

Nature of the New Birth

by Dr. A.E. Wilder-Smith

Dr. A.E. Wilder-Smith explores the profound implications of the new birth through the story of Nicodemus and biblical analogies.

Duration: 49:24

Scripture: Numbers 21:4-9, Matthew 6:33, John 3:1-17

Topics: "New Birth"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of the serpent on the pole from the Bible. He emphasizes the importance of explaining this story to children in a way they can understand, using relatable language and examples. The speaker also shares a personal anecdote about his own experience with a snake bite and how his grandson helped him recover. He concludes by highlighting the healing power of obedience and the positive impact it had on his family.

Transcript

Right, good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I want to try and talk to you this morning about the nature of the new birth, what the new birth is. And I'm going to do it with a little story of Nicodemus, which you all know very well.

And I'll try and look at it through my particular type of spectacles. Let's read just a little bit together from John 3, 1 to 17. John, the gospel according to John, chapter 3, 1 to 17.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. And this man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you were a teacher come from God, for no man can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. Now what were the signs that this ruler of the Jews knew about? Well, I'll give you an example of how the grapevine worked in those days.

We know how it works today, don't we? But it worked in those days, too. You remember Jairus, who had a little girl, a little daughter of twelve years old, and he was a ruler of the synagogue. Now he will have known Nicodemus.

We know that Nicodemus afterwards, after Jesus' death, played quite a role in respect to the honor which he paid to Jesus who had been crucified. Now Jairus had this little girl of twelve, and she was dying. So being a ruler of the Jews, he didn't know of anything better to do than to send for Jesus.

You see, they'd had a big wedding sometime before at Cana, and they ran out of wine at this wedding. Out of wedding to run out of wine, really, that's a very bad thing to happen, isn't it? I remember when we were living in Wheaton years ago, we invited some friends over to dinner one night, and we were in a new house, just that they'd offered it to us for rent, so we took it. And two hours before the people came, we found that the stoves hadn't been connected up, so we couldn't cook anything.

So here were these people starting to arrive, and we got a turkey in the house, I believe it was a turkey in those days. And we couldn't have anything to cook yet, so what could one do? So in the case of Jairus, when the little girl was ill, the only person you could send for was Jesus. So he sent for Jesus a batch of servants.

The man is worthy of ascending, he's the ruler of the synagogue, and please come quickly and save the little girl. Well now, while they were still talking to Jesus, another batch of servants came and said that the little girl had already died, and they shouldn't bother the master. So Jesus said that they shouldn't worry, it would be all right if they believed.

So this second batch of servants and the first batch came along with Jesus and showed him where the house was, and he went into the house and said, Don't wail and mourn like you do here, she's only asleep. And they all laughed him to scorn, because they knew she was dead. Now he went into the room and took her by the hand and said, Child, arise.

And she arose immediately. It was just by fiat. There was no lengthy healing process or anything like that.

Now he said, Now give her something to eat. Very sensible thing to do after a little experience like that, wasn't it? Now, don't you think that the servants then were the same as they are today, if you've got any. Bit of a problem that, isn't it? Servants the world over are the same.

They talk, you know. That's why in Austria, if you go through the old palaces in Vienna, you'll see that the doors are all double. You're going through one door, and there's about a yard between that and the second door, so that the servants couldn't stand at the door and look through the keyhole.

They'd disaligned, put out of alignment, the keyhole. So you look through one, you couldn't look through two, you see. So they kept the grapevine from working, because the servants didn't know what was going on.

Now these servants did know what was going on. And they talked in the evenings, in the pubs, wherever they went to have their evening meals. They said what Jesus had done.

So Nicodemus was fully aware of what he'd done. Nobody can do the signs you're doing. That is, he was creating by fiat.

You take the wine. The servants knew that they filled the pots with water, with good, clear, drinking water. And when the wine came to be doled out, everybody in the guests, among the guests, said this is the best wine.

Why have you kept the best wine to last? You don't do that. You keep the worst wine for last. When people are satisfied, they won't notice it so much.

