

The nature of the new birth

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[0 : 00] Turn to the Gospel of John chapter 3, reading verse 3. John's Gospel chapter 3 at verse 3. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Now we began last week to look at the new birth or regeneration. And it's a vital and all-important subject to look at. But we must remind ourselves when we are looking at it, in one sense it's not the heart of the Gospel, in that in itself it is not good news.

The Gospel is good news and the Gospel is Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, exalted, able and ready to save. That's the good news.

And yet that cannot become good news to us until we are born again. Except a man be born again, he cannot see, he cannot enter into, he cannot recognize the kingdom of God.

And these words were addressed to Nicodemus, let us remember, a man who was very religious, a man who was a teacher, a man who was a leader amongst the Jews.

[1 : 19] And what Jesus is saying to him is this, the only way you can enter into the blessings which you seek in coming to me is by the rebirth, by the new birth.

And we looked last week at the necessity of this new birth. And we saw the reasons why man needs a new birth, why man needs a rebirth. And the first reason is because man is flesh.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Flesh produces flesh. There's no spiritual life on flesh. It's incapable of producing spiritual life.

That's the first reason. And then the second reason is because man is blind. He cannot see, he cannot recognize the things of the kingdom. He is blind.

His mind is blinded. He's in the dark. That's why he must be born again. And then the third reason was because man is powerless. It's not within his power to save himself.

[2 : 23] We are absolutely dependent upon God's mercy and God's grace and God's power. And so we saw that the new birth is absolutely necessary.

It's absolutely necessary for us. Well, if it's absolutely necessary for us, let us look this week at the nature of the new birth.

It's something that's necessary. Well, what is the nature of this new birth? Well, three things with regard to the new birth. First of all, it's entirely the work of God.

It's entirely God's work. The word translated again, he must be born again. If you have a Bible with a margin, you can see it could also be translated born from above.

The word there could be translated equally well, born from above. In other words, the work is heavenly in origin. It comes from above, this work.

[3 : 27] It doesn't rise from the earth. It is not man produced. It is God produced. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives birth to Spirit.

It's entirely a work of God. And it's a sovereign work of God, we are told. Because Jesus says, The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound of the rock, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goes.

So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. Verse 8. The wind bloweth where it listeth. It bloweth as it pleases. It is God's sovereign work.

It's a free act of God. He's not under any constraints. God is a free agent in a new birth. It's a sovereign work of God.

It's a work from above. It's God coming down. That's what this new birth is. You see, Nicodemus was schooled in the religion of doing.

[4 : 38] All his religion was, it's summed up in what a man does. And that's what he was thinking about all the time. What can man do? Doing, doing, doing was his religion.

And what Jesus is saying to him, well, salvation begins with not doing, but with receiving. Salvation is about receiving.

Salvation begins with something that God does. Not what man does. That's natural religion. That's the flesh. It's always talking about what we can do.

But Christianity starts with what God does. It involves the exercise of divine power and a manifestation of divine love.

God intervenes to give us salvation. And he brings it from above. It's God's work. It's entirely God's work.

[5 : 39] This new birth. This being born again. And therefore, it's a work of God. It's a heavenly work. But then the second thing we are told about it is it's entirely a new start.

It is spoken, first of all, as a new birth. And John is very fond of this concept of a Christian being born of God.

He told us earlier on in his gospel, in chapter 1, verse 12, about those who received Christ. As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

They were born, not of natural descent, not of human decision, not of a husband's will, but of God. They were born of God.

And in his epistle, he develops this theme how Christians are those that are born of God. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.

[6 : 56] And right through his first epistle, he develops this idea that the Christian is a person who has been born of God. And it's not only confined to John, we have it in Peter.

Peter tells us in his first epistle, he has begotten us again into a living hope. He has given us a new birth into a living hope. That's a Christian hope.

We've been born again, he says, and as newborn babes, we are to receive the word. We are to desire the sincere milk of the word.

It's a concept in Peter and also in James. He chose to give us new birth through the word of truth. We have begotten, says James, through the word of truth.

It's a birth. The child is born, the Christian is born, he has a new birth. And therefore, it's a new start.

[7 : 57] Because it's a new birth. It's a new beginning. But then also, it's a new creation. You see, there was a creation at the beginning of time.

And now there's another creation. A creation for a new age. There was a creation for the first age. And now there's a creation for the second age.

And the very New Testament word for regeneration is palingenesis. another genesis. Or a second genesis. And Jesus, speaking to his disciples in Matthew 19, verse 28, says, At the regeneration of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you also will sit on thrones.

And what he's saying there is, when everything has been completed, when the whole work has been finished, it will be called a regeneration. because not only will man be regenerated, but the heavens and the earth will be regenerated.

It's a new creation. It's a recreation. It's a work of regeneration. A new creation. And Paul, in writing to Titus, says that he, according to his mercy, has saved us house with the washing of regeneration.

