

OLD-TIME RELIGION
12 Fervent, Soul-Winning Sermons

By

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CHAPTER SEVEN

BORN AGAIN - AND KNOW IT

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"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 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. 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. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. 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. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:1-19).

In that last verse JESUS says plainly and pointedly that after all is said and done there is just one reason why people are not saved - because they love their sins. They give many other excuses, but JESUS said, "**This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**"

We take our text from the seventh verse: "**Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.**" You notice the language that JESUS uses: "**Ye must.**" He did not say, "You ought to be Born Again." He did not say, "It would be a fine thing for you to be Born Again." JESUS said, "**Ye must be born again.**" And if you study GOD's Word you will find that whenever GOD uses that word must it means every time that there is no other way.

I. Some of GOD's Musts

I call your attention to a few of the times GOD uses the word.

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, verse 6, we read, "**He that cometh to God MUST believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.**" It is self-evident that no man can come to GOD who does not believe there is a GOD. He must believe that GOD is or he will never come to GOD; he will have no thought of coming to GOD. But he also must believe that GOD will do what He says. That is exactly what the writer meant when he said, "**He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.**" If you believe those two things this morning, you are in a mighty good position to be saved. It does not save you, but it makes it easy for you to be saved. If deep down in your heart you believe that there is a GOD and that GOD will do what He says, I tell you it is mighty easy for you to be saved. But you must believe those things or you will never seek GOD and never come to Him.

Again we hear that word "**must.**" Peter is preaching at the beautiful gate of the temple after he has healed that man who was lame in his feet from his mother's womb. The people throng around him and say, "**In whose name did you do this miracle?**" Peter says, "**In the name of Jesus of Nazareth whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead.**" And then he says these significant words, "**Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we MUST be saved**" (Acts 4:12). You notice that word again. He does not say, "Whereby ye may be saved." He does not say, "Whereby ye can be saved." But it is that word "**must**" again. It means you will either be saved through the name of JESUS or you will never be saved. You will go to Hell. So again we have the inevitable, inescapable choice. It is either that or nothing. That is what GOD means when He says must: there is no other way.

Again, in the third chapter of John's Gospel which we read a moment ago JESUS said to Nicodemus, "**As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so MUST the Son of man be lifted up.**" He did not say that He was going to be crucified. He said He must be crucified.

As JESUS started His last journey up to Jerusalem you hear Him telling His disciples, as His face is steadfastly set toward Jerusalem, "**that he MUST go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many**

things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Why "**must**"? Because unless He does there is no remission. Unless He makes the atonement for sin, unless He sheds His precious Blood, there can be no salvation. There was no other choice. There was no other way that men could be redeemed. The Son of man must be lifted up.

Again, to Nicodemus He says, "**Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.**" Again He means that there is no choice; that there is no other way. There is no such thing as people ever entering the kingdom of GOD any other way, for JESUS said, "**Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" Oh, why is it that people refuse to believe the Word of GOD? All over the world and even in the churches, there are multiplied millions who think that they are going to get there some other way. There is no other way!

JESUS did not say to Thomas, "I am a way." He said, "**I am the way.**" He did not say, "I am a beautiful way." He did not say, "I am a wonderful way." (And He is a wonderful way!) He said, "**I am the way.**" He used the definite article. And then, knowing how men would listen to the Devil instead of listening to GOD, He added, "**No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.**" Don't let anybody deceive you! There never will be a man who will come to GOD except by Him.

"**Ye must be born again.**" Now, you would not be surprised to hear JESUS say that to Mary Magdalene out of whom He cast seven devils. You would not be surprised to hear JESUS say to the woman at the well of Samaria, "**Ye must be born again.**" You would not be surprised to hear Him say to the woman taken in adultery and dragged out before Him in the temple court that morning, "**Ye must be born again.**" But, listen, friends; when JESUS faced Nicodemus, He was not talking to a down-and-outer.

When JESUS looked Nicodemus in the face that night He had never faced a finer man during His earthly ministry. Nicodemus, JESUS said, was the master in Israel - the outstanding religious teacher of his day. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin. No man could be a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin until he was thirty years of age. He must also be a settled, proven man. There must be no stain on his life and no question about his character. He must be a man outstanding for his religious life, for his morality and his devotion to the Word of GOD. But Nicodemus was not only a member of the Sanhedrin, he had been chosen as a teacher of the Old Testament Scriptures. And not only was he a teacher of the Old Testament Scriptures, but JESUS said he was the outstanding teacher of his day.