So those were the sort of things that Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews, had got to know via the grapevine. Now, when it got to feeding the 5,000 or the 4,000 from a few fishes and from barley loaves, they knew how long it took to grow a fish, and how long it took to grow the wheat or the barley for barley loaves or wheat loaves. They knew that.

And they knew that this one, Jesus, could do that by fiat. No time at all involved, because he's the eternal one. You see, all this argument that we're going through about evolution today is really the result of Christian people and others not knowing that God is the eternal one who creates by fiat and not by time.

That's how he does it. So he says, and it is. It was the case with the wine.

It was the case with the barley and the fishes. And now is the case of this little girl who's already dead. So he goes in, and he does it again by fiat, and says, I say to thee, child, arise.

And she arose. Don't you think that those servants, although Jesus said they weren't to talk about it, because that was just the invitation to a servant, to go and speak about it and tell it all over the world. And they'd done so.

And so Nicodemus said, now look, I've had enough of the grapevine. I'm going to see myself. But I don't want all my colleagues to see me.

How many here would like to go and have a talk to the pastor, you know? But they don't want to be seen doing it. Just do it on the quiet. So he comes to Jesus by night, and he's very polite.

He's a rabbi. And it's like calling a person who isn't a doctor, doctor, you see. That's all.

But he did it. And Jesus took a look at him, and he said, now look. Nicodemus said, now look, no man can do the things that you're doing, except God is with him.

Now that was putting it rather mildly, wasn't it? Because, I mean, to raise the dead and to create by fiat, you don't really need to have God with you. You have to be God yourself, don't you, to do that. There's nothing for it.

So Jesus wasn't willing to argue with the Pharisee, because, you see, they knew too much theology, but nothing else. And he said, now look here, Nicodemus. You can't even see the kingdom of God except you're born again.

Well, poor old Nicodemus, he was nonplussed at that. What does that mean? Do you know he descended to the ridiculous? Could a man, when he's old and big, enter his mother's womb and be born again? Have you ever heard of such a fatuous answer or a fatuous question? It's Nicodemus' game. Jesus was trying to tell him something new.

Because his mind was fixed, he couldn't take it in. You know, many of us suffer from a fixed mind. When you talk about a born-again Christian today, because there's been so much propaganda and they've been so made ridiculous, that people don't understand.

Their minds are made up that all born-again people, who call themselves born again, are just simply, you know, fatuous people. That's what they say. So let's have a look at this conversation and see how it goes on and finish it.

How can a man be born when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? 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 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 anew.

The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus said to him, how can this be? You see, if I were to translate it into the modern code, he would have said, I haven't a clue what you're talking about.

I just don't understand you. I haven't a clue. So, how can this be? Jesus answered him, now he gives it back to the teacher, because the teacher's right for it.

He says, how can this thing be? Are you a teacher in Israel? Are you a teacher in Israel, and yet you do not understand this, what the new birth is? You don't understand that, Nicodemus. Fire on you, shame on you. You ought to know that as a theologian.

Truly, truly I say to you, we speak what we know, and we bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things, and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? The new birth is something that happens on earth. The other things, the coming of the Lord, and the glory of the kingdom, and all those things, they're a different matter.

You wouldn't understand those at all, unless you first of all get born again. No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. Now he was getting very near, wasn't he? He was sailing near the wind, as we might say.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believes in him may have eternal life. He leaves the analogy of the new birth, and being born again, and goes to the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness. A second analogy, and hopes that the theologian will understand that.

Now we must just have a look about this lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness, because it's all connected with new birth, and here it is. Numbers 21, 4. From Mount Hor, they set out for the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way, and the people spoke against God, and against Moses.

Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food. And the worthless food was the manna which God gave every day, and the quails which he sent them. Then the Lord, as an answer to their impatience, sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.

And the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned. We have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray the Lord that he take away the serpents from us.

Moses' prayer wasn't answered. So Moses prayed for the people, and the Lord said to Moses, Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole, and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Now that's what Jesus was referring to, and what Nicodemus very well understood from his knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures. So let's just have a look at these two parables which Jesus gave to help understand the new birth. First, being born again, and second, looking at the serpent on the pole which healed them.

