First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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April 19, 2026
Have You Been Born Again
1 John 5:1-5

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When I first began in ministry, I spent most of my time around high school and college students. And I found a very common experience among the people in that stage of life: they frequently struggled with assurance of their salvation. Most were raised in church and had made some type of a profession of faith as children. Often, I would have a 20-year-old college student say something like, "I know I prayed a prayer when I was 8, but I don't know how much I really understood back then. I don't know if I was just doing what was expected of me or if I got caught up in the emotion of Vacation Bible School or if I genuinely was saved. And, if I don't know whether I was saved back then, how can I know if I'm saved now?"

That struggle for assurance can be a very difficult and emotional battle**.** My response usually went something like this. "Do you remember being born?" Of course, the answer was, "No." "If you can't remember being born, then how can you know if you were born?" The answer to that seems so obvious that it almost sounds like a trick question, but almost everyone knew the answer. It wasn't that they would ask their parents. It wasn't that they would track down their birth certificate. It wasn't that they would go to a hospital to undergo testing. The answer is that we know we were born because we are alive.

We don't have to go back in time to figure out if we were born. Just take a deep breath and check for a pulse. If you show signs of life, guess what? You were born.

And our text is about. John is writing this letter to Christians who had been influenced by a group of false teachers. And he has a two-fold purpose. First, he wants them to be able to identify teachers who might claim to be Christians but are not. Second, he wants them to be assured they really are Christians themselves. And throughout this letter, John has cycled through a three-part test to assess whether someone is an authentic Christian.

- The test of Faith (Doctrinal Test) 2:3-6; 2:28-3:10 Do you believe the truth about Jesus?
- The test of Love (Relational Test) 2:7-11; 3:11-18; 4:7-21 Do you love Jesus and love like Jesus?
- The test of Obedience (Moral Test) 2:18-27; 4:1-6 Do you obey Jesus?

Those tests are to the Christian life what breathing and a pulse are to our natural life. You don't have one without the others. They go together. And, as John begins to close out this letter, he combines all of them together to stress their importance. You can be assured that you have been born again. Not because your parents were there when you prayed a prayer or because you have a baptism certificate from when you were 8. Just take a breath and check for a spiritual pulse. If you show signs of life, then you have been born again.

BIG IDEA: YOU CAN KNOW YOU HAVE BEEN BORN AGAIN AS YOU DISPLAY FAITH IN JESUS, LOVE FOR OTHERS, AND OBEDIENCE TO GOD.

1 John 5:1–5
Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. 2 By this we know that we love the

children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. 4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

It's not easy to follow John's train of thought here. There are more interpretive challenges than we could possibly tackle in a single message. But the main things are plain things and we'll spend the majority of our time looking at them and I trust the Holy Spirit will help us in time with the rest. So, let's take our big idea a little bit at a time and make our way through this text.

THE NEW BIRTH MAKES US CHILDREN OF GOD

Three times, John refers to being born of God. In verse 2, he refers to believers as children of God. Obviously, those two things go together. And I don't want to assume that everyone knows what John is talking about. The bible teaches that all of us have sinned against God with devasting consequences. Sin is rebellion against God that makes us enemies of God, not His children. It separates us from God and the life He created us to live. In that way, we are spiritually dead. (Ephesians 2:1-3) That's why Jesus said what He said to Nicodemus in John 3.

John 3:5–7
Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

We need to be born again. We need to be brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. That's why we need Jesus. And we don't just need Him; we have Him because of a God who so loved this world that He gave His only Son. At just the right time in human history, the Son of God became a man so that men could become sons of God. That was possible because, as a man, Jesus represented us before God. He lived the perfect life we have all failed to live. He died a sacrificial death as a payment for our sin. And He rose again from the grave so that He could raise us up to a brand-new kind of life.

Those who have that new life in Jesus are born again into the family of God. The new birth makes us children of God. If you are a Christian, it's because you have been born again. There is no such thing as a Christian who hasn't been born again.

That's what John is talking about in our text. And, in the remainder of our time, I want to focus on how you can know that you are born again as a child of God.

1. YOU KNOW YOU ARE BORN AGAIN AS YOU DISPLAY FAITH IN JESUS

1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God…4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

The first thing John connects to the new birth is faith. In the original language of the New Testament, the word "faith" in verse 4 is the noun form of the verb translated "believes" in verses 1 and 5. To have faith is to believe. And both words are connected to the idea of trust. To place your faith in something is to believe certain things that cause you to trust, or depend, on them being true.

