

# The New Birth, Do we understand it

by Fred Tomlinson

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*This sermon emphasizes the transformative power of the new birth experience, highlighting how it brings sight where there was blindness, life where there was death, and purity where there was corruption. The speaker delves into the profound impact of being born again, stressing that it is an act of God that breaks chains, frees hearts, and opens doors to new life. The message calls for a deep understanding and personal response to the authentic gospel, urging listeners to rise up, walk in newness of life, and follow Christ.*

**Scripture:** John 3:3, Ephesians 2:4, Titus 3:5

**Topics:** "New Birth", "Transformation in Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

I had an unforgettable and very humbling experience just over 60 years ago that's still very clear and real in my memory. I was riding my first motorcycle which for those who may be interested it was a James 150cc two-stroke motorcycle I was very pleased with up until this point. My new girlfriend was riding pillion and I wanted to take her to a particular area that I liked very much, a large hill and with a lovely view and outlook.

So off we set but when we got close to the hill and started making the climb, I only had three gears to choose from in those days but I was back down in the first gear and the engine stalled and it wasn't because either myself or my girlfriend were overweight but my girlfriend had to get off the motorcycle and walk the rest of the distance while I chugged alongside in first gear. That motorcycle didn't last very long after that but I married the girl and that was 57 years ago and without getting into technicalities and causes the lesson that I want to draw from that event is that if your motor, quote-unquote, if your motor tends to stall it will definitely ruin the journey. To stall spiritually is something entirely different, it's on a different level altogether and as with a motor vehicle there can be many causes for it but during these decades of my own involvement in pastoral care I've had the opportunity to talk with very many people and many of them in talking about themselves and perhaps they'd come to me to talk about themselves.

I would hear this this story that they were having trouble keeping their engine running if you follow what I'm trying to say. They were continually stalling, they weren't making the progress that they knew they should or ought to be making and I think and believe that even today there are very many people who are in this category and for some of them they just find a different route for their lives and ignore the things that they also have been following and pursuing and there are others who are searching and if you like they keep searching for some, what can I call it, some additive that will boost their power, boost their ability to actually live this Christian life the way God intends it to be lived and it's very possible that there are those who are listening to me today who can identify with this, people who are in this same category. On occasions where I have been in conversation with people who've come for this reason I'm describing it's not been unusual for me to say to them just tell me a little bit of how you first became a Christian, what happened and the answer to that question can be very enlightening and can very often provide a key for the way forward.

It's essential at times to come back to where we started because this I've discovered if we start wrong we will never get it right and there's such a need, someone else has said and I think it's been said probably by many many times over the years the real way forward is always by going backward. There's a tendency to be always looking for that next thing, that next experience, that next something when in actual fact it's very likely and I believe very common that the real need is to go back and let's see how we started. I know that we've got one master builder, it used to be two builders here in the meeting this morning and it's very obvious to every one of us but certainly to those men that if you don't get the foundation straight and right the building will never be right and this is certainly true in a spiritual sense as well and that's what I want to do this morning for a little while is to sort of turn our attention back to things that belong to the to the very beginning.

Risking coming across in some kind of harsh way which is not my intention, I do believe that in many many cases the real problem lies in the fact that the true and the authentic gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is not being preached for different reasons and if the message that people are exposed to is not the clear authentic biblical message then of course faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God it's so important that we hear the authentic biblical truth. Why would it be that something less than that would be being preached and presented? Of course there are different answers that we can give to that. One thing that we can't ignore today is that we live in a context of society and culture which is a consumerist culture even in my relatively short lifetime we've seen this developing and evolving over the years and over the decades but today probably as probably as in no time in history people are shopping for a product that's what it's all about another product a better product a more efficient product we just want another product and it's sort of built into the way we think and and that's one thing out there in the world at large but the real tragedy is that that mindset has made its way into the Christian Church even into the evangelical portion of the church I believe and as the result it's become necessary and it's done either deliberately or without realizing what people are actually doing wittingly or unwittingly in order to make the the product that more appealing to people there has to be some modifications made to the product that is the way people are thinking and what this means is that the gospel this authentic true biblical gospel ends up becoming adjusted or manipulated and again I'm not throwing out accusations because I think it's like things in these realms tend to move very slowly almost imperceptibly until somewhere we wake up and realize that we're not where we should be or where we once were perhaps and so on I suppose the need for a Christian ministry to undertake these alterations modifications adjustments or whatever they are the truth will inevitably become and even the ministry you could argue could become sidelined it will not be efficient because we've learned ways to present the product in such a way that it's attractive and it's

