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## **The Words of Our Salvation: Regeneration**

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### **Introduction**

Tonight we are continuing in our series on “The Words of Our Salvation”

Allow me to echo Pastor Dan words from a few weeks ago in what our heart desire is through this series. Quoting Pastor Dan “We aim, through this series, not merely to inform, but to plead with all of you to so “lay upon your hearts” that you will flee sin and cherish the Christ you see in these theological topics”.

Early in the morning of May 20<sup>th</sup> 1883 on the island of Krakatau, in the Straits of Sunda, a volcano erupted, with violence nearly ten thousand times that of the Hiroshima bomb. A shock wave blew around the globe. Life had been extinguished and organic matter sterilized by the intense heat. There were no seeds, no topsoil, and certainly no wildlife. Nothing was left of the island but a lifeless mass 130 feet deep of lava and volcanic ash. Observers estimated that 40,000 people lost their lives, thereby making this one of the deadliest eruptions in history. Scientists declared positively that no animal or vegetable life would be able to survive. Nevertheless, over the next three years, flowers and ferns began to sprout out of the dark soil. Seeds had been carried there by the wind and the sea. By 1897, many portions of the ground were covered with vegetation. Soon the entire island was covered with plant growth, and an array of birds, animals, and insects populated the island. As I read this historical account I couldn't help to see how this vividly illustrates what is taking place spiritually when God completely transforms the sin-darkened souls of men. Just as this 130 foot deep mass of lava and volcanic ash was dead, life was brought back to it by the seeds that had been brought by the winds and the sea. So it is when God the Holy Spirit brings an awakening to mans spiritual death. The name the Bible gives for this experience is “regeneration”, “new birth” or “quickening” as is referred to in the King James Version.

## **Definition of Regeneration**

Regeneration is the inward work of God's Spirits to give spiritual life to the dead soul, whereby, He convinces us of our sin, and enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renews our wills, by giving life to the soul.

The term "new birth" never occurs in the Bible; and the noun "regeneration" occurs only twice in (Titus 3:5, Mt. 19:28). The Greek word translated "regeneration" is "palingenesia", which, when broken down into its components parts, means "born – again" ("palin" = again" "genesia" = birth). While the term new birth never occurs, related words occur many times, such as "new creation", "born again", and "new man". Wayne Grudem defines born again as "the scriptural term referring to God's work of regeneration by which he imparts new spiritual life to us. It is also clear from such references as Eph 2:1, Rom 8.8,11, Eph 2:5,6 that in his natural state an individual is dead because of sin, and unable because of that condition to enter into eternal life.

We must understand that regeneration is a divine work, and that is why it is effectual. It is not a work that we can bring about in our lives. It is a work of God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Just as no infant born into this world produced its own birth, even so no sinner can effect his own new birth. It is the work of God specifically, of God the Holy Spirit.

### **What is regeneration then? It is instantaneous.**

Just as a child is born at a specific moment in the physical birth, so the spiritual birth occurs instantaneously when the Holy Spirit imparts new life. Regeneration is the one-time experience of receiving new life in Christ, when the work of a new creation is begun, and the process of transformation is set in motion. The regenerate man is no longer the man he once was. By virtue of the work of the Holy Spirit, the new life has come into the souls of men. This new nature has its own desires, affections, and interests - they are all spiritual, rooted in Christ, and God centered.

### **Why is regeneration or new birth necessary?**

Now we need to ask the question why is regeneration or the new birth necessary. It is necessary because man, as we are learning through the study of Genesis is guilty before God. He is depraved and polluted in his being. Man is incapable of receiving spiritual things in his mind, will and affections. An unregenerate sinner is unable to do anything

to please God. An unregenerate sinner is dead! He is dead in trespasses and sins. The sinner is in a state where there cannot be any human solution to make it good. (Psalms 58:3) David himself says ***“The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.”*** (Psalms 51:5) David says concerning himself ***“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*** (Jeremiah 17:9) Jeremiah says, ***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”*** No one can understand the depravity of the human heart only God understands it, and therefore it is only God the Holy Spirit who can deal with it and change it. Because we are spiritually dead, then the Holy Spirit makes us alive by regeneration.