I really like Adirondack chairs. Through the years, we have gone through quite a few of the cheap plastic ones you see in Walmart or Home Depot. They all end the same way. I sit in them and they break. So, a few years ago, I decided to build an Adirondack chair out of real wood that would be suitable for an actual human. It took me a couple days to do it and when I was done, I brought it around back and put it on display. There was never a moment I doubted it would hold my weight. But, believing that wasn't all it took to place my faith in that chair. I placed my faith in it when I sat down and put my full weight on it.

And there is a similar dynamic here. Believing certain things about Jesus is critical for saving faith. But saving faith is more than just mental assent to the facts about Jesus. Saving faith requires us to place our trust in Jesus, to depend on Him to be for us who He says He is and to do for us what He says He will do. And what is it that we are to believe about Jesus? John specifically mentions two things.

- Believe Jesus is the Christ – verse 1

"Christ" is another word for Messiah or Anointed One. The Messiah is the person God promised to send into this world to defeat the powers of darkness (Genesis 3:15) and deliver God's people from their sins (Matthew 1:21) through His life, death, and resurrection. So, to be born again, you must believe Jesus is the One Person in all of human history who was anointed by God to provide salvation through His life, death, and resurrection. Or, to quote Jesus from John 14:6, you must believe that He is the Way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to God the Father except through Jesus. The second thing John says we are to believe is…

- Believe Jesus is the Son of God – verse 5

To believe that Jesus is the Son of God is synonymous with believing Jesus to be God. In the Gospel of John, it's clear that what Jesus meant by claiming the title "Son of God" was equivalent to being God. For instance, in John 5:17-47, Jesus refers to His work with God the Father. The Jewish leaders wanted to put Him to death because they understood Him to mean that He was equal with God. Jesus doesn't backtrack and say He meant something else. He doubles down and says that He should be honored by people just like God the Father is to be honored by people (John 5:23). That's blasphemy unless it's true. And it's only true if Jesus is God. John says that's a non-negotiable.

To believe in Jesus means that you depend on Him as the only way for you to be right with God the Father and that you entrust your whole life in this world and for eternity to Him as your Savior and your God.

And don't miss this: if you believe in Jesus that way, you are born again**.** Period.

For those of you who may struggle with assurance of your salvation, I just want to encourage you to make this your practice. Don't look back to 20 years ago and try to figure out what happened way back then. Look to Jesus right here and now and ask, "Do I believe that Jesus is the Christ who is God, equal with the Father and the Spirit? Am I depending on His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His glorious resurrection to make me right with God?" If the answer is yes, then take God at His word and believe you have been born again with all the benefits of being a child of God. And that new birth brings about a new kind of life. That's the next evidence of new birth that John mentions.

2. YOU KNOW YOU ARE BORN AGAIN AS YOU DISPLAY FOR LOVE OTHERS

1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

John uses a kind of parallelism in this phrase that essentially directly connects faith in Jesus with loving the God the Father. I believe that's because you can't love God the Father apart from trusting Jesus. To reject Jesus is to reject the Father. Also, if you are born again by the power of God's Spirit, the Spirit produces fruit in you. And the first description of that fruit is love (Galatians 5:22). So, if you don't love God, you don't know Jesus. We'll come back to this idea in just a minute.

But the point John is making is that when you love God, you love everyone who has been born of God. That means you love every other follower of Jesus. We've talked a lot about this in our study of 1 John, but John adds a new facet of teaching in our text.

1 John 5:2
By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

This is one of the tough parts of this passage. It's sounds like the opposite of something John often says. He routinely says our love for others is evidence of our love for God. That's what he just said in verse 1. It's what he said at the end of chapter 4. But here he says that we know we love others when we love God and obey His commandments. What's that mean? Well, I'm not 100% sure, but here's my best attempt. Remember, the love John is describing is "agape." It's the unique love that only comes from God. It's distinct from the other kinds of love that we naturally have in relationship with other people. So, it seems that John is asking, "how can I know if my love for someone is "agape" love and not just the natural love people have who don't know God?" His answer is that agape love compliments your love for God (rather than competing with it) and coincides with His commands.

Let me put this in real life. How do I know if my love for my kids is "agape" love or the kind of love every healthy parent has for their kids? The answer is that my love for my kids should complement my love for God and not compete with my love for God. If I love my kids in a way that would cause me to choose them over God, that's idolatry. But, if my love for my kids stirs my heart to love God more, it's "agape." I've experienced both. There are times when I know my heart would make idols of my kids. But there are also times when I've felt my love for them as their father and immediately turned my heart to God <u>the</u> Father in worship – "God, I cannot understand how you love me even more than this."

