

# The Internal Call: God's Work Alone

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[ 0 : 00 ] Music We began our study this year, a couple weeks ago.

! And you may recall I started with a rather bold statement.! In my opinion, this is the most important study we can or will ever ever understand. Or undertake.

Again, I say that it's not because I'm the teacher, it's because Jesus is the teacher. Our topic is regeneration, also known as the new birth, the inward call, the effectual call, the efficacious call, being born again or being born from above.

And all those terms we have and we will use interchangeably. We saw last time the essential nature of regeneration.

On the one hand, it's important, but more than that, it's vital. It's absolutely vital. Without regeneration, the Lord tells us that no one can see the kingdom of God, much less enter into the kingdom of God.

[ 1 : 24 ] You won't even see it. So let's review once more of the first four verses of John chapter 3. We're going to be camped out in John for a long time.

John chapter 3. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 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.

Jesus answered him, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him, how can a man be born when he is old?

Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Now Nicodemus, let's give him a little credit. He understands the impossibility of crawling back into your mother's womb.

For that reason, the comment of Jesus is beyond strange to Nicodemus. To him, with his fallen and limited understanding, it is an absolute impossibility.

[ 2 : 45 ] So Nicodemus asked the Lord, how is such a thing even possible? And the Lord Jesus, with infinite knowledge and wisdom, ignores the question.

He didn't give him an answer. He just continues to provide Nicodemus vital information on regeneration.

And may I say, through the Holy Spirit, providing us vital information concerning regeneration. So in verse 5, Jesus says, truly, truly, now we understand that's important, right?

This is true, this is true. I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

We're going to be putting in some time on this water and the Spirit. Not tonight, but we'll be coming back to that verse. It's an important verse.

[ 3 : 49 ] Here we are told though, that apart from the new birth, no one can have access to the kingdom of God.

You can put in there the kingdom of heaven. No one's going without the new birth. They have no ability to enter the kingdom.

To do so, God must act upon that individual. And may I point out that God alone must act.

It is not a cooperative effort on the part of man. Although many people and many denominations and many religions try to hold to that.

We don't meet God halfway to receive the blessing of salvation. It is God alone who must birth us into the kingdom.

[ 4 : 52 ] And let me add that God is not patiently or impatiently standing at the door knocking, waiting for us to open it so he can be freed up to then provide us with the new birth.

That's not how it works. In rebirth, and remember all those other names we called it, they're interchangeable, new birth, rebirth, regeneration, and so on.

We see the primary action of God in his sovereignty. The God who commanded light to shine in Genesis during the creation, now commands gospel light to enter and shine in the dark soul of a man or a woman.

The new birth is not only essential, it is all of God. It is all of God. As the Puritan John Owen points out, the Trinity is at work in the new birth, but it is essentially the role of the Holy Spirit to carry it out. This is the meaning of the words of Jesus in verse 6. Verse 6. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit his spirit.

[ 6 : 29 ] For there to be a new birth, God must enter into the natural world of man and cause it to happen.

Everyone in my hearing was born at some time in the past. And let me add, and we'll talk about this in a few weeks or a month, you didn't have any input in that.

And neither did I. But everyone at some point in the past was born. And none of us came out of our mother's womb as a follower of Christ Jesus.

The flesh does not produce a believer. The flesh does not have the capacity to produce a believer. To become a believer, we must be born of the Spirit of God. In verse 7, the Lord emphasizes even greater the absolute necessity of the new birth.

[ 7 : 38 ] Jesus says this, Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born again. He said, don't be amazed at that.

I told Nicodemus, the great teacher of Israel. Lost man. You must be born again. You see, Jesus uses the word must when he says, you must be born again.

And I love the way Dr. Lawson handles this. He does a good job of explaining this by using a number of terms with which we are familiar.

He says that rebirth by the Holy Spirit is absolutely obligatory. It is compulsory.

It is mandatory. It is required. It is demanded. It is imperative. And it is inescapable, to name a few.

[ 8 : 39 ] And let me also say very plainly that rebirth is also supernatural. That's because God does it. And it's supernatural.

To be saved, every person ever born into the human family must be born again. There is absolute requirement.

