

Eternity Is At Stake!

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I believe that a person can go to church all their life, serve in some capacity there and yet still be in their sins and die an unsaved individual. The marks of the unconverted are more visible in some than in others like the man in my Sunday school class who was there faithfully every Sunday morning with a big smile on his face but the trouble was, on Saturday nights he'd be sitting in a strip club which was his habitual practice. Or like the elder in the church I knew who could stand in the sanctuary and pray the most eloquent moving prayers but when you saw him during the week, he had one of the filthiest mouths you'd ever want to hear. How can sweet and bitter flow out of the same fountain if the fountain is sound?

And I believe a man can go to seminary, earn a doctorate in theology, pastor a big church and yet still be an unconverted man. Now, some of you find that hard to believe but this I know from personal experience, friends. I was sitting at a big banquet table at my seminary graduation service and seated at my table were about six pastors and their wives. We were enjoying a nice meal before receiving our diplomas in the morning. The talk around the table went as follows. One man was asked what he was graduating with and he said he had a Master in Divinity. Another man said he was finally getting his doctorate after all these years. Then they turned their attention on me and one man asked me, "What are you graduating with?" I answered that I already had a doctorate and now I was getting my PhD, to which one pastor sarcastically remarked, "What are they going to call you, Dr. Dr.?" And after that experience, I wrote a little poem and it went like this:

"Dr. Dr. was all the rage,
But the problem was,
Dr. Dr. wasn't saved."

I wasn't saved. I knew theology, I knew my Bible, but I didn't know my God. I was resting on my hope of heaven on a good opinion of myself and a long track record of service but, bless God, he got me to the place where I was lost and I saw that I was in need of a Savior. He showed me that in my current condition I was on my way to hell and not only that, but I deserved to go there. I had to see myself as a lost sinner on his way to hell. I had to see the deceitfulness of my wicked heart. I had to see all the service I had done in church was for my own recognition. I wanted to be acknowledged for giving myself in church duties. But I was seated upon a false bottom, friends, of carnal security and sinking sand.

It was a real eye-opener to learn I was yet an unconverted man, even though I had a string of letters after my name. Do you want to know something, friend? I believe in my heart there are some good deacons and some good pastors that know deep down all is not well with their soul, but the one thing that keeps them back is their pride. They're afraid of what man would say if they learned their true condition. Now that's sad, isn't it, to risk dying in your sins because of foolish pride?

I'm going to preach today on the doctrine of regeneration because I fear there are a great many who sit in church Sunday after Sunday who know absolutely nothing of the new birth; their brand of religion won't save them; their long track record of service won't save them; a feeling won't save them; repeating a prayer won't save them; walking an aisle won't save them. All the physical things they did in response to what the pastor told them to do won't add up to a hill of beans in eternity.

I believe there are multitudes who believe that Christ died for their sins but they have yet to believe on the Christ who died. There are many textual decisionists out there who enter the church because they believe the text. Now, this is a serious matter, friends, because eternity is at stake and that's the title of my message today, "Eternity Is At Stake!" and my text can be found in John's Gospel in chapter 3. We're going to take a look at what Jesus had to say about how a person enters God's kingdom. You must be born from above and that's a work of grace that only God can perform, friend. You don't make yourself a Christian because if you do, then at the judgment your entire life will be a heap of wood ready for the fire.

Now that's the end of my introduction and let's get down to business. I believe a preacher's job is to be a surrendered vessel that the Spirit of God can flow through as a means of blessings to others and it's the preachers task to reclaim backsliders to God and to preach the full counsel of God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit so God can save sinners. Let me ask you, friend: have you been washed in the blood and are you born from above? I can't save you, friend, and you cannot save yourself. You have to be shut up to God entirely and become a beggar for mercy because he's the only one that can take away the heart of stone and make it a heart of flesh. It is God who gives the grace of saving faith. Do you believe that? It's true. Jesus declared, "No man can come to me except the Father which has sent me draw him."

