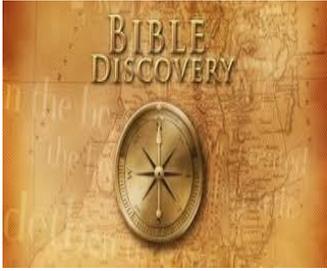


A Change in Me



Perhaps it's because I've reached *that age* when I look back nostalgically to what I remember as I met Jesus personally. Revivals, tent meetings, retreats, camps all played a part in learning to know Jesus. At one of those camp meetings, I remember a funnel cloud approaching through the trees to the farmer's field where all our tents we set up and as we stood together holding hands and praying, I recall watching the cloud spit in two and circumvent the camp ground before returning to a single funnel at the other end. Those experiences with Jesus helped shape who I am today. One song, which we still sing, was "*Born Again*" (*there's really been a change in me...*). This song of course speaks of the event of Nicodemus in John chapter 3. Yet, here's the strange thing: though we're all familiar with what Jesus had to say with, "*you must be born again*", few of us actually understand what it means for us personally. In more formal terms, it speaks to regeneration – essential to our salvation - though it's more commonly referred to as the new birth! This foundational doctrine of regeneration is almost totally forgotten and in many places has never been known.

But that's exactly what Jesus invites this religious leader (*and us*) to consider - being regenerated in and through God, the delight of ***being born again!*** Through God's grace, forgiveness of sin and reconciliation of sinners is offered by God. Regeneration, being born again, then is the *spiritual transformation* in a person receiving Christ, brought about *by the Holy Spirit* that brings the individual from being spiritually dead to spiritually alive. One can imagine Nicodemus; a religious Jew who knew only being right with God as a matter of studying the Law and keeping it. He and his contemporaries were perhaps a little envious, certainly intrigued with Jesus, yet they didn't understand Him. He wasn't like other Rabbis who taught the Law, the need for Torah observance, the requirement that righteousness was *earned*. Yet obviously Jesus was doing miracles, touching lives with the power of God, giving life to the dead. So Nicodemus enquired of Jesus saying, "*We know that you are a Teacher who has come from God for no one can do these works except God be with him.*"

To Nicodemus, Jesus responds, in effect telling him, "You're trying so hard to understand who I am and what I'm all about, aren't you? *But you can't* understand who I am and what I'm all about – it's impossible unless my Father gives you a new life in Him! This new life is a gift from God and therefore comes from above.

Jesus radically confronted Nicodemus' beliefs that to be in the kingdom of God you simply "*kept the law*".

Until you have this new life, don't even begin to think you'll understand what I'm talking about!" Anyone who thinks of Jesus as meek and mild, cowering against the authorities of His day finds His words here most troubling. Jesus radically confronted Nicodemus' beliefs that to be in the kingdom of God you simply "*kept the law*". That's why the Apostle Paul wrote at Romans 3:20, "*Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*" Jesus indicates to Nicodemus and to us the law doesn't do it. The law of God is good and righteous but it was never intended to save us from our sins – its purpose was as it continues - to direct us to the saving grace shown through the sacrifice and resurrection of *Jesus, God's Son* and our wonderful Saviour.

Keys to Unlocking our Minds



To help us understand, Jesus provides us several keys, unlocking our minds to the concept of His New Birth.

- 1) First of all, ***it's first on our "to do list"*** if we would understand God's Kingdom. Until we allow God's work in our hearts to transform us, we can't begin to figure out God's love, His grace, and His Son. Jesus tells

Nicodemus, “Unless a person is born from above, it’s not possible to see what I’m pointing to—to God’s kingdom.” So many of us move through our religious lives stumbling in blindness because we’ve tried to live as Christians without first being born again – receiving a new birth from our Father above.

