

Salt & Light: Born Again

Day One

Fruit of a Poisonous Tree

In America, when law enforcement breaks the law and obtains evidence of a crime from that illegal action, that evidence is inadmissible in court. Since the original act was illegal, anything that follows from it is tainted and will further the injustice done. If the police were to say that they were really, really sorry and promised not to do it again, it would not change the fact that anything following the unjust act would itself be unjust. When Nicodemus is told by Jesus that he must be born again, he is addressing a Pharisee who spends a great deal of time and effort trying to be righteous and just. The Pharisee party at the time of Jesus was serious about keeping the law, having dedicated their lives to that purpose. If trying harder to be good, to get closer to God by being more serious and dedicated in your efforts was the answer, these guys would have shown us. Jesus, in telling Nicodemus to be born again, was destroying the illusion that working harder could solve our sin problem. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden they became like God in being independent. They cut themselves off from the roots of the vine, and became dead branches. Because if this, even our righteous acts are like filthy rags. All come from a crooked heart, from motivations that are self seeking and wicked. Even when we try to do right, it often has consequences that are destructive due to our lack of wisdom and foresight, a condition that has resulted from a lack of effort due to a lack of love. Which one of us can honestly say he has ever done his best? If God is the ideal and the standard of perfection, then only something that begins in Him and remains in Him can be perfect. This is why we must be born again and have His spirit working through us. Without this rebirth, everything in our lives is fruit from a poisonous tree, destroying all it touches.

Verses: John 3:1-15, Galatians 2:16-21, Matthew 7:15-23, John 15:1-11

Prayer Topics: Humility, Repentance, Grace, Unity

Day 2

Learning

When you become a parent for the first time, one of the most surprising things is seeing just how much a newborn has to learn. They are so unaware that it comes as a surprise to them to discover their arms and legs. They have to learn to hold their head up, and to move it towards someone speaking to them. I recently watched a fail video where a father was helping his young daughter on the swings as a sheep slowly walked by behind the little girl. When the father let the daughter know there was a sheep behind her, she fell off the swing trying to turn and look. The coordination just wasn't there. When we are born again, the same thing happens. We must start over again, and learn new responses to the world around us. The way we responded to things in our old life was a product of the flesh, informed by our worldly desires and trained by the culture around us. When we are born again, we must put to death the flesh with its worldly desires that dwell within us. This means that we need a new teacher, so we must learn to turn our attention to the Spirit of God, learning to take instruction from Him rather than from the world. If we hold on to our old ways, our rebirth would be of no use to us at all. We decided to have our old life buried with Christ for a reason, and it wasn't to have the old life raised again. Relearn all the things you thought you knew, this time with the right teacher.

Verses: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, Romans 8:1-11

Prayer Topics: Hope, Reset, Retrain

Day 3

Parents

When I was a kid we owned the world's ugliest record player. We needed this because we had a set of Disney records that had story books in the

sleeves. Perhaps my favorite of all the records we possessed was Peter Pan. In that story are a group of boys known as the lost boys, and these boys suffer from a particular deficiency- they have no parents. This lack of parentage means the lost boys are condemned to stay children forever. Although they have a leader in Peter Pan, that leader is no further down the road of maturity than they are, making growth impossible. Without this mature leadership, there is no direction to do anything they don't feel like doing, making them captive to their current emotions. Our parents, as we grew up, made us do a lot of things we did not want to do. In this, they helped us to overcome the flesh. Being born again does not mean staying a child. We must find spiritual mentors to disciple us into maturity. This means actually submitting to their authority. Failure to do this is the greatest cause for a lack of spiritual growth I have seen during my ministry. I have known far too many Christians who will not ever place themselves under the authority of another, which leads to stagnation. Sometimes this results in staying in the same church for years with no growth, but most of the time it results in endless church hopping or the withdrawal from church altogether. If you had spent your childhood with no parents, where would you be? How is it any different spiritually? Many will say that God is their father so they don't need any mentorship. God is your father, but he still gave you parents for a reason. Submit to discipleship, and experience the growth God desires for your new life.

Verses: Ephesians 4:11-16, Hebrews 13:7-19, 1 Peter 2:13-17

Prayer Topics: Mentor, Discipline, Guidance

Day 4

Trust

When I was young, one of my least favorite things to do was grocery shopping. Since this part of my life took place in the 70s, when I got a little

older my sister and I often got to wait in the car instead, and in the central coast area of California weather almost always made that a comfortable option. Before that though, I had to trudge along with my mother through the store, the only redemption being the cereal aisle, where all the sugary creativity that big food could offer was on display. I once got so engrossed in looking at the colorful boxes that I knew from the commercials that I didn't notice when my Mother had moved on. I went to the next aisle to find her but she wasn't there. At that point I panicked, and became so visibly worried that an observant older woman asked me if I was lost and helped me find my mom. This story is not remarkable at all, but happens with endless variations all the time. When you are very young, the world is a wonderful place so long as a parent is close by. The trust you have in your parents is so complete that you never question their capability to handle the situations around you that are far beyond your understanding or power. There were several times growing up that my dad lost his job, and a couple times we moved in with relatives. It never occurred to me in these times to be worried about my future. When I grew up, I realized that the situation is completely different in those circumstances for the parent, who has all the stress of the families future on their shoulders, unless they are born again. One aspect of being born again that is vital to our spiritual growth is a childlike trust in God our father. Without this trust, we will not listen to and obey the prompting of scripture or the spirit, and we will lose the carefree joy of living in relationship to God. Do you have that childlike trust? What is stopping you? What can you do today to grow that trust?

Verses: Isaiah 26:3-4, John 14:25-30, Philippians 4:10-20

Prayer Topics: Vulnerability, Confidence, Respect, Gratitude

Day 5

Humility

To be born again is to be humiliated. All the accomplishments. All the accolades, everything that you have earned in your life is given up so that you can begin again. This demand for humility that is inherent in being born again is the reason most people do not do it. To be born again is to admit

the worthlessness of all you have worked for, dreamed, and accomplished. It is an admission that all you have thought, felt, and done has been infected, and that you are powerless to treat the disease. Nothing can be saved or salvaged. When you are born again you start over from the very beginning with nothing. Whatever you try to bring from your old life will infect the new. This is why Jesus said it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into heaven. This is why the religious leaders plotted to kill Jesus but the sinners, the lost, the down and out embraced him. Are you prepared to be humbled? Can you see that all your works are filthy rags? Then be born again.

Verses: Matthew 16:24-26, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 3:9

Prayer Topics: Sacrifice, Exchange, Peace