

Salvation

by Watchman Nee

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in Christ's death and resurrection for salvation and regeneration.

Scripture: Psalm 22:16, Matthew 26:38, John 5:24, John 11:41, Romans 5:12, Hebrews 7:10

Topics: "Regeneration", "Salvation"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes the profound impact of sin and death on humanity, explaining that spiritual death separates man from God. He illustrates how Christ's sacrificial death serves as a substitute for humanity, allowing believers to escape judgment and receive eternal life. Nee further elaborates on the necessity of regeneration, highlighting that true salvation involves a transformation of the spirit, which is achieved through faith in Christ's death and resurrection. He contrasts the spiritual and carnal Christian, urging believers to grow in grace and allow the Holy Spirit to govern their lives. Ultimately, Nee underscores that regeneration is the starting point for a believer's spiritual journey, leading to a life empowered by God's eternal life.

Transcript

CALVARY'S JUDGMENT

Death entered the world through the fall of man. Reference here is to spiritual death which separates man from God. Through sin it came in the beginning and so has it ever come since then. Death always comes through sin. Note what Romans 5.12 tells us about this matter. First, that "sin came into the world through one man." Adam sinned and introduced sin into the world. Second, that "death (came into the world) through sin." Death is sin's unchanging result. And lastly, that therefore "death spread to all men because all men sinned." Not merely has death "spread to" or "passed upon" (Darby) all men, but literally "to all men the death did pass through" (Young's). Death has permeated the spirit, soul and body of all men; there is no part of a human being into which it has not found its way. It is therefore imperative that man receive God's life. The way of salvation cannot be in human reform, for "death" is irreparable. Sin must be judged before there can be rescue out of death. Exactly this is what

has been provided by the salvation of the Lord Jesus.

The man who sins must die. This is announced in the Bible. No animal nor angel can suffer the penalty of sin in man's stead. It is man's triune nature which sins, therefore it is man who must die. Only humanity

can atone for humanity But because sin is in

his humanity, man's own death cannot atone for his sin. The Lord Jesus came and took human nature upon himself in order that He might be judged instead of humanity. Untainted by sin, His holy human nature could therefore through death atone for sinful humanity. He died a substitute, suffered all penalty of sin, and offered his life a ransom for many. Consequently,, whoever believes on Him shall be judged no more (John 5.24).

When the Word became flesh He included all flesh in Himself. As the action of one man, Adam, represents the action of all mankind, so the work of one man, Christ, represents the work of all. We must see how inclusive Christ is before we can understand what redemption is. Why is it that the sin of one man, Adam, is judged to be the sin of all men both present and past? Because Adam is humanity's head from whom all other men have come into the world. Similarly the obedience of one man, Christ, becomes the righteousness of many, both of the present and the past, inasmuch as Christ constitutes the head of a new mankind entered into by a new birth.

One incident in Hebrews 7 may illustrate this point. To prove that the priesthood of Melchizedek is greater than the priesthood of Levi, the writer reminds his readers that Abraham once offered a tithe to Melchizedek and received from him a blessing and so concluded that Abraham's tithe offering and blessing were Levi's. How? Because "he (Levi) was still in the loins of his ancestor (Abraham) when Melchizedek met him" (v.10). We know that Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac Jacob, and Jacob Levi. Levi was Abraham's great grandson. When Abraham offered the tithe and received a blessing, Levi was not yet born, nor even were his father and grandfather. Yet the Bible considers Abraham's tithe and blessing as Levi's. Inasmuch as Abraham is lesser than Melchizedek, Levi too is of less account than Melchizedek. This incident can help us to understand why Adam's sin is construed to be the sin of all men and why the judgment upon Christ is counted as judgment for all. It is simply because at the time Adam sinned, all men were presently in his loins. Likewise, when Christ was judged, all who will be regenerated were present in Christ. His judgment is hence taken as their judgment, and all who have believed in Christ shall no longer be judged.

Since humanity must be judged, the Son of God-even the man Jesus Christ-suffered in his spirit, soul and body on the cross for the sins of the world.

