

Why You Must Be Born Again

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As we come to the word of God today, we're going back to the book of 1 John and so I invite you to turn to the book of 1 John as we begin here today. So many of the New Testament letters, if not all of them, were written to Christians in order to instruct them in their faith and to give them a sense of what God had done in salvation, what the true nature of salvation is, and then to help them see the consequences of that as they live out their lives and the book of 1 John is no exception to that general rule. The book of 1 John as we have said a long time, is that it is written to give Christians spiritual victory in the midst of a hostile world. It's not easy to live as a Christian in this life. We have indwelling sin that bubbles up out of us from time to time and grieves us and causes us to mourn and to struggle sometimes. We live in a world that is antichrist in the broadest sense of that term; it is opposed to Christ; it hates Christ and therefore quite naturally hates those who follow Christ. And we live in the midst of a world that has a plethora of false teachers that seek to deceive and are self-deceived and just really make it a confusing time to try to live for Christ and we have to walk through this world, we have to walk through an environment like that in order to reach our final destination of heaven and we're intended to glorify God as we do that. That's not a simple task and left to our own devices, we would most miserably fail as we tried to do that. But the glory of the Gospel, the glory of Christian salvation is that we are not left to our own devices to respond to the opposition of those who rise up against us when we try to walk in righteousness. We're not left to our own devices when it comes to dealing with false teachers and trying to discern the true from the false. We're not left even to our own power to try to overcome sin.

God has given us the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us, to comfort us, to help us in that process and part of the way that God does that is that he takes us to his word and he gives us understanding so that we can see and understand the spiritual realities of what it means to be a Christian and the spiritual realities of how we became a Christian in the first place, and that is the magnificent subject for our verse here this morning, 1 John 2:29. I'll start at verse 28 but we dealt with that last week and so we're really going to focus on verse 29 and the issues surrounding it here this morning. Chapter 2, verse 28 and 29. I am very delighted for you to be here this morning and to be able to benefit from God's word because I know that this will help you, if not challenge you. Chapter 2, verse 28, John says, "now, little children," you see, he's writing to believers there. He's not writing to the

whole world, he's writing to those who are children of his in the faith, those who are true Christians and he says to them,

28 Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.
29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is [watch this] born of Him.

Born of him. Born of God. That's what we're going to be considering here this morning. And just a little reminder from last week is to remember that one of the things that motivates us and encourages us and gives us strength and hope as we walk through a difficult life here on earth is the fact that this life is not the end, this life is really just a transition period until we reach the final destination for which God saved us. God saved us, if you're a Christian, God saved you in order to bring you to himself in an eternal way to be with him in heaven throughout all of the ages of eternity. That is the ultimate destination of what it means to be a Christian. This life, in one sense, is secondary to our final destination and in verse 28 he reminds us that Christ is one day going to intervene in world history; Christ is going to come back; Christ is going to appear and take over the reins again, as it were, and when that happens when Christ returns and establishes his rule here on earth, we as those who belong to him are going to participate in the glory of that. There is a glorious future ahead for you as a Christian that you should never lose sight of. There is a glorious future ahead for you as a Christian that gives you the motivation to persevere in the midst of a hostile world.

Now, part of that persevering is living righteously, as we move into verse 29, and he says, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." Now, we're going to park on this. This is really the start of a three week series, this week and then the next two weeks, talking about what it means to be born of God and there is just a wealth of things that we need to consider here. And part of the reason, let me tell you why I slow down here at this particular verse and deal with this topic carefully and over an extended period of time like that, is because even in my own life and not all that long ago, I simply really struggled to understand exactly what this meant, to be born of God. The theological word, as we'll see in a little while, is regeneration. What does this doctrine mean? And we have to understand it. It's very, very crucial. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3 that unless a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. So whatever this doctrine is, whatever this event is of being born of God, is somehow the dividing line between going to hell and going to heaven. It's about the dividing line between spending eternity with Satan as your master in hell or with God as your King in heaven. This is monumentally important according to the words of Jesus himself. And because it's important for us to know this and because, quite frankly, I care about your souls, I want you to understand this because I believe that this is utterly transforming and that clarity on this particular doctrine is going to give you a clarity of vision and understanding about your salvation that maybe you haven't had before. I know it had that kind of impact on me.