Let us look now at what Jesus has to say on this subject of the new birth from John 3, and as we look at this passage, we see a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus who comes to Jesus by night and Jesus has to straighten out this theologian's thinking for Nicodemus by birth and education is fit for heaven in his eyes because he's a ruler of the Jews. Listen to me, friends, there are some very learned seminary professors who are yet dead in sin. Education won't get you to heaven.

Jesus challenges the traditional thinking of this Pharisee, Nicodemus, by telling him that if he wants to see the kingdom of God he must be born again. Nicodemus takes Jesus' remark as a physical thing. How can he enter the second time into his mother's womb? But Jesus reveals to Nicodemus and to all the future Nicodemuses down through the

centuries that it's not a physical act that saves you: walking an aisle won't get the job done, nor repeating the Sinner's Prayer, being sprinkled with water or immersed in water won't save you for there is nothing in the water but H₂O. If you want to go to heaven, then you must be born from above. It's a spiritual transformation and implanting of a new principle.

Listen to the words of Jesus from verse 6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Then Jesus goes on to say something quite remarkable, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." That explains the worn-out missionary in some distant land whose labors seem fruitless for years with no converts, but then quite suddenly the wind begins to blow and souls are saved. God has come in all his power and authority and hearts of stone are made into hearts of flesh born from above.

I think one of the best illustrations of this is seen in the life of the great British evangelist, George Whitefield. When I was conducting my research on Whitefield for my two volume biography of his life, I discovered that when Whitefield was a member of Wesley's "Holy Club" at Oxford, he was devoutly religious to the point of extreme. He would pray and visit prisoners and widows and give alms and deny himself good food. He'd even deny himself warm clothes in the winter time, believing it was his religious works that proved him a Christian until Charles Wesley loaned the young George Whitefield a book by the Scotsman, Henry Scougal. Allow me to read you Whitefield's own words, friends, describing his conversion from his journals. Whitefield said that he had been diligently performing his rounds of pious duties as fasting, watching and praying and receiving the sacrament yet,

"I never knew what true religion was until God sent me that excellent treatise by the hands of my never-to-be-forgotten friend. At my first reading it, I wondered what the author meant by saying that falsely placed religion and going to church, doing hurt to no one, being constant in the duties of the closet, and now and then reaching out their hands to give alms to their poor neighbors – alas, thought I, if this be not true religion, what is? God soon showed me for in reading a few lines further, that true religion was union of the soul with God and Christ formed within us. A ray of divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul and from that moment, but not until then, did I know that I must be a new creature."

Well, if you know anything about George Whitefield, friends, and the Great Awakening, you know that Whitefield's main message throughout was: ye must be born again. As a matter of fact, when Whitefield was in New England preaching in the open air to vast crowds of 20-30,000 people, a Boston minister approached him one day and asked, "Mr. Whitefield, since you've been among us all you preach is that you must be born again. When, sir, will you preach another message?" To which Whitefield replied, "When ye are born again."

The name of the book Whitefield read was entitled "The Life of God in the Soul of Man," and that's what true salvation is, friends, we must have a new nature, new principles, new affections, new aims. We must be born again from above. You see, friends, by our first birth we are only corrupt, shaped in sin and iniquity. We must undergo a second birth, a transformation. When Jesus was here in his earthly ministry as he passed through towns and villages, all who encountered him experienced change. To be born again is to have a life of communion with God because we are savingly united to Christ our Savior through a living union with the living Lord. Do you see that, friend? Only God could open the ears of the dead and speak life.

I'm now going to preach the Gospel to you and it's my prayer that you won't hear this poor preacher's shaky voice so much, so long as you hear his voice as it comes to you in power, majesty and authority. Listen to me, friend, you must be born again. A work of regeneration must be performed on your heart by the scalpel of the Holy Spirit in a divine operation. Hear now the good news of the one who came down here so we could go up there. And remember, friend, that the Gospel is for the hungry, the weary and the thirsty. Are you hungry for God? Are you weary of your sins? Are you thirsty for Christ? Then come to Christ. Don't be afraid of what others will think of you. Eternity is at stake!

Listen to these Gospel pleas:

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

Let us pray.