

THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE: John 3:1-8

Reading: John 3:1-8.

We have seen in the last sermon that the Holy Spirit is God. We are therefore to honour Him. To understand His work in the believer is to enter into the complexity of the soul of man, our inner selves and how we react with the Person of the Holy Spirit indwelling us. His name means that He is the Creator of holiness. We saw last time that He is Creator of life (Genesis 1:1-2). He is also, as our passage today shows us, the Creator of spiritual life. He makes us new creations and the results of that work last forever.

1. We do not start life as Christians.

This can be a stumbling block to people, that we cannot make ourselves Christians, but that we have to rely on God to make that happen. Unfortunately, we can insist that God work to our idea of how we think He ought to work. God is made to wait on our decision whether or not we will believe. The cross is something that we decide about, whether it is important or relevant to us. We reckon that the power lies in us, whether to believe or to disbelieve. We believe that we have sufficient understanding and wisdom within ourselves, that we can repent in our own strength and likewise we can choose to have faith or not. We might allow for the fact that God can help us somewhat with all this, but not entirely. Christ's death is a resource that is made available to us if we should choose to try it out.

But we flatter ourselves in all this. We think we are capable of more than is the actual reality. We seriously underestimate what sin has done to us in fatally disabling the power of our mind and will when it comes to spiritual things. Even if we have come from a Christian home or had schooling that was helpful in giving us respect for the Bible, any desire for spiritual light has to come from God. We are institutionally sinful. Our thoughts, our judgments, and our actions are pervaded with sin. We cannot think straight, feel the right things or choose the right thing in spiritual matters. We are always wrong on all the issues that count the most.

2. God brings life to pass.

It needs the powerful and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to bring life to pass in us so that we can reason properly and desire salvation from the Lord. This we see in John 3:3-8. We have to be born anew to see the value and reality of spiritual things. The Spirit has to thoroughly re-organise and energise our thoughts, desire and will. We have to be totally re-aligned to a new setting. Flesh cannot produce these things because sin cannot produce life. It requires the Spirit to produce spiritual life in us. When He works

in us to give us life, then we can 'see' and 'enter' the kingdom of heaven. It is as we find it in John 5:22-25 where the voice of the Son of God has the power to give spiritual life to those who are dead and without it. This is regeneration, the creating of something anew. Like an engine that might have working parts but they are lifeless until there is a source of energy, otherwise nothing will ever work. We have new desires and new thoughts that are actually ours, but we would never have had them except for the supernatural working of the Spirit.

3. What does regeneration create?

The Holy Spirit in regeneration creates two vital abilities. He re-structures the mind and the will to repent and to have faith. Neither repentance nor faith are naturally occurring phenomena in the human heart. They have to be designed by God.

Repentance goes against our nature because it does injury to our pride. We would never choose to do this ourselves. We would never choose to believe that we are helpless and quite unable to please God through who we are and what we do. Neither would faith in Christ to save us from sin occur to us naturally. It would make no sense to admire what the Lord has done on the cross, to appreciate it and desire for the benefits of it to be given to us. The Holy Spirit does what we cannot do. He unlocks the horrors of our own souls to us and unlocks the glory of the Son of God, dying on the cross for us. We are able to make true and objective evaluations. We are able to see ourselves in true light and are able to appreciate the Son of God in His true light.

As part of this, God is established to us as real. He is not some vague being but the God of the Bible and the Moral Governor of the Universe, and therefore our Judge. He reveals to us that we are unable to meet His demands and cannot meet Him on His terms. We see ourselves as morally ugly and defiled, and condemned. He creates in us the desire to be made right with Him, to be forgiven of sin, to be holy. But how is this to be done? This the Spirit does by revealing Christ to us as the bringer of God's love and mercy. We realise, through the Spirit's help, that He died in the place of sinners. He also creates in us a desire to cry out to God for mercy and salvation. We understand that this is the only way we can come to God and that there is no other hope. So we are justified, adopted, sealed by the Spirit, and see the fruits of spiritual life in us through our movement towards holiness.

The clarity with which we understand this will vary, as will the timing of different aspects. We may never know exactly when we were converted. But the fact that we have experienced these changes in ourselves, is evidence that the Spirit has given us life.