Now, let's unpack this a little bit. When God saved you as a Christian, when you were truly born-again, there was more that happened to you than simply the fact that you went from being a guilty sinner to being a forgiven sinner. There was more than the fact that there was a guilty verdict on your account and God changed the verdict, not only to not guilty but to righteous in Christ; there was that change in your legal status before God, the law no longer condemns a Christian. Paul said in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," and so to be a Christian in part means that you are no longer condemned by the law of God. Christ has fulfilled all of the right requirements of the law on your behalf and now you can stand before God in a perfect position before him because you stand before him in the glory of the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's a wonderful thing. We have a legal right to be before God because that's what Christ purchased for us with his life, death and resurrection.

But that's not what we're talking about here today. You need to know that but that's not what we're talking about here today. When God saved you, something magnificent beyond that verdict in heaven changed. When God saved you, he gave you a new nature. God gave you a new principle of life in your heart. God made you a new creation and that is what John means when he speaks of being born of God. It means that God, if you want to think about it in a vertical dimension, from on high God disposed on you, put upon you, put within you, a new principle of spiritual life and that new principle of life in your heart is the reason that your life changed when you became a Christian. It wasn't simply a legal verdict that was changed, God gave you new life that caused you to naturally start to live in a different way; to live with new heart affections, new desires, new loves. That is what John means when he speaks of being born again, being born of God.

Now, just in the broader context of 1 John, I want you to see something. Verse 29 is the first time that John uses this phrase "born of Him" or "born of God," but what I want you to see is that in the rest of the letter of 1 John, this is a dominant important theme and it dominates everything else that he has to say. Look at chapter 3, verse 9, just a few verses down from where we're at. Chapter 3, verse 9, he says, "No one who is born of God practices sin." So there it is again. All I'm showing you right now is the presence of this theme in the letter. You are born of God, chapter 3, verse 9. Look at chapter 4, verse 7, in this verse that is familiar. Some of you may know the chorus that these verses have been put to music. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God," there it is again, "and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." One more, chapter 5, verse 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." So as we read through the letter of 1 John, we see this theme of being born of God coming up again and again with very many practical ramifications for the Christian life. Our righteousness, we live righteously because we have been born of God. We love other Christians because we have been born of God. We believe in Christ and believe in true doctrine because we have been born of God.

So being mindful of some of the history of where some of you come from, we have to start thinking about the nature of salvation vertically and what God has done in our lives and what the ongoing ramifications and impact of that is rather than simply reducing

salvation to a very false view of, "Well, I walked forward at an altar call when I was 10 years old and I prayed a prayer and that was it." And if you think about salvation in that way, understand that that's a distorted view of salvation at best and it's also going to reduce salvation to something that you did on a horizontal level before men. What the Bible teaches us to think about salvation as, what the true nature of salvation is, is that God from heaven took you in his arms, as it were, and did a spiritual work of a miraculous nature in order to cause you to be born again. It wasn't something that you did on your own by walking an aisle or praying a prayer. Salvation was a work of God in your life and when you start to see that from the Scriptures, when that starts to open up in your understanding, it changes everything. It changes absolutely everything and we're going to see that as we go along. God gave you new life in Christ.

Now, let me give you a definition, okay? The theological term for what we're talking about here is regeneration. Don't let that word scare you. We're going to walk through it and explain it. When God gave you new life, that moment in time is called regeneration and I'm going to give you a definition for regeneration here. We're kind of doing a little teaching here, I guess. What does regeneration mean? Well, you can write down this definition. Trust me, this is so important. Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts the divine nature to a sinner so that he, meaning the sinner, so that the sinner will repent of sin, believe in Christ, and serve Christ in newness of life. Should I say it again? I'll say it again if you're taking notes. Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts the divine nature to a sinner so that the sinner will repent of sin, believe in Christ, and serve Christ in newness of life, alright? Now, that's about as technical as it's going to get.

Let me give you an illustration to kind of give you a little bit of a breather here. This is very simple and deliberate on the part of God in describing it in these terms. When a mother gives birth, she delivers new physical life. When a mother gives physical birth, she gives birth to, she delivers new physical life. Well, when the Bible talks about a Christian being born again, it's talking about it in a spiritual sense in something very readily understandable going from the familiar to the unfamiliar, the seen to the unseen. When salvation occurs, when God draws someone to Christ, what has happened is that God has given new spiritual life to that person who was previously dead in sin. That's all that regeneration means. It means a lot but it can be understood in that simple sense of God giving life to a previously dead sinner and bringing them to Christ, bringing them to himself. We say it's a secret act because you can't see it happen. Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes, so also that's just like when a man is born again. You can't see where the wind has come from or where it's going but you see the effects of it." In the same way in regeneration, the Holy Spirit moves on a heart, brings that person to Christ, he didn't necessarily see it coming, you can't predict when someone is going to be born again, but you can see the aftermath, you can see the effects of it from the changed life that is produced. And as we read through the Scriptures, we see that the Bible describes salvation in the context of God giving new life to a previously dead sinner.

Now, I want to highlight two aspects of regeneration today. We'll deal with other aspects. I realize that you will walk out of here maybe today with a view unanswered questions.

Trust me, we're going to deal with those in the next two weeks but today what I want to highlight is just two aspects of regeneration and draw out some spiritual applications for you, alright? Now, point 1 is: the reality of regeneration. We're going to talk about the reality of regeneration and the necessity of regeneration here this morning. The reality of regeneration. I really want you to see this. I guess that's why I'm teaching on it. That's because that's what you do. You've got to see this. You've got to understand this. The reality of regeneration. The theme of regeneration is found throughout the New Testament more prominently and more often than you might suspect. The Bible uses different metaphors to describe it but it's describing the same reality of God giving new life to a sinner; that that's what salvation is like.

There are different metaphors that you can see. First of all, we've seen here already the idea of being born of God. Turn back to the book of Titus 3 which is just before the book of Hebrews as you're going back to the left in your Bible. Titus 3, beginning in verse 4. We are taking a little biblical survey of this theme of regeneration here and we're going to see, first of all, that the Bible describes it with the term "regeneration." Look at chapter 3, verse 4, "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us," there it is, right? Salvation is the theme here that Paul is writing on. How did he save us? Why did he save us? On what basis did he save us? He saved us, notice this and notice some very basic grammar as we go through this, notice who the subject is, what the verb is and who the direct object is. I know that grammar isn't often taught in these ways anymore but it's very important for you to realize who is doing the acting in these verses that I'm going to show you, and who is the recipient of the action. In every case, God is doing the action upon the sinner and not the sinner doing something that God later responds to. That is a huge point, very obvious, but we've been conditioned to overlook it through poor teaching over the decades. Look at this and read and just see with clarity what the Bible says about this.

"God saved us," verse 5, Titus 3:5, "God saved us." God saved you if you're a Christian. You didn't save yourself. "God saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." God saved you not on the basis of something that you did, not because you walked an aisle. Nobody got saved because they walked an aisle. They got saved, if anybody gets saved at all, it's because God saved us on the basis of his mercy and by a work of the Holy Spirit on our hearts. That's the teaching of Scripture. "Not," verse 5, look at it with me again, "not on the basis of deeds which we have done, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." This was a work of God in your life. If you are saved, if you are a Christian here, understand that God did a work on your life and the Bible calls that regeneration.