Let us first consider his physical sufferings. Man sins through his body and there enjoys the temporary pleasure of sin. The body must accordingly be the recipient of punishment. Who can fathom the physical sufferings of the Lord Jesus on the cross? Are not Christ's sufferings in the body clearly foretold in the Messianic writings? "They have pierced my hands and feet" (Ps. 22.16). The prophet Zechariah called attention to "him whom they have pierced" (12. 10). His hands, His feet, His brow, His side, His heart were all pierced by men, pierced by sinful humanity and pierced for sinful humanity. Many were His wounds and high ran His fever for, with the weight of His whole body hanging unsupported on the cross, His blood could not circulate freely. He was extremely thirsty and therefore cried out, "My tongue cleaves to my jaws"?"for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Ps. 22.15, 69.21). The hands must be nailed, for they love to sin. The mouth must suffer, for it loves to sin. The feet must be pierced, for they love to sin. The brow must be crowned with a thorny crown, for it too loves to sin. All that the human body needed to suffer was executed upon His body. Thus He suffered physically even to death. It was within His power to escape these sufferings, yet He willingly offered His body to endure immeasurable trials and pains, never for a moment shrinking back until He knew that "all was now finished" (John 19.28). Only then did He

dismiss his spirit.

Not His body only, His soul as well, suffered. The soul is the organ of self-consciousness. Before being crucified, Christ was administered wine mingled with myrrh as a sedative to alleviate pain, but He refused it as He was not willing to lose His consciousness. Human souls have fully enjoyed the pleasure of sins; accordingly in His soul Jesus would endure the pain of sins. He would rather drink the cup given Him by God than the cup which numbed consciousness.

How shameful is the punishment of the cross! It was used to execute runaway slaves. A slave had neither property nor rights. His body belonged to his master; he could therefore be punished with the most shameful cross. The Lord Jesus took the place of a slave and was crucified. Isaiah called Him "the servant"; Paul said He took the form of a slave. Yes, as a slave He came to rescue us who are subject to the lifelong bondage of sin and Satan. We are slaves to passion, temper, habits and the world. We are sold to sin. Yet He died because of our slavery and bore our entire shame.

The Bible records that the soldiers took the garments of the Lord Jesus (John 19.23). He was nearly naked when crucified. This is one of the shames of the cross. Sin takes our radiant garment away and renders us naked. Our Lord was stripped bare before Pilate and again on Calvary. How would His holy soul react to such abuse? Would it not insult the holiness of His personality and cover Him with shamefulness? Who can enter into His feeling of that tragic moment? Because every man had enjoyed the apparent

glory of sin, so the Savior must endure the real shame of sin. Truly "thou (God) hast covered him with shame . . . with which thy enemies taunt, O Lord, with which they mock the footsteps of thy anointed"; He nonetheless "endured the cross, despising the

shame" (Ps. 89.45,51; Heb. 12.2).

No one can ever ascertain how fully the soul of the Savior suffered on the cross. We often contemplate His physical suffering but overlook the feeling of His soul. A week before the Passover He was heard to mention: "I 'Now is my soul troubled'" (John 12.27). This points to the cross. While in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus was again heard to say: "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt. 26.38). Were it not for these words we would hardly think his soul had suffered. Isaiah 53 mentions thrice how His soul was made an offering for sin, how His soul travailed, and how He poured out His soul to death (vv.10-12). Because Jesus bore the curse and shame of the cross, whoever believes in Him shall no more be cursed and put to shame.

His spirit too suffered immensely. The spirit is that part of man which equips him to commune with God. The Son of God was holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners. His spirit was united with the Holy Spirit in perfect oneness. Never did there exist a moment of disturbance and doubt, for He always had God's presence with Him. "It is not I alone," declared Jesus, "but I and he who sent me ... And he who sent me is with me" (John 8.16,29). For this reason He could pray, "Father, I thank thee that

thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always" (John 11.41-42). Nevertheless, while He hung on the cross-and if there ever were a day when the Son of God desperately needed the presence of God it must be that day-He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27.46) His spirit was split asunder from God. How intensely He felt the loneliness, the desertion, the separation. The Son was still yielding, the Son was still obeying the will of the Father-God, yet the Son was forsaken: not for His

Own sake, but for the sake of others.

Sin affects most deeply the spirit; consequently, holy as the Son of God was, still He had to be wrenched away from the Father because He bore the sin of others. It is true that in the countless days of eternity past "I and the Father are one" (John 10.30). Even during His days of earthly sojourn this remained true, for His humanity could not be a cause of separation from God. Sin alone could separate: even though that sin be the sin of others. Jesus suffered this spiritual separation for us in order

that our spirit could return to God.

When he surveyed the death of Lazarus, Jesus might have been thinking of His Own approaching death, and so "he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (John 11.33). Upon announcing that He would be betrayed and die on the cross, He was again "troubled in

spirit" (John 13.21). This tells us why, when He received God's judgment on Calvary, He cried out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" For I think of God and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints" (Matt. 27.46 echoing Ps. 22.1; Ps. 77.3). He was deprived of the mighty strengthening through the Holy Spirit in His spirit (Eph. 3.16) because His spirit was torn away from the Spirit of God. Therefore He sighed, I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; thou dost lay me in the dust of death" (Ps. 22.14-15).