appealing and this is certainly where the the seeker friendly ethos has really developed greatly in these days and it's not that the gospel has been deliberately abandoned or indeed abandoned at all but I would suggest that what is taking place is that the the truth the message emphases are being refocused in other words the there are features of the gospel which are more attractive and more appealing there are features of the gospel that are deeply and profoundly challenging as I say that I'm thinking of the opening words of to treat Bonhoeffer's book on discipleship and the very opening words that the call of discipleship is a call to come and die now that's not a popular message that's not a seeker friendly message and so these aspects of the gospel which are very very real and far more plentiful than many of us have really come to believe or recognize I mean to say they've been moved over into the margin they are not the main thing they are not the main message and I could I'd be wasting my time but I could I could suggest to you a variety of features which are highlighted today made much of in terms of the presentation because they're appealing to people by and large and so on but when we do this we embrace what I personally have chosen to think of as a minimalist gospel in other words we've reduced the the truths that are plain and clear here in Scripture to the irreducible minimum and as I say we've screened out things that are not as attractive and appealing but in doing that inevitably there's a loss of the of the dynamic there's a loss of the cutting edge of the gospel which is essential for it to be the gospel you remember how the Apostle Paul deals with this in Galatians chapter 1 the issue there was was somewhat different it was a context of legalism and so on but nevertheless he was deeply exercised because the message which he discovered was being preached among the people was not the message that he preached when he had gone there originally and the church had been founded and he referred to what they were teaching as another gospel which he hastened to say is not another in other words if it's not what I have preached and then he qualifies even that by saying that which I preach was not I'm paraphrasing wasn't my idea my ideas I didn't even learn it from anybody else he said I received it from God and that gave him a tremendously solid rock-like foundation he knew what he preached had come from God himself and on that basis he also knew that what God had given to him that he'd preached produced a certain quality in the lives of men and women and when that message is manipulated or altered for any reason and in any way it loses that cutting edge and in losing its cutting edge what we're really saying is it's lost the anointing of the Holy Spirit because he is the one it's not that brings about the changes in people's lives it's not merely that we hear some words and concepts that are different to what we've ever known so well that's wonderful I know this happens commonly but that's not that's not the true preaching of the gospel Paul would say again on another occasion he said writings of Thessalonians he said you you know you received the words that we preached he's referring back to his personal presence there years earlier and he said you you knew that it wasn't it wasn't just words of men but you received it as being the Word of God which in fact it was in truth he said and so there we are and I think I might just add to that that in in losing this edge losing this this this dynamic this power this aspect of the Holy Spirit's ministry we may make the message more relevant but we've lost the most important thing of all I think in trying to garner maximum response we've actually lowered that high bar that the scriptures set for the message of the gospel we've lowered it down to a lower place and without without wanting to come across in any sort of careless or facetious way I do believe and I think I must say this that in many cases the way in which that which is being considered to be that the gospel is presented it's presented in such a way in terms of for response from people that you are required you make these are these are phrases that are common you make a decision for Christ now that's a common expression and we add to that well if you pray this simple prayer just repeat these words after me and then we wouldn't say the next thing but it amounts to this then we would be told that's it you're in all these adjustments are made in heaven and you're in and as I was thinking about this the other day I thought if that's true and I do believe it is and I've got some personal experience about it that that's

