

# The Order of Salvation

by Richard Owen Roberts

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**Scripture:** John 3:3, Hebrews 12:6, Acts 2:47, Ephesians 2:1, John 2:23, John 3:5

**Topics:** "Regeneration", "Spiritual Birth"

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## Description

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## Transcript

I think some of you are a lot farther back than you need to be. And if you don't have any pity on yourself, have a little pity on me. And let's move it down and keep it down here where it ought to be.

Thank you so much for helping. Now, our subject at this time is a subject that seems ridiculous and unimportant to a great many. But I honestly am convinced that it is of a very critical nature.

Now, you don't have to be very smart to see that the nation is in moral and spiritual decline. And I believe it is directly linked to a viewpoint that seems to exist in the church, that God's not all that smart. And I'd like to begin with that question.

Is God really that smart? Now, in conversations with various people, I hear them using terms like salvation, regeneration, or the new birth, repentance, faith, and numerous other terms as if they were synonyms. And if you listen to the typical preacher today, the Bible's not worth very much. So if it gets two or three minutes worth of attention in a Sunday morning sermon, then the rest of the time is spent talking about some television program or football game.

So here is a question to consider. Are salvation and regeneration and other terms like that synonyms? Now, I don't think I need to emphasize this, but I'm going to anyway. We're not a very big crowd.

And we don't have to be very formal about things. And I believe it would help a great deal if you have an objection or a question. Let's deal with it right now, not some other time.

So I'm going to urge you. Now, I'm not speaking for anybody else. That's up to them to decide.

But for me, you won't bother me if you interrupt. Now, naturally, it does help a little sometimes if at least a wee bit of politeness is used. I mean, it is better to let a guy finish a sentence before you bring another matter to the fore.

So just a little bit of kindness or consideration. But do interrupt at any point. Maybe if you wave your hand, I'll be capable of seeing it.

If I can't, don't worry. Do whatever it takes to get my attention. But let's work together to gain some ground this week in our understanding of the Word of God and in our relationship to its purpose.

Now, here's a phrase that some of you may never have heard, but yet it was a very prominent part of the Church for a terribly long time. The order salutis. How many of you have heard that term before? The order salutis.

Well, apparently not all of you by any means. It's a Latin phrase, naturally, and it refers to the order of salvation. And honestly, you won't profit near as much from Scripture if you regard God as dumb, as you will if you regard every single word in Scripture as having significance.

And clearly you can't nearly gain as you ought if you lump things together as if they were synonyms when they are not synonyms. Well, just, as I said, a little hint as to the way we ought to behave ourselves when we're together this week. Now, our theme this morning is regeneration.

And that, for many, is a not very meaningful and not particularly helpful term, but we'd like to look at it today in a fashion so that at least our thinking begins to be in tune with God's thinking instead of in tune with the people around us and in the church who haven't paid much attention. Now, perhaps I don't need to mention this, but I will, but the church, by and large, has so messed up the subject of regeneration, if it indeed thinks at all in that term, so that they have made regeneration something we do. And you contrast that, then, with the historic conviction that regeneration is something God does.

You can see there's a huge distinction between what I do and what God does. And how can I possibly relate adequately to the Word of God if I can't even distinguish between man's work and God's work? Now, just in case some of you do tend toward the feeble-mindedness, the church, by and large, today, talks about accepting Christ. I would think a vastly more consequential issue would be Christ accepting us.

Does Christ need acceptance? Well, if you think he does, you obviously haven't got a very clear picture of Scripture. But you see, for the bulk of people in today's so-called evangelical church, the focus is upon receiving or accepting Christ. And so we have literally millions of people in this nation who can tell you the day and the hour they accepted Christ.

And many of them couldn't possibly tell you anything at all about God accepting them in Christ. Now, think like this. Do you know the word polity? How many of you know the word polity? All right, that's fine.

My concern is to help one another, and if I'm using terms you don't know, how am I going to be of any help to you? Now, we have what we call church polity. Let me ask you, do you see any difference between

Roman Catholic polity and Baptist polity? Well, you know that some religious organizations, whether you have any opinion or not on any subject, it doesn't matter, because it's what they tell you from the top that counts. And you know also that there are denominations where essentially the people don't vote on anything.

