

NEWBORN

A SERMON

Preached on Wednesday Evening August 7th, 1861

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the New Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

Volume 3 Number 139

“So is every one that is born of the Spirit.” John 3:8

IN what a variety, of ways the Lord begins a work of grace in the hearts of his people. Hence it appears that while. Nikodemus heard a great deal concerning this Jesus of Nazareth, and a great deal, of course, against him, Nicodemus had very serious thoughts, and seems to have reasoned within himself like this: Well, after all, my religion may not be right, and if not I shall be lost to eternity. There is something perhaps that I do not understand, I will watch the first opportunity of getting an interview with this Jesus of Nazareth, and then perhaps, wherever I am wrong I may be put right, for I cannot believe that a man can do the things, which are done by him, and yet not be of God. These thoughts prevailed with him. And there are persons, have been ever since, and are now, who have their thoughts; and become somewhat suspicious as to whether their religion is right and they go on enquiring and enquiring and hearing one minister and another, till by-and-bye they hear something of one that is everywhere spoken against; and such a one thinks, Well, I do not know, perhaps my religion may not be right; perhaps that is the very sort of character of minister that may set me right; perhaps it is Satan, the enemy of souls, that stirs up people to speak against certain ministers; I will go and hear for myself. And so, Nicodemus went to see and hear for himself, and the Lord very kindly received him, and did not deal out to him one harsh nor unkind word, but commenced with him upon that essential matter that, through mercy, we are brought to know is essential, that “Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And when Nicodemus took this, not spiritually, but carnally and naturally, that did not put the dear Savior out of patience; but the Savior kindly, in an explanatory way repeated the subject, and said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” And then the Savior kindly informed him of the essential difference between our natural birth and this spiritual birth of which he was speaking, namely, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” And although Nicodemus still somewhat stumbled at this apparently new doctrine, yet it was not a new doctrine. It is a doctrine as old as the Bible; it was a truth that Abel experienced, or else he would never have been brought into acceptance with God as he was; for it was as true in the antediluvian, postdiluvian, and Levitical ages as it is now, that no man except born of God can enter into the kingdom of God. How then is it that the Israelites had lost this doctrine? Ah, not because it was not in the Bible, but because they had done then as

a great many people do now, put some mere ceremony of the flesh into the place thereof. And so now men would put what they call baptism, infant sprinkling, into the place of regeneration, and tell the poor untutored people in towns and villages that their babes have no souls until they are sprinkled by these men. These men themselves are deceived, and they deceive others; and thus, they get rid of that vital work of the Holy Ghost in the soul essential to eternal salvation. That is the way, that was lost, and they, having got rid of that doctrine, then the next step was very easy, namely, to get rid of the atonement of Christ, and of the real character of Christ; so that when Christ came unto his own his own knew him not, and consequently received him not; and he would not have been received by one person now, if the Holy Spirit did not convince of sin and thus make way for Christ. But the carnal mind is enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, neither can be. If we are born of God, we have a life that can never die, we are children of God, he is our Father, and on our side. But if we are not born of God, we stand under that terrible prohibition, "If any man has not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Well now, our text is so significant, as you might easily see, as to take in the whole range of the Christian's relations to God; his destiny, his privileges, and whatever he may possess. You may apply the whole range of gospel truths you apply the words to all the glories of eternity in relation to the saints, and "So is every one that is born of the Spirit." Now taking the connection as our guide, then, I think we may open up, the Lord enabling us, this subject, this evening, in the following order: Firstly, *consecration*; secondly, *spiritualization*; thirdly, *contrast*; and fourthly, *mystery*.

