

A Promised Birth

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Date: 11 March 2019

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[0 : 00] Last time we looked at the fact that the new birth is a monergistic work.

I was listening to a tape of John MacArthur on the way here and he said it's monergistic. So I've been saying it wrong all the time and I'm not going to correct it. I'm too set in my ways. But that means our regeneration is solely dependent upon God.

God is not sitting patiently or impatiently on the throne waiting for any input from us. He's not standing at the door unable to get in.

Regeneration depends on God. And we're going to continue our study this evening and examine the fact that the new birth is a promised birth. It is a promised birth.

The verses that we'll focus on tonight will be John chapter 3 verses 9 and 10. And then all the way over in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse 6.

[1 : 13] And I'm going to begin with the passage in John chapter 3 verse 9 and 10. Nicodemus said to him, and that him is Jesus, how can these things be?

Jesus answered him and said, are you the teacher of Israel and you do not understand these things? I would say there's some level of rebuke in there.

I'm sure you will recall that the Lord Jesus was paid a visit by Nicodemus. He was an important and venerated member of the Sanhedrin in Israel.

And as a reminder, the Sanhedrin was the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of Israeli government all rolled into one. We have those three branches, but they're separated, separate but equal.

But these are all rolled into one. And Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. Most people believe he did not want to be seen by his colleagues, although the Bible is not totally clear on that.

[2 : 26] Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to enter into the kingdom of God, it was necessary that he be born again. That is the Greek word *anōthen*.

It can also mean born from above. A spiritual birth that comes down from God. Now, Nicodemus is a great teacher of the Bible in his day.

And that means in his day, the Old Testament. He's never heard this. He's never heard this. And he responds by questioning the Lord.

He says, how can these things be? In verse 9. How is this even possible? And probably veiled in that response was, how is it possible that I, the teacher of Israel, haven't heard these things?

Nicodemus is caught off guard by the Lord's response to him. And Jesus comes right back and he says, are you the teacher of Israel?

[3 : 33] And yet you do not understand these things? And by that statement, it is obvious that Jesus expected Nicodemus to have already understood this truth concerning the necessity of the new birth.

Concerning the necessity of God giving the new birth. He should have known these truths because he was the teacher of Israel. Now, as a reminder, there are many passages in the Old Testament that speak of rebirth.

It does not use the word rebirth, but it talks frequently about God placing a new heart inside a man. That is a monergistic work.

We saw last time in Jeremiah and Ezekiel this truth. What Jesus is really saying to Nicodemus is, you have the reputation of being the great teacher of Israel.

Haven't you been reading your Bible? Haven't you been reading the scrolls of the Old Testament? It's a rebuke. Look, Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

[4 : 49] There were about 6,000 Pharisees roaming around the countryside of Israel in his day. It was the strictest sect in the whole country.

And he had risen to be an elite member of the sect of the Pharisees. There were only 71 of those guys ruling the country. But he and his associates were not depending upon the Bible for knowledge about entrance into the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. We use those terms interchangeably. They were dependent upon reading commentaries and human writings to describe, well, what did God mean by that verse of Scripture? Like any human writing, there were mixtures of error in there. The Pharisees were also relying upon their heritage, their lineage, certainly their family connections. We see that with the high priests because you had Caiaphas, but you also had Annas, his father-in-law. And there was family connections there to have risen to that level. They were relying on their citizenship in the nation of Israel.

[6 : 03] These were the chosen people. They were fond of telling, especially Gentiles, that they were the chosen race. And they were heavily relying upon the fact that they were children of Abraham.

Abraham was their father. They'd been born under the Abrahamic covenant. In other words, Nicodemus, like those around him, were relying totally upon external religion and the belief that such would somehow commend them or him to God. They're relying on religion. And that reliance or the practice of reliance on religion hasn't gone away. It's very prevalent with us globally. It predominates on the earth in our day. All of the world's religions depend on man's performance within that religious order to one day arrive in heaven or whatever they might call it. And different religions call it different things. This is true if you study Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, and others.

[7 : 21] Mormon's Jehovah Witnesses have a works-oriented theology to reach heaven. You often see little young Mormon guys, good-looking guys, little ties on, white shirts, pedaling around the neighborhoods on their bicycles, gaining some points.

