

Spirit-filled (4) – Connected To Jesus

Reading: 1 John 5:1-5 & 1 Peter 1:22-25

As I mentioned last week I believe the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives can be summarised under three basic ideas – regeneration, empowerment & sanctification. I believe these three ideas help us understand the essence of what the Holy Spirit comes to accomplish in our lives. He comes to make us spiritually alive, he comes to empower us for ministry & mission & he comes to make us more like Jesus. Last week I also highlighted that there is a mysterious side to new birth – it is an act of God, unless the Spirit breaths nothing happens... This week I want to highlight that while new birth is a mysterious & supernatural work of the Spirit it always brings focus on & connection to Jesus. And the Spirit always uses the Word as his primary instrument in bringing all this about in an individual life.

1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEW BIRTH & FAITH IN JESUS

In last week's message I briefly referenced how new birth & genuine faith come together. This week I want to begin by highlighting that new birth awakens genuine faith in Jesus. I want to make sure we see the connection between being born again by the Holy Spirit & having life through faith in Jesus. We cannot become spiritually alive unless the Spirit of God breathes life into us. If we are spiritually dead we cannot hear, see, think or feel spiritually speaking. There is no real spirituality without the Spirit of God. When a person is physically born they are born with new ears, new eyes & new heart & new mind. Likewise new birth gives us new spiritual eyes, ears, heart & mind. And just as it takes time for a new born baby to adjust to the world & figure out what has happened. So it can take time for a newly Born Again Christian to adjust to new life in Christ...

We have already seen that new birth is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in a human life. However the Gospel of John also makes something else clear: Jesus himself is the life the Holy Spirit gives. New birth connects us to Christ by awakening faith in him. In the new birth the Holy Spirit makes us fully alive by connecting us to the One who is life! Jesus said in John 14:6; **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** In John 6:35 he says; **"I am the bread of life."** In John 4:10 he offers living water. In John 20:31 John says; **"These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

There is no spiritual life apart from connection to Jesus & faith in Jesus. In Galatians 2:20 it says; **"The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"**. Colossians 3:4 says; **"When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."** The reality is this: In the new birth the Holy Spirit connects us to Christ in a living union. Christ is life & his life becomes our life! This means among others things that his love becomes our love, his power becomes our power, his righteousness becomes our righteousness, his obedience becomes our obedience, his faithfulness

becomes our faithfulness, his mind becomes our mind, his Father becomes our Father, his mission becomes our mission, his victory becomes our victory. We could keep going because becomes our all in all. This comes as a result of new life. The Spirit is the cause & Christ is the source of our new life!

For this reason we should never disconnect the reality of new birth from faith in Jesus. Theologians will argue about which comes first until Jesus returns. However I don't want to get into that I simply want to point out that they come together & they validate each other. Before the story of Nicodemus Jesus would not entrust himself to the fickle faith of the crowd referred to in John 2:23-25, but after highlighting to Nicodemus the vital need to be born again he talked about a faith that gives eternal life. V15 says; **"Everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."** V16 says; **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."**

So before the born again conversation we see a fickle faith but afterwards it talks of a faith which gives eternal life. I think John might just be trying to communicate something. When our best Friend the Spirit makes us born again he does so by awakening genuine, enduring, focused faith in Jesus in us – the eternal kind of life faith. The kind of faith that saves which Paul talks about in Romans 10:9-10. The Spirit gives us new ears that hear Jesus... new eyes that see his glory... a new heart that longs for & responds to him in faith & love. Keith Warrington reminds us that this eternal life is about the quality as well as the length. He writes:

"The Spirit's role is to mediate the quality of life enjoyed by God to believers. Eternal life is not simply life that lasts forever. Rather, it is descriptive of the kind of life associated with eternity. It is not simply everlasting life but fullness of life that can be experienced because one has entered into a relationship with the eternal God himself."

John records in John 17:2-3; **"For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."** Or as Jesus says in John 10:10; **"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** Jesus came to make us fully alive & the Spirit has also come to make us fully alive by connecting us to the life of God in Christ. This means we are not only to anticipate the wonder of that life to come but we are also to begin experiencing it now. New Birth births something of the life we will enjoy for all eternity in us. Through new birth & faith in Jesus we can be connected to that eternal kind of life now...

Born Again Christian's live in the paradox of the already but not yet. The eternal kind of life has invaded our life in this world. Our new hearts, minds, ears, eyes are made for the eternal kingdom of God & some day we will have a new body to match this new life which has been freely given us!