First: Firstly, that of CONSECRATION. The Savior says, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit." Now that first clause, "Born of water," it is upon that, or from that, I gather the idea of consecration, for we cannot metaphysically describe being born again, nor do we wish to do so, but we may describe it evidentially. Now to be born of water, therefore, evidently means to be quickened by the pure word of God. "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the Word." There you see the Word is called water. Water is of a cleansing kind. And the Savior, in the 15th chapter of this very book, uses these words: "Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." So that to be born spiritually of water means, of course, spiritual water, or water spiritually, that is, the pure, living, free grace word of God. "You are born again," says the apostle Peter, "of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever." I need not multiply scriptures to prove that the word "water" there means the word of God, that it does not mean any mere ceremony pertaining to the body, but that it means a vital reality brought into the soul by the spirit of the living God. Now then, seeing our way clear thus far on the meaning of the word "water" take it to mean the word of the Lord, we may now go on to say something of this consecration. Let us take the scriptures to guide us in the matter of this consecration to God, for that is the idea conveyed: "You are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you;" and again, "For their sakes I sanctify myself," for their sakes I consecrate, for Christ is spoken of as being consecrated for evermore, being devoted for evermore to God; and so I consecrate, devote, sanctify myself that they also may be sanctified through the truth; your word is truth. Now I will describe to you the kind of character that is thus dealt with by the Lord, and then I am sure the words will belong to such, and we may say, "So is everyone," without exception, that is born of the Spirit, First, then, apart from this consecration, we are said to be without Christ, and without hope, and without God in the world; so that if we are consecrated, then we are not without Christ, but we possess Christ; and if we are consecrated, we are not without

hope; if we are consecrated, we are not without God; but we are with Christ, and with hope, and with God. And see how beautifully the apostle in the same chapter traces this out. He says: "You who sometimes were far off," without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world; "You who sometimes were far off are now in Christ Jesus," there begins the consecration, believing in Jesus Christ, "made near by the blood of Christ;" brought to believe in the cleansing blood of Christ, brought to see that God the Father holds us, as you have been singing this evening, free by the blood of Christ from all sin; that Christ, by his own blood, by what he has done, holds us free from sin; that the Holy Spirit beholding us here as believers in Christ Jesus, and having access to God by the blood of Christ, holds us without sin. And if this does not make the soul love God, I don't know what will. Here the Lord thus speaks; "I, even I, am he;" ah, it matters not how deep their caste, it matters not how dark, it matters not what they are, how numerous they are; "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions." However little your faith may be, if you are born of God you are sure to believe in Christ as the effect of being born of God, you are sure to feel your need of his precious blood; and Jesus, "That he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate; let us therefore," said the apostle, "go forth unto him."

"To whom, dear Jesus, oh to whom
Should needy sinners flee,
But to yourself that bids us come?
Our springs are all in you."

This brings us near to God; so now in place of our saying to God, "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of your ways;" so far from this being the case, our language now is, "The desire of our souls is unto your name, and to the remembrance of you." Well, let me linger here for a moment longer. Is it a truth that God the Father holds us entirely and ultimately free from sin by Jesus Christ? Is it a truth that Jesus Christ holds his people by what he has done free from spot, wrinkle, or any such thing? Is it a truth that the Holy Spirit testifies of the Savior, and that he on this ground abides with us forever; because any reason for the Holy Spirit to forsake us is by the blood of Christ taken away? if the Holy Spirit forsook, us for anything, it would be for sin; but then Christ has taken that sin away, so that the Lord does not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. Ah, here Jesus has broken down the middle wall of partition, he has broken down that that was between God and us, our sin and the curse due thereto; he has fulfilled the law that stood against us, he has slain the enmity, and brought us into sweet reconciliation to God. Now we love Jesus Christ in his cleansing blood, cleansing from all sin; now we love God the Father in having loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins; we love God the Father where he has sanctified us; "Sanctified of God the Father," that is chosen, and given to the Lord Jesus Christ: we love the Holy Spirit, and here it is we are consecrated to God. It is this that inspires me to hope in the Lord, it is this that enables me to preach the gospel; yes, I will go so far as to say, that but for this truth of which I am now speaking, that it is by the blood of Jesus Christ that we are made near, that his blood cleanses from all sin with infinite and eternal certainty, were it not for this, there would be no gospel to preach. So then, my hearer, you must not despair all the time we have such a Savior as this. The man, then, that is clean through the word that Christ has spoken to him, that man has life in his soul, made to see that he is by nature without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world, but now he receives Christ Jesus. And there is one thing you could not do if you were to try "No man," said the apostle, now some of you little ones see it you cannot try yourselves by this evidence this evening, help you along if I can, I am a little one myself, and yet

