

Place: Lurgan Baptist 2:11:2003

Readings: 1 Peter 1:13-25 James 1:16-18

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

7. THE MIRACLE OF THE NEW BIRTH

A famous evangelist was seated at a welcoming dinner in his honour attended by the civic, business, religious and political leaders of the eastern nation that had invited him to hold an evangelistic campaign. The man next to the evangelist was the archbishop of that country. During the course of conversation, the visiting preacher asked the archbishop when he had become a Christian. The man's eyes glistened with emotion as he put down his fork and proceeded to tell the preacher his story. He had already been installed as the archbishop in his country when he was invited to the city of Chicago to give a lecture in a prominent theological school. He accepted the invitation and found himself in the heat of Chicago. One afternoon, in his effort to do some sightseeing, he boarded a city bus. *No sooner had he taken his seat when a big black finger tapped him on the shoulder.* He turned to look into the full, round ebony face of an obviously poor woman seated behind him. In a wonderfully rich voice, she asked, "*Mister, has you ever been born again ?*" He frowned, thinking for sure he had misunderstood the question since English was his second language. With polite reserve, he asked, "*Excuse me ?*" The deep rolling voice repeated, "*I says, has you been born again ?*" The archbishop stiffened his neck, straightened his shoulders and replied with the greatest dignity, "*My dear madam, I am the archbishop of the church in my country. I am here to give a lecture at the theological seminary.*" As the bus rolled to a stop, the woman rose to get off. She looked at the proud, religious man dressed in his flowing robes bearing the bejewelled insignia of his office and persisted bluntly, "*Mister, that ain't what I asked you. I asked you, has you been born again ?*" Then she turned and walked off the bus and out off his life.

But, the archbishop said her words rang in her ears and burned in his soul. He went back to his hotel room, located a Gideon Bible in a drawer, opened it to the Gospel of John, and read the familiar story of Nicodemus. With increasing clarity and conviction, he knew that even with all of his religious training and devotion and service and recognition, he had never been born again. So he slipped down on his knees, and that night, in a Chicago hotel room, thousands of miles from his home, God answered the cry of his soul and he was born again of the Spirit of God. Can I ask you this simple, personal question, *have you been born again ?* If not then you are not a member of God's family. You may be religious, you may be sincere, you may be a churchgoer, you may be a preacher, a Sunday School teacher, a choir-member, you may be a member of this church or some other church, but unless you have been born again you are not ready for eternity. This is the only starting place of the Christian life. The Lord Jesus said, "*Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" (Jn 3:3) You see, all need this new birth and the people to whom James penned this letter had experienced this new birth.

Do you see how he puts it in (1:18) ? In relation to the miracle of the new birth we can say, all need it, they had it: God did it ! For having dealt with many gifts in (1:17) James now deals with one gift in (1:18) In (1:17) we see God as the Giver of Benefits, but in (1:18) we see God as the Giver of Birth. For the crowning proof of God's perfect goodness is the new birth. So this I want to talk to you on, " *The Miracle of the New Birth.* " James tells us three things about it here.

(1) THE INSTIGATOR OF THE NEW BIRTH

Now there are some who believe that James taught a theology that was opposite to Paul's. They say that the Book of James is an epistle of straw that promotes salvation by works. But nothing could be further from the truth, for before James ever talked about works he made sure that we knew that salvation is in Christ alone.

Do you see how he puts it ? " *Of His own will begat he us* " The Amplified Bible puts it like this, " *And it was of His own free will that He gave us birth as sons.* "

Now that " *begat,* " is the same word as is used in

(1:15) and translated " *bring forth.* " Sin brings forth death, but God brings forth life. God is the instigator of the new birth. For this new birth is divine. Do you recall what Nicodemus thought ? He thought that he had to

re-enter his mother's womb to be born again, but he was wrong, for this birth is not of the flesh, its from above.

It's the work of God. Just as we did not generate our own physical birth, so we cannot generate our own spiritual birth. When we put our faith in Christ it was God who performed the miracle. You see, this new birth was brought about:

(a) BY GOD'S PLEASURE:

" *Of His own will,* " (1:18) If you were asked the question, " *why did God create man ?* " I wonder what your response would be ! It seems to me that the Bible answers that question in (Rev 4:11) where we read,

" *Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power, for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.* " The words, " *For Thy pleasure,* " could literally be translated " *by Thy will.* " You see, these two thoughts are inseparably intertwined. God created man for His pleasure, it was by His will. It pleased Him to do so. Now if that is why God created man, why does God recreate man ?

What is the reason behind a man's new birth ? James says, " *of His own will begat He us.* " This was something God Himself decided upon. He did not act under pressure from us or others. He took no-one into His confidence, nor did He seek advice on the point. The new birth, was for His pleasure. It was by His will.