Must be born again. The only person not needing to be born again was the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone else was born separated from God. We are born alienated from God.

The very words the Lord uses here implies that we are all born outside the kingdom. He tells us to enter in, we must have a rebirth.

If we need something to enter in that clearly implies that we started on the outside. If we started already on the inside, we would not have to enter in, right?

[ 9 : 44 ] Does that make sense? Does that make sense? But he says to enter in, you must be born again. One of the great men of history that God has used was George Whitefield.

I heard a one-hour sermon on a pulpit committee one time. He kept talking about George Whitefield. I went up when I met the pastor.

I whispered, I said, Whitefield. Actually, I probably wasn't the pastor, it was the music guy. He kept talking about George Whitefield. George Whitefield preached without a microphone in open-air meetings on both sides of the Atlantic.

He had audiences that ranged between 10,000 and 80,000 people. I mean, how did you hear? But they did.

Somehow, I don't know what they did, but the Lord opened ears. That's all I could say. The message that he preached the most on was entitled, You Must Be Born Again.

[ 10 : 52 ] He preached that over and over and over, all over England, the colonies here in America. And after one such sermon, a lady came up to him, and she said, Mr. Whitefield, I'm glad she didn't say Whitefield, Mr. Whitefield, why do you so often preach on the topic of being born again?

And Whitefield responded, because you must be born again. Perfect answer. Perfect answer. So the rebirth is absolutely necessary.

And as I've said, it is also absolutely supernatural. We scratched the surface on this earlier, but now we're going to cover that more in depth. Now, let's face it, the birth of a child is exciting for parents. Right, Cameron? Trust me, it's even more exciting for grandparents. The birth of a child is really exciting.

Even more exciting is the birth of a sinner into God's kingdom. It has eternal significance.

[12:12] In some cases, perhaps the Spirit of God has allowed some of us to introduce someone to the gospel. And it's just, it's amazing. When Jimmy Carter was in the White House, he frequently used the term born again, telling people that he was born again.

I remember those days. Lobbyists in Washington, D.C. started showing up to meetings with lapel pens that said, born again, or I'm born again.

Now, let me just say to you, they couldn't have explained that for love nor money. They were trying, it was a tactic to get business with the government.

So they would sit down with bureaucrats who heard President Carter over and over and over say, I've been born again. And they had these lapel pens.

And I added a little point here. Given the fact that President Carter now endorses all sorts of aberrant theology, I'm not sure he knows what that term means anymore. And I cut that way down.

[13:23] I had a whole paragraph. Every person that has ever lived or ever will live had a natural birth.

Now, I always tell people I can't be president because I was born Caesarian and that's, I'm not a natural born citizen, but I do. The main reason I can't be president is none of you would vote for me, but we won't go there.

We won't go there and nor would I run. But Jesus said to enter the kingdom, we must have a supernatural rebirth that only God can provide.

Now, what did John mean with the word again when he wrote this gospel that bears his name? And of course, he's quoting Jesus. The apostle John is quoting Jesus in the gospel.

Well, it can mean a second time. Paul wrote in one of his books about turning back again.

[14:25] You were somewhere. You left that behind. You returned again. So, one basic definition of again is again.

Pretty simple. Since we were born in sin, the psalmist said we were born speaking lies. Since we were born in sin the first time, with an inherited sin nature, we must repeat that birth to be born of God.

That's called being born again. We must be born a second time, this time birthed by the Spirit of God.

This is a second meaning though for the Greek word again. And it means from above. It is the Greek word anathen. It is often used in John chapter 3 with this in mind.

It is a spiritual birth that comes down to us from God in heaven. It comes from above. It comes from above.

[15:29] Most of the time in the New Testament is rightly translated from above. Above refers to heaven where God lives. In the closing words of John chapter 3, the Lord Jesus refers to himself as one who came from above.

He says he came down from above. Listen, when Jesus stood before Pilate, the Lord told him he would have no authority over him unless it had been given to him from above.

The authority Pilate had over Jesus to judge him had been granted from above by God the Father.

The fullest and I think the most beautiful picture of rebirth is that it must come to us from above.