Everything is decided for them by somebody else. Well, now, can you see that if a religious organization is ruled from the top down, it isn't nearly as important what the people believe as in a denomination that is ruled from the bottom up? So, if the people don't really matter in terms of what they think or believe, then what does it matter whether or not they understand regeneration? But now, in a typical church like this, though I have no strong firsthand acquaintance, but I'm making some presumptions bearing the name of Baptist, that means that the thinking is that each person who is a member has a voice. Is that accurate? But as I said, in an Episcopal church, you wouldn't think that way.

Each person doesn't have a voice. In a Lutheran church, they might have a tiny voice. In a Methodist church, they can squawk when they want to, but it doesn't have much impact.

But in a Baptist church, what each person thinks and says counts. I assume this is not an unusual situation where people not only have a voice, but a vote. And the impression I get is that good pastors get thrown out on their ear from Baptist churches just because somebody who's got a lot of clout doesn't like them.

Now, maybe some are put out because they are no good, but surely we couldn't say that that's always the case. Baptist people, generally speaking, and of course, not just Baptists, I don't want to offend you, but it's what we call congregationally governed. Now, I don't want to shame or embarrass you, and while I wouldn't mind going home tomorrow, I would prefer to go on my own rather than your pushing me out, but the simple truth of the matter is I'm not a Baptist.

Never have been. Probably never will be. But I am a Congregationalist, and whether you like it or not, so are you.

This is a congregationally governed church. That means each person has a say. And there are many like this.

Many of our so-called Bible churches throughout the nation are congregationally governed, and of course, many other denominations. Well, now, this is the thing I want you to understand. If a Roman Catholic church is observed in its understanding of regeneration, that's not nearly as dangerous as if a Baptist church doesn't know what they're doing.

And you see why that's true. So it's terribly important that we understand the Scriptures because we do give every person a voice and a vote. Now, with that, as sort of the introduction to the matter, in other words, by saying that there is great significance in our understanding regeneration, let me proceed to try and help you.

Let me give you a statement from the book of Acts, chapter 2 and verse 47. I'm just going to read this to you. It's certainly not the text of the morning, but it's worth thinking of.

Listen now. And the Lord was adding to their numbers day by day those who were being saved. Did you get that? The Lord was adding to their numbers day by day those who were being saved.

Now, that's very different from a lot of our churches today. That, of course, is a description of what was happening in the book of Acts every day. The Lord was adding to their number.

Now, there's an incredible difference between what the Lord adds to the number and what we add to the number. And if you're familiar with the book of Acts, you know that the disciples had been instructed by the Lord to wait or to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. And because they were endued with power from on high, they weren't anxious to build up their numbers.

They were deeply concerned to have God build up their numbers. And so what God built up was not trash. But you see, we live in a time when it's not that way at all.

In most instances, it could not be said that the Lord has built up the number, but that the pastor or the people or a combination of those two has built up the number. And literally, what was happening in the book of Acts, which is what is referred to in those words I just read, God was taking dead people and giving them life and then adding them to the church. But now, generally speaking, what is happening today is men are taking dead people and adding them to the church and no life is being given to them.

So most of our churches today have some with life and some who have no life. And those who don't have any life don't necessarily like what's going on. So every little while, they throw the pastor out and try somebody else.

Now, that's a very sobering thing if you face it squarely. And because that's part of what's happening and because the vast majority of church members are as dead after being members as they were before becoming members, the nation is in the critical situation of going downhill rapidly, both morally and spiritually. And the only thing that will ever change that is to go back to the realization that the Holy Spirit is wiser than us and knows what he's doing.

And we're going to have to dump some of the notions that we've allowed ourselves to be infiltrated by and get back to the Word of God. So that's our theme this morning. The theme of regeneration, which I want to state again, is not something we do, but something God does.

And if you will pardon an old man to reminisce for a moment, when I was a youth, I was invited to serve a dead church as pastor. Insofar as I could tell, not a large church, but insofar as I could tell, there might possibly be one Christian in this entire church. And even at that I was wrong because the person I thought was a Christian didn't turn out to be a Christian at all.

