

The new birth

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[0 : 00] We turn to a reading in John's Gospel, chapter 3, and reading again at verse 3. John chapter 3, verse 3.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except the man be born again, who canst thee the kingdom of God. Now we're living in abnormal times.

And perhaps when I say that, many of you think that I'm referring to the international situation in the world today, or even to the national situation, to the national scene.

But when I say that we're living in abnormal times, I'm referring to something quite different. We are living in abnormal times today because the multitude of people around us, and in our midst, are in a deep spiritual slumber.

They are careless with regard to their souls, they're indifferent to the claimant of God, they are formal in their religious exercises, they are perunctory in their duties, and they're at peace in the world.

[1 : 15] That's the situation, the abnormal situation we have today. And why is it an abnormal situation?

Well, it's an abnormal situation because that kind of attitude is not in keeping with reality. This situation is not in keeping with reality.

The reality is that because God is God, and we are sinners, condemned and under the wrath of God, with hell ready to devour us, we should be alarmed, we should be awakened, we should be concerned, concerned, spiritual need should be the absorbing and pressing concern of our souls. That's in keeping with reality. But you see, the situation is not like that. And although we have churches with a good degree of liveliness, with sound teaching, with warm fellowship, and so on, we lack this.

We lack this. We lack the sense of God. We lack people, as our forefather used to say, who are far bend with God.

[2 : 33] Where do you find the people today who are far bend with God? Who have a sense of God upon them and about them. We lack conviction of sin.

We lack concern about the wrath to come. We lack the fear of God. And that's why we're in an abnormal situation. Because our situation does not correspond to the reality of spiritual and eternal things.

Well, the question then is, how is the situation going to be changed? How is the situation going to be changed? Well, ultimately, only by the Spirit of God poured out upon us.

We know that ultimately that will be the thing that will bring the change. When the Lord Jesus Christ promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples, he said, when he is come, he will reprove or convict the world of sin.

That's the first thing he's going to do. He's going to convict the world of sin. And when he came at Pentecost, that's what happened.

[3 : 48] When the people heard the gospel preached by Peter, they were cut to the heart with conviction, with a realization of their needs.

And in all the times of true revival that we had in Scotland and Kirk of Shots and Tambyslum and Salcite and wherever the Spirit came, that was the first sign of the Spirit's work.

A great conviction of sin. In the great awakening in England under Wesley and Whitfield, a great conviction of sin. Under Edwards in America, a great conviction of sin.

That's how they knew that revival had begun. That's how they knew that revival had come into their midst. Because people were stricken down with conviction of sin.

And so therefore, if we are interested in these things, we should be praying above all for the coming of the Holy Spirit. How earnest are we in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit?

[4 : 52] If it's the Holy Spirit who's going to bring conviction and bring us to a sense of reality, a situation that's in keeping with the reality that is behind everything or is outward, it's the Spirit of God that we need to pray for.

And we need to pray earnestly. But we must also remember that the Holy Spirit uses me. He uses the word. It was the word he used on the day of Pentecost.

Peter quotes large portions from the Old Testament and applied them to the people who were listening to him. Because you see, preaching is a means of grace.

It pleased God by the foolishness of the same preach to save them that believe. As if it was the preaching or the message that saved them.

But you see, God uses means and so it's his Holy Spirit that does it. The means he uses is the preaching of the gospel. But then there's another thing that Scripture tells us and that is that he uses men because Paul is speaking about his conversion in Acts and his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road.

[6 : 07] And this is what Christ said to him. I'm sending me to the Gentiles, he says, and I am sending you to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

As if Paul had the capability to do that. And yet that's what was happening. Jesus was sending Paul to the Gentiles to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan and to God.

Why? Because God is a God of means. He uses the means that he has appointed to do these things. And what we need today is not only to pray for the Holy Spirit but we need the restoration of faith in the means we already have.

And that's a great conviction we need to realize today. What we need is a restoration of faith in the means we already have. You know there's so many books today on the methods of evangelism. And if you looked at them all you'd be completely baffled. In our training day for the Highlands and virus in church yesterday we had a table half the width of the church in church full of books on evangelism and methods of evangelism.

[7 : 27] And if you read them all in the end you'd be completely baffled. You'd be like the Kirkuk who did things naturally but then when he tried to follow the rules he got all mixed up.

And that's exactly what could happen because there's so many different ideas about evangelism today. And what's needed is a restoration of faith in the means that God has appointed the old past the old means the old truth preceptive in modern language in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. That's what God is going to use when he comes again to bless his church and his people. And therefore it's not new message we need but restoration of faith in the old method.

In the old method that God has used throughout the centuries. And when men and women are awakened to a sense of their sins one of the things they realize is there need to be converted. And that word is repeated over and over and over again in the Acts of the Apostles. Repent and be converted to turn from one direction to another.

