he was becoming a follower of Jesus. That is exactly what they did later, when Nicodemus became even more brave and defended Jesus openly. (See John 7:50–52.)

But Nicodemus did not understand what the Lord taught him: “No one can see God’s kingdom without being born again.” Do you understand what Jesus was saying? What does it mean to be “born again”? Do you think you will be born again? (*Pause*)

Obviously, you are not going to be born again the way you were the first time. You have grown since you were a baby, and you are much too big to fit inside your mother again! When Nicodemus pointed this out to Jesus, the Lord explained that we must be born “of water and the Spirit.” What does that mean?

When babies (or adults) get baptized, the minister puts water on them. Do you know what the water means? (*Pause*) Water is a symbol of God’s truth washing away all the bad and dirty parts of us. For example, when we learn that we should treat other

people the way we want them to treat us, it helps us not to be mean to other people. So being “born of water” means learning to be good to other people.

What if we *act* as if we love other people, but inside we really don’t love them or care about them at all? Is that any good? (*Pause*) If we think mean things about people inside ourselves, we will probably *do* mean things to them before long.

Being “born of the Spirit” means changing the way we think and feel inside ourselves. It means learning to love other people and think good things about them. And when we truly love other people, we will always do our best to make them happy.

This is how the Lord feels about us. The Lord loves each one of us very, very much, and wants each one of us to be happy. That is why the Lord shows us how we can be reborn as a new person, inside and out. We can become angels right here on earth!

Basic Correspondences

night = when we do not understand

born of water = changing our outward behavior

born of Spirit = changing our thoughts and feelings

Thoughts from Swedenborg

We are not born from our parents into a spiritual life, but into a physical life. Spiritual life is loving God above all else, and loving other people as much as we love ourselves. We should do this according to the rules of faith that the Lord taught in the Bible. But physically-minded life is loving ourselves and material things more than other people, and even more than God. *The Heavenly City #174*

We all have an inner and an outer self. The inner one is our spiritual self, and the outer one is our material self. For us to be reborn, both of these have to be reborn. When we have not been reborn, our outer, material self is in control, and our inner self works for it. But when we have been reborn, our inner, spiritual self is in control, and our outer self works for it. So you can see that our life is arranged upside-down from birth. What should be in control is just a worker, and what should just be a worker is in control. For us to be set free, this arrangement has to be turned the other way around. This cannot happen unless we are reborn from the Lord. *The Heavenly City #179*