Those are both the analogies which Jesus uses to make us understand what is necessary if we're going to see the kingdom of God, or if we're going to enter into it. You must see where you're going, mustn't you? You'll land somewhere you don't want to go if you don't look. And Jesus said, if you want to see, you've got to fulfill these conditions.

Now, Nicodemus listens to the story of being born again, and he's absolutely nonplussed. He's speechless. He says, I'm a clue.

I don't know what you mean. You can't mean, literally, that we have to enter our mother's womb again, get connected up with the umbilical cord, and be born again. It'd be rather difficult with that size of a person, wouldn't it, a man doing that? So we'll leave it at that point and go to the next one.

Now, Jesus was referring, in the case of the new birth, to the babe in the mother's womb, which is nicely packed up in a little parcel, so tucked up that it doesn't take much room, and it's alive. The mother knows that it's alive. When it's quickened, you know, it starts to kick, and she's sure that her babe that she's carrying is alive.

After the birth, if it survives the birth, it's alive too. But there are two qualities of life. There's the first quality of the unborn babe in the womb, and there's a second quality of life in the born child, which is now living a life quite different to the babe in the womb.

You see, the babe in the womb has lungs, but it doesn't use them. The babe in the womb has eyes, but it can't use its eyes in its mother's womb. It's pitch black there, can't see anything at all.

It can hear with its ears, it can hear its mother's heart beating, and it can hear its mother's voice, and recognizes its mother's voice. And if a mother sings nice songs, the babe will be quietened thereby, because it knows its mother's voice. That it can do, but the other things it can't.

It doesn't use its mouth either to eat. It will drink the amniotic fluid. Babes do that, but they don't get any nourishment from that sort of thing.

They only get a little bit of H₂O, which is what they need for their physiology, you see. But they don't do it like we do at all. So the quality, the type of life of the unborn child is quite different from the type of life of the child once it's born.

You think the restricted space available to an unborn child, it can't run around, it'll kick, but it can't do much more than that. You ask an unborn child what it must feel like to be born, and run around and plague mother and father and all the rest of it, it wouldn't have a clue, would it? It couldn't understand that, because it's never experienced it. So the types of life of the unborn babe and the born babe are quite different.

Now, you think what it has to go through to get born. The mother has a hard time, but the babe has a very hard time too. You think of the narrowness of the birth canal to get that baby through that.

That hinge, you know, is very, very big, and the babe's got to get through it. Now, Jesus compared this with the way to life. Being born again to eternal life.

And he said the way is narrow, and few there be that find it. It's a very narrow way, and I often think, you know, that when a person has been convicted of sin and knows he needs forgiveness or she needs forgiveness, that's often such a narrow way that people are afraid of it. They are.

The way is narrow that leads to life. Narrow as a birth canal is to a child being born. So don't be afraid of that.

They say, you see, that a person like myself is frightfully narrow-minded. You know, these Christian people, especially these fundamentalists and people who don't believe in evolution and all that sort of business, are simply restricted in their outlook. Well, to go through the new birth, you have to take it very carefully with sin.

You take it very exactly. And there's no largeness there at all. You call a spade a spade, and you're honest down to the last penny.

You are. And if then sin, the conviction of sin comes upon you, I often think it's like a babe going through a birth canal. It really does hurt.

A person who's looking for the eternal kingdom of Christ will find the question of sin very hard to deal with. Very, very narrow. And they can't understand it.

But you think of this, that if the babe goes through and is born, the mother, it says, forgets all the pain she's gone through. And the babe, too. And she rejoices that a man has been born to the world.

And in her joy, she forgets the sorrows and pains. And it's like that with the new birth. If you're worried about changing your ways and learning to look to Jesus instead of the world to help, you will find it hard.

But think of this. Look at all the Christian people you know who are real Christian people and the joy that they have. Because they shout for joy sometimes, you know.

You think and compare with the joy when a child has been born. And it says also that it's not only the midwife and the doctor who will dance around the room when the job is over and the babe is there. It says even the angels in heaven rejoice over one who's been brought to repentance, therefore seen the kingdom of God and started to enter it.