On the one side, the Holy Spirit of God deserted Him; on the other, the evil spirit of Satan mocked him. It seems apparent that Psalm 22.11-13 refers to this phase: "Be not far from me ... there is none to help. Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they opened wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion."

His spirit endured God's desertion on the one side and resisted the evil spirit's derision on the other. Man's human spirit has so separated itself from God, exalted itself, and followed the evil spirit that man's spirit must be totally broken in order that it may no longer resist God and remain allied with the enemy. The Lord Jesus became sin for us on the cross. His inner holy humanity was completely smashed as God passed judgment upon unholy humanity. Forsaken by God, Christ thus suffered sin's bitterest pain, enduring in darkness the punitive wrath of God on sin without the support of the love of God or the light of His countenance. To be forsaken by God is the consequence of sin.

Now our sinful humanity has been judged completely because it was judged in the sinless humanity of the Lord Jesus. In Him, holy humanity has won its victory. Whatever judgment should come upon the body, soul and spirit of sinners has been poured upon Him. He is our representative. By faith we are joined to Him. His death is reckoned as our death, and His judgment as our judgment. Our spirit, soul and body have altogether been judged and penalized in Him. It would not be any different had we been punished in person. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8.1).

This is what He has accomplished for us and such is now our standing before God. "For he who has died is freed from sin" (Rom. 6.7). Positionally we already have died in the Lord Jesus; it only awaits the Holy Spirit to translate this fact into our experience. The cross is where the sinner-spirit, soul and body-is altogether judged. It is through the death and resurrection of the Lord that the Holy Spirit of God is able to impart God's nature to us. The cross bears the sinner's judgment, proclaims the sinner's worthlessness, crucifies the sinner, and releases the life of the Lord Jesus. Henceforth anyone who. accepts the cross

shall be born anew by the Holy Spirit and receive the life of the Lord Jesus.

REGENERATION

The concept of regeneration as found in the Bible speaks of the process of passing out of death into life. A man's spirit before regeneration is far away from God and is considered dead, for death is dissociation from life and from God Who is the fountain

of life. Death is hence separation from God. Man's spirit is dead and therefore unable to commune with Him. Either his soul controls him and plunges him into a life of ideas and imaginations, or the lusts and habits of his body stimulate him and reduce his soul to servitude.

Man's spirit needs to be quickened because it is born dead. The new birth which the Lord Jesus spoke about to Nicodemus is the new birth of the spirit. It certainly is not a physical birth as Nicodemus suspected, nor is it a soulical one. We must note carefully that new birth imparts God's life to the spirit of man. Inasmuch as Christ has atoned for our soul, and destroyed the principle of the flesh, so we who are joined to Him participate in His resurrection life. We have been united with Him in His death; consequently it is in our spirit that we first reap the realization of His resurrection life. New birth is something which happens entirely within the spirit; it has no relation to soul or body.

What makes man unique in God's creation is not that he possesses a soul but that he has a spirit which, joined to the soul, constitutes the man. Such union marks out man as extraordinary in the universe. Man's soul is not related directly to God; according to the Bible, it is his spirit that relates itself to God. God is Spirit; all who worship Him, therefore, must worship in spirit. It alone can commune with God. Only spirit can worship Spirit. We thus find in the Bible such statements as: "serving with my spirit" (Rom. 1.9, 7.6, 12.11); "knowing through the spirit" (I Cor. 2.9-12); "worshiping in spirit" (John 4.23-24; Phil. 3.3); "receiving in spirit the revelation of God" (Rev. 1.10; 1 Cor. 2.10).

In view of this fact, let us remember that God has ordained He will deal with man through his spirit alone and that by man's spirit His counsels are to be realized. If such be the case, how necessary for the spirit of man to continue in constant and living union with God, without for a moment being affected into disobeying divine laws by following the feelings, desires, and ideals of the outward soul. Otherwise, death shall set in immediately; the spirit will be denied its union with God's life. This

does not signify that man would no longer have a spirit. It simply means, as we have discussed previously, that the spirit would abdicate its lofty position to the soul. Whenever a person's inner man heeds the dictates of the outer man, he loses contact with God and is rendered dead spiritually. "You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked" by "following the desires of body and mind" (Eph. 2.1-3).