I saw something graphically displayed. We had a video series here years ago on different religions and cults. And that particular Sunday night, it was a Jehovah Witness. And there was an evangelical pastor who saw a little old lady, probably in her 80s, standing on a street corner in a large city in the southwest. I think it was Dallas. It might have been Houston. handing out or actually trying to sell copies of the Watchtower, the Jehovah Witness magazine. It's interesting.

If you say you don't want to buy at this, we'll just give you some. But their first step, try to sell it. It was the middle of the summer in the southwest and about 102 degrees Fahrenheit.

[8 : 30] The pastor walked up to this little lady and said, Why are you doing this? And basically she said, Well, I get so many points for my performance, and essentially I'm working my way to heaven.

And he said, Well, can I show you something? And I'll use your Bible. She had a Jehovah Witness Bible. But he'd read that and he knew there wasn't any errors in this particular section.

And she said, Well, yeah, you can read that to me. So he takes her Bible, opens to Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9, and he reads it to her. For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. And that little lady looked down at the Bible, looked up at him, and he said her eyes began to fill with tears. And she said, If that's true, what am I doing standing out here in this heat?

[9 : 40] Because she really legitimately thought, and it had been taught, you've got to work your way to get there. It would be like all of us appearing one day before the Lord and telling Him, Well, you've got to let us into heaven.

After all, we're Southern Baptists. Except for Mike, it ain't going to work that way. Of course, Mike is at least a second generation, maybe more, I don't know. But, you know, that's not on the list. So we have Nicodemus, an elite Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, and the number one teacher in the entire country of Israel.

And that's really what Jesus is asking when He says to him, Are you the teacher of Israel? And there's a lot of emphasis on that word, the.

If Nicodemus is the acclaimed teacher in the entire nation, having all this supposed knowledge and expertise and ability, why does it appear as if He didn't even pass Biblical Studies 101 when He went to their school?

[10 : 52] Jesus is telling Nicodemus that He had totally missed the message of the Old Testament. In His chosen profession, Nicodemus had totally blown it.

Now, what precisely had Nicodemus missed? That salvation was by grace alone, through faith alone, in the coming Messiah alone.

Nicodemus had failed to recognize that the new birth is a promised birth. It was promised long ago in the pages of the Bible, and for Nicodemus, that was the Old Testament scrolls.

The New Testament hadn't even been written yet. And we should not fail to recognize this. When you get to John chapter 3, this is not something new that the Lord's teaching. Rebirth.

It's in the pages of the Old Testament. So where do we find the teachings of the new birth in the Old Testament? Everyone in the kingdom of God entered because they were born again.

[12 : 01] Born from above. Save for the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot name one biblical person in heaven that did not get there except by rebirth.

Be they Adam, Eve, Abel, Seth, the patriarchs, prophets, kings, disciples, apostles, and one of the thieves on the cross. They were all born from above.

Now there's a point to be made here. If we were alive on earth and living as a Jew in Israel when this took place, we would have all held Nicodemus in the very highest regard.

If we'd seen him, we'd say, that's Nicodemus. You know, that's Nicodemus. We would have done that. That's just human nature. He was the teacher of Israel.

Well, here's a man. He didn't drink. He didn't smoke. He didn't swear. He didn't cheat on his wife. He gave more than a tithe to the temple. He was an elite Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin.

[13 : 11] And Jesus comes along and says, you need to be born again. You need to be born from above. And if you're not born again, you will never enter into the kingdom of God.

And you know, I think if we were living in that day, our reaction would be, if this guy's not going to make it, who among us will? I mean, really? I've been scared to death.

If he's not going to go in, then who is? Who is? Well, how many of us need a new heart? Listen to these sobering words by our Lord.

Matthew 5.20. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now that's sobering, guys, because outwardly, these guys looked like they were righteous. They dressed righteous. They behaved righteous. You know, they were so righteous, they rang little bells so people could make sure they said, oh, there's that righteous Pharisee.

[14 : 22] That's how righteous they were, you know. They drew attention to themselves. And Jesus actually gives an answer to Matthew 5.20 in Matthew 5.48. Listen to this.

If that doesn't disturb you, try this on. You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Oh man, he's gone to meddling now.

He's left preaching behind. And I'm sure that makes us all feel better. As long as your righteousness is the same as your Father's, you'll be okay. As Steve Lawson says, at this point, let's all stop, gulp, and swallow real hard at the same time.

You know, the righteousness of God we're talking about. And these words were spoken to us by the God of the universe who is incapable of lying and who always speaks perfectly accurate truth.

