

Series Title: “John’s Gospel of Jesus: God in Flesh”

Today’s Title:

“God’s Kingdom and the Second Birth”

Scripture Reading: John 3:1-8

Text: John 3:8

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Introduction: (Illustrations from *2,200 Quotations*, p.173)

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon

“Every regeneration is really instantaneous. Its evidences, its outward manifestations may be gradual, but there must be a time when the man begins to live. There must be a period when the first ray of light darts on the opened eye. There must be a time when the man is condemned, and a period when he is not condemned. And there must be an instant when the change takes place.”

“Do I address one here who imagines that an orthodox creed will save him? I suppose that no one is more orthodox than the devil, yet no one is more surely lost than he is. You may get a clear head, but if you have not a clean heart, it will not avail you at the last. You may know the Westminster Assembly’s Catechism by heart, but unless you are born again, it will not benefit you. Did you say that you believed the thirty-nine articles? There is one article that is essential – “Ye must be born again.” And woe to that man who has not passed through that all-important change.”

Premise: God’s kingdom is entered into only by new birth

Outline:

I. Man’s Purpose vs. Christ’s Purpose

II. Man’s Focus vs. Christ’s Focus

III. Man’s Way vs. Christ’s Way

I. MAN’S PURPOSE VS. CHRIST’S PURPOSE

i.e. Climb the ladder of success vs. ascend the ladder of obedience

A. Consider the ladder of success

1. Note the prestige of Pharisaism

“...a man of the Pharisees....”

[see *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, Second Division, Vol. II, pp.12ff]

- The Pharisees were specially precise about interpretation and observance of the law; they were rigidly legal.

- from the testimony of several historians: “*They*

were

considered to interpret the law with accuracy.”

“They renounce the enjoyments of life and in nothing surrender themselves to comfort.”

“Hence they were those, who seriously and consistently strove to carry out in practice the ideal of a legal life set up by the scribes.”

- c/w Philippians 3:4-6 “...though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless.”

2. Note the power of Pharisaism

“...a ruler of the Jews....”

- Flavius Josephus

“The Pharisees have imposed upon the people many laws taken from the tradition of the fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses.”

“They had the greatest influence upon the congregations, so that all acts of public worship, prayers and sacrifices were per-formed according to their injunctions.”

3. Note the phobia of Pharisaiism

“...came to Jesus by night....”

- The Pharisees were known as the separatists of their day. Not only did they scrupulously separate themselves from uncleanness as to the law of Moses and manmade traditions, they especially separated themselves from those they considered to be unclean.

- c/w John 9:18-23

Note: The point here is that if one speaks or acts against the Pharisees' commands, he is at risk of removal from the synagogue. This is paramount to full-fledged Jewishness

- (Illustration from Tan #3037)

The *Farm and Ranch Review* reported that a London young woman was wrongly identified “as a drowning victim and declared dead at the inquest.” How did she then react to the decision? The coroner declared: “Once a verdict is recorded, it can only be altered by the High Court, and until they quash the verdict, you must remain legally dead.”

B. Consider the ladder of obedience

“Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you....’”

c/w Mark 10:35-45

Lessons to learn on obedience from this text:

1. Clamoring for worldly power and recognition is inappropriate for followers of Jesus Christ
2. Following Jesus promises suffering and rejection
3. The Christian's greatest accomplishment is to serve others
4. Our mission is not the recapturing of man's self-esteem, but to declare that Christ died to redeem man from his sin against Almighty God

II. MAN'S FOCUS VS. CHRIST'S FOCUS

i.e. Recognized credentials and performance vs. transformed heart and mind

A. Consider man's recognized credentials and performance

1. Consider the credentials of a rabbinical instructor

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher...."

- from *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, Division II, Vol. I, pp.323-325

"The ideal of legal Judaism was properly, that every Israelite should have a professional acquaintance with the law. If this were unattainable, then the greatest possible number was to be raised to this ideal elevation. 'Bring up many scholars' is said to have been already a motto of the men of the Great Synagogue. Hence the more famous Rabbis often assembled about them in great numbers, youths desirous of instruction, for the purpose of making them thoroughly acquainted with the much ramified and copious 'oral law.' The instruction consisted of an indefatigable continuous exercise of the memory. For the object being that the pupils should remember with accuracy the entire matter with its thousands upon thousands of minutiae, and the oral law being never committed to writing, the instruction could not be confined to a single statement. The teacher was obligated to repeat his matter again and again with his pupils. This repetition was not however performed by the teacher only delivering his matter. The whole proceeding was, on the contrary, disputational. The teacher brought before his pupils several legal questions for their decision and let them answer them or answered them himself. The pupils were also allowed to propose questions to the teacher....All knowledge of the law being strictly traditional, a pupil had only two duties. One was to keep everything faithfully in memory....The second duty was never to teach anything otherwise than it had been delivered to him. Even in expression he was to confine himself to the words of his teacher...It was the highest praise of a pupil to be "like a well lined with lime, which loses not one drop."