the Lord does not despise little ones. Hear what the apostle says: "No man speaks by the Spirit," and no man can speak by the Spirit of God, at least, not really so, if he is not born of God, for so is every one that is born of the Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, with which he is quickened: "No man speaking by the Spirit calls Jesus accursed." Ah, could you curse him? You know you could not, you know you could not. Ah, but I am afraid I do not love him. But could you curse him, could you hate him? No. Could you trample his mighty dignity under your feet as though you would like to bring him to nothing? No. Could you count the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, devoted to God for sinners, an unholy thing? No. "No man speaking by the Spirit calls Jesus accursed;" but the man that speaks by the Spirit calls Jesus blessed. And you know that you do sometimes in the secret feelings of your mind say, Blessed Jesus, you know that if I have any hope for time, it is in your wondrous work: you know I have no other way but by your cleansing blood. Here, then, is consecration to God: here the heart is yielded up to God, here the soul is yielded up to God: here we can sing with the poet,

"You have my heart, it shall be yours,
Yours it shall ever be."

These people then, thus brought near to God, thus consecrated to him, these people are what the apostle Peter calls "a chosen generation," that election being one part of your consecration to God, for that comes in the regeneration as one reason why you are regenerated; and as "a royal priesthood," that is another reason why you were regenerated, constituted one, with Jesus Christ; "a holy nation," reckoned so when you were unholy; that is another reason why they were born of God; "a peculiar people." that the Lord has taken and left all the others, this is another reason why they were regenerated. Well may it be said of such that they shall show forth the praises of him who has called them out of darkness into, his marvelous light. "This people have I formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise." Now my hearer, if you ever expect to see God's face with joy, if you ever expect to die out of your sins, if you ever expect to appear accepted at the great assize, if you expect an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, if you are seeking it in any other, way than that defined by the apostle; I will quote the words again because they are words that the Lord has greatly blessed to my soul, and therefore I dwell upon them with more pleasure "But now in Christ Jesus you who were afar off are made near by the blood of Christ;" if you are seeking to please God, to be accepted of God, to serve God, to be consecrated to him, and to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God in any other way than in Christ Jesus, and by his blood, then let me say that you will be disappointed, you will come short; and good as you may be in yours own eyes and in the eyes of others your death will be among the unclean if you die where you are. You cannot die out of sin but by dying in Christ, you cannot die out of enmity only by dying in that reconciliation that is in Christ, that perfection and acceptance that is in Christ. That is the man that is born of God, then, that is thus convinced of his need of Christ, and that becomes consecrated to God by Jesus Christ. And what a firm consecration it is, it answers to his own. "The law makes men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, makes the Son, who is consecrated forevermore." And the man once consecrated to God in this way is consecrated forever. Ah, his heart is in it, his heart is in it. What! part with this everlasting love, this electing grace, this redemptional perfection, this Blessed Spirit, this God? Ah, no, no; he is our present infinite all, he is our everlasting all; and even now, amidst all your gloom and castings down, when the Lord is pleased sometimes, when you are walking in the street, about your avocations or wherever you

are, just to cast one sweet thought into the mind, so as to make you feel that there is hope for you, it will cheer you up, and make you say, What a fool I am to doubt anything; what a poor weak thing I am to live under all these suspicions, when here is a God who if he meant to destroy me, never would thus have brought me to believe in his dear Son, and to see and feel that there is no way of access to him but by the blood of Jesus. Ah, poor weak nature strives for something of our own; it says, you know we ought to be good, and ought to be good, and ought to be good. I say there is something better than what you call good, and that is real honesty, to confess that in your flesh dwells no good thing, and to confess what a poor creature you are; and that honesty, to confess the truth of what you are, is more acceptable in the sight of God than all the fleshly pretensions to fleshly good that men can manufacture or muster up.