The life of an unregenerated person almost entirely is governed by the soul. He may be living in fear, curiosity, joy, pride, pity, pleasure, delight, wonder, shame, love, remorse, elation. Or he may be full of ideals, imaginations, superstitions, doubts,

suppositions, inquiries, inductions, deductions, analyses, introspections. Or he may be moved-by the desire for power, wealth, social recognition, freedom, position, fame, praise, knowledge-into making many daring decisions, into personally arbitrating, into voicing stubborn opinions, or even into undergoing patient endurance. All these and other like things are merely manifestations of the soul's three main functions of

emotion, mind and will. Is not life composed pre-eminently of these matters? But regeneration can never arise out of these. To be penitent, to feel sorry for sin, to shed tears, to even make decisions does not bring in salvation. Confession, decision, and many other religious acts can never be and are not to be construed as new birth.

Rational judgment, intelligent understanding, mental acceptance, or the pursuit of the good, the beautiful, and the true are merely soul activities if the spirit is not reached and stirred. Although they may serve well as servants, man's ideas, feelings and choices cannot serve as masters and are consequently secondary in this matter of salvation. The Bible hence never regards new birth as being severity to the body, impulsive feeling, the demand of the will, or reform through mental understanding. The Biblical new birth occurs in an area far deeper than human body and soul, yea, even in man's spirit, where he receives God's life through the Holy Spirit.

The writer of Proverbs tells us that "the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord" (20.27). During the time of regeneration the Holy Spirit comes into man's spirit and quickens it as though kindling a lamp. This is the "new spirit" mentioned in Ezekiel 36.26; the dead old spirit is quickened into life when the Holy Spirit infuses it with God's uncreated life.

Before regeneration the soul of man is in control of his spirit while his own "self" rules his soul and his passion governs his body. Soul has become the life of the body. At regeneration man receives God's Own life into his spirit and is born of God. As a consequence, the Holy Spirit now rules man's spirit which in turn is equipped to regain control over the soul and, through the soul, to govern his body. Because the Holy Spirit becomes the life of man's spirit, the latter becomes the life of man's whole

being. The spirit, soul and body are restored to God's original intention in every born-again person.

What then must one do to be born anew in one's spirit? We know that the Lord Jesus died in the sinner's place. He suffered in His body on the cross for all the sins of the world. God views the death of the Lord Jesus as the death of all the world's people. His holy humanity suffered death for all unholy humanity. But something does remain for man himself to do. He must exercise faith in committing himself-spirit, soul and body-into union with the Lord Jesus. That is to say, he must reckon the death of the Lord Jesus as his own death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as his own resurrection. This is the meaning of John 3.16: "Whoever believes into (literal) him should not perish but have eternal life." The sinner must exercise faith and believe into the Lord Jesus. By so doing, he is united with Him in His death and resurrection and receives eternal life (John 17.3)-which is spiritual life-into regeneration.

Let us be careful not to separate into distinct matters the death of the Lord Jesus as our substitute and our death with Him. Those who stress mental understanding will surely do so, but in spiritual life these two are inseparable. Substitutionary death and co-death should be distinguished but never separated. If one believes in the death of the Lord Jesus as his substitute he already has been united with the Lord Jesus in His death (Rom. 6.2). For me to believe in the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus is to believe that I already have been punished in the Lord Jesus. The penalty of my sin is death; yet the Lord Jesus suffered death for me; therefore I have died in Him. There can be no salvation otherwise. To say that He died for me is to say that

I already have been penalized and have died in Him. Everyone who believes in this fact shall experience its reality.

We may say then that the faith by which a sinner believes in the death of the Lord Jesus as substitute is "believing into" Christ and thus union with Him. Though a person may be concerned only with the penalty for sin and not with the power of sin, his being united with the Lord is nonetheless the common possession he shares with all who believe in Christ. He who is not united with the Lord has not yet believed and therefore has no part in Him.

In believing, one is united with the Lord. To be united with Him means to experience everything He has experienced. In John 3 our Lord informs us how We are united with Him. It is by our being united with Him in His crucifixion and death (vv.14-15). Every

believer at least positionally has been united with the Lord in His death) but obviously "if we have been united with him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6.5). Hence he who believes in the death of the Lord Jesus as his substitute is likewise positionally raised up with Christ. Though he may not yet fully experience the meaning of the death of the Lord Jesus, God nevertheless has made him alive together with Christ and he has obtained a new life in the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus This is new birth.