But then there was an elderly man whom I had not at that time met who had been praying for a long time that the Lord send the truth to that church. And he was fairly ill for a long time and I didn't meet him, but that didn't keep him from praying. And then on the third Sunday, when I was there as pastor, I thought I saw some tears on one face.

I was fairly sure of that. I thought maybe I had seen a tear or two on a second face, and I thought maybe I had seen a single tear on a third face. And so at the end of the service I said I will be here at the church at three and anyone who can no longer live without the knowledge of sins forgiven is welcome to meet me here.

And to my amazement, there were 13 that came. 13, if I may say so, dead people who were walking. So many that I didn't know how to handle that is in the way that I had intended the 13, and so after laying out some of the basic truths of Scripture, I said I would like to have an opportunity of an interview with each of

you for at least a half an hour over the next six days.

And please do not leave until you have signed up for an interview, but it would be better if you came and told me how God had made you alive than if you came to ask me how that might happen. And over the next six days, 11 out of the 13 came reporting how they had been born again. And then, using the language of Acts 2 that we just read, the Lord was adding to the church daily those who were being saved.

It was a genuine work of God, and although most of them who were born again in those days have gone onward to the glory, there was not a single one that fell away. Because when the Lord does a job, He does a wonderful job, but when we do it, it leaves an awful lot to be desired. So we're talking about regeneration.

The Lord taking someone who is dead, spiritually, and making them alive. And I hope that it's very, very clear to you that there is a vast difference between the Lord making a dead person alive and a dead person praying the sinner's prayer. Because a very high percentage of those persons who have prayed the sinner's prayer are every bit as dead after they prayed the prayer as before they prayed the prayer.

Now, a few of you may be aware, and I'm certainly not making anything of this, but many, many years ago, Billy Graham, the well-known evangelist, asked me to become his ghostwriter, and that was quite impossible. It never worked out. But then later, when they started the Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois, Maggie and I moved from California and worked for several years with the Graham Association.

They paid my salary, and although I was said to be on the faculty at Wheaton College, it was really quite different from that. I was actually part of the Graham Association. Now, I mention that because I wanted to tell you that because of that arrangement, many, many, many times, I had serious conversations with members of the Billy Graham Association, with various evangelists and so on.

And time after time, we would come to the discussion that we're having here this morning. And I would tell them very plainly that what God does and what man does can be radically different. And that of the millions of converts that they were reporting around the world, most of them were just converted to Billy Graham and not to Jesus Christ.

And using their own statistics, I would remind them that at least 92% of all those that they claimed as converts were so fallen away within two years that they had absolutely no contact with Christ or the church. And do you know how they would respond to me? They would say, Mr. Roberts, your problem is you're so negative. You should get excited about the 8% that follow through instead of being so worried about the 92% that fell away.

And how do you suppose I responded to that? Well, that was a question. That meant I'm trying to draw you into this situation. Well, okay, but I've already said that, so that would be repetitious.

How do you suppose they responded? And, well, I don't mean to embarrass you or to make it difficult. They would say to me, rejoice over the 8%, and I would say to them, do you realize that the 92% that fell away are as if they received an immunization shot and no longer could be aroused or interested? And many times they say, oh, I tried all that. That's a lot of monkey business.

A false convert is much more dangerous than no convert at all. And, again, I want you to see how that relates to our nation, where a terribly high percentage of the nation that lives as if the devil was the only one they ever knew claim Jesus as their Lord. And then a huge number beyond that are unwilling to listen

to any Christian witness because they've been immunized against that by having been told that they were already a Christian having received Jesus Christ.

Now, with that, just as preliminary, we just now started, you see. I've just been making some friendly statements, too, up until now. But now I'm about to start what might be called the lesson of the morning.

