

God, who knows the end from the beginning, determined that sin would not overcome His eternal plan of having a people for His name to praise and glorify Him forever and ever. Thus we read in Titus 1: 1-3 “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior....”

There is a truth that is after [same word as “according to” in verse 1]. It means “down from” it fits, is logically derived from as a less proposition: God, to godliness, to truth, to the faith of God’s elect. The major propositions of this faith are these:

1. Hope of eternal life—God has prepared a heaven for those who love Him, 1Pe 1:4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. This is certain.
2. God cannot lie, and this was promised before the world began.
3. It is manifested by the preaching of the word, which was committed to Paul and the other apostles, for they all preached the same thing—for instance the passage that begins 1Peter 1:1-4 is very similar to these words in Titus.

As we have seen in these sermons on the *ordo salutis*, [this is the seventh and next to last], God determined to prepare a people for this prepared inheritance. Before we could, as His people, be taken to heaven, we must be prepared and fitted for heaven. The Father planned the inheritance; the Son redeemed the people; the Holy Spirit prepares them for Heaven. The parts of this preparation are organically connected and cannot be separated in reality; yet they can be separated logically and considered one at a time, as we have tried to do in this study. They can be considered from the first to the last, or they may be considered from the last to the first, as I have tried to do in these sermons.

Beginning with our **inheritance in heaven**, we then realized that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Death cannot enter there; hence, there must be a **resurrection** from the dead and we must be clothed with our everlasting, immortal bodies, after the image of Jesus in His resurrection. Then we saw that because it very well may be a long time before that takes place, God must **preserve** His people from the grave and the consequences of sin. He has promised to do that, for nothing can pluck them out of the hand of God, for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in purpose and that purpose cannot miscarry. His people are safe forever through the work of the Triune God, specifically the power of the Holy Spirit who is given to those who are sons of God.

This preservation is accomplished by the work of the Spirit in **sanctification**. We are sanctified by the offering up of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit to conform us to the image of Christ to which we are predestined. We are to pray that God would give us the good things of the Spirit. 2Th 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen

you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth..." Because of the Spirit, sin has no power to bring the elect to utter ruin, Ps 37:24 "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand." The Spirit is the hand [power] of God who fills all of creation and brings to pass the will of the father.

But sanctification is a precious gift that rests upon **adoption**. We receive the Spirit because we are sons of God. Ga 4:6 "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Also, Ro 8:9 "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

But only those can be sanctified who are **justified**. As long as we are in our sins, guilty before God, we cannot be adopted as the sons of God, cannot receive sanctification, cannot be preserved, cannot be resurrected, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. But hearing the gospel, we believed that Christ died for our sins and fully redeemed us from the curse that lay upon us. His righteousness becomes ours and our sins are not imputed to us, for we are considered dead with Christ on His cross, so that we can walk in newness of life. This is promised to all those who believe.

But now we see another difficulty. How can men believe and receive the Gospel when they think that it is foolishness. How can they believe that which they believe to be a lie. How can they receive into their hearts that which is an offense to them? The answer to this difficulty lies in **calling and regeneration** which is the subject before us today.

So let us read John 3:1-21

"1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. 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. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8 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 every one that is born of the Spirit. 9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (Joh 3:1-21)

There are three things in this passage that I want to address: **I. The Kingdom of God. II. The Gospel of the Kingdom; III. The Truth of the Kingdom.**

### **I. The Kingdom of God.**

- A. Nicodemus came by night to Christ, wanting to talk about the kingdom of God. He doesn't say that, but Jesus knew the mind of the Jew, and He cuts straight to the chase.
- B. The kingdom of God had rested with the Jews and with the sons of Abraham. God was the king of Israel. But the kingdom was about to be taken from them: Matthew 12: 42 "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? 43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."
- C. The fleshly seed of Abraham could only produce a fleshly nation. Now that Messiah had come, it would now be revealed that the kingdom of God would be manifest not by the seed of the flesh, but by the seed of the Spirit.
- D. Hence, "Ye must be born again"[John 3:7]. This was implied throughout the Old Testament, especially in the faith of Abraham, but now the implicit would become explicit. Implicit means hidden; explicit means open and clear. Moses saw only the hinder parts of God; we see the face and glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The spiritual nature of the kingdom is no longer hidden, but revealed.
- E. Ye must be born of the Spirit. Ye must be born of water and the Spirit. There are many interpretations, but I think the natural meaning is baptism and Holy Spirit. Baptism is the outward sign of inclusion in the kingdom, and the Holy Spirit is the inward reality. Baptism is the sign of the purification of the Holy Spirit, according to John the Baptist.
- F. The Kingdom of God is both outward and inward. It is outward in the church, her doctrine, her sacraments, her officers, in the holiness of the profession and conduct of the people. It is inward in the hidden work of the Holy Spirit, the prayers of her people, their true faith, and their true love for God and for their neighbors.
- G. Ye must be born again is a figure of speech, indicating the beginning of a new life in the spirit and not in the flesh. It is not the only figure, but it is a major one in the New Testament and was particularly appropriate for a ruler of the Jews who gloried in his descent from Abraham according to the flesh. Jesus is telling him that this must be forsaken for the old is passing away and all things are becoming new. The new wine must be put in new bottles.