Our righteousness has to exceed or surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter heaven. Externally, these were the most righteous appearing men in the world at that time.

[15 : 35] If that weren't enough, our righteousness would match that of God the Father. Now, I'm not going to pick on any of you. I'm going to pick on me. If I have any shot at entering into the kingdom of God, I can only get there two ways.

One of two ways. My righteousness, if I've never had any, my righteousness from birth to death must exceed the righteousness of a holy man like Nicodemus and be like the righteousness of my heavenly Father.

Well, I blew it at a very early age. I think I was still in diapers when I blew that. So let's go to plan B. My plan B. God has no plan B.

My plan B. I must have a new birth that comes down from the Father. It's the only hope I have. And it's a new birth that I don't have anything to do with.

Because if I have something to do with it, I'm going to mess it up. I promise you, I will mess it up. I must have a new birth. We all must have a new birth. I need heart replacement surgery where God removes the old sinful heart of stone and in its place gives me a new heart of flesh.

[16:55] And I've had open heart surgery, but they didn't remove it. They just worked on it while it was in there. We must be born again from above.

So let us examine an Old Testament passage that Nicodemus should have had memorized. He should have been going around the countryside telling folks this.

And the one place I'm going to look here is quoted frequently in the book of Deuteronomy. That was the Lord's favorite Old Testament book. He quoted Deuteronomy more than any other book.

And in Deuteronomy 30, verse 6, we read this. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live.

Now here we have a passage obviously talking about circumcision. But it is not physical circumcision. This is the real circumcision.

[18:07] This is the true circumcision. This speaks of circumcision of the heart. Physical circumcision, which was commanded of Abraham and those who came after him, although it existed prior, even in pagan cultures.

But physical circumcision is a symbol. The circumcision of the heart is the real. That's the real circumcision.

Physical circumcision involves a cutting of the foreskin. Spiritual circumcision involves a cutting of the heart to remove old sinful things and to replace them.

But what do we replace them with? Well, things like grace, faith, the Word of God. We could go on and on, couldn't we?

Deuteronomy, chapter 30, verse 6, describes the only way that anyone in any age can enter into the kingdom of God.

[19:20] There is no other way. And please note that only the Lord can perform this surgery. I mean, when I got to St. John's, if they just said, well, here's the scalpel and whatever, just go ahead and start and we'll make sure you get it right, but we're depending on you.

I'd have gone home. I'd have turned around and gone home. No one else can perform this surgery and no one else can do it for you individually.

Only the Lord Jesus can do it. When this divine surgery occurs for real, there is a dramatic and let me say to you, practically in our observations, an instantaneous result.

I said last time, we're not talking about being born again and 40 years later, well, I'd better repent and have faith. No. That doesn't work that way.

When it occurs, when God puts that new heart in at rebirth and it occurs for real, you will begin to love the Lord your God with your heart, with your soul, and if it wasn't enough, you will now live.

[20:48] You've gone from death to life, dead in trespasses and sin to being born again, rebirth. You're now alive. This is God putting into the spiritually dead heart new life.

This is the work of grace within the heart and grace is put there only by divine surgery. There's no other way.

Guys, you can search the scriptures, come back next Monday, tell us if you find another way, but you're not going to. You're not going to. When this divine life is placed within the heart, it is accompanied by love.

It is a love at the highest level, sacrificial love, agape love. What is agape love? It's love so much that a person is willing to go to the cross and die for someone else.

Sacrificial love. It is a love for God. This happens when you're born again. You have a love for God.

[21:58] Perfect? No. Still working on that. You have a love for God. You have a love for God's Word. I remember I went out to a bookstore, Christian bookstore. I know they had Christian bookstores.

And I went in and bought a Bible. I still got it. It not only wasn't a study Bible, it didn't have a footnote. I was on my own. And I made the typical mistake for these pastors to know what I'm going to say.

I started in Leviticus. I had a nose blade from the Bible hitting me in the bed. What is this? I wish someone had told me, start with John.

Start with John or 1 John. So you have a love for God, a love for God's Word. And you have a love for God's Son. You don't understand all what's going on, but you have a love for the Son of God.

You have a love, and I'm going to say this, and I want to preach to one of my own sons on this. You have a love for God's church. You know, I have people all the time say to me, you mean I can't go

to heaven just because I don't want anything to do with church?