The other factor is that "agape" love aligns with what God says. If we neglect to discipline our kids because we "love them so much," we need to know that we aren't loving them with the love of God because God's word calls us to discipline our kids.

And that's true for all our relationships. We don't love people by endorsing or supporting lifestyles that are inherently sinful. It isn't loving to say that homosexuality is ok or that transgender ideology is ok. That's not the love of God because it contradicts what God says is right.

- Is your love for others shaped more by emotion or by God's truth?
- Are there relationships where your "love" for those people actually competes with your love for God – and what would it look like to re-order those loves in your heart?

The love of God aligns with what God says is best in His Word. And that's actually the last thing we see in our text.

3. YOU KNOW YOU ARE BORN AGAIN AS YOU DISPLAY OBEDIENCE TO GOD

1 John 5:3
For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

The final evidence for being born again is obedience to God. John says that's essentially what it means to love God. If you love Him, you will obey Him. Loving God isn't primarily a warm, fuzzy feeling we get. Love for God is what happens when we see God in a way that willingly does what He says. And we know from our study of chapters 1 and 2 that John isn't talking about sinless perfection. He's talking about willing obedience, not perfect obedience. That's what he means by the commandments of God are not burdensome. There's something in our new nature that wants to obey God even though it's a daily battle because our flesh will resist it. But John doesn't leave it at that. Look what he says in verses 4-5.

1 John 5:4
For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

John says that the reason God's commands are not burdensome is because whoever is born of God overcomes the world. The word "overcome" is verb form of the word that's translated "victory" in verse 4. It's the Greek word "nike."

When we are born again, God gives us victory over the world through the work Jesus has accomplished His death and resurrection. So, how does that cause God's commands to not be burdensome for us? Well, remember what the world is. It's the system of this age that is opposed to God and the way He says life works best.

Go back to chapter 2.

1 John 2:16
For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

The world is characterized by the sinful desires of our flesh and pride. Our sinful desires and pride see God's commands as a burden and a hindrance to our joy. For instance, when we hear the command of God to be generous, the sinful desires of our flesh and our pride want to resist that command so we can hoard our money and possessions for ourselves. Or, when we hear the command to forgive those who have sinned against us, the sinful desires of our flesh and our pride want to resist that command so we can take revenge.

But, when we are born again, God places His Spirit within us and gives us new desires. Even more, verse 5 says that the victory over the world is our faith. In other words, by faith we believe God. We believe God knows what He's talking about, that He knows how life works best and He knows what will bring us the greatest joy. We believe that what He says is true so that we begin to see what the world says is a lie. So, we step into obedience because we believe God and we have the power to obey because God's Spirit lives in us empowering our obedience.

It will be a lifelong battle. That's why John uses the language of having to overcome something and live in victory. But the promise here should cause us to rejoice. Christian, you are empowered by God to defeat sin and live in obedience. You don't have to fight for victory; you already have it in

Christ. You can say “no” to sin because Christ has already given you victory over it! You aren’t a slave to your sin. You are a child of God!

Rejoice in Christ and renew your fight against sin by stepping into obedience. It’s your birthright as a child of God.

- Where do you feel the strongest pull from “the world” (desires, pride, approval)?
- Are actively fighting sin from a place of victory - or passively accepting defeat?
- What would it look like for you this week to live as someone who has already overcome through faith?

If you have a desire to obey God and resist sin, that’s evidence that you have been born again. That means you have a spiritual pulse and are alive in Christ.

YOU CAN KNOW YOU HAVE BEEN BORN AGAIN AS YOU DISPLAY FAITH IN JESUS, LOVE FOR OTHERS, AND OBEDIENCE TO GOD.

And I want to close with an invitation to everyone in this room. If you want to live in the supernatural love of God, if you want to experience victory over sin through life-changing obedience, if you want to overcome the temptations of this world, then look to Jesus through faith and receive His forgiveness of sin and His resurrection power to live a brand-new life. We don’t conjure up love and obedience on our own. That’s why we need Jesus. That’s why we need the new life that only comes from Him. And the good news of the gospel is that we don’t just need Jesus, we have Him because God so loved this world that He gave His only Son. And, next week we will see that whoever has the Son has life. So, look to Jesus in faith and live.