And that's heavy. It comes down to those being saved by God from God who dwells above.

It is obviously outside of our self because it comes from above. The spiritual rebirth. Let me give you an example of this which is not only thought provoking but in a sense somewhat humorous.

[16:52] It was a painting of the apostle Paul when he was still Saul. Remember he was breathing out threats against the baby church.

He got arrest warrants from the high priest to go to Damascus, go to Syria and round up believers. And he's on his journey to Damascus when suddenly he's hit with a blinding light that came from above.

There's that word again. And there's the word again, again. He's been thrown from his horse in this painting. Now let me say, I've read that. I don't know if there's any evidence he was on a horse, but that's just me.

I've read it several times. But in the picture he's thrown from his horse, big horse. The horse is laying partially on top of him. Paul, Saul, is struggling to disentangle himself from the animal before he's crushed.

He's trying to shield himself from the light that has blinded him, this light coming from above. His aides have rushed up to help him.

[18:00] The caption below the painting is this, Paul speaking, I was on my way to Damascus to arrest and imprison Christians, but decided instead I would exercise my free will and get myself saved.

Well, it didn't happen that way. It came from above. It came from above. Saul's rebirth came from above, meaning it was from God.

When John wrote his epistle of 1 John, he said, We are born of God. This rebirth had nothing to do with this world.

It came down from another world being above where God dwells. This rebirth has nothing to do with dead religion.

It has nothing to do with man's activities, morality or efforts. Our rebirth did not come from a horizontal level.

[19:04] The rebirth we are talking about is exclusively vertical. Exclusively. And that's the operative word there is vertical meaning it's from God acting upon a dead soul.

Dead in trespasses and sins. Now, Nicodemus uses this impossible image of reentering his mother's womb and asks Jesus if that's what he's referring to.

Of course, that is an impossibility and an absurdity. It can't happen. Even if it could, we came back out, it would still be an earthly birth.

We would still be just as lost as the first time. Instead, the Lord uses some very vitally important terms to describe this rebirth.

He tells Nicodemus that to enter the kingdom of God, you must be born of water and the spirit. If you are not born of water and the spirit, you are lost and cannot enter into God's kingdom.

[20:13] And we're going to spend some time on water and the spirit. Not tonight. But again, I want to quote Dr. Lawson. We need a new birth from another dimension.

We need a new birth from another realm. We must be born from above. We need more than a natural birth.

We need a supernatural birth. We need a new life. We need a new start. We need a new mind. We need a new heart.

We need new desires. We need a new will. We need a new beginning. We need a new destiny. We need to become a new creature. We need to start all over.

We don't need an upgrade on our life. We need a whole new life to be given to us from above like we have never experienced before.

[21:13] And as the kids say, that's heavy. What is Jesus talking about this rebirth? He's talking about regeneration. He's talking about becoming a new creature.

It's exactly what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5.17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. That is something only God can provide.

I can't provide that for my children. Or you for yours. If we could, we would, right? We can't. Only God can provide that. We need a second birth.

And I want you to think about this in the realm of mathematics. If you've only been born once, you're going to die twice.

[22:13] If you've been born twice, you're only going to die once. And maybe not at all if the Lord will come back. For those born once, someday they're going to die physically and then die spiritually for eternity.

Those born twice will only die physically. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. And let me add, and I've said this before, I don't buy into all these books and people on TV and people from other religions and cults and what that, you know, I died and I went to heaven and I saw all these things and then God brought me back.

And I came back to life. And almost all of them said, there was this tunnel. And there was a little dim light at the end and I'm going through this dark tunnel and then I came into this light.

And let me tell you, it's like I said at my mother-in-law's funeral just a few weeks ago. Her last breath on earth was followed by her first breath in heaven. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

And I think that's why Dr. McBride used to tell us, keep short accounts with God. You could be standing, you know, in an instant in front in his presence or kneeling.

[ 23 : 39 ] To be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord Jesus Christ. I have said that being born again takes a supernatural birth, but it is not a superficial birth.

Regeneration, and what we're talking about, and we'll be talking about it for quite a time, reaches down deep into the soul of a man or a woman. It is not superficial and it is not only just on the surface.