So all these things are balanced by pain and by joy. Now Nicodemus, he was lost. He said, look, how can these things be? I don't understand you.

Would you please not talk in mysteries? I want some plain talk now. So Jesus said, okay, Nicodemus, we must get on your wavelength. Now he didn't say that word exactly, but you know what I mean.

He said, Nicodemus, you're a theologian. Just think back, recall for a moment the little business of the serpents in the wilderness. Do you remember it? Well, of course, Nicodemus knew all about that.

The people had got impatient with God. They didn't want his manner anymore. They didn't want his quails anymore.

So they cursed Moses, and they didn't bless God. And the result was that God sent them fiery serpents. Now the fiery serpents were little highly colored desert snakes that were very poisonous.

And they wriggled into the camp everywhere and bit the people. When a lot of them died, they went to Moses and said, we've sinned. We have, and the serpent is a type of sin, so they knew that.

Now Moses was asked to pray for the people, and he prayed for his enemies. They just cursed him, but he prayed for them. And if anybody's just cursed you, you pray for them.

That's the example that Jesus gives here. So he prayed for them, and God didn't answer. He didn't take away the serpents.

What he did, he said, Moses, you get down to work, my boy. You get down and make up a little serpent like those that are doing the biting. Make it of brass and stick it on a pole so that you can see it's been killed.

Stick it through the back of its throat, and it'll be a dead serpent. And if anybody is bitten, he's to look at, in trust and obedience, that serpent, and he'll be healed. Okay? So Moses does it.

Now nobody knew what that meant until Jesus came and told us what it meant. He said, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that all who look to him will be saved. So the saving of the Jew from the poison of the serpent is an exact allegory of the crucifixion of Jesus.

So it means that Jesus compared himself to the serpent. Now you think of that. If I didn't believe the Scriptures, I'd never dare say a thing like that, because to compare God with a serpent, a serpent being the sign of sin, would be pretty well blasphemy, wouldn't it? Pretty well.

But he did so. Now Nicodemus, being a theologian, would have understood that. What do we learn from it? Well, if you look at the serpent, look at some of the old art galleries of the temptation of Eve and Adam in the garden.

You'll find from the artists who knew their job that they didn't picture a serpent there like the serpents such as we know them today, you know, coiled around the tree and no legs and no limbs. They pictured a beautiful animal on legs, talking intelligently with Eve. I don't think Eve would have been beguiled by some python hissing at her, you know.

I don't think so. She was too intelligent for that, and so was the serpent too intelligent to think of a game like that. So he came and talked to her, and he says the serpent was the wisest of the animals of the field.

Now today a serpent isn't the wisest animal of the field. It's quite inferior in its intelligence to some of the mammals like the monkeys. So we can say this, that the curse of the Holy Scriptures upon the serpent is to be taken very literally.

Cursed be thou, on thy belly shalt thou walk, and thou shalt eat dust with thy food, because he's got no hands to clean the food. He has to eat it with all the dust that clings to it. So I think this, that one of the main marks of sin is that it degrades.

It devolves an organism. You see, the serpent lost its legs. If you look under the skin of a python, not when it's alive, but after you've done the necessary, and cut it and have a look where the legs should be, you'll

find under the skin little tiny undeveloped rudimentary legs.

Now legs are coded for in the genes of a python, but they're not expressed. They're degenerate. You see, we code for the muscles of our arms, but if you don't use the arms, the muscle atrophies, the muscle shrivels and shrinks.

They do say that the brain, being a modified muscle, if you don't use it, shrinks too. And that's the reason why some people mustn't shake their heads very hard, because you can hear it rattling around inside, you see. Now I wouldn't like to vouch for the truth or the untruth of that, but I'm merely trying to make a point clear to you that it's possible to develop things, and it's also possible to degrade things so that they decay.

Now the serpent is an example of an animal which is... Are you ready for it? Not sleep just at this moment. Send up another 20% oxyhemoglobin and you'll be all right. A serpent is an animal that's secondarily primitive.