And I'd like to ask you to turn to the book of Ephesians. And I would like you to have a careful look with me at what is said in Chapter 2. So Ephesians, please, at Chapter 2. And as has been the case yesterday and is still the case today, I fish out my glasses that aren't very good, but maybe I can read accurately here. Have you got Ephesians 2? And you were dead in trespasses and sins in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prints of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Among them we, too, all formerly lived in the lust of the flesh, indulging the desire of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as others. Now, let's pause for a moment and ask, about whom are those words written? Well, yes, of course. Someone did this, and rightly so.

And someone said all, and rightly so. So that is the condition of all mankind. They are dead in trespasses and in sins.

And even after they have prayed the sinner's prayer, they are, unless God himself has done something, still dead in trespasses and sins. Man does not give life to others. Only God gives life.

Now, I know that that's obvious, but yet it's so significant. We ought to be greatly affected by that. Verse 4, 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. Now, notice the wording here. By grace you have been saved, and indeed are being saved.

Well, we needn't pursue this further, I suppose, but surely we must get that fixed. Every person is dead in trespasses and sins. So there are obviously two issues that we need to consider.

The natural man is dead. When we are born physically, we are born dead spiritually. And we remain dead all through our life unless we are born again, or born a second time, or regenerated.

Now, perhaps you've heard the statement, those that are born once must die twice. And those who are born twice die only once. Now, from the nodding of heads, I can see that at least some of you have heard that, but let's give it consideration.

Those who are born once die twice. Now, what does that mean? Well, if you're born dead, so what are the two deaths? Well, perhaps I'm a little closer to one of these than most of you. I mean, I recognize that just about everybody my age has already gone, and for reasons God only knows, I'm still here.

But we do know about physical deaths. Some of you have been within the last few months at the funeral of someone, perhaps someone you loved. But when a person dies in this life, is that the end? No, no, there's still another death, the eternal death.

And have you ever seriously weighed the question, what is death? Is death cessation of existence? No, not really. When a person dies in this life, they don't cease to exist. The body that they occupied may rot away, but they still are facing the second death.

And in the second death, is there no feeling, no understanding, no anything? Well, if there were, then our Lord Jesus Christ wouldn't have been so explicit in things that he said about hell. And I wonder how many of you have ever faced this reality. There are six words that are never spoken in hell.

Now think of that. Six words that are never spoken in hell. Do you know what those six words are? Anybody have an idea? Were you about to say something? All right.

As I said, we're not here to embarrass one another, but to help one another. Six words. Sooner or later, he will come.

Think of that. Six words never spoken in hell. Sooner or later, he will come.

Because just as heaven is a place where the unbroken presence of Christ reigns, so hell is a place where the presence of Christ never comes. And just think now. A person in hell for 1,000 years can't say to himself, sooner or later, he will come.

After he's been there a million years, he can't say, sooner or later, he will come. After seven trillion years of endless burning, he can't say, sooner or later, he will come. Because Christ never, ever comes.

But hell goes on and on and on. And suffering is unceasing. And as I said already, the reverse.

Imagine now heaven, where Christ is never gone, where he's always present, where he's always in control. Well, my point is simply to help you to get a sense, not only intellectually, but experientially, of the difference between being dead and being alive. And the main thing I've tried to focus upon is to help you to feel deeply that there's nothing we can do to bring life to ourselves.

Now, we'll take just a moment or two, maybe a little longer, to ask and to think about this question. What are the marks of spiritual death? Do you hear that clearly? What are the marks of spiritual death? I've got the list that I brought along. Not that I want to bore you to tears, but I just want to get you thinking about this.

Listen carefully. And these have no order. They're just some random things that I wanted you to think about.

We can say concerning the dead person that he is and always will be unaffected by God's rights in this world. Now, just think of that. The dead person is unaffected by God's rights in this world.

Do I need to mention to you that God does have rights? Is it not obvious that the one who made everything out of nothing has rights that accompany that creation of all things, including us? But the person who's dead, never, never, ever, ever, never, he can come to church every Sunday for 35 years in a row, never miss once, and be totally unaffected by God's rights. He's dead. Or think of this one.

To be careless concerning your own soul. And again, let me repeat what I just said. A person can come every Sunday for 35 years in a row.

The preacher can say everything he knows. He can weep all the tears that his body is capable of producing. And you'll never succeed in getting a person, even for a jiffy, to weigh the state of their own soul.