### **Scriptures Concerning Regeneration**

As we look at scripture concerning regeneration there are two basic passages of Scripture that discuss regeneration as it pertains to the impartation of the new life to a believer. (Turn with me to John 3:3) ***“Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*** This refers to regeneration as a “new birth.” The Greek work translated “new” is *another* and may be translated “from above”. In other words, the second birth is a birth from above, from God. The new birth is a spiritual birth in contrast to the first birth which is a physical birth. In the spiritual birth the Holy Spirit regenerates the person; He is the *means* of regeneration. (Look at verse 3:5 of John). ***“Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”*** The phrase “is born” is passive, indicating it is a work done *upon* man, not by man. Man does not bring about regeneration; God produces it. John 1:13 says ***“who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*** This passage indicates the new birth is not effected by the will of man. Regeneration is an act of God, not a cooperative effort between God and man.

(Turn with me to Titus 3:5) ***“...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, v.6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,”*** Here we see another passage where regeneration is explained. In this

passage regeneration is linked to two things: washing and renewing by the Holy Spirit. It is noteworthy that in both John 3:5 and Titus 3:5 two elements are mentioned; water and the Holy Spirit. It is possible to understand water here as representative of God's Word. We see this in Eph 5:26 *"that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word"*. The sovereign work of God in regeneration was also predicted in the prophecy of Ezekiel. Through him God promised a time in the future when he would give new spiritual life to his people. Ezekiel 36:25-27 reads, *"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."*

In **Eph 2:4-6** we see God glory is being put on display for His never-ending mercy and love for those who are spiritually dead because of their sinfulness. *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved v6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.* When we were dead He made us alive! A spiritually dead person needs to be made alive by God. Regeneration brings spiritual life to the dead.

### **Its Effects**

So what are the effects of these passages? We see that by this divine work the sinner is re-created in and to newness of life, the defilement of the heart is cleansed or "washed" away and now is enabled to "see" and to "enter" the kingdom of God by faith. He is also enabled to believe in Jesus, to love others, particularly other brother and sister in Christ, and to do righteousness and to turn away from a life of sin. (It is not the result of human experience). In other words, it is not something the person does but something that is done to the person.

One major effect of being born from above is being made alive, and in this we have eternal life. The power that raises believers out of death and makes them alive is the same power that energizes every aspect of our Christian lives. **Rom. 6:1-7** reads *"What*

*shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that graced may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.* Brother and sisters we are dead to sin and alive, to righteousness through Christ's resurrection. God is actually producing righteousness to the believer.

(Turn back with me to John 3:2.) We see in this passage where Jesus explained the new birth to Nicodemus. Beginning in v.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." **Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God"**. Unless Nicodemus was born from above, he would not see God.

In v.4 Nicodemus responded immediately to Jesus' statement that no one could see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Nicodemus was a leading teacher of Judaism, and was I sure a very brilliant man. He knew he could not return to his mother's womb.

In v.5-8 we read where Jesus answered, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sounds, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."** So we see that this is the doctrine of regeneration. Only God could prepare Nicodemus' heart to believe in Jesus Christ. (Turn with me to Acts 16:14) Here we see another example of God preparing the heart of Lydia. ***"One who heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a***

*worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul*". We see again through this passage that the Spirit of God had evidently been at work convicting of sin, righteousness and judgment. She had become a God seeker. However, this was not enough. She, like the Pharisee Nicodemus, had to be born from above, for *"that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"*. So when Lydia's heart was opened, her innermost being was changed. Lydia immediately understood the Scriptures that Paul was expounding. They made sense to her, and she trusted in Jesus as the promised Messiah. She then confessed her faith, and was baptized. Note that it was after her heart was changed she then she confessed her faith. Faith does not precede regeneration.