Now, the Bible uses other terms to describe the same reality. Look over at the book of 2 Corinthians 5. The Bible calls it regeneration; the Bible also calls it a new creation. A new creation. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ," if you're a Christian here this morning, this is describing you, it's describing me, I'm in Christ,

you're in Christ. "If anyone is in Christ," what is he? "He is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now," verse 18, "all these things are from God." They're from God, not from us; not from anything that we did. "Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." Notice, again, the subject, the verb and the direct object. The direct object receives the action of the verb. I'm sorry to be so pedantic about it perhaps but it's so important to see. God reconciled us to himself. God did the work. God did the initiation. God where there was no spiritual life in you, God created spiritual life where none existed and therefore drew you to himself and by that means made you into a new creation in Christ. How wonderful to think about that theme in a place called the Creation Museum. We think about creation in terms of Genesis 1 and that's right and well and good that we should, but as you think about yourself as a Christian, you should be thinking about yourself as that, "God created a work in me that I never could have produced on my own." You were as utterly incapable – listen – you were as utterly incapable of making yourself into a Christian in the New Testament as you would have been to create the world out of nothing with your own hands. You were equally powerless to do both things. You had no power to create the universe and you had no power to save your own soul. If you're saved here today, it's because God exercised his creative spiritual power on your heart in order to deliver you into new life and to bring you into his kingdom. You are a new creation in Christ. That means you didn't do it yourself. God did the work.

Now, there is another way that the Bible describes it: regeneration, a new creation, the Bible describes it also as a spiritual resurrection. A spiritual resurrection. Look at Ephesians 2. We'll begin at verse 1 and I'll read this passage twice here just for the sake of setting the context. I'll refer to it again a little bit later. Ephesians 2:1, Paul, describing a Christian's life before Christ says, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." Look, you were spiritually dead. You were not mortally wounded. You weren't on a respirator, on life support with a spiritual feeding tube. You were dead. Dead men can't save themselves. Dead men don't have the capacity to bring life into themselves. You just can't do it. It's the nature of being dead that you don't have life to produce in yourself.

So a dead man can't give himself life; you can't create the universe; you can't give yourself life. Dead men, what happened? How is it then that we could be here as Christians enjoying spiritual life in Christ? Look at verse 4. Look again at the subject, the verb and the direct object. Verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions," here's the verb and here's the direct object, God "made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." That's a mouthful, isn't it?

Let's work backwards from it. You had no control over the ages to come, verse 7. Verse 6, you didn't have the power to raise yourself up with Christ. You didn't have the power to seat yourself with Christ in heaven. That's not your domain. Heaven belongs to God. You don't have any prerogatives there. You don't have any power there. You don't have any ability there. You can't do this. A dead man can't make himself alive but look at the verbs and kind of passing over the descriptive clauses that Paul gives and what verses 4 and 5 say is the subject, verb and direct object is: God made us alive together with Christ. It's clear. It's clear. A spiritual resurrection took place in the life of a Christian. God took a dead man and brought him to life. If you're a Christian, understand that before Christ you were a dead man. You were walking around physically but spiritually you were dead. You had no capacity of life within you and the Bible says that while you were dead like that, even when you were dead in your transgressions, God made you alive together with Christ. It's awesome. It's magnificent. It's tremendous to think about.

Then fourthly. So we've looked at regeneration, a new creation, a spiritual resurrection and, again, just kind of circling back to the idea of a new birth, it's a new birth. Look at 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Then look over at verse 23 of 1 Peter 1, "you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." You have been born again. God has caused you to be born again according to his great mercy. This is all from God, not something that you did.

Now, the word pictures are different but the reality is the same: God sovereignly acts on a sinner's heart through the truth of the word in order to impart spiritual life. Now, think about, here's an illustration for you, think about the physical resurrection of Lazarus in John 11. You remember the scene. Lazarus had been dead for four days and Mary and Martha and the crowd were around and they say, "Lord, he's been in there four days, he stinketh," using the King James version. They said, "This is really bad. The deterioration and the decay of death is going to be taking hold of him." Jesus says, he calls out to Lazarus...let's look at it, John 11. No one is in a hurry here this morning, right? We might as well look at the passage. John 11. Let's look at verse 38. This is an illustration in the physical realm of what happens in the spiritual realm. John 11:38, "So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Remove the stone.' Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.'" Verse 43, "When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.' The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"

Now, let's just think about this for a second. Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave. Lazarus could not have come out of that grave on his own power. Jesus called him, as it

were, by name. Jesus sovereignly and powerfully called him and somehow imparted physical life to him so that the man who had been dead came out of the tomb and walked. Understand that that is a picture of your salvation. God through the proclamation of the Gospel whether you were reading it, whether you were hearing a preached sermon or seeing something on television, somehow, we'll talk about this more in a week or two about exactly how this occurs, but somehow you came under the sound of the Gospel when you were spiritually dead and somehow someone told you that you need to repent of sin and believe in Christ in order to be saved and at some point in time you did that. What you must understand, what is pivotal in understanding the nature of salvation, what is pivotal for your spiritual growth is to understand that your response to the Gospel was not something that came independent of the work of God on your heart. You believed in Christ because God did a work on your heart to change you from being stubborn and resistant and unwilling, changed your heart so that you were willing to come and believe in Christ. Just like Lazarus wouldn't have come out of the tomb unless Jesus had called him out of the physical tomb, you were in a spiritual tomb, buried and dead and the Lord Jesus Christ called your heart and said, "Catherine, come forth," and you came forth in response to the power of his call in your life. And if your name is not Catherine, then just insert your own name; you know how that works.

That's the reality of regeneration and I want to let that sink in on your mind for a moment. Do you know what that means? Do you know what that means? Do you realize the implications, the consequences of this? This means that the very God who spoke the worlds into existence directly and personally called your own spiritual life into existence. This is incredible! This is magnificent! This is beyond anything that we could have asked or thought. God did a spiritual work in your heart by name just like he called Lazarus by name, "Lazarus, come forth." In the same way he said, "Scott, come forth. Come to me." And you came and he gave you in the midst of that call, he gave you the life and the power in order to come to him. It was a gift that he bestowed on you while you were still dead in sin and utterly unworthy of such a gracious gift. Bless his holy name. Honor the name of Christ. That's the reality of regeneration. You can describe it however you want. "God regenerated me. God gave birth to me spiritually. God made me a new creation. God resurrected me from the dead. Wow. I kind of want to take my shoes off. This is holy ground but this is the clear teaching of Scripture." That's the reality of regeneration.

Now, let's drift over...let's not drift, let's plunge into the second point here this morning. Drift makes it sound like there is no direction. Let's look at the second point: the necessity of regeneration. The necessity of regeneration. We've seen the vertical dimension which makes us want to give glory to God. Here we're going to see kind of the personal dimension of why it had to be that way. The one, the reality of regeneration causes you to give glory to God, the necessity of regeneration causes you to humble yourself before him. The necessity of regeneration. Why is it that you must be born again? Why is it that you can't save yourself? Why is it that you can't take any credit for your salvation? Well, regeneration is necessary because men and women and children do not have the capacity to respond in faith to the call of the Gospel. They are utterly unable to do so unless God does a prior initial work in their hearts and calls them to himself.

Men cannot respond to the Gospel on their own. That's why Jesus said unless you are born again, unless you are born from above, you can't see the kingdom of God.

Well, two Scriptures among others will help us see the necessity of regeneration. Look back at 1 Corinthians 2:14, and we may add a third one just for fun. I think it's important to enjoy the word of God. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, "a natural man," one left to his own devices, one who is apart from the work of the Spirit of God, "a natural man," look at this, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." How many times, let's illustrate it this way, how many times have you tried to share the Gospel with someone and they just don't get it? You might as well be talking to that wall over there and banging your head against the wall because they just can't get it. They just don't and they ask some of the most foolish questions in response sometimes. Well, it's because they can't understand it. You are presenting them spiritual truths that they do not have the spiritual capacity to receive. That's why it's difficult and it's not because necessarily that you're doing a bad job of sharing truth with them, it's because you're talking to a dead man. You're talking to a concrete wall. Of course your words just bounce off. They are spiritually appraised. They are a natural man. They don't accept these things. They cannot understand them, the Scriptures say. This is a desperately bad situation for someone to be in.