making salvation easier than getting the library tickets because if you want a library ticket you at least have to take your driver's license and show it we're saying this is easy just you make the decision you pray this little prayer and that's it and once again I'm not being foolish in making that comment but I'm asking you to consider whether quite possibly there's something wrong with this is there an adjustment that's been made because we I would say at that point is it any wonder then that people who come in that way stall quickly I'll find it's just not running properly it's not working and once again this is where I was a few minutes ago this is what's causes some people to come seeking and asking questions there's something wrong with me or with my experience somewhere can you help me and I say well let's go back to ask these questions because I think in so many cases when person comes in through this doorway that I'm suggesting there ends up being no discernible difference between their lives or our lives if you like and the lives of people who were not believers there's no no discernible difference at all there's no evidence of of that dynamic holy life that the Bible presents as being such an a vital component of the Christian message years ago there would be those who are sincere followers of truth who use the expression quorum di living quorum di which is combination of two languages there but they are essentially meant this living to live your life before the face of God this is the normal Christian life but I think the all-too-common minimalist message that's very superficial that doesn't impose any deep personal challenges to us at all fails to bring us into a real experience of God where holiness is the concept we know is in the Bible somewhere and things of fellowship with God is somewhere in the Bible but it's not our personal experience we just can't get there and and that of course is a serious serious problem it may it may be true that in these days in which we live right now there are fewer and fewer people who are actually privileged to be hearing the authentic message of the gospel and this this statement I know someone might want to turn around and want to imagine that I am boasting in some way I am not boasting I am deeply humbled but there is such a thing as the authentic truth of the gospel it's right here before us and all we're calling for in these days is to as a reevaluation of these things I'm thinking I'm thinking of the younger people today who through no fault of their own have found themselves swept up in this minimalist movement of that's it's got its excitement it's got its fun together it's got a lot of things and a lot of well-meaning people who are not being criticized right now they were involved but it this is we're talking about the truth of God and the power of the Holy Spirit who wants to accomplish something in men and women's lives that is dynamic that changes that the deepest core of our being and alters our lives and alters our lifestyle and alters everything so that we're a different people we're the people of God and for many years now I know I've been saying that I I think that one of the greatest needs within the Christian Church movement today is in fact a redefinition a redefinition of the biblical truths that we claim to believe because sadly familiarity breeds contempt we sort of take things for granted we and we're in this very visual culture as well where it's far more easy to watch things that and particularly those that are entertaining and and to get to come aside to be alone really alone and for not five minutes but to get alone not just reading your daily reading but to be alone with God and and think but I'm not giving more credit to our brains than I ought I'm just saying to pause long enough in God's presence where where these words are not just words of a hymn or a chorus that we've learned speak Lord for thy servant heareth and of such a biblical phrase as you would know it's so important may God exercise your hearts to reconsider these things we're not looking for some from some clever new twist on the gospel some gimmicky approach not at all we're looking we're coming back to the old paths as they're called in the Old Testament the old paths the original way the truth of God and I'm asking you as I ask myself freshly again are we prepared to come aside in the presence of God and say speak to me Lord show me what I need to hear and so far as this gospel is concerned show me what it really is that is in your heart to accomplish in men and women's lives in this day and age the New Testament contains many references to the act of becoming a Christian I don't I don't know better ways to say that but the actual

