

Chapter Four

Born Again

The Love of God

As I was preparing this chapter on the new birth I was writing to a young man about why he rejected Christianity. His main reason was that he is a naturalist. He only believes in what is physical, what he can see, hear, smell, taste and touch. The other reason was that in his view Christianity is irrelevant to the world's needs. He didn't understand how Christianity related to or improved any of life's pressing needs.

That struck me, because as a pastor/teacher I want to be relevant. But there are two kinds of relevance. First, I can be relevant to you if my message feels to you like it will make a difference in your life. On the other hand, what I say is relevant if it is true, whether you feel it is or not. If I proclaim to you that the bridge ahead is washed out, and it is, then I am relevant whether you believe me or not.

People are concerned about racism, climate change, pollution, hunger, war, crime, health care, justice, illegal immigration and on and on. And if I say today that I am going to teach on being born again, some people might think I am irrelevant. But at the heart of all of our problems there is the problem of the human heart. The human heart is held captive to the power of sin. And sin is the root cause of all our sorrows and troubles. And the heart and core of the relevant message of God's Word is the need for change: deep, personal, powerful transformation that leads to a better person and eventually to a better world.

This is why in John 3 Jesus said to Nicodemus, a most religious man, who was in search of a more fulfilled life, "You must be born again,"¹ and "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."² The kingdom of God about which Christ spoke refers to the coming time when our world will be healed. There will be no more wars, no more disease, no more injustice.³

All of the things in our world that are so broke and damaged, all of the problems that so concern people, will one day be rectified forever. All of this will

¹ John 3:7

² John 3:3

³ Isaiah 2:4; 9:6; 11:3-5; 33:25; 35:1-7; Daniel 7:13; Mark 1:14, 15

happen when our world is born again. And only those people who are born again will live forever in this coming paradise. Let's read about this promise of a world re-born.

So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

(Matthew 19:28)

The word "regeneration" is translated from the Greek word *palingenesia*. We learned about this word in the last chapter from Titus 3. When we are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ we are born again or regenerated. The Greek word for "regenerated" in Titus 3:5 is the same word here in Matthew 19:28. It means created anew.

Regeneration stresses the beginning of a new condition in contrast to the old condition. When we are born again, regenerated, we are given new life, the life of God in Christ in us. And just as we will one day experience everlasting life and glory, so too will our world. Here is what the apostle Peter said about this in the Book of Acts.

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,²⁰ and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,²¹ whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

(Acts 3:19-21)

When we are saved and born again times of refreshing come into our lives. So too, when Jesus Christ returns our world will be restored to the paradise it was before Adam sinned.⁴ There will be no more war, no sickness, no more natural disasters. The desert will blossom like the rose. The apostle Paul tells us about this time too.

⁴ Isaiah 9:6, 7; 11:6-10; 35:1-10; Ezekiel 34:26; 44:3; Revelation 19:1-10; 21:1-5

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.
(Romans 8:18, 19)

Right now you are born again. Right now you have become a new creation. And when Jesus Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords, you will be revealed in full glory as a child of God. And all of creation eagerly waits for this revealing and here's why.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.
(Romans 8:20, 21)

After Adam sinned not only was humanity disfigured because of sin, all of creation suffers too. Flowers and animals die, trees rot and fall. There are storms and floods and earthquakes. But when Christ returns to establish his kingdom all of creation will be delivered from its "bondage to corruption." It will be restored, regenerated, born again. God has promised us a new paradise. But why has it taken so long to come? Peter reveals the answer.

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.
(2 Peter 3:8, 9)

The delay in the return of Christ is not because God is slow to keep His promises. Rather, God is patient and desires for as many people as possible to be saved to enjoy the coming new world. Someone will be saved to day, tomorrow and next year. But when the family of God is full, Christ will return, the

wicked will be judged, God's people will be glorified and the earth will be re-born.