Turn back to the book of Romans 8:7. Why is regeneration necessary? That's the question we're asking. Paul says in Romans 8:7, he says, "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so," there is no spiritual capacity to do this, "and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Turn back to the Gospel of John 3 shortly after Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again," John 3:19. We've been lifted up by the glory of God and the reality of regeneration and now we are brought down to the depths and seeing the utter inability of man to respond to it and this is all most depressing. We've gone from the mountain to Death Valley. Chapter 3, verse 19, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." They loved the darkness that they were in. Verse 20, "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." There is this love for sin that is just part of the bondage of the condition of the lost. They love it. They like it that way. You know, they like being an ugly mole burrowing around in the dirt of sin. That's the realm in which they like to live, to burrow around in it and every one of you and me included were like that before Christ, a blind mole digging around in the dirt of sin and loved the darkness and the evil of it. This is desperately bad. This is desperately bad. Why is regeneration necessary? There you have it. Men in the flesh cannot please God. They cannot understand. They love the darkness.

Look back at that passage in Ephesians 2:1 here. Why was this great work of regeneration necessary? Ephesians 2:1 says, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins," you were dead in sin. Verse 2, you were dominated by the devil, "in which you formerly walked

according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." Verse 3, you were doomed to suffer the wrath of God, "Among them we too all," there it is. Don't you love the humility of Paul? He includes himself in it, "we too all." He says, "I was like this. I was a former blasphemer and persecutor of the church." "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." Dead in sin, dominated by the devil, doomed to suffer the wrath of God. Listen, that's why it was absolutely necessary for God to regenerate you if you were ever going to be saved because you were desperately unable to save yourself. Men lack the power to reach out to God. They lack the desire to do that. They are not inclined to do that. That's the nature of their heart in sin.

So when that reality collides with the Gospel and the preaching of the Gospel that says, "Sinner, you must repent and believe in Christ in order to be saved," where does that saving response come from is the question? And Scripture says in Ephesians 2:8 and 9, it is "by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves," it did not come from you, "it is the gift of God." God graciously when you were under the sound of the Gospel, God graciously worked in your heart and rearranged the desires of your heart and imparted new life to you so that you said, "That's what I want. I will repent. I will believe." But understand that the initiating power of that came from God, not from within your own heart. It could not have come from your own heart. The description of men unsaved in the Bible is too clear to think anything else. That's why you had to be born again. Listen, every sinner who does not know Christ is at the utter mercy of God to do a work in his heart because he can't save himself. You can get up and walk an aisle and you could come up and you could come down the aisle here and kneel around me while I was praying and it wouldn't do a bit of good unless God was at work in your heart. You can't save yourself by physically relocating from the seat to the altar. That's silly.

Charles Spurgeon put it this way, listen to this quote. It's three paragraphs but it's really good. There is a reason why Charles Spurgeon, his works have survived and people read them 125 years later. Charles Spurgeon put it this way, "The Gospel says, 'Repent.' But the unregenerate man loves his sins and will not repent of them. He presses them," his sins, "to his bosom and until his nature is changed, he will never look upon them with abhorrence and sorrow." Continuing the quote, "The Gospel says, 'Believe; cast away all confidence in your own merits and believe in Jesus.' But the carnal mind is proud and it says, 'Why should I believe? Why should I be saved by the works of another? I want to do something by myself that I may have some of the credit for it, either by good prayers, or good works of some kind.'" Continuing the quote, Spurgeon says, "Brethren, we must be born again because the truth of the Gospel cannot be understood and the commands of the Gospel cannot be obeyed except where the Spirit of God works regeneration in the heart!"