### **II. The Gospel of the Kingdom. Vs. 12-17**

- A. Earthly things are symbols of heavenly things. The supernatural birth of Isaac is a figure of those born of the Spirit, and many other things of the hinder parts of God, prefiguring the glories that would be revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. Christ now comes to one of those powerful "hidden things."
- B. Only the One who came down from heaven can reveal the glories in His own Face. Moses must wear a veil; but now the veil is to be removed and the truth stand out in all its glory.
- C. The Son of Man must be lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness.

1. Israel murmured about the manna. Think of that!!! The bread that came from heaven was a source of complaining and griping.
2. How blind they were; how bound in sin and misery!! Aaron had just died, God had given them a great victory over a king of the Canaanites and they were greatly enriched, but they still griped and complained, not realizing that the manna, the death of Aaron, the victory over the Canaanites were are figures of the great things that God had for them and for us. For we have a priest who will never die, our bread has come from heaven, and we shall inherit the earth, a figure for the heavenly kingdom!

D. Newness of life would come by a look to the Cross. Faith in the Gospel.

1. The Cross would be lifted up to the whole world.
2. The message was to look, to believe the message of healing.
3. Those who looked [believed] would live.
4. The gift of serpent in the wilderness was healing from the bite of the serpent.
5. The gift of Christ on the Cross is eternal life, healing from the results of sin and misery.
6. The calling and the life are so closely entwined that they cannot be separated. Life comes from hearing the word. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." The calling to life is the preaching of the cross of Christ for the Spirit is given when men hear and believe the preaching of Christ crucified.
7. Illustration: the resurrection of Lazarus. This new life is a calling, it is a resurrection, it is a new birth, it is a cleansing, it is a new garment, it is repentance, it is faith, it is seeing, hearing, feeling, hoping, trusting, it is life from the dead—so many figures are used in Scripture to stand for it: summarized by the words "everlasting life." It is the life of the Spirit of God.

III. **The Truth of the Kingdom.** Vs. 19-21 The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of light.

- A. From the Cross of Christ comes a dazzling light, the light of truth and grace. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth come by Jesus Christ.
- B. Darkness and lies are the work of the devil, even though we cloak them with platitudes and pretenses.
- C. The Cross reveals:
  1. The reality and horror of sin.
  2. The reality of the love of God.
  3. The hopelessness of man's natural condition.
  4. The hope of the cure; new life in Jesus Christ: a life of truth and grace.
- D. The man of truth loves the truth and will not live a lie. Vs. 18-21
- E. The light of the Cross separates between the children of darkness and the children of the light. Ephesians 5:13 "But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. 14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." [Here is another figure for the life of the Holy Spirit—an awakening out of sleep and sluggishness.] 1Cor. 15:33 "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. 34 Awake to

righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame."

## Conclusion and Application

1. A man must hear the voice of God and believing be called from the dead to life in Christ, to be born again; to awake from sleep; for it is in hearing the gospel that faith is born and the Christian life begins.
2. Let us make much of the cross of Christ. The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to those who are saved it is the power of God.
3. Because of the Gospel and the work of the Spirit, we are thus able to mortify the deeds of the body, so that we might live, as Paul says in Romans 8
  - 10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.
  - 11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.
  - 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.
  - 13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.
  - 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.
4. We can put off the old man, and "follow after" the things of righteousness and peace. "I am a sinner" no longer identifies you; but you are faithful and true, seeking those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, for you are dead with Christ and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

As Paul again writes in Colossians 3:5-16

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye. And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Col 3:5-16)

So now we have come full circle, for this is the passage with which we begin every worship service at Trinity Covenant Reformed Church. Every blessing rest upon you. Amen and Amen.