But the day of the Lord⁵ will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

¹¹ Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

(2 Peter 3:10-13)

The “day of the Lord” is a term used for the time God will judge and destroy the wicked. But a new heaven and a new earth is coming. And the Greek word translated “new” means new in quality, not just new in time. And the reason why it is different in quality is because righteousness will fill all of creation. But right now God is saving people and making them new. And the reason why is love—God loves you!

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the

⁵ The Day of the Lord is the time when God will pour out His wrath on an unbelieving and wicked world.

Holy Spirit, ⁶ [which]⁶ He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7)

We read these verses in the last chapter when we learned about being regenerated. But I have a different emphasis now. God saved us from being foolish and from being deceived. He has given us power to overcome malice and envy and hate. We have the spiritual ability to not give in to various temporary lusts and pleasures.

People get fooled and envy and lust because generally speaking people are disenchanted. We all want more than the world seems to offer. As I mentioned in the last chapter we are all looking for truth, goodness and beauty in one way or another. Besides being disenchanted most people are sensible. In other words they are guided by feelings and emotions rather than reason. This leads to being hedonistic; we go from one desire or temporary pleasure to another. And there may be an immediate pay off, but it leaves us wanting more. So, we are back where we started being disenchanted.

Being saved, being regenerated we have a new heart that can be satisfied and blessed and supremely happy with the things of God. Psalm 1 declares that the person who delights in the Word of God is "Blessed" or supremely happy! In 1 John 1 we are told that fellowship with God and with Christ brings about fullness of joy. Now let's notice the motive for God saving us.

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, (Titus 3:4, 5)

Underscore three words: kindness, love and mercy. God forgave our sins, renewed our hearts and filled us with His Spirit, because He overflows with kindness, love and mercy. God does not want us to wallow in sin and then perish. He wants to be good to us, so we can enjoy Him forever. We will find these three profound words again in Ephesians.

⁶ The Holy Spirit is not a "whom." It is not a person in the Godhead. It is the life and power of God.

If you will remember the context of Ephesians 2, the chapter begins by reminding us that we were all once dead in sin. And we were living in a world manipulated by the devil. But then something wonderful occurred.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
(Ephesians 2:4-10)

Once again, as in Titus, three key words describe the motivation for God to save us. In verse 4 God is "rich in mercy" and overflows with "great love." And in verse 7, we are told that God redeemed us so that in the ages to come He might lavish upon us the "exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us." But there is more!

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

(1 John 3:1-3)

John wrote “behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us.” Let us look at it, think about it, rejoice over it and praise God for it. Literally, the Greek for “what manner” is “of what country” is this! It is an exclamation of total astonishment. What kind of country is this, what foreign land is this, where there is this kind of love?

God’s love for us is so deep, so passionate, so selfless that in the new birth he has made us His children. And one day we shall be just like Him. Just like in an acorn the full oak tree is in the seed, so the full likeness of God is in us, in the seed of the new birth.

It is interesting, but sad that when Adam and Eve sinned they bought into Satan’s lie that by disobeying God they would become more like Him.⁷ But they didn’t become like God. Sin disfigured the image of God in them and then all of humanity. But God, in grace, mercy, love and kindness has been at work to reverse the fall. He will make us as He is.

In the regeneration, in the new world, when Christ sits on his throne of glory, all of us who are born again will live forever in a world restored to paradise. There will be no more war, no hunger, no poverty, no pollution, no crime, no disease, no injustice. I am not saying that we shouldn’t do our best to make our world better now. We should. God has called us to love and serve, to be salt and light.

What I am saying is that our world will be a better place, because of the mercy, love and kindness of God. God has dealt with the heart of all of our problems by giving us a new heart. And this is why the message of the good news of Jesus Christ and the coming kingdom is extremely relevant. All that we see, hear, smell, taste and touch is going to change.⁸ And unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God. Believe God’s Word and receive His mercy, love and kindness.

⁷ Genesis 3:5

⁸ 1 John 2:15-17