Listen, if you're here today as a Christian, at some point in the past you came under the sound of the Gospel and you believed in Christ. By outward appearance, that was something that you did and there's a reality in which you did repent, you did believe in Christ, but understand what we're talking about here today is the hidden nature of what

happened behind that act of faith and repentance where you came to Christ. We're talking about what happened behind that in order to enable you to do that. That's what we're talking about and, beloved, you have to understand and you have to embrace this as a Christian: you were not wise on your own to come to Christ. You did not desire that on your own unaided by God and just as a dead man said, "Eh, I think I'll live today." It doesn't work that way. You might as well have said before your birth, your physical birth in your nonexistence, this is how absurd it is for people to think that way about their salvation; you might just with equal conviction say that, "Five years before I was born, I decided I would be born. You know, I generated my own physical life." That's absurd. No one even thinks that. No one even talks that way because it is so insane. If you talked that way, you would rightfully be in the white coats in the psych ward. You didn't do it. It didn't happen that way. Your parents in the midst of your nonexistence, if you can even put it that way, when you didn't exist, your parents came together and your physical life was formed in the womb. You did not contribute to your physical birth. Any suggestion to the contrary would be utterly absurd and it's that metaphor – listen – it's that metaphor of birth that the Scripture uses to describe what must happen for a person to come to Christ, in order for a person to enter the kingdom of heaven. It's that metaphor of birth. Something has to happen that you don't have control over before you can be saved. You've got to be born from above. While you were dead, while you were dead, God planted new spiritual life in your heart.

Charles Wesley, of all people, in the words of the hymn that we've sung here in the past said,

"Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,"

There was a ray that came from God, a light, as it were, that came into your spiritual darkness.

"Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee."

"But the reason that I was able to rise and go forth, the reason that my chains fell off was because you, Lord, shined a light, shone a light into my soul and I responded to the light that you gave while I was still dead in sin." Beloved, the sequence is critical. The sequence is essential. God did not give you new birth because you believed in Christ. You believed in Christ because God gave you new birth. I love seeing those heads nod. It's really important, that whole sequence. That determines everything and we'll talk about that more in a week or two.

Now listen, these things in my mind are just utterly irrefutable from Scripture. I know that people don't agree with it but I think the Scripture so clear on this. You have to

redefine what it means for a man to be dead in sin in order to think anything different. Now, there are spiritual consequences to what we are saying here. One of them is this: that the reality and the necessity of regeneration utterly crushes human pride. It utterly crushes human pride. I'm here today as a Christian not because of any insight that I had. I'm here as a Christian because in the midst of my sin and the depth of my depravity, at the worst possible moment, God by his Spirit, came powerfully onto my life. I can't take any credit for it and, beloved, neither can you. If you're saved, you can't take any credit for it. It's because and when you really grasp this, you can know if you're grasping this when you start to say, "Do you know what? I wouldn't want to take any credit for it. I don't want any credit for my salvation because that would just be treasonous to say, 'Yeah, Christ died for me but I made the first step.'" That's treasonous.

Beloved, you and I in sin could not and would not come to Christ on our own. You couldn't and you wouldn't and that humbles your pride. And what regeneration, the doctrine of regeneration teaches – get this, get this and love Christ more now than you did when you walked into the room – regeneration teaches you that God loved you by name, singled you out as a particular object of his mercy and exercised his divine omnipotence upon your heart in order to draw you to Christ. Jesus said in John 6, "No one comes to the Father unless my Father draws him." And all of a sudden, humbled by the vast desert of your own spiritual deadness, humbled by that, dead under the baking sun of death and sin as a spiritual corpse, as it were, rotting in the desert, God looked down on you and, as it were, said, "I will have mercy on that one. My child, come forth. I know you're unworthy. This isn't about your deserving at all. I know you can't come. I know but I want you for myself. Child, come forth." And in that word of grace, in the word of the Gospel that you heard, God, as it were, reached into your heart, changed your heart and brought you to himself. That is grounds to love and praise him. When you understand how utterly undeserving you were of that kind of grace and realize now that you are basking in grace now and in greater glory yet to come, then your heart excludes boasting and gives praise to God. God truly gets all of the glory for your salvation. All of it, not 98%. Jesus said, "You must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven," and the only question that matters is: have you been born again?