Because that person is dead. And you may come along and say, oh, I've got the solution. Will you pray the sinner's prayer with me? And maybe if you twist their arm hard enough and they get rid of you, as is often the case, they may go along and pray the prayer, and it won't do a spectacle.

It won't make a particle of difference. I have a friend in the far west. I had actually been enabled to start a church in his part of Idaho.

And perhaps it will help you to get what I'm saying if I share a bit of this with you. You see, at one time when I was a student in college, I served as a student minister of a Methodist church. And these folks, now that was in the state of Washington, right on the border, Newport, Washington.

And this fellow that I'm going to speak to about was brought many times by a Christian family in Idaho to the Methodist church. And so he heard me speak often. He was the kind of a person that was loaded with questions.

And I quickly realized, and some of you had yet to resolve this matter, there are people who, when they ask questions, are not listening to the answer. While you're giving the answer, they're busy preparing the next question. So you're really wasting your time when you answer their questions.

He was like that. Then one week, this Christian couple got this guy to agree to go to a service in Spokane, Washington. Now most of you perhaps haven't been in that area.

Maybe you don't know the topography like I do. But you could go over the mountain and be in Spokane in very short miles. But in bad weather, you couldn't get over the mountain.

That is Mount Spokane. You'd have to go around. It would take at least 40 minutes to go around.

Anyway, this man agreed to go to what was then the Fourth Presbyterian Church. The elders were warned that he was coming, and so they were there to meet him. And after the service, to drag him into the prayer room.

And he had a long ways to go back home. And 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, they're still trying to get him down on his knees to pray the sinner's prayer. And finally, because he wanted to get home, he got down on his knees and prayed the sinner's prayer.

And they were elated, praising God for this wonderful conversion. And then he got in his pickup and headed for home. And he kept saying to himself, you've always been a rotten sinner, but now you've added to it.

By the first time in your life being a hypocrite, and all the way home he was saying to himself, you hypocrite, you didn't mean a word of that. And he most certainly didn't. And when he finally got home, his wife who'd gone to bed already, he woke her up and he said, now look, I've never minded being a sinner, but I can't stand the thought of being a hypocrite.

I'm going to get down on the floor and say, Lord Jesus, if you can do anything with me, help yourself. I'd like you, he said to his wife, to join me. And there, God came and brought life.

Well, I've told you already, I was a student at the time. And a very few days ago, this dear man, still alive, after some 60 years, called to tell me how God was moving in their church. Do you get the picture, the difference between what we do and what God does? That's what we're concerned about.

That's what the Bible calls regeneration. I'll not go further with this list of marks of death, but I am going to ask you, will you do some thinking about this? Will you face the reality of what the dead look like? And will you honestly acknowledge that you can't change them? Only God can. Now, with that as a background again, let's turn to one of the most well-known passages on this subject of regeneration and get a very clear look at what God has to say.

This is in the Gospel of John, and I'm asking you to turn to Chapter 2, the Gospel of John, at Chapter 2, and I'm urging your very careful attention at verses 23, 24, and 25. A few of you who do have minds at work can remember that on Sunday morning we were looking at Chapter 2, verses 1 to 11. But now we're looking at the last three verses of the chapter, and before we actually consult them, I would like to remind you of the content of Chapter 2. The episode of the wine that was made from water verses 1 to 11, that's the first incident.

The second incident is the first cleansing of the temple. And just by way of summary, what happened after Christ threw the money changers out of the temple? Well, they found another door and came back in. And then we have three verses that are most certainly not connected with the miracle in Cana of Galilee and not connected with the cleansing of the temple.

Now, I don't want to harm any of you who may be loaded with superstitious notions, for all I know. While we know that the Word of God is inspired, we're not so silly as to think that the division into chapters and verses is inspired. Now, that's a rather mundane statement, but important, because look at these three verses now at the end of 2. When he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in his name, beholding his signs, which he was doing.

