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## You Must Be Born Again

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When Jesus told Nicodemus, “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” Nicodemus was confused. “How can a man be born when he is old,” he asked. “He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”

Jesus’s answer in John 3 was conclusive:

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into 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.’”*

Nicodemus’s confusion was understandable. The revolutionary character of the Gospel broke through old traditions and understandings. The new wine of the Gospel could not be contained in the old wineskins. Still, Jesus chided Nicodemus. “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?”

*The New York Times* ran a story on September 26 that provides incredible evidence that there is within the human heart a yearning to be born again. In “[For a Fee, a Thai Temple Offers a Head Start on Rebirth](#),” reporter Seth Mydans tells of a Buddhist temple that “offers, for a small fee, an opportunity to die, rise up again newborn and make a fresh start in life.”

As the paper reports:

*Nine big pink coffins dominate the grand hall of the temple, and every day hundreds of people take their turns climbing in for a few moments as monks chant a dirge. Then, at a command, the visitors clamber out again cleansed — they believe — of the past.*

*It is a renewal for our times, as recent economic hardship brings uncertainty and people try seeking a bailout on life. In growing numbers, they come here from around Thailand to join what has become an assembly line of resurrection.*

The photographs are gripping. Individuals line up to enter coffins, assume a burial posture, and lie briefly under a shroud. Then, they arise and, in some cases, even take on new names. These so-called “funerals for the living” are attracting so much attention in Thailand that a movie, “The Coffin,” is now in Thai cinemas.

More:

*On weekends as many as 700 people a day pay 180 baht each, a little more than \$5, for the ceremony and much more for amulets that are auctioned off by temple acolytes.*

*“We have only 50 of these, a limited edition, the price is up to you!” they cry. “Twenty baht, 50 baht, did I hear 300 baht? Someone has run into luck.” As the number of visitors has grown, their dip into the supernatural has become more perfunctory; now a monk with a bullhorn herds worshipers through the row of coffins, nine at a time.*

*Like Charlie Chaplin on an out-of-control assembly line, they follow the monks’ commands: into the coffin, down on their backs, eyes closed, shroud on, shroud off, up on their feet, quick prayer and scramble out into a new life.*



*The whole process takes a minute and a half. The next group of nine is waiting.*

But that new life is not the rebirth promised by Christ. Instead, those in the area are warned that “bad karma” from “dying” devotees might be remaining around the coffins. They have been warned.

The practice of “funerals for the living” brings Acts 17 to mind, where Paul addressed the philosophers in Athens with the word that people of all nations are “groping” for God [Acts 17:27]. Here we see clear evidence of that truth.

There is a universal human sense that something horrible is wrong with us. This problem is one that is so fundamental that we sense the need to have a new start — a new birth, so to speak.

“When I went in I felt warm, and when I came out I felt released,” said Nual Chaichamni, age 52. According to the article, she has performed the ceremony six times already. “As I lay there and listened to the chanting of the monks, I felt relaxed,” she said. “When I got up, I was thinking of good things, thinking of the Buddha image in the hall. I felt good.”

The transforming power of the Gospel of Christ is so powerful that the new believer is truly “born again.” As the Apostle Paul explains, the old has passed away and all things have become new. The Christian experience of being born again has nothing to do with expunging bad karma, nor is it a ritual that can be put up on offer for sale. It is all of grace, and it brings the forgiveness of sins, life everlasting, and union with Christ — not the gift of good karma.

Jesus Christ did not tell his disciples to be merely observant as those without the Gospel grope toward God. Instead, He sent his disciples — and his church — into the nations in order to preach the Gospel.

We owe a debt of gratitude to *The New York Times* for reminding us of what is at stake.

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The newspaper provides a video of the ceremony [here](#).