experience the moment and and it's referred to in different ways and what I want to do this morning is perhaps just take four maybe five references that I'll draw your attention to and we won't have covered the whole issue by any means who knows maybe we'll carry on next time but we'll see about that but I'm asking you first of all to turn to John's gospel if you have your Bible and where else could I be turning then to the third chapter John chapter 3 this this is that passage of Scripture as you will know already but you'll be reminded in a moment well we find that text that is famous famously quoted and re-quoted that uses the phrase born again so I'm in chapter 3 of John verse 1 now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews this man came to Jesus by night and said to him rabbi we know that you have come from God as a teacher for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him Jesus answered and said to him truly truly I say to you let me pause there because some of your translations will say verily but one of the unique things about the language in which the scriptures were written is that this is a way by repeating words it's a way of emphasizing something when I want to emphasize something if I'm writing it then I may use block capital letters for a word I've done that right in front of me because I want to emphasize that particular word or maybe I'll do what I've also done here and that is I've highlighted that word it's in block capitals I've highlighted it you can underline this and why do we do that because this is something very very important we must not miss that's exactly what's going on here in this passage when Jesus repeats this word truly or amen or verily verily as the different translations put it truly truly I say to you verse 3 unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God Nicodemus said to him how can a man be born when he is old he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb can he and be born Jesus said truly truly I say to you unless one is 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 do not be amazed that I say unto you you must be born again just to remind ourselves because I think it's also relevant that Jesus here is talking to a very significant man he's referred to in verse 1 as a ruler of the Jews in verse 10 as a master he is the teacher clearly clearly this man was a member of the Sanhedrin that was made up of 70 men they were they were the supreme cause if you will of Judaism these were the men that determined how things were to be interpreted and and all things pertaining to life for the people of the of the scriptures and so on they were the ruling body the elite men and the way that these words are placed together here in this text it would suggest to us that very likely this man Nicodemus was the leader of that group a very significant man in Israel no wonder he came to Jesus by night he dare not come in daylight and be seen coming to Jesus but he'd been paying attention to Jesus he knew about the deeds that Jesus was performing the miracles that he was performing and so on and it's to this man I'm wondering how this applies to us who call ourselves Christians today there's a kind of a parallel we can find here this was to one of the elite men who knew the text he could quote the passages he was an expert on the first five books of the Bible the Pentateuch and that memorized most of them because they were required to do that imagine that and yet it's to him that Jesus says listen to me Nicodemus there's something that you must really pay attention to verily verily truly truly you must be born again you must be born again his knowledge of theology was not sufficient you must be born again and Jesus said he says here in verse 3 that unless someone is born again they cannot see the kingdom of God and and I think this is quite likely at least two ways that you could think of that but the way in which I'm looking at it just now is you know the way we may use the word see when we say well I just don't see that I don't guess it I don't understand this and I believe that is in fact what Jesus is saying on this occasion it's as though he's saying you will never be able to make sense of any of this that you know in your brain until the Spirit of God does something in your heart and in the terms of his analogy here until a man or a woman is born again you'll never see it until then and of course he goes on further in verse 5 to say that and unless the same experience is had no one will be able to enter into the blessing and into the benefit of the kingdom of God

and so really what Jesus is doing here he is in as many words he's telling this theological expert that at this point in time Nicodemus you are blind you can't see you can't see this truth and for this reason you must be born again this experience whatever it was whatever being born again is and however it's to be understood it would make this transformation where he would see things where the light would come on and he would begin to understand and what does that say to us today I believe we could make a long list but until a person is truly authentically born again of the Spirit of God they cannot see the King of glory they may know a lot of texts of Scripture about him but they can't see him in this sense of understanding this sense of true fellowship they cannot see the benefits of the gospel kingdom the kingdom that is made available through the gospel frankly I don't until this happens I don't think a person see their own need that the imperative need of them actually having the experience they just don't get it and by the same token they clearly can't see how to enter it this is quite something when we follow these thoughts through to start with it makes it poignantly clear that we cannot talk someone into this we can't convince someone even our nearest and dearest we can't convince them by our words and by our descriptions and so on but one thing we've learned without any doubt from this passage and there's more to be found that we're not searching out this morning is that whatever this born again or this new birth experience is it is imperative to us if we're ever going to be the people that God ordained us to be if we're going to be real Christians let me turn you to two of the Scriptures quickly just a page back in my Bible anyway John chapter 1 and while you're going turning your pages maybe you want to keep your finger there and turn into book of James for a verse there also in chapter 1 let me read them both to you this is John writing John the Apostle and he says speaking about Jesus he came to his own verse 11 and his own did not receive him but as many as received him to them he gave the right or the authority to become the children of God even to those who believe in his name note this verse who were born not of blood not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God clearly when John says I'm not talking about those who are born according to the blood he's referring to our natural first birth but then he moves on talking about a man's will and he's saying here what it's as though he puts it this way I'm putting his words this way perhaps I should say he's saying when for someone to be born again it's not going to happen because they make a decision for it to happen this is of God it's not of the will of man that that cuts right across so much that we've been brought up to believe but it says here not of the will of man but of God and the verse in James I wanted is in the 18th verse of James chapter 1 let me just lead into it I read in verse 17 every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above coming down from the father of lights with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow in the exercise of his will he brought us forth let me just pause there the old King James which I'm more familiar with than this New American Standard Version I've got here but it uses the word begat which is not a common word we can understand why maybe translators decided maybe we won't use that word but the fact is the original word carries through that very thought that the original word brings through this this idea of being brought forth being brought forth into this world being born into this world except that of course all this is in a spiritual context so here we're thinking about this this new birth this second birth being born of God and he said in the exercise of his capital H his God's will God's will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we would be a kind of firstfruits among his creatures clearly there's more in that than we're able to look at just now but I would suggest to you that both of these texts the one from John chapter 1 and this one from James chapter 1 they both thunder through a particular truth that I'm wanting to emphasize this morning and that is that the new birth is is not an act of man it is an act of God this is something that God does which which then leads us it's as though that is a doorway into truth and that leads us to recognize that again I'm choosing to use this word whatever this is because we've not really fully defined what it is yet but whatever this new birth is it is it's crucial we started there didn't we with John chapter 3 but whatever it is it's it's an act of God it's not it's not something I decide about it's something