[8 : 39] the Thessalonians turned to God some idols to serve the living and true God. And it's turning from sin to God it's turning in repentance and this turning to God is a turning in faith.

And so conversion is a change of direction. It's a change of direction a turning round and going in another direction. And that's not a popular concept today.

It's being played down in the church. People don't like to think that they need to be conversing and turned about. And if they do they think they can do it themselves.

That it's been within their power to be converted and to turn round and to face the other way. But you see what the Bible states is that if you're going to be converted there's something else needed and that is that you must be regenerated before you can be converted.

And regeneration or the new birth goes before conversion. conversion is a human act of turning some sin to God. But in order to turn some sin to God you need the divine act which is regeneration.

[9 : 56] God has to give you new life. That's just the solemn truth that we've got to save. Yet if we're going to be saved God has to do something.

If we're going to get to heaven God must do something in our hearts. And it's no use that saying that this is something rare. This is something that God is going to do and therefore I can't attain to that.

In the meantime I'll just be religious. I'll come to church. I'll keep the Sabbath day. I'll read my Bible. It's easy to say that. But no matter how much we say of that it always comes back to this.

You must be born again. Except the man be born again. we cannot see the kingdom of God. And that's the ultimate we have to face.

And you see this man Nicodemus he's an excellent illustration of this. Because he was a religious man. He was a Pharisee and therefore he was intensely religious.

[11:02] He was a moral man. He was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He was one of the leading teachers of his day. Jesus said of him he was Israel's teacher.

He spent his time studying and teaching religion. Perhaps he was the best theologian of his day. And he recognized Jesus as a teacher comes from God.

And he would like to have engaged in debate and discussion with Jesus. And he was ready to enter into debate and discussion. But before he does so you see Jesus lays the axe to the root of the tree.

he cuts across his line of thought and he goes straight to the root of the matter and he says verily verily I say unto thee except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

and he cuts them short because he makes them realize that without this everything else is in vain. You cannot enter into these blessings Nicodemus that you come to me for.

[12:07] There's no way to enter into them except by the rebirth. You need to be born again. You need to have this new life come about.

You need to be saved in this way. And what applies to Nicodemus applies to us all. Applies to every person born into this world.

And why is that? Well, why is it necessary to be born again? Jesus gives us three answers here. He gives three answers to Nicodemus. And the first answer is because man is flesh.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That's the first reason why you must be born again. The flesh gives birth to flesh.

Human nature is powerless to produce spiritual life and reality. And flesh here means fallen human nature. Sin you see led to spiritual death in the case of Adam.

[13:10] And we read it, Adam's children were born in his own likeness and in his own image. And all his descendants were born in his likeness and in his image.

You see, fallen human nature can only produce its own likeness. It only produces fallen human nature. And fallen human nature cannot act spiritually.

If you like, man is spiritually still born. What a sad thing is a still birth in a natural sphere. It's a sad thing.

But that's exactly man's condition. He's still born because he's born dead. He's born spiritually dead and without life.

And what can a dead man do to bring life to himself? Nothing. He cannot bring life to himself. Born a sinner always a sinner.

[14:14] Born spiritually dead, spiritually dead he will remain except a man be born again. He's flesh and he produces flesh.

He has no spiritual vitality. He has no spiritual life. All he's got is flesh and not produces flesh. And that's the first reason.

And the second reason is man cannot see. Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. You see what he means here is to recognize or to appreciate or to understand the significance of.

Nicodemus could not understand. How can a man he says be born when he is old can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?

He had no understanding of what our Lord was saying. And then later on he says how can these things be? He had no understanding recognition or appreciation of what our Lord was saying.

[15:21] And you see there was this blindness in his mind and he was shrouded in darkness. There was not only darkness within him but he was surrounded with darkness.

Nicodemus was in the dark. Man by nature is in the dark. As our Lord says later on in this very chapter this is the condemnation that light is coming to the world and men love darkness rather than

light because their deeds were evil.

For everyone that doeth evil statheth a light neither cometh to light that his deed should be reprov'd but he that doeth soon cometh his life that his deeds may manifest that they are wrought of God. Man by nature is in the dark and he hides from the light that's what our Lord is saying they are in darkness says Paul in writing for these the Gentiles are in darkness and they do the deeds of darkness they belong to the kingdom of darkness and are under its sway the God of this world has blinded their minds so they don't see these things and the glory of the gospel is this that the God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness shines into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and a divine calling is a calling out of darkness into life and this is why we've got to be born again we cannot recognize what is wrong we cannot appreciate the kingdom of God Nicodemus thought he was a man who could see and he was living in the light and