Again it is important to note that in the new birth, in regeneration man is passive. Our new birth, (regeneration) is totally from God. It is not based on human effort, and we see this clearly in John 1:13 *"who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God"*. This verse indicates the new birth is not effected by the will of man. Regeneration is an act of God, not a cooperative effort between God and man. God is the one who breaths life into a spiritual corpse through the Holy Spirit. It can be likened to what Jesus did to Lazarus, who was dead and buried. Think about it Jesus come to the tomb or in this case a cave, and Martha Lazarus sister said to the Lord "he has been dead four days there will be an odor from his decaying" Lazarus was dead! He was wrapped from head to toe in linen cloth. He was not asleep he was dead! So what am I trying to emphasize here the new birth *must* precede anything we do. Lazarus had to be made alive before he could exit the tomb. Prior to the new birth we are dead in trespasses and sins, and dead men can do nothing spiritually unless made alive from God the Holy Spirit. Therefore regeneration must *precede* faith, repentance, confession, baptism, prayer, or any other response on our part. Man is not involved, but when a person is quickened made alive to Christ that work affects his mind, will and emotions. He will increasingly know God's will and will delight in it. This person will now have new desires. He will no longer want for the things of the worldly kingdom, but will desire the thing for the eternal kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion let us apply these truths personally. It is one thing to understand a doctrine and another thing to experience it. Both Nicodemus and Lydia were both concerned about the well being of their soul. Nicodemus had seen the teacher that had come from God, and Lydia had meet with the Jewish women and learned from the Scriptures. Both were prepared to listen to the words of God. The Lord Jesus promised in Matthew 7:7 **“Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.”** Both Lazarus and Lydia made that response.

### **Is regeneration evident in you life?**

There are several passages that point to the results in our lives from being born again.

1. 1 Jn. 2:29 – We are capable of doing righteous things.
2. 1 Jn. 4:7 – Being born of God is the basis of true Christian love, since we have a new capacity to love others.
3. 1 Jn. 5:4 – We are able to overcome the world because of the radical change of life that has taken place.
4. Eph. 2:5 – Formerly dead in sins, we are made alive together with Christ. This union brings us into permanent contact with His unending life.

Has the Lord been preparing you for a further revelation of His Grace? Do you feel a spiritual hunger? Does life with all its pressures fail to satisfy? As you come under the sound teaching of the inspired Word at Clearcreek Chapel, or in your personal studies have you felt convicted of sin or the great sin of unbelief? As you think about righteousness are you comparing yourself to someone else who is less spiritual, or are you measuring yourself alongside Jesus Christ. When we measure ourselves against Jesus Christ we will see how short and flawed we really are.

When you think of judgment do you think of a day of reckoning when all the dead will be raised to give an account? Do the terrors of damnation trouble you? As I was preparing for this message I was reading much of C.H. Spurgeon works, and I saw that this very thing the terrors of damnation haunted him. He had nightmares about being in hell. But then he was told: "Look and live! And suddenly the gospel made sense and he knew that salvation was his.

(2 Corinthians 4:6) ***"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*** As Pastor Russ has been teaching us in Genesis this is a direct reference to God as Creator, who commanded physical light into existence. To quote John MacArthur from his study notes "The same God who created physical light in the universe is the same God who must create supernatural light in the soul and usher believers from the kingdom of darkness to His kingdom of light.

***"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, v.14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13-14).***

***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, v.9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9).***

Regeneration is a work whose effects will be visible to all. Just as the evidence of life was brought to a lifeless mass of lava and volcanic ash, so will the work of regeneration be seen in the life of a believer who desires to love and obey God. Tonight examine and see whether you have experienced this initial, first work of God in your soul. His life, death and resurrection are sufficient. All is paid for.

Close in Prayer: