

FINDING GOD

by

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE SECOND BIRTH

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

I WILL DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION to John 3:3: **“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** You will see by Romans 3 that it is absolutely necessary that a man be born again. You see in Romans 3 what man is by nature. If you want to find out what God is, turn to John 3: **“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** Yes, read Romans 3 if you want to find out how man lost life.

Then read John 3, read it prayerfully, with God’s Spirit in you, and you will see how man is going to receive everlasting life. I don’t know a chapter that ought to be read in a Christian spirit, and read more deeply than that chapter. It is so plain and reasonable.

If there are a thousand people who want to know what love God has for them, let them read John 3; they will find it there, and find eternal life. They will learn how the way for the salvation of their souls is open to them. Yes, I do not know anything more important than this subject of regeneration. I don’t know of anything in the Bible more important and plainer than that; and yet it is a question that neither the churches nor the world are sound upon. There is no question upon which the churches and the world are more confounded than upon this very question of regeneration. If a man is sound on every other subject, you may find that he is unsound on this subject of regeneration. It is the very foundation of our hope, and the very foundation of our religion. It is a great deal better, with God’s help, to understand this question perfectly first, than to go on farther in the Word of God. It is a solemn question —“Am I born of the Spirit? Have I been born again?” For you know that **“except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**

Let me say what regeneration is not. It is not going to church. Very often I see people and ask them if they are Christians. “Yes, of course I am; at least I think I am; I go to church every Sunday.” Why, I could say to them, the very Devil goes to church every Sunday; and no one goes more regularly to church than he does.

If you go down in the dark alleys and byways of the city, and do all the good you can, preach God's Word and show God's love to those abandoned beings—I tell you that is not regeneration; No! No! It is a false idea that you get regenerated by scattering the seed of God by the wayside. Why, if going to church was regeneration—being born again—there is hope even for Satan himself. But there never was a church erected but that the Devil was the first to enter and the last to leave. There is no one, I tell you, who is a more regular attendant.

But still there is another class of Christians, or who think they are Christians. They say: “I am trying to do what is right—am I not a Christian? Is not that a new birth?” No; I tell you, no. What has that to do with being born again? There is yet another class—those who have turned over a new leaf, and they think they are regenerated. No; forming a new resolution is not being born again. That will not do you any good.

Nor will being baptized do you any good. Yet you hear people say: “Why, I have been baptized, and I was born again when I was baptized.” They believe that because they are baptized into the church, they are baptized into the kingdom of God. I tell you that is utterly impossible. You may be baptized into the visible church, and yet not be baptized into the Son of God. Baptism is all right in its place. God forbid that I should say anything against it. But if you put that in the place of regeneration—in the place of a new birth—it is a terrible mistake. You cannot be baptized into the kingdom of God.

If I thought I could baptize men into the kingdom of God, it would be a good deal better for me to do that than to preach. Then I should get water, and go up and down the streets to save men that way. If they would not let me do it while they were awake, I would do it while they were asleep. I would do it anyhow. For, **“except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”**

If anyone rests his hopes on anything else—any other foundation—I pray to God that He may sweep it away from him. You may be baptized into the church and not be disciples of Jesus Christ. I say to you, do not rest your hopes on that foundation.

Another class says: “I go to the Lord's Supper; I partake uniformly of the sacrament.” Blessed ordinance! Jesus said that as often as you do it you commemorate His death. Yet that is not being born again; that is not passing from death into life. It says plainly—and so plainly that there need not be any mistake about it—**“Except a man be born . . . of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”** What has a sacrament to do with that? What has baptism to do with being born again? What has going to church to do with being born again? But another man comes and says, “I say my prayers regularly.” Still, I say, that that is not being born again. That is not being born of the Spirit.

It is a very solemn question, then, that comes up before us; and I would that everyone should ask himself earnestly and faithfully: “Have I been born again? Have I been born of the Spirit? Have I passed from death unto life?”

Now there are some men who say that being born again is very good for a certain class of people, such as the drunkard, or the gambler, or other vicious people; that would do a great deal of good.

There are certain men who need to be converted, who say: “Whom did Christ say this to? Who was Nicodemus? Was he a drunkard, a gambler, or a thief?” He was one of the very best men of Jerusalem; no doubt about that. He was an honorable councilor; he belonged to the Sanhedrin, he held a very high position; he was one of the best men in the state; he was an orthodox man; he was one of the very soundest men. Why, if he were living today, he would be made president of one of our colleges; he would be put at once into one of our seminaries, and have the Reverend put before his name—Reverend Nicodemus, D.D., or even LL.D. And yet what did Christ say to him? **“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**

So said He to the woman in John 4. In John 8 you see an example of self-righteousness, when the Pharisees were talking to Him. Well, there are Pharisees in the present day, who rely upon their own merits and their own greatness. They say to you: “Oh, yes; the Gospel is very good for the abandoned and the outcast, and the unfortunate; it is very good for immoral men; but we are moral. Tell it to men who are not moral.” They seem to think that when Jesus said, **“Ye must be born again,”** He meant someone else must be born again—didn’t mean them at all.

You see John the beloved walking through the streets, and you say to him, “I met your Master last night—I went around to see Him.” John would say, “How did you like Him?” His friend would reply, “I never met such a Person in my life; never heard a man talk as He did. What he told me has been ringing in my ears ever since. He told me that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believed on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John, does your Master talk that way all the time?” “Yes, He always talks that way.” That man will never forget that interview. He was found in the dark by Christ; he was directed into the right way; in that way he will ever continue, and there is not a thing he would not do for Jesus.

See Nicodemus. He, with Joseph of Arimathea, took down the body of Jesus and brought it away, and stayed with Jesus to the last. I never knew a man who had a personal interview with Jesus who did not stay with Him. Oh, make up your mind that you will seek Him, and follow Him until you have an interview with Him; for never man spake as that Man spake. He is just the Man whom everyone wants.

But I can imagine someone saying: “If that is how to have the new birth, what am I to do? I can’t create life. I can’t save myself.” You certainly can’t, and we don’t preach that you can. We tell you it is utterly impossible to make a man better without Christ, and that is what men are trying to do. They are trying to patch up this old nature of Adam’s. There must be a new creation. Regeneration is a new creation; and if it is a new creation, it must be the work of God. In Genesis 1 man does not appear. There is no one there but God. Man is not there to help or take part. When God created the earth, He was alone. When God redeemed the world, He was alone. **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, and the leopard cannot change his spots.

You might as well try to make yourself pure and holy without the help of God. It would be just as easy for you to do that as for that black man to wash himself white. A man might just as well try to leap over the moon as to serve God in the flesh.

Therefore **“that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”**

Now God tells us in this chapter how we are to get into His kingdom.

We are not to work our way in—not but that salvation is worth working for. We admit all that. If there were rivers and mountains in the way, it would be worth swimming those rivers and climbing those mountains. There is no doubt that salvation is worth all that; but we don’t get it by our works. It is to him that worketh not, but believeth. We work because we are saved: We don’t work to be saved. We work from the cross but not toward it. Now it is written: **“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”** You must have your salvation before you can work it out. Suppose I say to my brother, “I want you to spend that \$100.00 carefully.” “Well,” he says, “let me have the \$100.00, and I will be careful how I spend it.”

I remember when I first left home and went to Boston; I had spent all my money, and I went to the post office three times a day. I knew there was only one mail a day from home; but I thought, by some possibility, there might be a letter for me. At last I got a letter from my little sister, and I was awfully glad to get it. She had heard that there were a great many pickpockets in Boston, and a large part of that letter was to have me be very careful not to let anybody pick my pocket. Now I have to have something in my pocket in order to have it picked. So you have to have salvation before you can work it out.