Second. Secondly, in the being born of God, there is not only this consecration, perhaps the word “reconciliation,” would have expressed what I have said better than the word “consecration” perhaps it might, for that is what it is after all, reconciliation, is consecration, and consecration is reconciliation; for what is our alienation but enmity? what is our reconciliation but love to that which by nature we blindly hate; there is secondly, SPIRITUALIZATION. Such persons are born of water and of the Spirit, so they are sure to be a spiritual people. Spiritual necessities will exist; they will be sensible of those spiritual necessities; and the Lord has united in his word spiritual supplies with spiritual necessities. Look at it. “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” means, Blessed are the spiritually poor, destitute of everything “theirs is the kingdom of God.” Do you ask what the kingdom of God is? The kingdom of God is that state of things which the Lord Jesus Christ founded, as described in the 9th of Daniel, where you have a beautiful account of the end of sin and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness. So if you are a poor destitute creature, with no righteousness, no wisdom, no strength of your own, if you are spiritually poor, then that kingdom of righteousness, wherein dwells righteousness, into which sin can never enter, that righteousness that rules over all, that kingdom that lasts forever, and all the advantages thereof, belong to you. Here is the spiritual necessity. Can you say you need that righteousness? I can truly say relative to myself, and I think hundreds of you can say the same, that it is as clear to you as A B C, that unless you are found in that righteousness you never can be saved. Now, then, his kingdom is founded in righteousness; “a King shall reign in righteousness,” that is in the righteousness; so, I understand it there, his own mediatorial righteousness. He was raised from the dead on the ground of the perfection of his work, raised from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant. “A King shall reign in righteousness.” Now, if you are born of God here is the spiritual poverty, and the kingdom which he has founded you will receive; that is: you will receive it in the testimony of it, and you will take your stand upon the testimony of it, and to take your stand there is to take your stand upon an eternal rock. “His kingdom rules overall.” Then again, you will want the comforts of God’s word, you will want the comforts of his love, the comfort of his salvation. I hope some of you are come with that feeling this evening.

“Blessed are they that mourn.” How many times have some of you gone to the house of God for the last time, you thought? You say, I go mourning, miserable, I feel cast down, my soul within. me is so cast down, and everything seems against me. What is to be done? What do you want? Ah, I want Jesus Christ to be my comfort; I want some word from the throne of God to come just where I am, and strengthen me, and comfort me, and hold me to hope in God. Well now, if that be what you want, you will have it in the Lord’s own time; the vision is for an appointed time. If you were

dead in sin you would not have this feeling; if you were where you once were you would not be longing after the consolation of his word.

Why, when you were in a state of nature, when you went to hear a sermon, you could not say, well, I heard the minister very well; he just met me in my mourning, downcast, helpless, forlorn state: no, you knew not then that you were poor, blind, wretched, and miserable. But those who are born of God are made sensible of their necessities. Then, "Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the land," Now the meek is the man that is willing to have the land on the Lord's own terms. "They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but your right hand, yours arm, and the light of your countenance, because you had a favor unto them." Or to take the Savior's description, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;" it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. You will not turn up your nose and say, ah, this savors of Calvinism you will say, no, I know very well that if I obtain that land, it must be by the good pleasure of God; if I obtain an inheritance among them that are sanctified, it must be by the good pleasure of God. Your pride will be humbled down, and you will come to terms, and be glad to have eternal glory upon free grace terms. Then, again, we are spoken of, that is, those who are born of God, as hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Now I take the word righteousness there to mean enjoyment of God. Lord, there seems something wrong between you and my soul; there is not that communion, there is not that fellowship, matters are not so right as I could wish; Lord, I want to see your face, to enjoy the light of your countenance, the anointings of your spirit; I long for this righteousness, this having, of matters, and keeping of matters right between me and my best of all friends, a friend that loves at all times. What do you say to that? Are you happy without fellowship with him? Not if you are born of God., But I will not dwell more upon this part then, that to be born of water means to be brought out of our godless state into reconciliation with God; to be born of the Spirit is to be brought to a consciousness of our spiritual necessities, and to feel our need of the promises the Lord has given that those necessities shall be supplied. And those that thus know their necessities will stand out for that gospel by which their needs are supplied. And by so doing they will be called ugly names; the master was called Beelzebub, and those who stand out for this gospel, which alone can supply their needs, such persons will be hated by the world, because they are not of the world; the Lord has chosen them out of the world. The gospel that the poor need, that is, the gospel everywhere hated; but it is the gospel that the poor are made to love, and by which the poor are satisfied with bread.

Third: Being born of God means not only *consecration* and *spiritualization*, but also CONTRAST. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." To suggest only one or two ideas. In our first birth we are born in sin, in our second we are born in salvation, born in Christ. In our first birth we are under the curse; in our second, under the blessing. In our first birth we are children of wrath; in our second, children of the Most High God. In our first birth, we are born to sin; in our second, to be holy. In our first birth we are born to die; in our second, to live for ever and ever. In our first birth we are accountable for all we are by nature; and in our second, we have no accountability; Jesus Christ takes the whole of it; we are free, and eternally free. In our first birth, we have entailed even by original sin itself eternal condemnation, eternal perdition, in a word, a hell of never abating despair; in our second, we have salvation (heirs of salvation), justification (heirs of righteousness); glorification (heirs of eternal glory), heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Time would fail me in the contrast between the two. Don't deceive yourselves. I do not mean that you are born of God because you can form a pretty clear idea of the *doctrine* of

being born of God; I do not mean that; I mean that you of yourself, in your own soul and conscience, must feel, and it must be a matter of personal, solemn, prayerful concern with you, that you are by nature without Christ, without hope, and without God; and that you will never be able to call Christ yours until he calls you his; and that you will never be able to hope in him until he has formed a hope in you, "Christ in you the hope of glory;" and that you will never be able to call God your Father but by the spirit of adoption. This is a solemn work, a heart-searching work, a humbling work. And I don't believe you are born of God, because you can form a clear idea of the doctrines of spiritualization, no, you must, feel the poverty, you must be the subject of the mourning, the meekness, the hungering, thirsting, and solemn decision for that gospel which alone can supply your needs. And then you must not only form a pretty clear idea of the doctrine of contrast between the two births, but you yourself must, in the sight of God, appreciate the one above the other, and bless God for your creation only as it stands, connected with regeneration; bless God for your creation only as it stands connected with salvation; for the man that lives and dies unborn of God, better for that man if he had never been born into this world. I can truly say that I feel more and more the solemnity of my existence. Sometimes, when I get into a low state of mind, I think, ah, if the world did, but see these that are dead in sin, what a hell is awaiting them, what reservoirs of wrath will by-and-by break forth upon them, if they could but contrast for a moment the mere passing shadow of mortal existence with that eternal scene of things when death shall rend this veil from top to bottom, how would the whole world tremble before God, and with one simultaneous voice would pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But ah, it is now as it always was, God alone can awaken the dead; he alone can give a man to feel and see the importance of these vital and eternal things.

Forth: But fourthly, in thus being born of God, it is also SOVEREIGNTY and MYSTERY. When I was first concerned for eternal things, I did not know this. I went about, among my relations, and so teased them with my religion, that they all fled from me; the very sight of me was enough; and I told them they could pray as I did if they liked; they could look to God as I did if they liked; that they could be as much concerned about their souls as I was if they liked, and it was their own faults if they were not.