[9 : 20] The same word. A new beginning. A new creation. And Paul, faith emphatically, at the end of Galatians, he's all stirred up within him because of that controversy at Galatia.

The controversy that was dogging a church at Galatia. People saying that you needed to be circumcised. That you needed to do the works of the flesh to please God. Well, what Paul says at the end of that epistle, neither circumcision means anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. That's what matters. Forget everything else. Everything else is insignificant in comparison with this. What matters is, are you a new creature?

Are you a new creation? If any man, he says right into the Corinthians, be in Christ, he is a new creation. You can't be in Christ without being a new creation.

An effort, it's a work of new creation. And the emphasis is upon this magnitude of what God is doing. He made a creation at first and people go out perhaps today and they'll wonder in that creation, they'll marvel at it, they'll look at the beauty of it, but they never think about the new creation that God is making.

[10:42] The new creation that he's making in the hearts of his people and one day will make throughout this world. The magnitude of the work which God is doing is making a new creation.

An effort, it's a new creation. But then also, it's a resurrection. it's not only a birth, it's not only a creation, but it's a resurrection.

And this is the beauty of this, you see, because the first creation was made out of nothing. The first creation was made out of chaos. But the second creation is made out of its very opposite.

It's made out of death. Life is made out of death. An effort, it's a more wonderful creation than the first. The first creation was made out of nothing.

But the second creation, the new creation, is made out of death. He brings us from death into life. You as he quickened are made alive, says Paul, who are dead in trespasses and sins.

[11:47] And he gives us new life. And he works it out there in Romans chapter 6, that we are dead to sin and alive to God because of this work that God has done.

It's a resurrection. That's what it is. It's a new start in every way because it's a new birth, it's a new creation, and indeed it's a resurrection.

It's the inception of a new state of things. And therefore, it's a new start. And then the third thing about it is, it's entirely transforming.

The transforming power of this change is total. It's a new principle of life within us. It's a new life. Just as in that babe that is born, it's tiniest babe, all the members of the babe, all the members of the body are there.

All that will eventually be the man or the woman is in that tiny babe. No matter how small he or she may be. It's got everything potentially that will make it a man or a woman.

[13:01] And you see, that's what the new birth is. John uses the perfect tense to denote the decisive, completed character of regeneration.

Like natural birth, if it has happened at all, it has happened completely. You can't be half-born. one is reborn. And from then one is spiritually alive.

You can't be half and half. There's no halfway house. And just as in the natural birth if a baby is alive, he or she is crying and sucking and moving and so on.

And we know the babe is alive. So in the spiritual birth, there will be evidence that the person is alive. And I'll mention three this morning.

And the first is that the mind is illuminated. This is the first thing that you know of a person who is born again. Once I was blind, now I see.

[14:05] I recognize the kingdom of God. I see the kingdom of God. If there's been a powerful change, if it's been a sudden change, perhaps you're inclined to say when that change comes, how didn't I see this before?

Everything is so clear now. I just can't understand how I didn't see it before. It's all so clear to me now. And you're amazed at the change that has taken place.

And you see it's a dawning of light. And it's exactly what God is doing as he tells us, as Paul tells us, the God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

You see, it's a new creation. And as the old creation had at its beginning light. So the new creation had at its beginning light.

God creates light. God creates light in the soul. And so there's this illumination of the mind. That's the first evidence we know that we are born again.

[15:23] You see, you're convinced today if you are born again of the reality of these things.

You're convinced that the way of the world is just a way of emptiness and vanity and whistling in the dark and having a fling while it can.

That's what you're convinced of. And on the other hand, you're convinced that God is real, that Christ is living, that the serving him is the only true way of life, that the people of God are the happiest people on earth.

You see, you've been enlightened, you've been illuminated, you've got a new perspective on life.

You see that you've been wrong before. All things have become new.

And there's this divine illumination, there's this divine light that has come into the soul and has changed your thinking, has changed your attitude to everything.

You're born again. You have a new understanding of these things. There's this change in the mind. But then a second change in that the heart is purified.

[16 : 31] The heart is purified. We read in Ezekiel chapter 36 the promise to Israel about the new covenant that God was going to make with them. I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you will be clean.

I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give a new heart and put a new spirit in you. And that's the new covenant.

That's the New Testament blessing. That's what it means. And this is what we experience. And we believe that this is a reference that Jesus had here to a person being born of water and of the spirit. What does it mean in verse 5 except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Well water is the symbol of purification.

And therefore we are purified. We are washed with water. We need to be purified. Some of you say Paul writing to the Corinthians were idolaters and adulterers and fornicators and so on.

[17 : 40] Such were some of you that you are washed that you are sanctified. Your hearts have been purified. It was like a cage of unclean birds.

