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The Gospel According to Matthew

You Must be Born Again (Part 1)

April 21, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 15:10-20

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-40

Mat 15:10-20 And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand: (11) it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.” (12) Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” (13) He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. (14) Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” (15) But Peter said to him,

“Explain the parable to us.” (16) And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? (17) Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? (18) But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. (19) For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. (20) These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

What does this Scripture have to do with Easter and the resurrection of Christ? It shows us at least in part why the resurrection of Christ was necessary – namely, so that WE can be born again and resurrected to new life both in spirit and in body. That is to say, what we see here is why the Bible says to us, *you must be born again*. We must die with Christ and be raised with Him else our old person enslaved to sin will still reign.

I want us to spend several Sundays now in our study of Matthew's Gospel thinking very, very carefully about the doctrine of the new birth. *You must be born again*. No one will ever see Christ's kingdom, let alone enter it, unless they are born again. Many, many, many people today who think they are Christians – aren't. Why? Because they have not been born again. They have never died and been raised up again in Christ. And religious people are in particular danger of being deceived here:

Joh 3:1-3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (2) This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." (3) Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Pastors, church elders and deacons, long time church members, people like Nicodemus – religious rulers in their churches – are many times still dead in their sins, trusting in some outward religious practices enforced by the traditions of man which we considered last week. But the Lord looks upon the *heart*. The heart of man – the person we are in our essence – there is where the trouble lies and there is where the

remedy must be applied. Man is fallen in sin. His entire being is fallen – that is what we call total depravity. There is no cure for the old fallen man. He must die and be born again a brand new creation. *You must be born again*.

Let me give you just one contemporary example and perhaps this will help you see how widespread the denial of the new birth is in churches today and how incredibly deceptive this denial is.

Lutheran theology, at least in its everyday practice, teaches people that they are born again through water baptism – in their case, most often infant baptism. Roman Catholicism of course teaches the same thing.

Now, I have talked with conservative, professedly Bible-believing Lutherans about this subject and they will often deny that they believe in *baptismal regeneration*. However, in arguing for the necessity of baptism they will say:

Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Act 2:38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Act 22:16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

Now I won't take the time here to deal with each one of these verses, but I am simply showing you how many people try to prove that the Bible says we are born again through water baptism.

But, what do we see in practice in such people? *Even though such people practice unrepentant, ongoing, habitual sin in their everyday lives, they are convinced that they are saved and that their children, who they had baptized, are also born again.* In other words, they actually deny the doctrine of the new birth because the "new birth" they embrace does not change the old sinner into a true new creation.

Let me read to you an devotional written by a Lutheran pastor and in it you will be able to see that his theology denies the new birth. It is an exposition of this parable from Luke 20- [NOTE: In this sermon series on the new birth I am not teaching that this error is specific to Lutherans or to Rome. I am just citing this Lutheran example as an example of something that is *widespread* in evangelical churches that practice believers' baptism] -

Luk 20:9-18 And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. (10) When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. (11) And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. (12) And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. (13) Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' (14) But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' (15) And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? (16) He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" (17) But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? (18) Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

Now, listen to this pastor's commentary:

“Jesus spoke this parable specifically to the Jewish leaders. He spoke it to them as a warning. He wanted to warn them about their fate if they kept on rebelling against God by their unbelief against him.

This parable also has something to say to us. For us, it serves as a reminder. As we witness the owner’s patient dealing with the farmers and his justice, we are reminded about the great things our God has done and still does for us today.

Jesus is giving us a picture of how our God treats us. It is an example of one of God’s great acts for us; he is patient with us. Our God, like the owner, planted a vineyard in our hearts. He did this by giving us his message of salvation, which produced faith in us. He now continues to nurture, strengthen, and grow our faith using his Word and sacraments. This takes great patience on God’s part because *by nature we are not an easy crop to cultivate.*

Too often we neglect God’s gifts of Word and sacrament and fail to feed our faith. When we don’t study the Sacrament, and when we don’t stay away from those things that threaten our faith, we are failing to keep God’s vineyard fruitful.

Jesus is giving us a picture of our God’s greatness in his treatment of us. The Lord *treats his people the same way the owner treated the farmers.* God sends messenger after messenger to us in our lives in the form of pastors, teachers, friends, and family members to teach us God’s Word so that we repent of our sins and put our faith in Christ our Savior.