Not our merits or deserts, not our rights or efforts, but His Sovereign will. Oh, wondrous grace ! (a)

(b) BY GOD'S POWER:

Listen again, “ *And it was of His own free will that He gave us birth.* ” My God did it, for we could never accomplish it for ourselves however hard we tried. It must be, can only be His doing and power. This new life had its origin with God. God gave us birth. Now is the Scripture not replete with this truth ? Do you remember what Jonah says ? “ *Salvation is of the Lord.* ”

(Jonah 2:9) The Lord Jesus says, “ *the wind bloweth where it listeth* ” (Jn 3:8) John speaking of this new birth says, it is “ *not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* ” (Jn 1:13) That is to say it is not of human descent, it is not of human desire, it is not of human determination. You see, no-one can be born again because of his relatives, his resolutions or his religion. This new birth is the work of God. Paul says the same thing, “ *And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.* ”

(Eph 2:1) My this is the act of God by which new life is imparted to a person who trusts Christ as his Saviour. (a) (b)

(c) BY GOD’S PURPOSE:

For in eternity, God purposed to “ *take out a people for His name,* ” and make them like His Son. (Acts 15:14 Rom 8:29) So in time God is only continuing what He commenced in eternity. Now when you and I think about our conversion our mind naturally centres around a moment of decision, of response, of faith and of commitment. But the whole truth goes far deeper than that. The whole truth that although the our New Birth happened in a moment of time it was actually set in motion by God before time began. Do you recall what Jeremiah recorded ? God says Jeremiah, “ *Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.* ” (Jer 1:5) Do you see how far the issue goes back ? “ *Before I formed thee.* ” But we can go even further back than that, for Paul says, “ *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.* ” (2 Thes 2:13) Sure, there was a moment of faith, and of commitment, but that was the outworking of God’s eternal purpose before time began.

Paul underscores this truth when he says, “ *according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.* ” (Eph 1:4) Charles Spurgeon said, “ *he was glad that God chose Him before he was born because had he been born God would never have chosen him.* ” My here is a truth beyond our understanding ! *Election is a mystery in our comprehension, but it is a blessing in our apprehension.* Its one of those family truths that we are taught in the Bible that we cannot fully understand yet because God teaches it, we accept it and we are blessed because of it. Think of it, we are an elect people, a chosen people. In other words, God decided Himself that before you were born He was going to save you ! Do you know what this mean ? It means that you can take no credit for your salvation.

My if you’re saved all you can brag about is the wondrous grace of God. You did not earn it, deserve it, it came as an act of the sovereign grace of God. He chose you before you were born to be His child. You say, “ *preacher do you understand that ?* ” No, but I don’t have to understand everything to enjoy it. Do you understand electricity ? How, when you put the switch on, light fills the room ? Do you understand it ?

Do you understand how that a brown cow eat green grass, give white milk and yellow butter ? My don't worry about the things you don't understand in the Bible. Enjoy them ! Think of it, we were loved then, we are loved now, we shall be loved hereafter.

(2 Thes 2:13) God had His eye on you back in eternity.

As far as God the Father is concerned I was saved when He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world. As far as God the Son is concerned I was saved when He died for me at Calvary. As far as God the Holy Spirit is concerned I was saved one Sunday Night when as lad of nine years of age I heard the gospel and trusted Christ at my fathers knee ! At that moment the entire plan of salvation came together and I became His child.

“ Of His own will begat He us, ” (1)

(2) THE INSTRUMENT OF THE NEW BIRTH

“ Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth, ”

Or, *“ He gave us His birth by His Word of Truth. ”* Paul reminds the Ephesian believers that their faith in Christ came *“ after that ye heard the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation. ”* (Eph 1:13 Col 1:5) You see, the Word of God is the instrument that God uses to bring about the miracle of the new birth. Do you ever think about

(a) THE POWER OF THIS WORD:

In the prophecy of Jeremiah God says to the prophet,

“ Because ye speak this word, behold I will make My words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them, ” burning up all that cannot stand in the presence of God. Now does that not encourage you in you are a S.S. teacher, a preacher, a youth leader ?

“ My words thy mouth fire. ” I tell you, gimmicks may produce interest but only God's Word can ignite.