You got it? It was, at one time, far more intelligent, but its brain is addled, it's decayed. It was able to walk because it's coded for in its genes, on its legs, but because of sin, it's lost them. Now, you think of these poor boys and girls who are dying of AIDS today.

If the AIDS is neurotropic, it goes for the nervous system, and it isn't their fault, you know. I'll be careful to put that in, I won't forget that one. Because very often it comes from the blood transfusions that they've had for other processes of medicine.

But if it goes to the brain, they gradually deteriorate to the time where they can't speak. They deteriorate to a vegetable. It's an awful thing to see.

But if illness, sickness and death are the result of sin, then of course you can understand it. You've got an example of development downwards instead of development upwards. Sin brings us to decay.

If you look at lots of people who are living in a way they ought not to live, you take, for example, those pictures of Jesus that we had. I know of a case of an Italian, I forget his name, I've forgotten that at the moment, who wanted a model for Jesus. So he went into the town and looked for days and days and found a young man who looked so noble that he wanted to use him as a model for Jesus.

So he did, and the picture, the sculpture he made of Jesus was a beautiful one. You know, a noble person. And then after a time, a long time, some years, he wanted a model for Judas.

And he looked through the town, through the town, through the town, and couldn't find a suitable model of Judas. Until one day, he's looking into a drinking hall, and there he has spied a man who looked the picture, the epitome of degeneration. So he asked him if he could take him as a model.

And he was horrified to find out that this was the same man that had been in the picture of Jesus. But he got into wrong ways with women and wine, and the result was he'd become to look just like Jesus. Was it Camus or one of the French authors who said, every man, ladies and gentlemen, take this ever so carefully what I say, every man is responsible, and every woman, is responsible for his face until he's 40.

After 40, he's responsible himself for his face. Before that, his parents are responsible for it. But after 40, he develops his face himself, and so he's responsible for it.

There's a lot of truth in it, you know. So the picture of the snake, the serpent, is always in the Holy Scripture, a picture of degeneration by sin. Now, Nicodemus would have understood that.

But Jesus went a little bit further than that. He said, now look, Moses had to take a snake, which had been pierced with a wooden pole, and put it up in the camp, and let people look at it, and those who looked in trust and obedience to what Moses had done, they were the ones that were healed. Now, when we were in Turkey, we had four small children in the house, our own small four children in the house, up to about 10 or 11 years old, and going right down to two and three years old.

And I had a colleague with me, an American professor, who had also four children, just about the same age as ours. Now, they weren't active church members, they were nice people, but I got on very well with him, my wife with his wife. We had a good time.

Now, when we were on holiday in Alanya, we got an urgent message to come back to Ankara from this professor. So, we went back, and there he was in an awful state of mind. His wife had developed a big lump in her, I think it was her left breast.

What should he do? Here he was in Turkey, and he said, the first thing you don't do is don't go to the hospital here, because they're rather to be compared to butchers than surgeons. Don't do that. And you've got to be absolutely clean in your surgery to attempt a job like that.

So, he said, what shall I do? So, I said, you go to the Mayo Clinic, and I recommended him to a particular place in the Mayo Clinic, and asked them to do the job. But he said, I can't. We've got four small children here.

I can't do that. I said, well, you must, because it's no good for you to send your wife alone. She's been brave enough to go to Germany alone to get the diagnosis done.

You have to go with her. You must stand by her at this crisis in her life. Well, they both understood that.

And they said, well, what shall we do with the children? Because we can't leave them here alone. No, I said, you don't need to do that. We've got four.

Four sardines in a can, you see. We'll be living in a very small apartment. Another four won't make much difference.

But we'll take the four on. My wife said that. She put me up to this.

Husbands, don't demand too much from your dearly beloveds. Let them suggest it themselves, if there's anything like that in the air. So, she suggested herself.

And, of course, the kids thought this was great because they knew our kids. And we had four extra children. Now, the wife went back with her husband to the States and to the Mayo Clinic.

And they operated on her. And she's doing fine after 20 years. She was healed by this.