Yet JESUS looked him in the face and said, "**Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" He also said, "**Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.**" In these two statements He used the generic term, a term that includes all the human race. But in the text He addresses His words directly to Nicodemus: "**Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again.**"

It is as though He had said, 'Nicodemus, don't be surprised when I say to you that you must be Born Again. Not only do those on the outside, the ungodly world, need to be Born Again; but, Nicodemus, you, the master of Israel, must be Born Again.' Listen, friend; dismiss from your

mind forever any thought that anybody ever will see the kingdom of GOD without the New Birth.

II. What Is the New Birth?

But what is this New Birth? My friends, it is a thing to be experienced rather than to be defined. It is the greatest miracle that GOD ever wrought. It is greater than the miracle of stilling the storm that night on Galilee. It is greater than the miracle of turning the water to wine. It is greater than the miracle of multiplying the loaves and the fishes.

It is also one of the great mysteries of GOD. JESUS said to Nicodemus frankly that it was a mystery. He said, "**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.**"

I sat in a men's Sunday School class a few Sundays ago and heard the teacher of that class say, "The New Birth is not a miracle." Oh, my friends, it is one of the miracles of the ages, wrought only through and by the power of the Holy Ghost, born of the Spirit of GOD.

What is it? It is the infusion of divine life into the human soul. It is the implantation or impartation of the divine nature in the human soul whereby we become sons of GOD. It is the infusion of divine life into a spiritually dead soul.

The New Birth is the work of the Holy Spirit, wrought in the human soul, applying the Blood of JESUS CHRIST in cleansing from sin and in miracle-working power, regenerating or making anew. It is not working over something we already have, but it is life from above, let down, so to speak, into the human soul, by which we become children of GOD; begotten of GOD; born of the Spirit of GOD. The miracle of the ages! By it we are made new creatures in CHRIST JESUS. Old things pass away; all things become new.

III. Why Is the New Birth Necessary?

Why does GOD say, "**Ye must be born again**"? Why did JESUS say, "**Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God**"? Why must we be Born Again?

In my early ministry I used to give a long string of reasons, and every one of them was true and Scriptural. I used to say, "A man must be Born Again because he is a sinner by nature." And that is true. GOD's Word teaches that we are all by nature the children of wrath; that in Adam all died.

I used to say that we must be Born Again because we are all sinners by choice and by practice. And that is true. The Word of GOD teaches it and our own experience confirms it. There is not a one of us who would say, "I have never sinned." Not even a little child would dare to say, "I am without sin." So it is true that we must be Born Again because we are all sinners and there is no difference.

I used to say we must be Born Again because GOD is a holy GOD, and holiness cannot live with unholiness. And that is true.

I used to say that we must be Born Again because Heaven is a holy place, and if we are ever to live in that holy place about which GOD says, "**There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie,**" we must be Born Again.

But in these later years of my ministry I have come to just one reason. I take my stand on that one.

You must be Born Again because JESUS said so.

The Son of GOD Himself who came down to this earth to be our Saviour from sin, certainly knew what was necessary for salvation. And He, when He speaks, certainly must speak with authority. If anybody could tell us, JESUS can. And JESUS said in His own words, "**Except a man . . .**" (And that is the generic term which includes all mankind: the young, the old; the rich, the poor; the black, the yellow, the red, the white; all nations and kindreds and people and tongues; the clean and the unclean; the religious and the irreligious. Regardless of who you are, how you were born, where you were born; regardless of your background; regardless of your morality; regardless of your character). "**Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**"

And, brother, that settles it. There is no room for argument. He is the One who must do the saving, and surely the One and the only One who can do the saving is competent to tell us what it takes. And JESUS said, "**Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.**"

IV. How Do We Receive the New Birth?

Now let us ask and answer another question. How may one be Born Again? If all must be Born Again or never see the kingdom of GOD, surely we want to know exactly how the thing happens and how we receive it. Let the Word of GOD tell us.

There are just two conditions:

- repentance toward GOD and
- faith toward the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

In the twentieth chapter of Acts when Paul had called the Ephesian elders together at Miletus, he told them, "**I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.**" Again he said, "**I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ**" (Acts 20:20, 21).

And then he said, "**I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.**" In other words, "When I have preached that, if men go to Hell, their blood is on their own hands.