Now you say, "But something happened. I did something when I believed." Yeah, that's true. That's true. Turn over to Romans 10. We'll look at this either next week or the following week. Romans 10. I want to help you understand this. What was it that happened then? Verse 17, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Like I say, we'll talk about this more next time but understand this, is that God uses means, he uses the Gospel in order to call people to himself. How could we have heard about this wonderful salvation unless someone had told us? How could they have told us unless someone had sent them, the Scriptures say? But understand that that is the means that God uses in order to call a heart to himself. There is something in the power of the Gospel as the Gospel is preached in combination with the inner work of the Holy Spirit, that God uses the very content of the proclamation of the Gospel in order to do that work in the human heart, and so you hear and a preacher calls on you and says, "James, you must repent and believe in Christ." And you hear that and God, as it were, is opening ears and taking the scales off of eyes as the preacher is making that proclamation, working in

your heart in order to respond to that which previously you would have rejected. And in response to the command, at God's initiation, God sending the preacher, God writing the words, sending the preacher, working in the Spirit, working in your heart by the power of his Spirit, in response to all of that, you say, "I will believe. I will repent." Then you look in the Scriptures and you look back and say, "Wow, that was something that God did in my life, not something that I achieved on my own." So God gets all the glory.

Now, listen, if you're not a Christian, you must be born again or you will go to hell. It's that simple. What I want you to see in the context of everything that we've talked about is that that should produce in your mind and heart a sense of utter spiritual desperation in the whole light of everything that we've talked about. You say, "But I can't do that on my own. You just said I don't have the power to do that." That's right and God calls you and commands you all the same. What that means is this, is that you have to abandon any hope in yourself and cry out to Christ for mercy as a desperate sinner saying, "I see this and unless you save me I will be lost. Jesus, save me! I can't save myself!" And it reduces the sinner to dust and causes him to flee to Christ, the one who alone can save him when he cannot save himself.

And if you're a Christian here today, let me just say it one more time: the God who created the universe is the same God who did this work of regeneration in your heart. I can't fathom this. I can't explain this really, you know, with words that do justice to the grandeur of what we're talking about. I don't have that vocabulary or that level of passion in my heart. All I can do is lay it before you and say to you this, is that if you're here and you're a Christian and you were dead in sin and now you know that you're alive in Christ and you realize that, "I couldn't have done this and God did this and that means...wow!" What it means is this, it means that you think about the God of your salvation, it means that you think about the Lord Jesus Christ in the terms of the deepest affection, the most profound love, the highest gratitude to which your heart can attain and say, "You did for me what I could not do when I wasn't even looking for it. I was lost but now I am a found. I was blind but now I see. I was in chains but now I'm free. And Lord, because I understand the reality and necessity of regeneration, I understand that you get all the glory for that. God, I thank you and I will walk henceforth, dear Lord, in a spirit of humble repentance and gratitude in response to the work that you have done in my life." That's what this does to your heart. John said in chapter 2, verse 29, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him."

Let's pray.

Our Father, as the musicians come, we just want to humble ourselves before you and give you honor and praise. Lord, we understand that we are responsible to proclaim the Gospel as Christians. We understand that sinners are commanded to repent and believe. But, Lord, in light of this teaching, what we see is that we also understand that unless your Spirit is at work while we are doing those things, then nothing will happen because the granting of spiritual life is your exclusive prerogative and you alone have the power to accomplish it. Father, I pray for lost sinners here in this room and those who will hear in other media in days to come. Lord, I pray for their salvation. I pray that you would

have mercy on them in their deadness just like you had mercy on me in my deadness. Father, for those of us that now know Christ, we are so very grateful and thankful to you. Lord, we were on the road to damnation and yet your Spirit intervened. Someone shared the Gospel with us, Father, when we were hateful and envying and despising people and someone shared the Gospel with us and somehow your Spirit spoke to our hearts in that and you did a work and saved us and now we no longer fear condemnation, we know that we live in your divine approval and we are the objects not of your wrath but the objects of your amazing grace. It's overwhelming, Father, but in a good way. We are overwhelmed with your goodness, your love, your grace, your mercy, and your power, that you saved us. We honor you for it. We rejoice in it, Lord. We are glad in Christ and because we are glad, we sing. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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