2. Note the credentials of God's apparent presence

"...come from God....unless God is with him."

Note: This was not an admission that Jesus was God

in flesh, but simply that God had empowered
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Jesus to fulfill the role of a prophet.

- Mother Theresa

“Oh, I hope I am converting. I don’t mean what you think....If in coming face to face with God we accept Him in our lives, then we are converting. We become a better Hindu, a better Muslim, a better Catholic, a better whatever we are....What approach would I use? For me, naturally, it would be a Catholic one, for you it may be Hindu, for someone else Buddhist, according to one’s conscience. What God is in your mind you must accept.”

[Mother Theresa: Her People and Her Word, Desmond Doig (Harper and Row, 1976) p.156]

3. Note the performance of supernatural activities

“...for no one can do these signs that you do....”

c/w I Corinthians 1:22-24 *“For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

B. Consider man’s need of a transformed heart and mind

“unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

c/w Hebrews 8:8-12 quoted from Jeremiah 31:31-34

- Arthur Brisbane (Illustration from Green #1121)

“We may sweep the world clean of militarism, we may scrub the world white of autocracy, we may carpet it with democracy and drape it with the flag of republicanism. We may hang on the walls the thrilling pictures of freedom: here, the signing of America’s Independence; there, the thrilling portrait of Joan of Arc; yonder the Magna Carta; and on this side, the inspiring picture of Garibaldi. We may spend energy and effort to make the world a paradise itself where the lion of capitalism can lie down with the proletarian lamb. But if we turn into that

splendid room mankind with the same old heart, deceitful and desperately wicked, we may expect to clean house again not

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many days hence. What we need is a peace conference with the Prince of Peace.”

- *Regeneration* from *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotion*, p.47

O God of the highest heaven,
occupy the throne of my heart,
take full possession and reign supreme,
lay low every rebel lust,
let no vile passion resist thy holy war;
manifest thy mighty power,
and make me thine for ever.

Thou art worthy to be praised with my every breath,
loved with my every faculty of soul,
served with my every act of life.

Thou hast loved me, espoused me, received me,
purchased, washed, favoured, clothed, adorned me,
when I was worthless, vile, soiled, polluted.

I was dead in iniquities,
having no eyes to see thee,
no ears to hear thee,
no taste to relish thy joys,
no intelligence to know thee;

But thy Spirit has quickened me,
has brought me into a new world as a new creature,
has given me spiritual perception,
has opened to me thy Word as light, guide, solace,
joy.

Thy presence is to me a treasure of unending peace;
No provocation can part me from thy sympathy,
for thou hast drawn me with cords of love,
and dost forgive me daily, hourly.

O help me then to walk worthy of thy love,
of my hopes, and my vocation.

vores, from caro, carnis, which means 'meat.' There are other animals that eat nothing but grass or plants. They are called

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herbivores, from herba, which means vegetation. Imagine taking a lion, who is a carnivore, and placing a bundle of hay or a trough of oats before him. He will not eat the hays or oats. Why not? It is not because he is physically or naturally unable to eat them. Physically, he could munch on the oats and swallow them. But he does not and will not, because it is not in his nature to eat this kind of food. Moreover, if we were to ask why he will not eat the herbivore's meal, and if the lion could answer, he would say, "I can't eat this food, because I hate it. I will only eat meat.'

B. God's sovereign creation of man's new nature

vv.5-8

1. God's Spirit alone causes new life in the sinner
2. From this new life, faith is born
3. With this faith the sinner trusts Christ to save his soul
4. Where, when, and exactly how the Spirit works is as mysterious as the origin & direction of the wind itself

Conclusion: (Illustration from Tan #5414)

The oldest sister of Daniel Webster was married to John Colby – the wickedest man in the neighborhood in respect to swearing and impiety. Then news came to Webster of a change, and he went to visit him.

On entering the house, he saw a large print Bible opened which Colby had just been reading. The first question Colby asked Webster was "Are you a Christian?" and then suggested that both kneel and pray!

When the visit was done, Webster told a friend: "I would like to hear what enemies of religion say of Colby's conversion. Here was a man as unlikely to be a Christian as any I ever saw; and he had gone his godless way until now with old age and habits hard to change! Yet see him – a penitent, trusting, humble believer! Nothing short of the grace of Almighty God."

Premise: *God's kingdom is entered into only by new birth*