God decides about and I'm because of that that which is accomplished you know the carrying out of or the fulfilling of this that is being discussed here will be a miracle because if it wasn't a miracle we'd be able to do it but we can't do it we haven't we have no ability to do it we'll see that even more clearly as we go forward the the new birth is an act of God which is supernatural which is a miracle in fact it would be true to say that that for a man or a woman to become truly or authentically born again they're born again of the Spirit of God it's an act of God which is supernatural and is indeed beyond question the greatest miracle that God is able to perform he could create universes without going to a cross but he had to become a man and go to a cross with all that that means in order to make this possible no one was born again until that was accomplished and the Holy Spirit would be sent to to to to communicate what Jesus Christ did on the cross into the individual lives of men and women like you and me that's why Jesus would say to Nicodemus you must be born again but you know what he couldn't get born again yet because Jesus had to go to the cross first and but what Jesus said was emphatically accurate and true of course which reminds us just to give a perspective to that to what Jesus is saying in John chapter 7 when he's talking about coming to him and drinking do you remember that passage but then John adds a parenthesis which links in here to what I'm just saying he said but but this spake he that Jesus this is what Jesus was talking about he was talking about the Holy Spirit who was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified you see how critical or crucial it was that Christ be crucified in and his bloodshed and accepted by his father in the holiest of all before ever there could be redemption for men and women and and so on but coming back here to this I think I think it's very easy for people to give a sort of a nod of approval to these things and we say yeah this is the new birth is of God yeah I believe that but do we really do we really understand this do we is our life being built on this fact that we use a word commonly in our Christian conversations we talk about conversion conversion now in actual fact the word and concept of conversion is not truly a New Testament or a new covenant concept believe it or not it the word conversion it appears numerous times in the Old Testament and in the Gospels which are prior to the cross it the word is used on two occasions in the book of Acts that you will find but on both of those occasions it is used as in the come in context of a quote from the Old Testament so you won't find Paul using the word conversion for example and so on and I would add to what I've said this statement it's not that there's anything fundamentally wrong with the word conversion but it is a wholly inadequate word to describe what the new birth is and that's the important thing and probably the saddest thing is that that in our modern you know dare I say evangelical church we've we're virtually making the word conversion a synonym for the new birth and that is serious because if that's what we believe that the new birth is merely a conversion we've missed the authentic truth of the gospel and this is the kind of thing I was referring to right at my at the outset this morning where things are missed out conveniently because it makes it more acceptable and easy to relate to and so on and so the word conversion has become almost a cliché it's but I I'm saying to you and I hope we remember this we if we're not careful we're making this a central feature of the minimalist gospel you know we're in a different age now so my illustration is coming from one step back from the present because now we have electric automobiles but you know we used to talk in terms of especially American cars gas guzzlers we can get a gas guzzling autumn the automobile and a conversion note the word a conversion can be made so that it will run on natural gas but it's still an automobile it doesn't become it doesn't become an outdoor swimming pool it's it's it's something that exists that has been manipulated and converted to suit the particular present need and so on now is that the Christian gospel no it's not no it's not the gospel presents something completely different the true new birth experience is not merely a conversion it is a recreation if any man is in Christ he is a new creature and it's entirely different do we really get that we say yeah I believe it do we really believe it that to be born again according to the Bible will involve such a radical transformation of the man I once was of the man you