It is **“to him that worketh not, but believeth.”** When Christ shouted on Calvary, **“It is finished,”** He meant what He said. All that men have to do now is just to accept the work of Jesus Christ. There is no hope for a man or a woman as long as he is trying to work out his salvation. I can imagine there are some people who will say, as Nicodemus did, **“This is a very mysterious thing.”** I see the scowl on that Pharisee’s brow as he says, **“How can these things be?”** It sounds very strange to the ear. “Born again; born of the Spirit? How can these things be?”

A great many people say: “You must reason it out; but if you don’t reason it out, don’t ask us to believe it.”

When you ask me to reason it out, I tell you frankly I can’t do it. **“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth, so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”** I can’t understand all about the wind. You ask me to reason it out. I can’t. It may blow due north here, and up in Boston it may blow due south. I may go up a few hundred feet and find it blowing in an entirely opposite direction from what it is down here. You ask me to explain it, and because I don’t understand it, suppose I stand here and assert, “Oh, humph, there is no such thing as wind.” I can imagine a little girl saying: “I know more about it than that man does; often have I heard the wind, and felt the wind blowing against my face. Didn’t wind blow my umbrella out of my hands the other day? And didn’t I see it blow a man’s hat off in the street? Haven’t I seen it blow the trees in the forests, and the grain in the country?”

You might just as well tell me that there is no wind, as to tell me there is no such thing as a man born of the Spirit.

I have felt the Spirit of God working in my heart, just as much as I have felt the wind blowing in my face. I can't reason it out. There are a great many things I can't reason out that I believe. I never could reason out the creation. I can see the world; but I can't tell how God made it out of nothing. All your Tyndalls and your philosophers of the present day can't create one grain of sand out of nothing. But even these men will admit there is a creating power.

There are a great many things that I can't explain, that I can't reason out, but I believe.

I heard a commercial traveler say that he had heard that the ministry and religion of Jesus Christ was a matter of revelation, and not of investigation. **"When it pleased God . . . to reveal his Son in me,"** says Paul.

There was a party of young men together, and these men went back to the country; and on their journey they made up their minds not to believe anything they could not reason out. An old man heard them, and presently he said: "I heard you say you would not believe anything you could not reason out." "Yes," they said, "that is so."

"Well," he said, "coming down on the train today, I noticed some geese, some sheep, some swine, and some cattle, all eating grass. Can you tell me by what process that same grass was turned into hair, feathers, bristles, and wool? Do you believe it is a fact?"

"Oh, yes," they said; "we can't help believing that, though we fail to see it."

"Well," said the old man, "I can't help believing in the regeneration of man when I see men that have been reclaimed. I see men that have been reformed. Haven't some of the very worst men in the city been regenerated—picked up out of the pit, and their feet put upon the rock, and a new song put in their mouths? They were cursing and blaspheming; now they are praising God. Old things have passed away, and all things have become new; not reformed only, but regenerated—a new man in Christ Jesus."

I think if you want to get near Hell, go to a poor drunkard's home. Is there anything nearer like Hell on earth? See the want and distress that reigns there. But hark! A footstep is heard at the door, and the children run and hide. The patient wife waits to meet him. The man has been her torment. Many a time she has borne about for weeks the marks of blows; many a time that strong right hand has been brought down on her defenseless head. And now she waits, expecting to hear his oaths and suffer his brutal treatment. He comes in and says to her: "I have heard that if I will, I can be converted. I believe that God is able to save me."

Go down to that house again in a few weeks, and what a change! As you approach you hear someone singing. It is not the song of a reveler, but it sounds like "Rock of Ages." The children are no longer afraid of him, but cluster about his knee. His wife is near him, her face lit up with a happy glow. Is not that a picture of regeneration?

I can take you to thousands of such homes, made happy by the regenerating power of the religion of Christ. What men want is the power to overcome temptation, the power to lead a right life.