And as a result of this awful trauma, the both of them became very earnest and happy, glorious Christians. Now, what happened with the kids with us? This is the important point. Well, the other was important, too.

But what happened? Well, we have, and we did have, and we still do when the children are home, we have a Bible story every night. Either Dad, when he was there, gives it, or Mom, when she's there, she gives it. And there's just one word goes through the house, die Geschichte.

That is the Bible story now. And everybody dropped tools, and they'd run to their beds and get themselves all washed and brushed up, you know, to go to sleep tonight. And then they'd sit on their beds and wait till Dad came with the story.

Now, the story I was taking through at the beginning of this time was this one, Nicodemus. So, they're all sitting there. The only thing you had to do was change the language, you see, because our children spoke German, and these little Americans, they didn't speak German, they spoke English, so we just had to switch, put the autopilot right, you see, and then it went perfectly.

So, we were talking about the putting, the raising of the serpent on the pole. Now, you've got to be careful when you go with children, you know, you've got to make them understand it so they don't get wrong ideas. They can get the wrong end of the stick very easy.

So, we were describing the scene in a language that they would understand, and said, look, Grandpa helped around the tent, and Grandpa helped with laying out the meals for picnics that they had while they were in the wilderness, and Grandpa just moved the trunk of the tree that they used as a table, and out jumped a little red fiery snake and bit him in his rear with portions. Now, he immediately jumped sky high and went into Grandma, and Grandma, of course, being a woman of understanding, she pressed the wound where the bite had been, pressed out what poison she could, and then she sucked out the rest with her mouth, which is the way to do it. You see, you can tell children all sorts of things.

If you've got a bit of gumption about you, excuse me, if you've got a bit of idea about you, how to do it, they learn all sorts of things this way. You suck out a snake wound, you see, if you've got a case to treat like that. Then they put Grandpa to bed.

Now, Grandpa started to go downhill. Here's another thing you can tell them, you see, there was a little red streak. It went downwards from the bite and upwards from the bite, so you could see the poison was taking.

And Grandpa began to go into a coma, and Grandpa began to hallucinate. You can tell children all sorts of things this way without even knowing they're learning. And the result was that little Tommy came in, a grandchild, and saw that his grandfather was in a bad state, and fetched a wet cloth with some cold water on it, and mopped his brow off, which was all covered with sweat, you see, from the snake bite, and brought him round back to consciousness.

And teach them to learn things this way. And asked him then, as soon as he got conscious again, Grandpa, when I open the flap of the tent, you'll see right in front of it, the serpent on the pole. Now Moses said, you're to look at that pole, and that serpent on it, which is being killed, you're to look at that, and that that obedience will heal you.

So when he was really out of his coma, and could look with understanding through the flap of the tent at the serpent on the pole, he did so. And looking at the pole, he said, you know, Tommy, I feel better. So Tommy said, yes, I told you you would if you were obedient.

That's all right. So they put him into bed, and he slept a deep sleep for three or four hours, and the next morning, he was right as rain, right as a trivet, okay? So Tommy was very proud of this, you see. And the next morning, Grandpa went out and helped with the work around the tent.

And as he was lifting up a bundle of firewood, he said, oh, again, and he'd been bitten in his side with one of these wretched little things. So they took him again to Grandma. Grandma pushed out, squeezed out the poison, and then she sucked it out with her mouth and put Grandpa to bed again.

Now, he started to go downhill again. Tommy came into him when he was really in a coma, put some cold water on his forehead again, brought him round, and said, Grandpa, what did Moses say? Oh, he said, Moses said I was to look at the serpent on the pole, and I would be healed. But Grandpa said, I've already done that.

Must I do it again? So Tommy said, well, it would be wiser to, wouldn't you? Because if you stay on like this, you're going to die. Oh, he said, I have to do it again. Oh, I'll send Grandma.

So he sent Grandma to have a look at the serpent, but it didn't do any good. And he started to go downhill again. Well, Tommy brought him round again with cold water and said to him, what you'll have to do is look again yourself, and then you'll be all right.

It's no good to trust other people. It's no good to trust having done it in the past. You must do it now.