But Jesus, on his part, was not entrusting himself to them, for he knew all men, and because he did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man, for he himself knew what was in man. Now, maybe you've never carefully looked at these words, and so maybe nothing great strikes you, but do understand, here is a group. We're not told what size, but we're led to think it may be quite a number.

And they come saying to Jesus, we believe as a result of seeing the miracle. And I want to ask you, is anybody ever saved as a result of seeing? Well, maybe you've heard, as I have, observed people saying, if somehow it would be possible to go to Mount Ararat and chip the Ark of Noah out of the ice and then put it on a cart of some sort and wheel it through all the streets of the city, everybody who saw would be saved. I hope you don't embrace nonsense like that.

The Bible is ever so clear. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. There's not a hint anywhere that we're saved by sight.

So here's a crowd. We know not the number, as I said, that comes to Jesus, and they say we believe because of what we've seen. And on his part, we read, Jesus did not commit himself to them.

And then there is given a reason that everyone here without exception would do very well to lay hold of. He did not pay any serious attention to what they said because he knew what was in man. And he didn't need anybody to testify of him.

Now, this is off the subject of regeneration, but it's too sweet an opportunity to pass up. Every true Christian needs to be fully liberated from the need of praise. Jesus was so liberated from the need of praise that when a group came claiming to believe, he was unmoved.

And would it be wrong for me to ask, have you been liberated from the need of human praise? You see, an awful lot of Christian work is ridiculous because it's done because a person hoped to get the acclaim or the praise of someone. Did you ever wonder why so many millions have been led to pray the sinner's prayer? I've tried to make it clear. It's not because it saves anybody.

But if you consider yourself a soul winner and you can get a lot of people to pray the prayer, then you can get all puffed up with pride and think you're doing well. So I do want to urge, before we go back to the subject of regeneration, that you seek earnestly to be totally liberated from any need of human praise. But now, with what we've seen in verses 23 and 24, let us then turn to chapter 3. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, ruler of the Jews.

This man came to him by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you've come from God as a teacher, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. Now, the wording is obviously different, but isn't that exactly what the crowd said? We believe as a result of what we see? Now, look, if you had the opportunity to choose between two teachers, Jesus and me, who would you choose? Well, if you have any brains, you'd choose Christ any day. Some of us do the best we can, but it's not all that good.

But Jesus was one stupendous teacher, and you can be certain he didn't teach nonsense, and he didn't practice nonsense. And because Nicodemus was prestigious, probably even wealthy, Jesus did not treat Nicodemus differently than he treated the crowd. Having rejected the claim of the crowd of necessity, being who he is, Jesus had to reject the claim of Nicodemus.

Now, that's terribly important. We do not have here a wonderful story of someone becoming a Christian. We have here the tragic example of somebody who doesn't know what Christianity's all about.

And just the way Christ responded to this man makes this very clear. Look at verse 3. Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Now, those are wonderfully urgent words, and words that we need to be certain we've got right.

Now, some of you who have been born again don't need to be told by me that there are two kingdoms, right here and right now. You know that. You weren't taught that by a pastor.

You were taught that by God. God can take a dead person, give them life, and enable them to see what cannot be seen by everybody around them. And because we can see that there is a kingdom of God and that the kingdom of this world is vying against the kingdom of God, we are unable to make wise choices.

We're unable to choose on the basis of that which brings glory to Christ and that which has everlasting worth over against simply choosing what feels good or smells good or looks good. And all around us are people, some of whom do mean well, it seems, but they're blind to the reality that there is a kingdom of God. So here's this prominent religious teacher being told very plainly that he can't even see the kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Now, dear friends, let's see the practical application of that. When the pastor of this church stands to preach Sunday after Sunday, he's got some blind people and some who can see. He can paint the kingdom of God in the most beautiful picture possible.

And there are some who don't have the slightest notion what he's talking about. And there are some who are thrilled at what he's saying. And because all of us who love Christ are burdened for those around us who don't know Christ and can't see the kingdom.

What is the biggest single thing that any person can do to help their pastor? Would it be to get a hold of your neighbor and twist his arm and get him to agree to come? The one thing that we can do seems to be the one thing the church won't do. I shared with some friends, maybe a few of you heard me say this, a while back when I was at Westminster Chapel in London, the then pastor said to me, do you realize that when Martyn Lloyd-Jones was pastor, of the thousands of people coming, a high percentage of them were perfectly ordinary means. They couldn't afford to take the tube or the subway from their suburb into downtown London, then go back again after morning service, then come back again for evening service.

Couldn't afford it. So what did they do? Brought their lunch. And after they had eaten their lunch, what did they do? They gathered together in prayer.

And they prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the preaching that night and, of course, on every occasion. Now just apply that. Suppose that you were the force behind the increasingly significant prayer life in your church and knowing perfectly well that no matter how much you love your pastor, it isn't going to make that much difference.

He'll appreciate it and benefit, but it's not going to win the lost. But suppose that you intensely, whether this is your church or somewhere else, you intentionally meet together every week to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that God will take away the blind eyes and the dead hearts and make a person alive so that they can hear the truth and be gloriously saved. And that's not silly talk.

That's reality. If you read through the book of Acts, that's what you've got, of praying people, fortifying the labor of preaching the gospel. And notice as well, verse 4, instead of saying, you have spoken a word I desperately need to hear, Nicodemus said, how can a man be born when he's old? How can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born? So then in verse 5, Jesus brings another pointed issue.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. But I hope that you see clearly that the lovely privilege of every believer is to earnestly pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the word. But what does a typical church do if it has a prayer meeting? Well, they pray against God's will and purpose.

That's what most churches that still have a prayer meeting do. God brings sickness to a person because he loves that person and wants to transform that person's living, and the church gathers and prays that that person will be healed. That God's purpose in bringing the sickness is immediately thwarted, and without any benefit or gain, that person is healed.

What if every time you prayed for the physical well-being of someone, you prefaced it by saying, don't heal this person until your purpose is fulfilled? Don't give this out-of-work man a job until he has discovered your plan and purpose. What if you took seriously Hebrews chapter 12 that makes it clear whom the Lord loves, he disciplines? How about stopping this nonsense of blaming the devil for everything negative and praising the Lord for sufficient love to bring us into difficulty that we may be turned and transformed into Christ's likeness? But now I know our time is up and I need to finish, maybe quite a while ago for that matter, for all I know, but I do want you to see clearly one major issue that you could conceivably have missed. This whole passage, we've only just read the beginning, but this whole passage on regeneration is a contrast between the physical and the spiritual.

Now I want you to really hold to that. It's a contrast between the physical and the spiritual. And this man, though he didn't know it, is about to help.

He's kind of preventing me from having a good look at you. So I'll look you over. I want to ask a question to you personally.

At what point did you tell your parents-to-be that you wanted a sturdy body? Did you hear what he said? He's of the notion that it was probably never. Now look, how can you make a contrast between physical and spiritual when no contrast exists? Was Christ such a dumb teacher that he compared apples and oranges, physical birth and spiritual birth, when they had absolutely nothing in common? If you can have some input into your spiritual birth, then it has no contrast. Because in our physical birth we had absolutely nothing to do with it.

Now that may not seem like very much, but that is a very powerful truth. And I don't hesitate to go back to what I said a moment ago. In one great church there were people who understood that Jesus is the Savior, that Jesus gives sight to the blind, that Jesus brings the dead to life.

And so the biggest concern those people had was to pray for the quickening, enlightening work of the Holy Spirit. Why waste your time trying to get people to agree to something when if you succeed it's not going to make a particular difference anyway? Why not give ourselves to that which really counts? Now I don't know the pastor here real well, but some of you know he journeyed all the way to Wheaton to talk with me. And some of you know he has attended these meetings and did plan them for the good of all who would come.

And you do know, I expect, that if the Holy Spirit was poured out on this place he'd be very glad. So why don't we concern ourselves with the real work of God instead of fussing around with nothingness? The greatest opportunity any of us could have is to plead that the Holy Spirit will be poured out and that as a result believers will get excited and have the most wonderful time of their lives as Christians and unbelievers will be awakened to their need and find that Jesus is the answer. That's regeneration.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/1vR9Bg562OI.mp4>

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