I did not as yet know the Lord, I did not know his sovereignty, I did not know that the Holy Spirit gives to every man sovereignly as he will, I did not know that no man comes to Christ except the Father draw him. I had this to learn, and I by-and-by found it out, that the Lord had mercy on me simply because he would. Hence I came to this scripture, that settled the matter with me, that "God, who is rich in mercy;" ah, thought I, rich indeed, rich indeed, to notice in a way of mercy a sinner like me. I saw that the Lord put there several things together, his mercy, his love, and regeneration, and our exaltation to sit together in heavenly places, and our final safety, "that he might in ages to come show forth the exceeding riches of his grace." And then I offended my relations the other way. I unpreached what I preached before, and that offended them more than the other. Well, they said, the other was reasonable, and now they really believed I was gone stark mad. So it is; "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." My hearer, do you know something of this reconciliation to God? do you know something of your poverty and need of Christ, and the superiority of the standing of the Christian, above all others, and yet you think that this is not all of God? You have got that to learn yet; as you go on you will find out your weakness; and that those election people after all, are none others but the people of the Most High God, and that that doctrine that you have been calling

arbitrary and unjust you will in the Lord's own time see that there is no salvation without it, nor glorification, for whosoever's name is not found written in the book of life is cast into the lake of fire.

The next idea is that of MYSTERY. When a wave of wind comes, I cannot tell where it commenced, and I cannot tell where it will stop. I know it commenced somewhere in the atmosphere, and just whereabouts it will go I cannot say. I know it does blow, I feel its power, and hear the sound, and so I hear the sound of God's truth, and at times feel its power, but whereabouts it sets out and whereabouts it will go I cannot comprehend. I am strongly inclined to think that the Savior would here set before us the two eternities. The Holy Spirit came from eternity, but whereabouts he set out, I cannot say; it is said to be from everlasting, and that we were chosen before the world was, but whereabouts in eternity I cannot say. And then if I look forward, I have an equal mystery before me. And what a delightful mystery it is. Can you comprehend it, that after cycles (for we must speak even of eternity by figures belonging to time) after cycles, and cycles, and cycles of ages, no end, no sign of an end; there is no end. And perhaps that is the strongest form in which language is capable of presenting eternity; because the words, "for ever and ever" men nibble at sometimes and try to persuade us they mean only a few years. But when it is put into that form, that there is no end, in that form it does look to me sublime to the last degree.

But, again, let us apply these five ideas in way of conclusion. Firstly, that of consecration; "So is every one that is born of the Spirit;" he is reconciled to God, consecrated to Christ. Secondly, that of spiritualization; "So is every one that is born of the Spirit;" made to feel his need of the provisions of the gospel. Thirdly, contrast; "So is every one that is born of the Spirit;" he has an infinitely better birth in grace than he had in nature. And fourthly, "The wind blows where it will," is God's work while there are two in the field to take one and leave the other; God's work to take Abel and leave Cain, to take Isaac and leave Ishmael, to take Jacob and leave Esau; the Lord does as he pleases. Here is sovereignty and so is every one that is born of the Spirit, born of the sovereign pleasure of God. The Father quickens whom he will, the Son quickens whom he will, the Holy Ghost gives to every man as he will. Then, lastly, the mystery comes from eternity, it goes to eternity, and yet eternity both as to the past and to the future is incomprehensible; "So is every one that is born of the Spirit" born into this great mystery of eternity. How these words will apply to the whole range of the gospel. Loved with an everlasting love, chosen in Christ, perfect in Christ. Safe in God's covenant, ordained to eternal life. Nor have I, on the other hand, noticed the trials and troubles of the people of God, but even in that sense also, "So is every one that is born of the Spirit." And then as to their happy destiny, there is before them fulness of joy; need not be afraid to go forward; no, bless the Lord, to go forward is to get more and more out of the desert, and nearer and nearer to that blissful scene that awaits us. When we meet in glory, see how the words will apply there. There is one in heaven perfectly happy; so is every one that is born of the Spirit; and everyone that is born of the Spirit will be sure to go to heaven.