once were a woman you once were it's something radical Oswald Chambers people like to read Oswald Chambers morning by morning but do they really watch what he's saying listen to this one of his statements he said the new birth is a cataclysmic and distinct and emphatic crisis now that that's not like okay will you make a decision for Christ before I leave and you know I pray this little you can see can't you just how different and contrasting this is this is our beloved Oswald Chambers the new birth is a cataclysmic event and distinct emphatic crisis and then some of us are familiar with the Anabaptists of years ago one of their statements reads like this in Anabaptist experience it was in reference to new birth it was a cataclysmic radical personal experience something to be personally experienced and objectively recognized as a unique event in one's own relationship with God and we read earlier having noted that the true new birth is an act of God he is the one who initiates it he initiates something I hope I'll make that even plainer in a moment but I wanted before pressing by too quickly to remind us that because he is the initiator he he is the one who chooses the moment that he is going to make this known to an individual in many cases where in such a hurry to get it all done we will sell the the product of minimalist gospel pray the prayer you're all done someone walks away with another sort of feather in their cap or another notch on their gun or whatever you do you know so many souls today well because someone seemed to make a response and seemed to pray a prayer but what really happened or did anything really happen that's the big question and can you see how far this is perhaps this is the most important thing to go home with today and I'm not ready to go home quite yet but but I think we want to really get this this is this is this is light years away from this concept I almost need to ask forgiveness for even making these statements it's miles away from this concept of poor Jesus standing outside in the cold at the door knocking on the door and he's saying please let me in that is not the message of the New Testament it's not it's not Jesus saying please please make a decision for me that is not what we're reading here we're reading about an almighty God who by his redeeming work the cost God more than we'll ever be able to begin to understand and by the giving of his Holy Holy Spirit to men and women he performs an act of God that reaches us in the very epicenter of our being in the core of who we are and transforms us so that Paul could write if any man any man is in Christ he she is a new creation all things the old life has passed away behold all things have become new the Apostle Paul he he preached this message we don't need me to tell you that let me turn you to some of his words I'm going to the book of Ephesians if you want to go with me you can and for some of us we're on very familiar territory I'm reading from chapter 2 and you were dead what I'm saying here perhaps before I read any further I'm saying that Paul preached the same theme but he in a sense he he opens that he opens the truth can I say this he opens it a little wider for us by because he's sharing with us something that clearly the Holy Spirit had taught him and he's able then to say and you who were dead in trespasses and in sins in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world according to the prince of the power of the air the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind and whereby nature the children of wrath even as the rest but God being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our transgressions made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in heavenly places in Christ and then he talks in verse 7 about showing us off in the ages which are to come the Apostle Paul in this section he's illuminating or he's opening up this great truth that we've been thinking about here and I think he's highlighting the sheer magnitude of this this experience this that God has made available and ordained for men and women and we're well aware that Paul because we could go elsewhere to find this but we're aware that he he understood the distant past didn't he he he understood what took place in the garden of Eden he was aware how that God formed that first man from the dust of the earth he was all too well aware of the text that said and God breathed into him into this clay