We should beware lest we insist that a man is not born anew unless he has experienced death and resurrection with the Lord. The Scriptures deem anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus as already regenerated. "All who received him, who believed in his name..

were - born of God" (John 1.12-13). Let it be understood that to be raised together with the Lord is not an experience antecedent to the new birth. Our regeneration is our union with the Lord in His resurrection as well as in His death. His death has

concluded our sinful walk, and His resurrection has given us a new life and initiated us into the life of a Christian. The- Apostle assures us that "we have been born anew to a having hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Peter 1.3). He indicates that every born-again Christian has been resurrected already with the Lord. However, the- Apostle Paul in Philippians still urges us to experience the power of His resurrection" (3.10). Many Christians have been born anew and been thus raised with the Lord, even though they are lacking in the manifestation of resurrection power.

Do not confuse, then, position with experience. At the time one believes in the Lord Jesus he may be most weak and ignorant; he is nonetheless placed by God in the perfect position of being considered dead, raised and ascended with the Lord. He who is accepted in Christ is as acceptable as Christ. This is position. And his position is: all that Christ has experienced is his. And position causes him to experience new birth, because it hinges not on how deep he has known experimentally the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, but on whether he has believed in Him. Even if experimentally a believer is totally ignorant of the resurrection power of Christ (Phil. 3.10), he has been made alive together with Christ, raised up with Him and seated with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2.5-6).

Still another matter should be carefully noticed with respect to regeneration; namely, that far more became ours than simply what we had in Adam before the fall. On that day Adam possessed spirit; yet it was created by God. It was not God's uncreated life

typified by the tree of life. No life relationship existed at all between Adam and God. His being called "the son of God" is similar to the angels being so called, for he was created directly by God. We who believe in the Lord Jesus, however, are "born of God" (John 1.12-13). Accordingly, there is a life relationship. A child

born inherits his father's life; we are born of God; therefore, we have His life (2 Peter 1.4). Had Adam received the life which God offered in the tree of life, he immediately would have obtained the eternal uncreated life of God. His spirit came from God, and so it is everlasting. How this everlasting spirit shall live depends upon how one regards God's order and upon what choice he makes. The life we Christians obtain in regeneration is the same which Adam could have had but never had: God's life. Regeneration not only retrieves out of chaotic darkness the order of man's spirit and soul; it additionally affords man the supernatural life of God.

Man's darkened and fallen spirit is made alive through being strengthened by the Holy Spirit into accepting God's life. This is new birth. The basis upon which the Holy Spirit can regenerate man is the cross (John 3.14-15). The eternal life declared in John 3.16 is the life of God which the Holy Spirit plants in man's spirit. Since this life is God's and cannot die, it follows that everyone born anew into possessing this life is said to have eternal life. As God's life is totally unfamiliar with death, so the eternal life in man never dies.

A life relationship is established with God in new birth. It resembles the old birth of the flesh in that it is once and for all. Once a man is born of God he can never be treated by God as not having been so born of Him. However endless eternity may be, this relationship and this position cannot be annulled. This is because what a believer receives at new birth is not contingent upon a progressive, spiritual and holy pursuit after he believes but is the pure gift of God. What God bestows is eternal life.

No possibility exists for this life and position to be abrogated.

Receiving God's life in new birth is the starting point of a Christian walk, the minimum for a believer. Those who have not yet believed on the death of the Lord Jesus and received supernatural life (which they cannot possess naturally), are deemed in the

sight of God to be dead, no matter how religious, moral, learned or zealous they may be. Those who do not have God's life are dead.

For those who are born anew, there is great potentiality for spiritual growth. Regeneration is the obvious first step in spiritual development. Though the life received is perfect, it waits to be matured. At the moment of new birth life cannot be full-grown. It is like a fruit newly formed: the life is perfect but it is still unripe. There is therefore boundless possibility for growth. The Holy Spirit is able to bring the person into complete victory over body and soul.

TWO KINDS OF CHRISTIANS

The Apostle in I Corinthians 3.1 divides all Christians into two classifications. They are the spiritual and the carnal. A spiritual Christian is one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells in his spirit and controls his entire being. What is meant, then, by being

carnal? The Bible employs the word "flesh" to describe the life and value of an unregenerated man. It comprises everything which issues from his sinful soul and body (Rom. 7.19). Hence a carnal Christian is one who has been born anew and has God's life, but

instead of overcoming his flesh he is overcome by the flesh. We know the spirit of a fallen man is dead and he is dominated by his soul and body. A carnal Christian, therefore, is one whose spirit has been quickened, but who still follows his soul and body unto sin.

If a Christian remains in a carnal condition long after experiencing new birth, he hinders God's salvation from realizing its full potential and manifestation. Only when he is growing in grace, constantly governed by the spirit, can salvation be wrought in him. God has provided full salvation in Calvary for the regeneration of sinners and complete victory over the believer's old creation.

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