It was centered on self and self-worship and self-pleasing and so on. These were all the evils in your heart. But you have been washed.

You have been cleansed. You have been given new desires. You have been given a taste for new things. You desire the worship of God. You desire to feed the new word of God.

You desire to love his son. You desire to meet with his people. And it's been a change. The heart has been purified of its idols and of its uncleanness.

And it's a change. Now that change is not perfect. You may sometimes wonder if you have been changed. There's so much evil in your heart. But the general trend is that you're overcoming these things and your desire is for the other things, for the new things.

[18 : 45] The heart has been purified. There's been a change at the temperature of your being. There's a change in affection. There's a change in desire. It may be weak in the case of some.

It may not be that noticeable. It may not be that strong. And yet it is there. There's a change in the heart. And the heart has new affections.

And then the third thing that will be seen and that is the will is redirected. Because there's an internal motivation to good.

The steps are now directed in the way of righteousness. The one born of God, says John in the epistle, does not go on sinning.

And what he means is not that we don't fall into sin, but we don't go on deliberately sinning. Everyone who does righteousness is born of God.

[19 : 42] And what he's saying is the general trend of your life from now on will be a doing of righteousness and an avoiding of sin. That will be the direction of your life.

The will that will be redirected. You'll be making decisions against sin, and you'll be making decisions for righteousness and for truth.

You'll be running up, running away from sin instead of running after sin. The life is set on a new course. The will is now inclined to go in the way of godliness because there's a motivation within.

And the will has been motivated to good. And the will has been directed to good. And the steps are going in the path of righteousness. And that's the change.

And that's the evidence that there's new life. That's the evidence that there's new birth. And as we said, there is no spiritual activity without regeneration.

[20 : 48] But then there's the other thing. There's no regeneration without spiritual activity. Because when there's regeneration, there'll be life.

When there's regeneration, there'll be spiritual activity. The change is so radical and so brave that it must reveal itself sooner or later.

It cannot be doubted whether a person is alive or dead. In normal circumstances, we know whether a person is alive or dead. And therefore, we'll know whether a person has been born again.

And there's evidence flowing from it. These evidences that we are being born again. And you see, there's no halfway house. And this is so evident in what our Lord is saying to Nicodemus here.

You're either born of the flesh or you're born of the spirit. There's no halfway house. You can't be in between. being. This is the solemn thing that you can't be in between.

[21 : 55] Oh, you may be in doubt as to your regeneration. And lots of people are in doubt as to their regeneration. They don't come to a consciousness of it, perhaps for years.

We're not disputing that. But what we're saying is you can't be in a halfway house. You're either in the one or in the other. And that's the solemn truth.

You see, the religious Jews in that passage we read in John chapter 8, they claimed Abram for their father and they thought they were all right. And what did Jesus say to them?

Jesus, the meek and mild Jesus says to them, you belong to your father the devil. You see, that's the choice. God is our father or the devil is our father.

There was Judas, the religious Judas, one of the disciples, have not I chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil. The words of Jesus and the words of John later on in his epistle, he that committeth sin is not the devil.

[23 : 00] You belong to the devil. And the choice is either belonging to God or belonging to the devil. Now I'm sure many of us have been alarmed in recent days by the revelations that we've been seeing in our newspapers about thirty thousand Satanists, thirty thousand devil worshippers in this country, people who are bent on evil, God is their enemy, Satan is their friend, Satan is the son of God, taking part in terrible acts in Islam.

Right throughout the land we have these people, the power of evil that's in Islam, the power of wickedness and so much of it's hidden, but it's there and it's a powerful thing.

Now the thing that we ask you is, which side are you on? Which side are you on today? Are you on the side of that? Oh well, you say we haven't gone to these extremes.

That's not the question. Are you on the side of these people? Are you on the side of Satan? That's the question. Let's put it another way.

If you can't answer that question, are you on the side of God? Are you on God's side today? Is God your father? Is Christ your savior?

[24 : 24] Can you say you're on God's side? Because you see there's no neutrality. There's no neutrality in the New Testament. You're either on God's side or on the devil's side.

You're of your father the devil or you're of your father God. And you see it's a day for decision. It's a day for coming out. It's a day for declaring whose side you are on.

Oh, you may have your doubts. You may have your fears. But surely you're deciding if you've been born of the spirit. If you've been born again to declare yourself on the side of God.

The days are too evil to do anything else. To think that for one moment longer you'd associate with sin and Satan and all the powers of darkness rather than come out on the side of Christ and on the side of God and declare yourself that this new birth has taken place.

That you have these new desires. That you have these new longings in your heart to be conformed to Christ and to conform to God.

[25 : 35] Well, that's the question you've got to ask yourself today. Have you been born again? And if you have been, then declare it for God's glory and for your own good.

We address a meditation on his word.

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