That is the way of eternal life. That is the whole story." That is what Paul said it takes in order to be Born Again - two conditions; repentance and faith.

JESUS said, "**Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.**"

We hear very little preaching about repentance nowadays, because people do not like to hear it. People do not like to face their sins. And repentance means, first of all, that you come face to face with your sins; that you do not dodge the issue; that you do not try to hide your sins; that you do not try to excuse or justify yourself, but that you face the issue fairly and squarely that you are a sinner - a lost sinner; that you are without GOD and without hope in the world; that you are living in open rebellion against GOD; that you are following the Devil instead of GOD.

The first step in repentance is to face your sins.

The next step in repentance is, having faced your sins, to confess them to GOD, forsake them, turn your back on them, and cry to GOD for forgiveness.

Oh, my friend, listen to me: there is no such thing as the New Birth without repentance. But, having repented of your sins, then in faith you turn your sin-sick soul over to JESUS CHRIST; open your heart to the Lord JESUS CHRIST who said, "**Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.**"

Turning away from your sin, you look by faith to JESUS who died for your sins, who "**bore our sins in His own body on the tree,**" and say to Him from the depth of your soul, "Lord, I'm opening the door; come in."

Hear the Word of GOD! "**But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name**" (John 1:12). That is what brings the New Birth. Nothing else does.

In John 1:13 we have it stated negatively: "**Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**"

Let us analyze that statement.

First, "**not of blood.**" What does that mean? It means that it is not something you received from your parents. I care not what your station at birth; I care not how religious your parents were, it is not a matter of a natural birth. You did not get it that way.

Then look at the next statement: "**nor of the will of the flesh.**" That means it is not something that you can do for yourself. With all the effort man may put forth; with all the morality he may have, no man can do it for himself.

Then another door was closed. That verse goes on to say it is not "**of the will of man.**" That covers the whole field. It is not anything that anybody - any institution, any priest, any potentate,

any ordinance - or anything else - can do for you, because it is not **"of the will of man, but of God."**

Have you been Born Again?

Back yonder some years ago - over thirty years now - one night I came to the marriage altar with the young woman of my choice, the darling of my heart. That night we met at the marriage altar and faced a young preacher. He said, "If you two young people believe in your hearts that you love one another enough to live with each other the rest of your lives, join right hands." I slipped my hand into hers and hers slipped into mine. The young preacher looked at me and said, "Joe Hankins, will you take Mary Julian to be your lawful and wedded wife?"

I said, "I will." And, friends, I did not say that merely with my lips. I said it with all of my heart. I meant it with all of my soul.

Then he turned to her and said, "Mary Julian, will you take Joe Hankins, whom you hold by the right hand, to be your lawful and wedded husband?"

Before she answered the question, she looked right straight into my eyes. Those big, blue eyes of her filled up with tears, and she said, "I will."

What was it that made the two of us one, in that most sacred of all human relationships, that relationship so sacred and so beautiful and so intimate and so divine that GOD says, **"They twain shall be one flesh"**? I will tell you what it was. It was not what the preacher did. It was not what the preacher said. It was my **"I will,"** from my heart, plus her **"I will,"** from her heart, that joined us together in that beautiful and sacred union.

The Scripture says that when you are saved there is another union - a union of your soul with CHRIST.

You become bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh (Ephesians 5:30). How does it happen? **"If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in."** JESUS long ago said His **"I will,"** and all of these years He has been waiting for your **"I will."**

When from the depth of your heart you look up to JESUS, turning away from the past and all of its sin and turning by faith to Him, and say from your heart, **"Lord, I will,"** the two of you are joined for eternity. Do you see it? That is the reason Paul said, **"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"** (Romans 10:10).

That day when you, with all of your heart and soul, repent of your sins, confess and forsake your sins, open your heart to JESUS and say from the depths of your soul, **"I will,"** then and there you will be Born Again.

When that ceremony was over and we started out after the wedding party was finished, my brother came over to me and said, "How does it feel to be married?"

I said, "It isn't a matter of feeling. I have done exactly what it takes to get married, and I'm a married man." Just as confidently you can say, when you have met the conditions of salvation - repented of your sins and said your "**I will**" to CHRIST - "I know I'm saved."

GOD's inspired word that "**liveth and abideth forever**" assures you of it. It is an experience, my friends; but it is a union first. And that union comes about - let me say it once more - by my "**I will**," plus His "**I will**."

Have you been Born Again?

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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