Being truly born again is more than putting on makeup to make yourself look presentable. It's much more than that. And may I say that being truly born again lasts more than a season.

There are a number of us in this room that have seen people come into this church, either quote, get saved or say they've been saved.

They join. Some go through water baptism. They hang around for a while. And then they leave. And we hope we don't have a clue where they're at.

[ 24 : 49 ] We have no idea. They go right back into the world. Why? I'd say in most cases because they were not born from above. They had no rebirth.

They went through the motions. Or as one man told me when I was talking to him about the Lord, he said, I've already got my insurance policy against hell. I went forward when I was 12 years old at a music concert.

I had a great nephew who said, I'm going to be baptized this Sunday. Why are you going to be baptized? Because my mom said it's time. They never spent one minute in a church or with a Bible or anything else.

And sadly, he was killed in a car wreck a couple years later. But it's more than getting a fire insurance policy. The new birth is at the roots of a man's soul.

It reaches down deep. A lot of people want to turn over a new leaf. But you can't. You can only turn over a new leaf if you have a new life.

[ 26 : 01 ] It takes a new leaf. The leaf I've got is all dried, fit for the compost pile or burned up. The second birth creates a new man.

And boy, we're going to hit that hard when we get to faith and repentance. Which I'll give you a little secret is an outgrowth of the new birth. It's an outgrowth of the new birth.

We'll get to that a couple years from now. And may I say this, the new birth creates a detectable man. Now what in the world?

I kind of came up with that term. I'm not sure that would be in the dictionary. When you receive that new birth from above, your friends and family members are going to see the difference.

And they're going to want to know what has changed in your life. It may not be that day. It may not be that week. But it'll happen. There's something different about you.

[ 27 : 05 ] There's something different about you. What's happened. And those born again will be more than happy to tell them because they want the same thing for them. You know, people born from above are not ashamed of the gospel.

It's the power of God unto salvation. The new birth in Christ is our hope of glory. It is our hope. And need I remind you in the New Testament the word hope is settled. It's a settled hope. It's going to happen. The new birth is the life of God in the soul of a man.

The new birth is supernatural and occurs outside of ourselves. The new birth is provided to us by another, even the Spirit of God.

That's where it comes from. The great preacher George Whitefield, I mentioned him a little bit ago, attended Oxford University in England. He joined a small group Bible study with a few other men.

[ 28 : 24 ] I think it was called the Holy Club. Maybe some other guys named them. Maybe they didn't name them. I would never name myself a member of the Holy Club. Some of the members there were John Wesley, one of the greatest preachers that ever lived, although he and I would disagree on a lot of things.

Another member was his brother Charles Wesley, one of the greatest hymn writers that ever lived. And he and I wouldn't disagree on anything. I sat at his piano, by the way, in London.

I didn't play it, but I sat there. Whitefield would later testify that while he was at Oxford, in the Holy Club, studying the Bible with these wonderful men, he came to realize that he was not saved.

He had never been born again. Whitefield came into the possession of a book written by a young Scottish Puritan.

And I love Scottish ministers. I've got Scottish. My wife is half Scottish. A young Scottish Puritan by the name of Henry Scogel. Have you ever heard of Henry Scogel? I hadn't either.

[ 29 : 44 ] Henry Scogel. He was a professor of divinity at Aberdeen University. And the book was actually an outgrowth of a letter he wrote to a friend who at one time professed Christ, but had, in his own words, lost his faith and walked away.

So, Henry Scogel penned this letter to him, which became this book. The book was actually this letter, and it was entitled, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.

I checked with, is it Abe Press or Ab Press? But anyway, they have copies. And I'm going to get a copy. I've never, I don't have it. I don't have it. Through the pages of that book, God saved George Whitefield.

The light came on. The light came from above. He was born from above, and he went on to become one of the greatest evangelists of all times. Preached to hundreds of thousands in England, and came to America, preached to the college.

I think he made seven trips to America. And actually, he died, I think, in Boston, and is buried there. They didn't haul him back and take a month or more on a sailing ship. And I'm pretty sure he's buried on American soil.