Too often we neglect these messengers and even mistreat them when they come to us with the Word of God to heal our sinful hearts or to put an end to our rebellious ways. We at times want our lives to ourselves. We want to live our way and really don’t want anyone else, even God, to tell us otherwise. The religious leaders, who Jesus was speaking this parable to, also rejected the messengers God sent them, and as a result they were putting their souls in danger.

Our God continues to send messengers into his vineyard to nourish our faith and lead us to repent so that we will be a part of God’s harvest on the Last Day.”

Now, if that leaves you confused, good! Because it is confusing. And the reason it is confusing is because this pastor keeps leaving us with the question, “just what kind of people are

you talking to hear anyway?” Are you speaking to Christians or to unsaved people? In addition, his words are confusing because he is misapplying this parable. It was meant by Jesus to be addressed to wicked, unrepentant Jews who killed His prophets and ultimately would kill His Son. But here is the point at which this fellow is denying – *you must be born again* –

He is teaching that Christians are still sinners. He is applying God's Words to evil hypocrites to Christians. Why? Because he is denying the true nature of the new birth. To him, it is a birth that doesn't birth anything in reality. There is no heart transplant involved.

And the result? Well, people look to their baptism as their salvation. So that even people who continue to walk in sin, unchanged from who they were, are assured that they are Christians.

And be sure that this same kind of denial is rampant in evangelical churches as well, even for all of their talk about being born again. They said a prayer and asked Jesus into their hearts. They walked down an aisle. They joined the church as members. They mouth the right words. But their hearts are unchanged.

Now with that example, let's hear those same words of Jesus once more:

Mat 15:10-20 And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand: (11) it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.” (12) Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” (13) He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. (14) Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” (15) But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.” (16) And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? (17) Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? (18) But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. (19) For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. (20) These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

Recall that what prompted these words is that the Pharisees had come and confronted Jesus with the fact that His disciples were not washing their hands before eating, according to Jewish tradition. These hypocrites elevated their tradition above the Word of God and Jesus told them so.

Then Jesus goes literally to the heart of the issue. He said that God is not fundamentally concerned with what we eat and drink and wear, but rather with what comes OUT of our mouths because THAT reflects the state of a man's heart. *What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart.* The heart – that is, the soul and essence of who a person really is – is the source of evil such as murder, adultery, theft, immorality and all sin.

And therefore any means of setting a sinner right with God necessarily entails making that man's heart and person absolutely new. You must be born again!

This is literally the very heart of biblical Christianity. God, in Christ, is creating an entirely new race of people to be His new Israel. This is what God's true washing is:

Tit 2:11-15 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, (12) training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, (13) waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, (14) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own

possession who are zealous for good works. (15) Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

And again:

Tit 3:4-5 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, (5) he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

The washing. What washing? How does the Lord wash us clean from our sin? *By regeneration* effected by the Holy Spirit. You must be born again. We see our sin by the Spirit's conviction. We are granted repentance and faith by Christ, but all of this is impossible unless we are born again.

Next time I want to take you back into the Old Testament and show you that the new birth has always been God's design for saving sinners. And then I want to show you what the new birth effects and how we can know that we have been born again, or not. And I hope that we are all going to see that apart from being born again and understanding that it is the only way into Christ's kingdom, a person will remain blind and deaf to the Word of

God, no matter how much “religion” he or she practices. Christ is risen just as He said! And only those who die in Him and born anew will be raised with Him.

You must be born again.

The following is taken from the doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod at –

<https://els.org/beliefs/we-believe-teach-and-confess/>

It is an unbiblical and false teaching and as you can see as you read it, insists that water baptism effects the new birth.

** We confess that God has instituted certain Means of Grace through which He announces and bestows the forgiveness of sins and the blessings of life and salvation, and through which the Holy Spirit works faith in the individual sinner to receive these blessings. These Means of Grace are His Word of the Gospel, which offers us free salvation through faith in Christ; Holy Baptism, which is described in Scripture as a “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit;” and the Lord’s Supper, in which the true body and blood of Christ are

distributed to the communicants. It is the Word of God connected with the earthly elements which makes Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper effective means through which forgiveness, life and salvation are truly offered to those who receive these sacraments. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, in written, spoken and sacramental form, is able to do all this because it is the power of God Himself. Holy Baptism has the power to work the new life of faith in the hearts of sinners. This regenerative washing “with water through the Word” is intended for all people, since all — including infants and children — are members of a sinful human race and are in need of God’s grace and forgiveness.