Now you're in trouble. Now you must do it. Very sensible little boy, you see.

So, well, you can learn out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know, even the oldest of us. I can, anyway. So he looked, made the tent flat, opened the tent flat, and had a look.

And he said, I feel better. And he slept. Now, I'm not going to lengthen this story, because with children you can embellish it each way, you see, and they'll never forget it.

So I used to do that regularly. Now, think of this. I don't want to do it 465 times, you see, that he got bitten in the 365 days of the year.

That would be rather boring for you on a Sunday morning, so I won't do that. But I will tell you this. They decided there was one thing to do to make the situation clear.

Now, would you please send 20% more oxyhemoglobin up top there and digest the potatoes that you've had or the toast that you've had for breakfast so that you've got enough sugar up the top to keep your brain working. And listen to this. They decided this.

The only way to be safe from the snakes, the only way, was never to get in a position where you couldn't look at the snake on the pole. If they were never in a position where they couldn't take a good look at Moses' snake on the pole, if they never got into such a position, they'd be all right. And what about us? We look at Jesus, who is sin for us, who became sin for me, and was crucified on a pole, on a tree.

If we take care that we never get into a position in our life where we can't look at him in faith, if we never get into such a position that we can't look at him, the serpent will have no power over us. So the secret of holiness is to lead a life where you can always, under all circumstances, look at Jesus, who became sin for me. Now you think what that meant for him.

Jesus was the King of Glory, the right hand of God the Father, the most beautiful among ten thousand, it says, Jesus. Yet, he came down in the form of a man, and his back was so ploughed with the whips and thongs of those Roman soldiers, that hanging on the cross there, suffocating and bleeding to death, he says that men couldn't bear looking at him. It was such a terrible sight.

Read Isaiah 53, if you want to read it. Men turned their face away from him because it was such a terrible sight, the Son of God dying on the cross for your sin and my sin, because he became sin for me. Now sin always degrades.

And Jesus was therefore degraded from the King of Glory to the man acquainted with griefs and sorrows for you and me. And as long as we can look at him as having done that for me, that puts us in the position of the new birth. Because until I've been born, I can't look at him.

But once I've been born and got my freedom of action to look at him as I will, if I can do that, I'll be healed. Now ladies and gentlemen, that's what it means to see the kingdom of God. Because the kingdom of God can't see sin and uncleanness and unholiness.

But if you can say from your heart, Jesus, you did it for me that I might be healed by your stripes, I am healed, then you are healed. That's the look of faith to the Son of God crucified for me, which is the beginning of the new birth. The continuation of the new birth, leading a life of holiness, becomes true inasmuch as I take care in the way I live that I can always look to Jesus on the cross.

If I'm too busy and never have time to have a quiet time in the morning before I get up, then sin will have power over me. You've got to order your life, ladies and gentlemen, the same as I have, in the ways of holiness. The ways of holiness are the ways of taking care that I can always look through the flap of the tent at Jesus, the suffering Messiah for me who was degraded so that I don't need to be degraded by sin.

Now Nicodemus would have understood that because after Jesus' death he came and helped with the burial and with all the other things when you have to bury a man who has been crucified to death, such as the Romans did it in those days. But if you do that every day, then Jesus is guaranteed that he'll lead you in the ways of holiness. That's what it means.

Keeping your life such that you can always look through the flap of the tent and see him where he is dying for you. If you do that, he's promised to make us whiter than snow. Think of that.

That's the nature of the new birth, the starting of that way. We'll pray together. We ask thee, Lord Jesus, that thou mightest show us these things more clearly, that we might all make sure that we have looked to thee today and every day so that sin has no more power over us.

And we bless thee for the freedom we have as children of God. We thank thee for the joy there is in heaven over one person who does that. We thank thee for this kindness and goodness toward us all.

For thou dost, it is thy wish, that all should be helped and brought to a knowledge of the truth. So bless us this day and make it the Lord's day for each one of us who may go through it looking to thee, the author of our salvation. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/dr-ae-wilder-smith/nature-of-the-new-birth/>

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