“ Is not my Word like as a fire ? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces. ”

(Jer 23:29) It smashes down man's futile rebellion against His maker. *“ For the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. ”*

(Heb 4:12) Ted Sherwood, an ex-welterweight champion boxer one night found himself among the throngs at Hyde Park. Disgusted at so many people listening to much verbal trash, he decided that he must attract as much of the crowd as possible away from the various meetings, so that he could preach to them the gospel that transformed his life. Tugging at his Bible, he took it from his pocket and sat it on the ground. Taking his coat he placed it over the Bible. Then he started to jump around the coast shouting in consternation, *“ Its alive ! Its alive. ”* The crowd ran from the other meetings to see what was happening and when Ted had a large congregation he lifted up his Bible and shouted, *“ Its alive, its alive. ”*

He then told them how that Book found him dead in the graveyard of pollution, and how it imparted new life to Ted Sherwood, the debauched and drunken boxer. My do you believe this Book is a living book ? Do you believe it has the power to convict of sin ? (Acts 2:37) To

regenerate the heart ? (1 Pet 1:23) To produce
faith ? (Rom 10:17) (a) What about:

(b) THE PLACE OF THIS WORD:

Have we got away from the Centrality of the Word of God ? Of the early believers we read, “*they gave themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.*”

(Acts 6:4) As a Christian what are you giving yourself

to ? You say, “*why I am giving myself to sport, to exercise, to education, to television, to making money.*”

Tell me, what place does this Book have in your life ?

How much time have you given to the Word of Truth in this past week ? Brethren, can I prick your conscience this ! Why is it that we never hear you at the Table ?

Is it because you have not spend time in this Book ? Is God’s Word being crowded out of your life ? My is this not what is happening in different places around the country ? *They have now got to the place where they have to evacuate the message in order to accommodate the method.* Listen, in any work you seek to do for the Master unless the Word of God is there, unless that work has the genuine ring of “*thus saith the Lord,*” the Lord will never bless it. You see, “*faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*” (Rom 10:17) (a)(b)

(c) THE PROPAGATION OF THIS WORD:

For surely if the Word of God is the instrument that God uses to bring about the new birth, then we’ve got to get the Word out ! My what are we doing with the good seed of God’s Word ?

Are you hoarding it or spreading

it ? Are you taking that good seed of God’s Word and scattering it far and wide ? “*Of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth,*” (1) (2) but look at:

(3) THE INTENTION OF THE NEW BIRTH

“*That we should be creatures,*” (1:18) Is this not the purpose for which we have been brought to spiritual life ? “*That we should be creatures,*” I wonder did James mean by this that believers of the apostolic age where the “*first-fruits,*” the first part of a vast harvest of redeemed people. (Rom 16:5 1 Cor 15:20) Maybe he meant that they were to be an example of what all subsequent gleanings were to be. The word “*first fruits,*” is the key word here, it unlocks the idea of

(a) DIGNITY:

Now James is writing to Jewish believers and the word

“*first fruits,*” would be meaningful to them. In Israel the “*first fruits* of the harvest were presented to God.

(Lev 23:9-14 Deut 26:1) The worshipper was simply acknowledging that it all came from

God, and therefore it all belonged to God. The “*first fruits,*” were the Lord’s portion. My do you know what the new birth does ? It makes us God’s children. You see, the purpose of the new birth is that we should be God’s very own people. Paul says that the Lord Jesus “*gave Himself for us, that He redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*”

(Titus 2:14) Thomas Manton says, “*the world are His goods but you are His treasure.*” What a dignity. My we may be pilgrims on earth but we’re not tramps. We’re God’s special people and that gives us great dignity. But along with dignity there comes:

(b) DUTY:

For just as no-one on earth could have a greater privilege than to be called and chosen to be a child of God so no people on earth have greater responsibilities than Christians. My we are the Lord’s first fruits, His portion, we belong exclusively to Him and that brings with it great responsibility. For as God’s special people, we ought to have:

1. GRATEFUL HEARTS:

You see, the O.T. Jews brought the first fruits to the Lord as the expression of their devotion, obedience, and thankfulness. (Prov 3:9) And my ought we not to be grateful ? We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, before there was any kind of leaning toward the Lord, before any desire for the Word of God, before any kind of prayer for us or by us, before any of those things God chose us in Christ. My does that not bring gratitude to your heart ? 1.

2. GODLY LIVES:

There is a lovely little phrase in (Jer 2:3) which says,
“*Israel was holiness unto the Lord, the first fruits of His increase.*” You see the two go together. God has chosen me, called me, saved me, secured me eternally. Should that not bring gratitude of heart, godliness of life ! For those whom God Chooses, He Changes. Now let me ask you. Do you claim to be of God’s elect ? Do you profess to be one of God’s special people ? Well, is your life changed ? Are you marked by gratitude of heart and godliness of life ? (Eph 1:6)

**“ On such love, my soul still ponder
Love so great, so rich, so free
Say, while lost in holy wonder
Why, O Lord such love to me
Hallelujah, Hallelujah,**

***Grace shall reign eternally.*”**