[23 : 11] And I say to them, look, if you're born again, that passes away. You can't wait to get down there when the doors open. That's just the nature. You want to be with God's people.

You want to be learning with God's people. You have a love for God's church. You have a love for God's people. You have a love for God's work. You want to make His work your work.

Share the good news. Go to the other most parts of the world, whether it's Bangladesh or State Street, and you have a love for the lost. Have a whole new love for the lost.

And this list is inexhaustible. I mean, we could go on and on. That is why it is called a new creation. Old things pass away. We become new creatures in Christ.

It is all a result of God cutting away the foreskin of the heart, that heart of stone, and giving new life with a heart of flesh.

[24 : 14] flesh. And that's why it's being called born from above. Because only God can perform this divine surgery. Only God can do this.

And no one else. Now, where does this happen? Where does this take place? It happens in the innermost beings of one's soul.

it goes deep. Guys, it goes deep. When it happens, we are never the same again.

Now, I'm not talking about something magical. When all this was happening to me, I was kind of disappointed. I thought I would see angels dancing and hear bells.

None of that happened. None of that happened. happened. But it doesn't say that it will happen. But it goes deep. We're not the same. This is not external religion.

[25 : 14] This is all internal. And it's down deep where only God can penetrate. He goes into the places of our very being where no one's ever been before.

We haven't even been there. And he takes us with him. This is a transformation and it must occur from the inside out.

It doesn't occur from the outside in. God goes in deep with his spirit. In Jeremiah 9.25 we read this. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh.

Well, that's a frightening passage, isn't it? Because the Jews were huge on this. you have to keep the Abrahamic law. God told Abraham, you've got to get circumcised.

And this was huge and they did it on the eighth day. Interesting side comment here. In the human body we have hemoglobin, the ability for the blood to coagulate.

[26 : 24] The highest point of the blood's ability to coagulate from birth until you die at age 90 is the eighth day of life.

That's the maximum where the blood will coagulate. Isn't that interesting? I threw that in for free. I'm not going to charge. So we hear a verse here in Jeremiah speaking of physical circumcision.

And again, that's only an external sign. It was just an external sign. the internal is the reality of what the sign is indicating.

There are millions and probably billions of people who have gone through physical circumcision, but it avails them nothing spiritually.

That is why Paul would later say, not all Israel is Israel. And yet all the Jews in Israel have been circumcised. He said, no, no, not all Israel is Israel.

[27 : 28] What did he mean there? There is a physical Israel and there is a spiritual Israel, a remnant, if you will. Physical circumcision provides no escape or protection from the coming judgment and punishment of God.

It is not enough to be physically circumcised. In our day, we can actually say it is not enough to merely sit in church Sunday after Sunday.

And let's face it, especially in America, how many millions of men are sitting there because it's easier to go to church than listen to your wife nag you.

I mean, it's the truth. We've had them in our church. It's just easier. They'll just go. Just don't make me go Sunday night or Wednesday night. But I'll go. I'll go. And I mean, that's just the nature of things.

But it's just not enough to sit in church and say, okay, well, I'm there. It's not enough to be baptized.

[28 : 37] It's not enough. I've been baptized twice. And it's not enough to sing in the choir. I haven't sung in the choir yet. Or to serve as a deacon or elder. It is not enough to know the Bible, to participate.

It's not enough to be a teacher. In fact, you have a higher calling and a heavier judgment. It is not enough to be external religious and have all the trappings and the outward signs of a spiritually, well, man, these are not enough.

I pray often in the dark of my house and my wife's asleep and it's two o'clock in the morning and I'll say, you know, God, you know me and I know me.

And no one else really knows me. They think I'm this, I'm a teacher. I do this. I teach Sunday morning and Monday night and sometimes Wednesday and when we don't have the cream of the crop with Lee and Willard, but you know me, God, and I know me.

And I'm usually laying on my face with, you know, before the Lord. He knows me. A lot of people have all the trappings and outward signs of a spiritually well man, but he's not.

[29 : 51] He's not. There must be something deep within our soul that has occurred and it is a place where only God goes.

That is why we described this last week as a monergistic birth. Only God is active in regeneration. We are passive. Our God is a transforming God and only God can circumcise a heart and give that heart new life, new creation, new creature in Christ.

And it's a miraculous rebirth. It's amazing. In our day, we would say that there are many on the church roll whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life.

there is an external church. We call that the visible church. We see it every Sunday. We see evidence as we drive down the road.