- 2) Secondly, **it’s God’s work**. Not one of us birthed himself or herself. This has to happen to a person before he can enter the kingdom of God. Jesus did not say “*Unless you see the kingdom of God you can’t be born again*” but, “*Unless you are born again you can’t see the kingdom of God.*” There’s a statement John makes in his first letter: “*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.*” The ‘seed’ is God’s life-principle which causes all life to begin and causes us to become alive to God. We were dead in our trespasses and sins; God made us alive by putting His own life-principle in our hearts. Only as we submit to God and allow His creation bearing way to have effect in our lives do we escape the consequence of our trespass filled, sinful existence. In the same way God made the heavens, the seas, the grass of the fields and the animals, His creative work fills us with His Spirit as we surrender and hear for ourselves, “*Let there be...*”
- 3) Thirdly, **man can’t control God’s gift of grace**. Jesus told Nicodemus, “*The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound but you do not know where it comes from and where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*” Science can define many things and help us to live with our environment. Yet there are still wonders which even the greatest scientist cannot fathom. Our world keeps silent the many scientists who have come to the conclusion that there is a God behind the universe – they never make it on the talk shows on TV but it does not alter the fact that ultimately there is a God who has created all things. The Phillips translation tells us, “*Unless a person submits to this original creation*”. We have to humble ourselves and submit ourselves to God’s creative work.
- 4) Next, we’re instructed **the work of God takes place within us**. None of us changed our outward appearance when we were saved. But something marvelous took place deep within us. Jesus explains, “*When you look at a baby, it’s just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can’t see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.*” I love the chorus, “Change My Heart O God...” because it speaks to what takes place as we surrender to God. An ignition takes place which awakens the spirit within us. God is spirit and since we’re made in His image, does it surprise you that we too have a spirit?
- 5) Again, **the work of God is transformative**. Jennifer Benson Schuldt, one of the contributors for *Our Daily Bread*, puts it this way, “The God who made us can also remake us’.” And famous Christian teacher J.I. Packer states, “Our God is a God who not merely restores, but takes up our mistakes and follies into His plan for us and brings good out of them.” We may not know how it happens but we see the evidence of God’s work in our lives when it happens. Just as the evidence of the wind blowing in the trees, so too the signs are evident in our lives as we walk with God, as we’re “born from above”.
- 6) Finally, **being born again causes us to live a new life**. How many times have we heard testimony of those saved from the most awful of habits and lifestyles? How often have we witnessed the most miserable of lives changed into wholesome, joyful lives because of God’s compassionate presence in a heart? Writer Bob Goff founded Restore International in 2002 seeking justice on behalf of the oppressed, to “*fight for freedom and human rights, working to improve educational opportunities and to be helpful to those in need of a voice and a friend.*” This wonderful work for God is an example to me of the new life direction we find when we become born again. We respond to God’s grace by desiring to do His will and walk in His way. The definition of *restore* is to “return (someone or something) to a former condition, place, or position; to repair or renovate so as to return it to its original condition.” In Romans we read of the ultimate restoration: the relationship between God and man. Though we were originally intended for relationship with Him, our sins separated us from our Creator [Colossians 1:21]. Yet, “*when we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners*” [Romans 5:6]. Because of the work of Christ, we are able to be born again and our response is to serve Him. According to Paul, every Christian has undergone a radical transformation that makes it impossible for them to live in sin.

That brings me to the summary today. If we're born again by the wonderful work of God through His Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and if we are transformed from the sinner to the child of God, and if we are called to respond in service out of devotion to all Christ has done for us in giving us a reignited spirit, then we must be a new creation; a creation born of God's Spirit. That was Paul's argument when he wrote, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"* [2 Corinthians 5:17-18 (ESV)]. Paul is explaining what we hear at Ezekiel, *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws"* [Ezekiel 36:26-27(NIV)].

This new creation is the result of God working a creative miracle in you. But I want you to consider more directly the aspect that this creation is "new". When we're "born again" from above, it's not to continue in the same old way we've known before our rebirth. We're made completely new through a new spiritual pursuit – *a new heart and a new spirit in you*. We don't change our physical appearance, we don't suddenly develop talents we've never possessed, we don't become a different person in that way – but God changes us within! Our desires, our claims, our treatment of others – *all these are changed from the inside*. It can't be explained by the ways of this world – it comes from out of this world. Again, because it's of God, from God, it's totally different. That's what caused the entire problem with Jesus and the authorities when He came to walk with us on earth – Jesus was and is different. **Jesus wants you and me to be different too.** We can if we're willing to be born again. If you've never surrendered your heart to Jesus and allowed His spirit to rule in your heart, never experienced Jesus on a personal basis, then I invite you today to let God in and push self out. Go ahead and come to Jesus and find a new life in Christ TODAY.

**New Creation
result of God
working a
creative miracle
IN YOU!**

For more information, or if you would like to speak with someone about salvation, give us a call or email us.

Blessings,
Pastor Dave