into this form that it created he breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living soul Paul knew all too well how that God gave instructions to Adam instructions that was a green light for him to enjoy all of the benefits of this creation this context in which he was existing but also it carried through this this prohibition which we're aware of and I don't need to explain it in detail this morning and God told him that if in fact you partake of the fruit of that tree you will surely die and Paul would know all of this he would know about how the serpent came how that the very devil himself was speaking to Adam and to Eve back in that time basically said this is all wrong God didn't mean that you'll die and so on but the fact of the matter is to hasten on here they partook of that which was forbidden by God and they died immediately they died immediately not physically but they died immediately Paul knew this he knew that what took place then was not a physical death but it was a spiritual death in that instant of that disobedience these two creatures who had lived and existed in fellowship with God himself in Eden were alienated from him separated from him physical death did come and became the new reality for men and women and indeed for all of creation Paul would all I know these things as I've read them but Paul certainly knew them because he'd really read these things because he was a Pharisee remember he knew the Old Testament he would also be well aware of that passage that some of us have looked at many times where we recall Ezekiel being conducted by God into that barren place a valley full of dry bones you remember and they're all dislocated and bleached in the Sun and so on until this this divine being that was conducting him said to Ezekiel Ezekiel can these bones live and you remember of course Ezekiel's response which which is classic he said O Lord God thou knowest in other words I haven't got the faintest glue there's no way in which I can see that no way can these bones live Jesus came in the fullness of time and he said I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly and think of him that made that statement think of course you know who I'm speaking about speaking about the Lord Jesus himself he made the statement but think about his reputation because we're told that everything that is created was created by him and we're told in the ancient scriptures I've been referring to that somewhere was it a moment in time I don't understand time and when time began I don't understand but we're told that father in my little pea-sized brain I hear being put this way that there came a moment in time when Jesus himself although he didn't take that hadn't taken that name Jesus at that point but he he cast his words out into the the darkness that existed and he said let there be light and the whole universe lit up there was light wasn't the Sun not yet but it lit up and illuminated what he was going to be doing wonderful so when when he says that he has come to bring life to men and women we should be standing up or lying on our faces I don't know but we need to we should be arrested we're talking about an act of God that brings new birth and brings these transformations and Paul recognized this and he knew that that which Christ had accomplished on the cross now made personal by the Holy Spirit's coming into a man or woman's life it could be somehow parallel to what happened back then he brings he speaks life it's by the word of an act of God by the word of the logos of God and that was the water that Jesus referred was referred to in John chapter 3 it's the Word of God not water baptism like some people believe I'm not diminishing it but that's not what Jesus was talking about on that occasion amen we need to see the new birth spoken of in Scripture is something by and through the personal action of the Holy Spirit it brings new life to men and women and isn't that what Paul's been saying he said I'm right into you who all once dead alienated from God in your trespasses and in sins that's where we were earlier unfortunately we're not looking at all the detail right now until he comes to verse 4 and he says but God but God by this divine act by this redemptive life-transforming act but God being rich in mercy and his great lover with his loved us even when we were dead he made us alive together with him and at that point at that point the alienation ceases to exist and were brought into fellowship with God that's what the new birth does it brings men and women into fellowship with God and you know just think back for a moment can these bones live I mean

