

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON 27th August 2023 am

SERIES "You must be born again"

Part 4 "Evidence of New Birth"

Scripture references from the ESV

1 John 5:1-5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

If you had a life-threatening disease, and the doctor told you that, thanks to some treatment, you had been cured, you would want to know how he could be sure of that. You would probably ask what evidence he could give you, and without that, you would find yourself endlessly wondering the disease had really been cured.

Every one of us has been born with a life-threatening disease, which, if left untreated, will result in our eternal death.

It is the disease of sin

That disease comes with several symptoms.

- A failure to love God, which shows in
- a failure to obey his commands and
- a failure to love other people, including God's people.
- A failure to deal with the pride of putting ourselves before others.

We may love those who love us and with whom we get on well, but we struggle with those who irritate us, disagree with us, ignore us or make us feel small because they are apparently doing better than us. We are more concerned to get what we want, rather than serving others, and are full of our own achievements but ignore the gifts of others.

- A failure to come to the one who can truly help us – Jesus.

It may be that we don't know him at all, or we don't believe he can really help or we are too confident in our own self and don't think we need him.

Even the smallest sin will kill us, and if left untreated this disease of sin will lead to eternal death.

God's cure for this disease is new life in Jesus.

Having exposed the symptoms of sin, God does not then tell us to heal ourselves by trying harder to get it right. Instead, he brings about a change in us at the deepest level of our being.

God comes to dwell in us by his Spirit, cleansing us from sin, and giving us a new heart to obey and a new strength to love him and love others.

God causes us to be Born Again.

- The New Birth is absolutely essential if we are going to enter God's kingdom and have eternal life.

The assurance that we have been born again is of eternal significance. If we have the eternal life that Jesus speaks of, then physical death cannot ultimately hurt us. It brings us into the presence of the living God.

How can we be sure that we have been born again?

As well as his gospel account of Jesus' life, John wrote this letter, and he gave the reason for it: **I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.** (1 John 5:13). John wrote the letter (1 John) to Christian believers (including you) under the influence of the Holy Spirit. He wrote it so that you could know if you have been healed of the eternally devastating effects of sin, and have been born again.

- Reading **1 John** every day this week would be a great help if you struggle with assurance of the New Birth.

John gives us five evidences that we have been born again, and all five undo the five symptoms of sin.

1. A person who has been born again will **love God**. When Jesus was asked what is the first and greatest commandment, he said **you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.** (Mark 12:30)

The essence of sin is that God takes second place in our hearts to everything else, and it is possible that he may not even have any place in our hearts. To test this, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is your last thought when you go to bed?
- Where does your mind go when you have nothing else to think about?
- Who do you go to first for advice before you make a decision?

How we answer these questions will show us the disordered nature of our own heart.

What happens in the New Birth is that we come to **see** the reality of Christ. Jesus said to Nicodemus: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** (John 3:3)

When the New Birth happens, we see the kingdom of God, not with our physical eyes but with the eyes of our hearts. Something deep inside causes God to become real and precious to us, rather than just knowing about him intellectually.

We taste the reality and goodness of God.

- The New Birth means that it no longer seems strange to us to say we love God and internal love for God will be evident in our external actions.
- 2. A person who has been born again will **love God’s people.** (v1 above). When we are born into God’s family, we find that we have in our hearts a new love for the family of God.

Before the Apostle Paul was born again, he was intent on destroying all Christians, but then God got hold of him by his Spirit, and caused him to be born again. He wrote to the Philippians (1:8): **For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.** Paul came to love God and as a result, he came to love God’s people. John makes this one of the greatest tests of whether we have been born again. He tells us that you cannot say you love God and then not love God’s people. **Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.** ⁸ **Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.** (1 John 4:7-8).

- God puts us in community, and we are called to love one another, whether or not we naturally get on together.

3. A person who has been born again will **obey God's commands** (vv2-3 above). When you love someone, you will want to do what they ask you to do, if it is possible for you to do so. The same applies when we love God. Sin such as gossip does not just hurt the person we gossip about, it is also an attack on God's character. It is not something we would want to do if we truly love God. However, we must take care.

Love for God and obedience to God are not the same thing.

- It is possible to be obedient to God out of a desire to get something from God. Nicodemus was guilty of keeping the rules so that he could get God on his side, and get eternal life that way. That is the essence of all false religion, including **false** Christianity. You also might think that if you keep the rules, then God will do what you want him to do. He will owe you eternal life and earthly blessings.

The essence of **true** Christianity is: **I love God, and out of love for him, I want to obey him.**

How can you know if you are obeying God in this way? John doesn't tell us that the commandments are easy, but he does tell us they are not burdensome, (v3). In our own strength, we don't find them easy to keep, but when we have been born again, we find delight in what God commands. His commands around sexual ethics, the roles of men and

women, marriage and the use of our money, for example, all make sense to us.

- God's commands are delightful to us, and we see beauty in them because they point to the beauty of the God we love.

4. A person who has been born again will **overcome the world**. John does not mean the natural world, the beauty of which points to its creator. He defines it thus: **Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Here the world means the sinful cravings of humanity and the pride that goes with them. You might for example

- Crave after sinful sexual relationships and then brag about your achievements
- Crave after material possessions and then boast about the things you have
- Crave after power in an organisation and then lord it over others

Someone who has been born again overcomes these sinful cravings, because they have a heart that is made new and delights in God. That person delights in God's commands and in God's people, and uses what they have to serve the people that God loves.

- They do not live like the world with hearts set on more power, more wealth or more sinful pleasures.

5. A person who has been born again will **have right belief about the person of Jesus. (vv1,5)**. No one can escape Jesus. Even those who are hostile to Christianity admit that he is a real historical person.

Who do you believe he is? Do you think that he was just a good man, or maybe an angel clothed in human flesh or a spirit who looked human? When you have been born again, you will believe that

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the only one sent by God to deal with the problem of our sin.

Jesus Christ is God come in human flesh.

Not only does he divide history into AD and BC, Jesus also divides the whole of humanity into those who are born of God and those who are outside the kingdom of God.

What you believe about Jesus matters for eternity.

It is so essential to come to know him.

When you ask yourself if those five assurances of the New Birth are true for you, you might think it sounds as if you need to be perfect to be born again, and therefore you do not have the life of God in your soul. However, in his letter John makes it clear that Christians are not perfect.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9)

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin,

we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 2:1)

Because John knows that we won't perfectly display evidences of the New Birth, he also shows that there is provision for forgiveness with God. Jesus, whose life **did** perfectly display the evidences, has been crucified for us.

- His death secures forgiveness for us when we fail to live out the new life that is in us.
- His perfect fulfilment of the evidences is credited to us for righteousness.

This does not mean that you can carry on living the same old lifestyle. If you do that, it would suggest that you are probably not born again, and have never experienced what it is to have your heart changed to love God.

- If this is true for you, then confess it to Christ and ask him to save you

However, if you think that you see something of these evidences in your life, and know that you want to grow in your

likeness to Christ, then John's assurance is that you have the New Birth. Martin Luther expressed it like this:

This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing,

not being but becoming, not rest but exercise.

We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it,

the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road.

All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.

If you see something, however small, of:

- Love for God
- Love for his people
- A desire to obey God
- Victory over worldly desires and pride
- Right belief in Jesus

then you can be sure that God has made you alive and will continue his work in you.

Ask yourself:

What is the trajectory of your life?

Are you on a course toward likeness to Jesus, or on a course away from it?

- Remember to read **1 John** every day this week to find assurance.
- If you cannot find assurance and know that you are not born again, then confess it to Christ and ask him to save you.