The only way to get into the kingdom of God is to be born into it. If the archangel Gabriel was to wing his way here, and we could have a chance to tell him all our wishes, we couldn't ask him for a better way of getting into the kingdom of God. Christ has made salvation ready for us, and all we must do is just to take it. Oh, may we not hesitate to take it!

There is a law in this country requiring that the president must be born in this country. When foreigners come to our shores they have no right to complain against such a law, which forbids them from ever becoming president. Now, hasn't God a right to make a law that all those who become heirs of eternal life must be born into His kingdom? An unregenerated man would rather be in Hell than in Heaven. Take a man whose heart is full of corruption and wickedness, and place him in Heaven among the pure, the holy, and the redeemed, and he wouldn't want to stay there. If we are to be happy in Heaven, we must begin to make a Heaven here on earth. Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people.

If a gambler or blasphemer were taken from these streets and placed on the crystal pavement of Heaven, and under the shadow of the tree of life, he would say, "I don't want to stay here."

If men were taken to Heaven just as they are by nature, without having their hearts regenerated, there would be another rebellion in Heaven. Heaven is filled with a company of those that are twice born. When I was born in 1837, I received my old Adamic nature; and when I was born again in 1856, I had another nature given to me.

It is impossible to serve God aright unless you first make up your mind to be born again. If a house is built upon the sand, it falls; but if it is founded upon a rock, it stands firm against the wind and wave. Our faith can never endure unless it is founded on Christ. We may travel through the earth and see many countries; but there is one country—the land of Beulah, which John Bunyan saw in vision—we shall never see unless we are born again, regenerated by Christ.

We look abroad and see many beautiful trees; but the tree of life we shall never see until our eyes are made clear by faith in the Saviour. You may see the beautiful rivers of the earth—the Ohio, the Mississippi, the Hudson—you may ride upon their bosoms; but bear in mind that your eye will never rest upon the river which bursts out from the throne of God and flows through the upper kingdom. God has said it, and not man.

You will never see the kingdom of God, except you are born again. You may see the kings and lords of the earth; but the King of kings and Lord of lords you will never see, except you are born again.

When you are in London, you may go to the tower and see the crown of England, which is worth millions, and is guarded there by soldiers, but bear in mind that your eye will never rest upon the crown of life, except you are born again.

You may hear the songs of Zion which are sung in our churches, but one song— that of Moses and the Lamb—your uncircumcised ear shall never hear, unless you are born again.

We may see the beautiful mansions of our large cities; but bear in mind that the mansions which Christ has gone to prepare you shall never see, unless you are born again. It is God who says it.

You may see ten thousand beautiful things in this world; but the city that Abraham caught sight of—and from that time he became a pilgrim and a sojourner—you shall never see, unless you are born again.

Many of you may be invited to marriage feasts here; but you will never attend the marriage supper of the Lamb, except you are born again. It is God who says it.

You may be looking on the face of your sainted mother, and feel that she is praying for you; but the time will come when you shall never see her again, except you are born again. Perhaps you have recently stood by the bedside of a dying mother as she said to you, “Be sure and meet me in Heaven”; and you made the promise. Ah! you shall never see her again, except you are born again.

I believe Jesus of Nazareth sooner than those infidels, who say you do not have to be born again. If you would see your children who have gone before, you must be born of the Spirit. Maybe you have recently borne a loved one to the grave; and how dark your home seems! You will never see her again, except you are born again. If you wish to meet your loved ones, you must be born again.

If you have a loved one up yonder, and could hear her speak, she would say, “Come this way.” Haven’t you got a sainted friend? Haven’t you got a mother in the world of light; and if you could hear her speak, wouldn’t she say, “Come this way, my son” “Come this way, my daughter”? If ever you see her again, you must be born again.

Yes; we all have an elder Brother there. More than 1900 years ago, He crossed over; and from the heavenly shores He is calling you to Heaven. Let us turn our backs upon the world. Let us give deaf ears to the world. Let us put our hearts to the kingdom of God, and cry, “Life! Life! Eternal life!”

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