[ 31 : 11 ] Well, another member of the club was John Wesley. And he began open-air preaching in England. And he journeyed to America where he preached all over the colonies.

Kind of interesting aside, Whitefield was a Calvinist. Wesley was an Arminian. But they were good friends. And when they would preach, sometimes they'd preach together. One would follow the other. And they would, that night, share a hotel room.

I'm sure I've told this before. They'd share a hotel room. And so one night after a day of preaching, Wesley said, well, perhaps we should have a word of prayer. So they both knelt down by their respective beds.

And John Wesley said, well, go ahead, George. And so he said, thank you, Lord, for the harvest of souls today. And we pray for another harvest tomorrow. Amen. And Wesley started crawling in bed. And Wesley said, Mr. Whitefield, is that where your Calvinism has brought you? You know, a 30-second prayer? And Whitefield went to sleep.

[ 32 : 19 ] And Wesley's praying. Whitefield woke up at 2 o'clock in the morning. Wesley's still on his knees over there, but he's snoring. And Whitefield goes and shakes and says, Mr. Wesley, is this where your Arminianism has brought you? Get in bed.

Get in bed. So here we have Wesley preaching all over England, all over America. And some years into his ministry, he realized he was not saved.

Been preaching. Had a harvest of souls. People say, how can an unsaved man? How can an unsaved man lead people to Christ? Well, it's easy.

The power's in the word. The power's in the word. It's not in the man that delivers it. It's not in the man that delivers it. We've seen some real high-profile guys on TV fall.

Jimmy Swaggart. People got saved under Jimmy Swaggart. But the power was in the word and not in the delivery. Now, you don't want a phony delivering it. You don't want a phony delivering it. But sometimes that happens.

[ 33 : 28 ] So, Whitefield figures out, I mean, Wesley figures out he's not saved. So, he returns to England. He went to England. And he eventually became reborn.

But it was very complicated. And it took years. Several years for that to happen. It's a fascinating study. I will not take time to tell it all tonight.

It would be a minimum of one hour, probably more, to tell it correctly. But I do want to mention one event that did occur that's very instructive.

He's on a ship going back to England, unsaved. Realizes, I'm not saved. Have not been reborn. Terrible storm hit.

There were passengers on board and even sailors who were weeping and screaming that we're all going to perish. The ship was going to capsize.

[ 34 : 27 ] We're all going to drown in the Atlantic. Wesley later wrote in his journal that he was so scared he could not even muster the courage to cry.

He wanted to cry, but he was too scared. And now I'm going into a quote. On one corner of the ship was a group of adults with children.

In the midst of the storm, Wesley looks over at them and they're talking. And they're singing hymns. They're listening to their leaders preach the word of God.

And when that was over, Wesley says, I looked over and the children were laughing and playing games. In this raging storm. These were Moravians.

And I've heard of those guys. I don't know if I've ever met one. They're still around. About 60,000 of them, I think. It's a Christian denomination that originated in Czechoslovakia.

[ 35 : 30 ] They broke with the Catholic Church over their theology. Well, finally, the amazed John Wesley, watching all this, couldn't take it anymore. And after they ended their prayer and praise and preaching session, Wesley approached the pastor and inquired of this strange behavior in the face of impending doom and death.

Moravian minister, Augustus Guttleb Spangenberg, Can you ever name your kid? Augustus Guttleb Spangenberg, answered Wesley by speaking of their absolute certainty of salvation.

As sure of heaven as if already there. He also said their lives were committed to the Lord's will. If it was God's will that this would be their final hour, so be it.

He explained they wanted nothing more in life than to please God most. And if it most pleased God to receive them into glory that day, rather than remain in ministry on earth, so be it.

Now picture that. They're on deck in the storms. Rain's coming in the wind. He explained that they wanted nothing more in life to please God.

[ 36 : 54 ] And so they're ready to go to heaven. John Wesley informed the obviously not from Oxford or Cambridge University minister, that he, the Reverend John Wesley, was an ordained minister in the Anglican Church, highly educated at Oxford, a scholar of scholars, and was returning from the American colonies where he had led Christian mission work.

