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The Gospel According to Matthew

You Must be Born Again (Part 4)

May 5th, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 15:10-20

Scripture Reading: Eph 2:11-22

Mat 15:17-20 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? (18) But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. (19) For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. (20) These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

This morning we continue with our consideration of the doctrine of *regeneration* – you must be born again

– as Jesus taught. All false religion, all false and counterfeit forms of Christianity, deny this fundamental truth of the gospel. You must be born again. If you have not been born again by the creative work of the Holy Spirit, then you are not a Christian and you are not a member of the kingdom of God. If a person departs this life without being born again, they will hear Christ command them to depart from Him for all eternity. This is how important this subject is for us.

You will notice that your Bible is organized in two major parts: The Old Testament (or covenant) and The New Testament/Covenant. It is impossible to understand Scripture apart from understanding this two-fold division. And this is the subject we will look at this morning. I will show you how it relates directly to the doctrine of the new birth.

Listen still once more to Jeremiah:

Jer 31:31-34 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I

will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, (32) not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. (33) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (34) And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Jeremiah is speaking of two covenants – an old one and a new one (as Hebrews 8-10 describe them). Old and New.

Now, consider for a moment this word "covenant." The Lord relates to His people by *covenant*. Think of it as a contract. There are terms. There are rewards (blessings) for keeping the terms and there are sanctions (curses) for breaking the terms of the contract.

Now, not all of humanity is in covenant relationship to God. For instance:

Eph 2:11-12 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— (12) remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

See it? The mass of humanity has no hope and is without God in this present world. That is the very condition WE entered this world in. All of us. Separated from Christ. Strangers to the covenants. I suppose that some would argue that there was a kind of covenant given to Adam in the garden – "obey and live, eat that fruit and you will die." We all know how that turned out. If it was a covenant, it ended in curse and death. All who are in Adam, and that means ALL human beings the moment they are born into this world, are under a curse. They have no covenant standing with God.

But when God sets out to make a people for Himself out of this dust of fallen humanity, He does so by establishing a covenant with those He

elects (chooses) to be members of that covenant. He does not choose everyone. He chose Abraham, for example and from that one man He determined to create a new humanity to be restored to a new Eden. He made what the Bible calls “the Promise” to Abraham and we will look at that more in a moment.

Now, hear this very, very carefully.

Our relationship to God must be one of covenant or we are, as Paul said, separated from Christ, alienated from Him, strangers to Him. Having no hope because you are without God. He does not know you.

This is what many, many people who think they are Christians (but were faking it and relying on their own works) will discover on that Day when it is too late and they will be eternally lost:

Mat 7:22-23 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ (23) And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

The Old Covenant: the Law

Now, if you are thinking, you will be saying to yourself right now, “but the Israelites were in a covenant relationship with God, yet they ended up being cursed.” And that is absolutely correct:

Gal 3:10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

Deu 11:26-28 “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: (27) the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, (28) and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.

We have read several times from Jeremiah 31 and there we are reminded that the terms of the old covenant *were written on stone*. That is to say, that covenant was “weak” because for the people in it to be blessed by God, they had to obey its terms. If they disobeyed, even once, they were cursed. And that is what happened:

Rom 7:5 For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused

by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

This continued to be the fatal error of Jews like the Pharisees. It was the error Paul was raised under and which he pursued for many years until Christ appeared to Him. It is the error so many religious people today are making:

Rom 10:2-3 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

And then you have that other great mass of humanity – the irreligious. They have a law as well, given to them by God through the creation (Romans 1). But they go about their lives refusing to acknowledge God or give Him thanks, and they are under His wrath and curse as well. The Jews actually will be held to a greater condemnation, as will all people who have received God's special revelation – such as the preaching of the gospel – but have rejected Him.

Alright then, the Old Covenant, because of man's sin, only empowers that sin. When the Lord says "You shall" the sinner says "I will not."

When God says "you shall not," the sinner says "Yes, I will." Those in the Old Covenant were covenant breakers. All of them. A few were just and righteous before God, but as we shall see, it was not by their works of the Law! Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, David...NONE were justified because they fulfilled the terms of the Old Covenant.