We see steeples everywhere. When my wife and I visit Scotland, we've been there more than once and we're going back, Lord willing, we look and we see from afar a beautiful and large Gothic cathedrals.

[31 : 06] angels. And then we get near and they're abandoned. The windows are boarded up. They've got a for sale sign out front or they've been turned into a pub.

And in Edinburgh and Glasgow, we saw many beautiful churches that were now pubs. They didn't make it as a church. Europe's gone dark. You know, the brightest places on earth for the church in our day is in the persecuted countries.

But Western Europe has gone dark. When Diane and I were there in Scotland, we visited Glasgow Cathedral in the city of Glasgow, Scotland.

The building itself could probably hold ten Highland parks. Ten of our buildings within their building. If we include the surrounding grounds and the cemetery, it is probably about the size of the city of Dewey, land-wise.

It's just amazing. We went there and worshipped one Sunday along with the church members. They numbered about 25 people.

[32 : 19] The average member's age was in the early 80s. No one spoke to us except one little old lady. And she came up and kind of just latched on to us.

A really nice lady. And after church, she came with us and walked us out as we were leaving. And I thank God for little old ladies. I said, ma'am, I was surprised at the size of this building.

There was only 25 people. And she said to me, these were her words. She said, well, this church is dying. And we will soon close.

when the last few members pass, it will be closed. I said, well, what's going to happen then? And she said, plans have already been published that this church will become a museum.

And it substantially was then. And you know, over there, if you've ever been, in the old days, they buried people in the church, in the floors, in the walls. Diane's got grandparents buried in that building.

[33 : 25] we went and saw their graves. It had their name and everything. But they said, it's going to be a museum. And it almost was when we were there. These were external churches that were dying or already dead.

Pray this church never dies until the rapture. And then we won't care. The world and America are filled with people who have never been circumcised in the heart.

They've never been reborn. They've never been regenerated by the Spirit of God. Most every church in the world has wheat and tares sitting in the pews on any given Sunday.

We have people in the visible church that are not members of the invisible church where God's redeemed people dwell. Paul spoke of this necessity of the new birth in Romans 8.28 for no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly nor is circumcision outward and physical.

And then of course in the great Romans 2.29 but a Jew is one inwardly and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Spirit.

[34 : 41] It can't be any plainer than that. You can't get any plainer. The true Jew and the true Christian are not so because of anything external.

External signs, external rituals don't get you anywhere and they especially don't get you eternity with God.

That takes true circumcision. Circumcision of the heart. Verse 28 says it's not outward. Verse 29 says it's inward. Referring to the soul and the heart.

True circumcision is of the heart by the Spirit of God. That is the message from Jesus to Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel.

There's another passage in the New Testament we should consider. It's found in Colossians chapter 2. Lee is teaching Colossians on Wednesday nights. Paul speaks about the sufficiency of Christ.

[35 : 46] If you have Christ, you have everything. If you don't have Christ, you don't have anything. If you have received by grace the Lord Jesus Christ, you don't need anything else.

You have it all. So many churches teach the necessity of a second blessing over and above Christ. There is nothing above Christ.

people might cry out and say, the Father is above Christ. During the incarnation, Jesus did submit himself totally to his Father. But remember, he's seated at the right hand of the Father.

He is co-equal and co-eternal with the triune Godhead. They are equal. Listen to this passage. In fact, they're so equal, they're one. Listen to this out of Colossians 2.11.

You'll be getting there in a few weeks. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the flesh and listen to this, by the circumcision of Christ.

[37 : 04] Wow, that's powerful. Mull that over this week. There you have the new birth. birth. It was promised long ago all the way back into the Old Testament.

And I can find Genesis passages that talk about the new birth. It is a circumcision of the heart performed by the great physician Christ Jesus himself.

It is not by human hands because it is not a physical circumcision. circumcision. It is a spiritual circumcision. The flesh dies, Christ enters in and makes us alive in him.

The new birth is everywhere in the Old Testament. It is in Deuteronomy. It is in Jeremiah. It is in Ezekiel. This is the new birth that Nicodemus should have known about and should have been teaching to the nation because he couldn't.

He couldn't do it because Nicodemus at that point needed to be born again and that's why this escaped him.

[38 : 23] He didn't have spiritual eyes to see. He had not been born from above. It is the same birth we all knew.

Thank you.