Well, when Wesley finished, the Moravian minister wasn't greatly impressed. But Wesley was too intrigued to be offended enough to go away. He continued his inquiry with amazement as to their obvious lack of the fear of death.

He had been shocked at Minister Spangenberg's claim of certain salvation. Wesley later wrote, I wasn't familiar with that term. And Wesley had neither encountered nor heard of such a claim.

Apparently, John Wesley was hoping to discover that they were all a bit slow. He thought these were just kind of slow people and didn't know enough to be afraid of the storm.

However, he was unable to get any satisfactory response from Spangenberg beyond the certainty of eternal life. That's all he would talk about.

[ 38 : 18 ] John Wesley, not wanting to accept that answer and determined to find errors in the minister's logic, hoped to prove that this was an outrageous claim of certainty of eternal life and was not the reason for their calmness.

Thus, Wesley went to the children. And he starts inquiring of them. If the adults were not afraid of the storm because of the certainty of eternal life, certainly the children's calmness had to have another source as they were too young and too uneducated to understand or grasp such lofty concepts.

Now, Wesley was shocked even more to learn that the children were no different in their thinking or answers than their parents or grandparents. They too said, we have the certainty of eternal life and had neither doubt nor fear that to fall into the raging sea was tantamount to falling into the arms of Christ.

Isn't that beautiful? While the stormy sea surged about them, the Moravian minister, Spangenberg, asked John Wesley point blank, Do you know Jesus Christ? Can you imagine asking Wesley that? Here's Wesley's reply. I know he is the savior of the world. The Moravian minister said, true. But do you know he saved you?

[ 39 : 49 ] Now, this is a leading question to say the least. The answer to Wesley did not know. So he hedged by saying, I hope he died to save me.

And the Moravian minister said, but do you know he saved you? They're going to let him off the hook. Again, Wesley answered with hesitation.

He waited some time, mumbled, waited some more, and finally he mumbled this. I'll try to mimic it. I do.

That was his answer. Do you know Christ has saved you? I sort of do. I mean, that's basically what Wesley said. He was not very convincing.

The Moravian preacher, realizing his obvious uncertainty, then tried to convince John Wesley that he was indeed saved if he did the following.

[ 40 : 50 ] Simply believed in Christ as Savior, had assurance of that salvation, and this assurance touched even to the point of death in a storm, just as the Moravians and even their little children certainly had.

Perhaps equal to Wesley's amazement at their assurance of salvation, the Moravian minister was then amazed at John Wesley, who just walked away. Gave no response to the minister's simple presentation of the simple gospel.

He just walked away. Their conversation ended there. However, history records the Moravian minister set the mental machinery of John Wesley's mind whirling for two years, trying to produce a true basis in his own life for the doctrines he had already been preaching.

He could not get away from Minister Springenberg's, I think I pronounced that different five times, five times, simple questions and certain comments, and eventually Wesley was born from above. He was born from above. So we've seen in our lesson this evening, going on now for almost 43 minutes, that regeneration is a supernatural birth.

[ 42 : 16 ] It comes from God. There's nothing we do that brings about this rebirth. In spite of what we've been taught. God does it.

And God does it exclusively. He doesn't need our help. He's quite capable of doing it. Listen to these words from Peter. 1 Peter 1.3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again. To a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Listen to those amazing words again as we close. He caused us to be born again. Who caused us to be born again? God caused us to be born again.

And it can't be any clearer than that. That's the Spirit of God recorded those words through Peter. God is the initiator of salvation to those being saved. What is our role?

[ 43 : 24 ] Give Him all the glory. Don't touch His glory. I remember Dr. Criswell was speaking at College of the Prophets. And one young minister said, Can you give us any advice as we return back to our ministries?

And he said, Never touch the glory of God. Never touch the glory of God. Give Him all the glory. So in the last two weeks, we've talked about the necessity of the new birth.

And this week, the fact that the new birth is supernatural, coming down to us from above. Born annulthin. From above. Being saved as a result of the new birth must also be scriptural.

We must do it God's way. By that I mean our salvation must be in accord with what the Scriptures teach on this subject. And by the way, that's where we will venture next time.

Thank you.