this is foolishness but to make my point we could say this those dry bones that are described in Ezekiel 37 they didn't need a seeker friendly preacher they didn't need a gifted exposition of a text they didn't need gifted musicians they needed life they needed divine life they needed eternal life and this is what the gospel offers let's get our priorities all sorted out we need we need to highlight the most important things this this really is the message that we are to preach and proclaim because this is where I started if we get this wrong we'll miss everything let me just take one further step with you if you if you're still with me I'm in Titus this time Paul writes after the two Timothy letters to Titus and in chapter 3 Titus chapter 3 I'd love to read more here it's a wonderful wonderful chapter but it comes down like this for we also once were foolish ourselves disobedient deceived enslaved to various lusts and pleasures spending our life in malice and envy hateful hating one another but when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared he saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness but according to his mercy by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy whom he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior and of course verse 7 so important as it follows on there regeneration regeneration is is another word for being born again it's made up of two Greek words palingenesia and it means again born that's what the meaning literally the meaning of regeneration is again born so while Paul didn't preach the message just in quite the same way that Jesus was presenting it he preached the same message and he's talking about it here and just a couple of things to note very quickly here he has said notice the word saved in verse 5 he saved us we talk about being saved often I wonder whether we know what we're really saved from what we are supposed to mean but that's for another occasion but he's talking about saved and he's talking about washing here and what's he talking about and he's talking about it being the work of the Holy Spirit of God in other words he's saying that this new birth which really it's it's a salvation message most assuredly and he said it's for those who experience it by the power of the Holy Spirit it's it's a cleansing thing it restores us into fellowship with God it destroys the alienation and it makes us alive inwardly by his indwelling Holy Spirit and he washes us he washes us from our stains of condemnation from our guilt and power of sin as John Wesley said it amen for those for those who deep in their hearts would pray what sometimes we sing here oh make me clean oh make me clean and then we sing I hate the sin that grieves your loving heart oh make me clear please make me clean and I've got another next line goes I hate the sin that grieves your loving heart amen the the phrase new birth is not a meaningless tag it's not a novel cliché it is not a teaser that gives us false hope it is referring to a creative work an act of God it gives sight where there was blindness it gives life where there was death it creates purity where there was corruption and Charles Wesley he viewed new birth as the first and primary outcome of a true response to the gospel and he said as many of us here know very well long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature's night thine eye diffused a quickening gray do you see just pausing there do you see he's made he's made a reference when we were all dead as Paul has been putting it in trespasses in his sins and then but God he's taking that line and we've emphasized how this is not an act of man it's an act of God so keep that in mind as I reread this long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature's night thine eye this is an act of God thine eye diffused a quickening gray I woke the dungeon flamed with light Jesus said you can't see it until I give you the ability the dungeon flamed with light my chains fell off my heart was free note this I rose went forth and followed thee you know I believe as I close this message that a proper understanding and a proper experience of the authentic new birth is God's solution to all of our stalling attempts to live the Christian life the authentic Christian life and I'd like to say to you if you sense in your heart that God is speaking to you this morning if you sense that it's as though he's calling your name is speaking to you personally from my own experience and I've heard others say this over the years in that particular meeting I felt as though I was the only person there I felt that that preacher was preaching exactly and directly to me that's what happens when the Holy Spirit's

calling your name speaking to you if that's happening to you this is your day of visitation this is your day when God is giving you an opportunity and based on that because he's addressing you personally I can say to you with the authority of Scripture your chains have already been broken and I can tell you something else that the door of your dungeon cell of your former life is open now you must do and this is all we ever are called upon to do you must do what Charles Wesley says in the last line of that hymn he said my chains fell off my heart was free why because light came in even doing anything he was dead in this dungeon God sovereignly uniquely powerfully visits him the place lights up he sees what he couldn't see before he hears what he couldn't hear before his chains have fallen off his heart is free and then I rose went forth and followed thee and that's what we need to do God doesn't need to undo your chains he's if he's speaking to you he's done it for you you need to rise up this is the act of faith say I have heard the Word of God this new birth is is the Spirit of God working with his Word and through his Word to us and he awakens us inwardly we God speaking to us the doors open I need to get up and walk out or in Paul's terms to walk in newness of life it should it's your day it's your moment it's your privilege let's pray my father we thank you from the depths of our hearts that this this gospel this gospel of God this gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is no small thing our minds cannot get around its greatness but Lord we praise you that you have made something possible and you're affecting it in the lives of men and women today by your Holy Spirit and we do pray together this morning that insofar as a heart has heard you speaking to them plainly and clearly today that you will impart faith to that soul to get a hold of your word to get a hold of your truth who will stand upon it and will begin to walk on the basis of it in newness of life walking away Lord not in not with the stench of grave clothes still clinging but Lord in the sheer cleansing purity of the righteousness of Christ that we can go forth and begin to live a new life by the grace and power of God we thank you in Jesus name Amen

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