Jesus tells him he's a blind man and he's living in the darkness that's his condition that's his position and very often as in the case of Nicodemus it's the most religious people that you find in this condition the most religious people are those who cannot understand that you've got to be born again I have a printer friend in England and he belongs to the church of England and a very upright and moral man he is and recently he was visiting some of my colleagues in Edinburgh and this man thought he would witness to him and tell him that he had heard a sermon the other night and that this sermon was about hell and about the need to be born again and when this man was telling me afterwards about what this person was saying to him he got things completely the wrong way just to show you the darkness of the natural man he thought that this man who was witnessing to him himself was confessing to the fact that he wasn't sure that he was born again and this man said to me oh well

[18:18] I tried to reassure him I said to him there's no need for you to worry as long as you're born once and you're a good moral upright fellow you'll be alright but you see that's the darkness of a natural mind the darkness that's in a natural heart man cannot see it unless he is awakened by the power of God so therefore you must be born again and then the third reason is because man is powerless he cannot see the kingdom of God he hasn't but the power to see the kingdom of God you see he can't revive himself he can't throw water on himself he can't breathe life into himself that's the problem with man he can't do it himself and of course that's the truth that's greatly suppressed in modern evangelism today you see the great emphasis in modern evangelism is on the acceptance of the message otherwise why preach you appeal to man you tell man it's in his self interest to believe in Jesus you'll be happy if you'll believe in Jesus you'll get to heaven if you believe in Jesus and he flatters man to think that he can make a response to the gospel and a man responds without being convicted of sin without being humble before God without lying in the dust before the almighty and you bring him into the church and he's in the church in that condition and then you've got to make him happy and you've got to keep him going and then you wonder why people become worldly and why marriages break up and so on within the church and why people go off the rails and so on it's because people haven't been humbled and brought to conviction of sin before they have been brought to

Christ you see man they try to tell them that they can believe and at then they will be reborn and it was in their own power to do it but the message of the gospel is this that you're a sinner that you are lost without holiness no man shall see the Lord and when you become convicted of it of your sinful nature then you're told that there's a divine remedy there's a divine remedy that not only saves you from the guilt of sin but also from the power of sin I can't do it but God can do it and because God can do it I must cry mightily to God because it's God's work then I must come completely to depend upon him yes I'm lost I'm undone but it's a gospel that tells me that undone sinners can be reborn by the power of God and what the youth people say of preaching to dead sinners but remember this that's exactly what has been done in the gospel we're preaching the word of life when you see you saw that valley full of dead bones he says can these bones live Lord thou Lord and you see we're preaching life to dead sinners that it's God that is performing the miracle he speaks and listening to his voice new life the dead receive we're living in an area and working in an area where God is working on miracles and bringing dead people to life and he's doing it through the word and he's doing it through preachers and that's the hope of the gospel we don't flatter men into believing they can do it themselves otherwise they're going to be deceived all their lives we tell them they cannot do it and yet they're under obligation to do it and as they hear

the gospel by the blessing of God and by the spirit of God they come to life the spirit convicts of sin and humbles the sinner it makes them realize that he cannot get to heaven in an unconverted state and when he sees that he goes to God he seeks the Lord it becomes the dull absorbing and pressing concern to get into that kingdom to be delivered from his sin this is the great concern of his soul and he seeks the Lord who seeks him with all his might and that's what we are to seek for we are to realize that we are lost and we are helpless that there's a divine remedy in the gospel and we are to listen to that divine remedy we are to seek that salvation that God has provided we are to realize that he is able to save us and that he saves us completely and when we are humbled before him when we are in the dust before him he raises us from the dust he raises the poor from the dust and the beggars from the downhills and he sets them upon with the princes even the princes of his people and so when conviction comes our great remedy is in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that's where the remedy lies and we've got to listen to that gospel we've got to seek that saviour we've got to go after him we've got to go after him like this we've got to be loved in the song of Solomon when she sought her lover by night on my bed I sought him and she didn't find him what did she do I get up and go about the city and about the street I'll go out to the means of grace and I'll seek him there and the watchman found me in the streets of the city and they say have you seen him I said have you seen him who my soul is and this is the pursuit of the soul after Christ and it's that pursuit that will go on until it finds that Christ and that for the soul will be using the means of grace every opportunity to seek Christ in the means of grace every opportunity in public and private to seek after that Christ and that salvation when this conviction of sin and a realisation of our need comes and we'll find it in the gospel that's the only remedy except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God but you see God is doing it and he's doing it through the means of grace and he's doing it as the gospel is preached and he's doing a complete renovation he's giving a new birth he's giving an entirely new nature and that's the answer to the problem of sin and nothing short of that and if we stop short of that we're deceiving ourselves and we're deceiving the people because it's only a new birth that will count in the end have you got that new birth today do you know that new life come about have you been changed because of this new life that's the question will it not speak it with all your heart make this the all absorbing concern of your soul and of your life and give yourself no rest until you find Christ the saviour you