Here is how John puts new life & faith in Jesus together in his first letter. He says in 1 John 5:4; **“Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.”** So being **“Born of God”** is the key to victory & **“Faith”** is the key to victory because the life given in our new birth is the life of faith. The two are never separate. Faith without new birth is fickle faith & new birth without faith would have no objective focus. But the faith & life that the Spirit brings is focused on Christ & it lasts as long as eternity & it brings something of eternity into our lives today! This is what our best Friend has come to do for us! He has come to connect us to Christ, who is our life! To be Spirit-filled is to be connected to Christ & to be connected to Christ is to be connected to the eternal kind of life.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SPIRIT & WORD IN NEW BIRTH

Something I want to continue to highlight through this series is the relationship between the Spirit-filled life & the word of God. The word is the Spirit’s primary instrument in bringing about regeneration & sanctification in the life of believers & the spreading the word to others so they can experience the same is one of the Spirit’s primary reasons for empowering us. So then how does the Spirit use the word in new birth?

In theology it is common to say the Holy Spirit is the *agent* of new birth. Titus 3:4-6 says;

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy. He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

So regeneration & renewal are the work of the Holy Spirit. However other Bible verses make it clear that, if the Spirit is the *agent* in rebirth, the word of God is the *instrument* he generally uses to bring new birth about. 1 Peter 1:23 says; **“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.** Verse 25 says **“and this word is the good news that was preached to you.”** James 1:18 says; **“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.”**

So the Word itself has life in it. It was inspired by the One who causes life & bears witness to the One who is the source of life. In the verses I just read new birth is compared to growth from a seed. The human heart is the soil, **“the seed is the word of God”** (Luke 8:11). Every preacher or witness to the Word is a sower, but the Spirit of God is the One who quickens the seed. New life springs up as the result. There is potential soil everywhere there is a human heart. There is abundant seed in God’s Word, but unless the Spirit softens & changes the heart of the hearer so that their heart can close around the seed in faith, there will be no harvest. New birth is a work of the Word & Spirit... Every reader & preacher needs to realise their utter dependence on the Holy Spirit to bring new life from the seeds sown.

Here is something else we really need to understand. The vital thing is not merely having the seed of life but planting it in our own hearts & others hearts. We can study seeds, we can hold them in your hand & examine them from every angle; we can even count how many seeds there are. However seed will stay seed until we plant it in the ground. Likewise we can have God's Word, we can study it & know it to some degree, we can know verses off by heart & we can know how many books & verses there are but until we plant it in our own hearts we will see no fruit in our lives. R. A. Torrey wrote; *"No amount of Bibles upon our tables or in our libraries will save us, but the truth of the Bible written by the Spirit of the living God written in our hearts will save."* The most important thing is not that the Word is written on paper but on our hearts by the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 3:3).

Here is a scary fact, we could even potentially preach & teach it to others... we could potentially sow the seed of God's Word in the hearts of others by reading it publically or teaching it at some level & yet miss planting it firmly in our own hearts by believing it personally. This story is told by Spurgeon:

In a certain parish church, as the result of the clergyman's preaching, there was a man who was under deep conviction of sin. He went down to see his minister, but the poor man did not know what to make of him & said to him, "I am very sorry if there was anything in my message that made you uncomfortable; I did not mean it to be so." "Well, sir," answered the troubled man, "you said that we must be born again." "Oh!" replied the clergyman, "that was all done at baptism." The man, who was not to be put off, said, "But, sir, you did not say so in your sermon; you spoke of the necessity of regeneration." "Well I am very sorry I said anything that made you uncomfortable, for really I think all is right with you. You are a good sort of fellow; you were never a poacher, or anything that is bad." "That may be, sir, but I have a sense of sin, and you said we must be new creations." "Well, my good man" said the perplexed minister, "I do not understand such things, for I was never born again." He sent him to a Baptist minister. The man became a Baptist minister, partly as a result of what he learned from the preacher who did not himself understand the truth he had declared to others.

I find this story both scary & encouraging. Scary because of the position of the preacher, teaching something he had not experienced & did not really believe or understand. Encouraging because even though this was the case, someone still came to Christ because of the Spirit's working through the Word! This gives hope to all people who attend churches where the Bible is read every week & taught at some level, but perhaps not really valued & believed by the clergyman. All it takes is one seed of truth for the Spirit to bring new life from it. As Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:8: **"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot see where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."**

You just cannot predict where the Spirit will blow. I think this verse in & off itself also rules out baptismal regeneration. The Spirit is just not as predictable as that. He brings life in his way at his time as he pleases but the word will always be his primary instrument & connecting people to Jesus will always be his primary aim. And if we are to partner with him in any way we must follow his lead in this by sharing the word & focusing on Jesus. Then we wait & depend on him doing what he can only do.