Now, let's ask this question:

How did someone become a member of the Old Covenant?

Was a Philistine, for instance, a member of the Old Covenant? Of course not. Why? Because they were born a Philistine. Then how DID someone end up relating to God by terms of the Old Covenant? Here is the answer:

By physical, natural birth, born to literal, earthly descendants of Abraham. They were born a Jew in other words.

The Bible calls such people "Israelites according to the flesh." It turns out however that such people, by means of their physical Jewish birth, were not really Israelites (the true people of God) at all. They ended up condemned if they relied on their earthly lineage as the basis of God's acceptance of them:

Joh 8:33 They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?”

Mat 3:9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

The New Covenant, and a New Birth

We MUST relate to God, our “friendship” with Him, on the basis of a covenant. And that covenant cannot be like the Old Covenant because it only ends up cursing us due to our sin and our inability to obey its terms.

Many people go wrong here. They set out to write the contract between themselves and God. They claim that they can determine the terms. They are very foolish and they will perish in hell forever if they depart this life thinking this.

An illustration: Let’s say you go to a car dealership and you see a car that you decide you want. The salesman takes you into one of those little cubby hole rooms and pulls out...a contract. When it is finalized, it has terms. You are going to pay let’s say, \$30,000 for that car and you are going to do this by paying \$350 per month for a number

of years. The contract has sanctions too. Fail to pay and the car won’t be yours.

Now, let’s say that you decide you don’t like these terms. So you tell the salesman, “here is the contract I am going to follow. I’m not going to pay you anything. You are going to give me that car and its title. Because I deserve it.

Now, as foolish as that sounds, this is exactly what most people are doing in regard to their relationship with God. Writing their own contract/covenant. They tell themselves they have the right to do it and that God will certainly sign His name to their terms and all will be well. They deserve the end they will receive. They are without hope. They are without God. No chance. None.

Unless we enter into a covenant with God, we are going to die in our sins. And that covenant has to be one which does not rely upon our doings to fulfill. It will have terms of course, but those terms will not be like the terms of the Old Covenant or we will just end up being cursed.

The Promise

Now, all through the Scriptures, running parallel to God’s giving of the Old Covenant (and in a way, within it)

is something called *the promise*. Here it is:

Gal 3:29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Rom 4:13-18 For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (14) For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. (15) For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. (16) That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (17) as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (18) In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.”

And again:

Gal 3:16-22 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring.

It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.

(17) This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. (18) For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; **but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.**

(19) Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. (20) Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. (21) Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. (22) But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

God made a promise to Abraham. That promise was the blessings and inheritance – eternal life, justification, the new heavens and new earth, the resurrection – all to be brought about by and in Christ. This promise was made to Abraham centuries before

Moses and the Law. God's promise cannot fail. That is to say then, *the New Covenant accomplishes the Promise!* Why? Because Christ fulfills all the terms of this New Covenant so that all we "do" is believe in Him and trust in what He has done for us.

Rom 9:6-8 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, (7) and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." (8) This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Rom 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. (29) But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

How then does a person enter into this New Contract with God? Well, in a way, just like the Jews did in the Old Covenant – *you must be BORN into it.* Only this birth is NOT our physical birth. It is not from being born to parents who are Christians. No, it is by faith in Christ who then effects the New Birth in us. Regeneration. This is

how we become true Israelites and thus truly "children of the promise." There is no other way to relate to God by the New Covenant other than being born again by faith in Christ.

You see this imagery in various pictures over and over again in the Bible. For instance:

Joh 10:1-7 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. (2) But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. (3) To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (4) When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. (5) A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." (6) This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. (7) So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

See it? Christ is the door. He alone is the Way into the sheepfold. He calls His sheep and they know Him and hear Him and follow Him.

Joh 10:14-16 I am the good shepherd.

I know my own and my own know me, (15) just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. (16) And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

How do you get into the flock of Christ? Christ calls you. He chooses you. He regenerates your heart and gives you ears to hear His voice. He makes you a brand new creation.

And all of this is why, *you must be born again.*

Eph 2:4-6 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— (6) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,