

CHILDREN OF GOD

John 1:11-13; 1 John 3:1-2

Intro: For many years the prevailing idea about what it takes for a person to become a Christian, is a simple decision, or sometimes a simple act, by which a person declares that he or she wants to become a Christian. A person may be told about the death of Christ, and that salvation is by faith in Christ, but we are the ones who determine whether or not we are going to be Christians. Consequently countless numbers of people throughout the years have gone through the motions, but their lives have never given any evidence that they have become the children of God, no evidence that they have any understanding that a Christian is a new creature in Christ. But the tendency on the part of those who have truly been saved, is to treat a person who has made a profession of faith as a fellow Christian, when the evidence may not be there as continuing proof of salvation.

Now it is true that if a person is really a Christian, he does believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that Jesus Christ died to save him from the penalty of his sins. But the Bible does not teach that salvation is something that we ourselves initiate, but that it is a work of God from start to finish. The Bible speaks about people being drawn to Christ. The Bible speaks of salvation as the work of a Creator. The Bible speaks of the people of God as having been chosen for salvation from before the foundation of the world. Tonight I want us to look at some Scriptures which speak of salvation as becoming a child of God.

Two weeks ago I spoke on 2 Corinthians 5:17. (Quote.) And I sought to show from what we understand about creation itself, some of the truths that apply to salvation. If a Christian is a new creature, there has to be a Creator. And the only Creators that the Bible talks about are God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Man did not help God in creation. Creation was complete before man was created. Man did not even help God to create him. God made man's body, and breathed life into him, and that is how he was made a living soul. And just as God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them *out of nothing*, so God did not take what man already had to make him a new creature, He brought into man that which had not existed before. Salvation is not a renovation of man, but it is God doing an entirely new work in the person He saves. And as God made Adam and then gave him life, so when we are saved we become spiritually alive; we have the gift of eternal life. And just as God

pronounced His creation of the heavens and the earth as “good,” and even “very good,” meaning that He was completely satisfied with what He had made, so the same is true when He makes us new creatures: He is fully satisfied with His work in us when He makes us new creatures. And He does this work through Christ, and through the work that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for us when He died on the Cross.

Now tonight we are looking at the Christian as a child of God. This has to mean that God is our Father, our heavenly Father. This means that we are in the family of God, so that every other Christian, every other true Christian, is either our brother or our sister. We are all in God’s family. And if we are the children of God, this means that just as we received our physical life from our parents, so we have life from God, eternal life, divine life. And if we have spiritual life from God, we are going to live in a way that is like God. We are going to be God-like, or God-ly. Why? Because we have been “born . . . of God”!

Now if a person only joins a church, but has not been “born . . . of God,” he or she is not a Christian. A person can even be baptized, but if that is the extent of his or her relationship with God, that is not salvation. A person can even become a worker in a church, or an elder or deacon, even a pastor, but if he has not been “born . . . of God,” he is not a Christian. You and I had nothing to do with our birth into this world, and the same is true of our birth into the family of God. It is a work of God. Every person who is a child of God is going to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior, but that faith is the first evidence of the new birth, not the cause of it.

Now turn with me to three verses in the first chapter of John’s Gospel – verses 11, 12, and 13. Here the Apostle John described for us:

I. THE NEW BIRTH (John 1:11-13).

The Apostle John was speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ when he wrote, “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”

“His own” is neuter in Greek, and should be translated *His own things*. But it is generally interpreted as meaning *His own people*. The Lord was born of Jewish parents, and the Jewish people generally did not receive Him. They did not believe the claims that He made for Himself, that He was the Son of God, nor did they accept His teaching. This applied origi-

nally to His brothers and sisters. Some Jews believed on Him, but most did not! And this led to what had always been the purpose of God, and that was that the door of salvation would be thrown open to Gentiles as well as to Jews.

And so we move on to verses 12 and 13 where we read that “as many as received Him, to them . . .” (reading to the end of verse 13).

To receive Christ is, as John explained at the end of verse 12, to “believe on His Name.” (The word “even” is not in the Greek text.) This not only means that a true Christian will believe what the Bible teaches about Christ, but that he will be trusting in Christ as his Savior. Such a person has been given the authority, the power, the right, to become what he had not been before, that is, “the sons of God,” meaning *one who has been born of God*.

And to emphasize what salvation is, John stated first what it is *not*:

- 1) “Not of blood” – not because you are a Jew, nor because you are a Gentile, nor because you are an American, or Oriental, or Scandinavian, or whatever.
- 2) “Nor of the will of the flesh” – It seems that the Apostle John was saying here that no person is saved by the exercise of his own will.
- 3) “Nor of the will of man” – This word speaks of an adult male, and it can mean several things. No religious leader can make us a child of God. Children are not saved just because their father is a believer. This excludes all human agency.
- 4) Very emphatically, “BUT OF GOD.”

Now which comes first, the birth, or the faith. I think that you can see that only one who has been born of God will truly believe in Christ. And so we can truly say that regeneration, spiritual birth, precedes faith.

Now before we go to the passage in 1 John 3 that I have announced, I want to stop by John, chapter 3. And here we have the story of the conversation that our Lord had with Nicodemus. And will you notice that Nicodemus “came to Jesus.” This is evidence that the Spirit of God must have been working on him.

Notice what the Lord said.

And then notice what the Lord did, and did not do. He fully explained the

Gospel to Nicodemus, and let Nicodemus go away after the Lord had put the Word in his heart. We hear no more about Nicodemus until the end of John 7, verses 45-53, and then no more until the end of chapter 19, verses 38 to 42. Surely this was evidence of a change that had taken place in the heart of Nicodemus. Cf. Jas. 1:18:

18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

The experience of the Apostle Paul was altogether different. There the change was immediate.

The Lord works in our hearts in different ways, but His work is effectual. And once the work is done, it is never undone! Who ever heard of being *unborn*? So you can see that the work of regeneration leads on into sanctification, and sanctification continues with the perseverance of the saints. And this is emphasized by the two verses I have selected in 1 John 3 – verses 1 and 2.

II. THE CHILDREN OF GOD (1 John 3:1-2).

The KJV uses the word “sons,” but the Greek speaks of “children,” *born ones*.

At almost 100 years of age the Apostle John was still marveling at how he had become a child of God. And he showed that this is the reason that he, and all other true believers, experienced an alienation from the world. The world really does not understand what it means to be a child of God.

But we are the children of God now. We know that we are being made like the Lord Jesus, but we don't know the full extent of our salvation. However, salvation is a present reality, and it is secured for all eternity.

Concl: Our first concern should be that we are in the family of God, born into His family. Our second concern should be that we are, as Jerry Bridges emphasized so well this past week, that we are pursuing the purpose of God in our lives, Holiness, which is conformity to the likeness of Christ. And our third concern should be that we are living in this world, not like the world, but as the children of God should live, so that when we speak to others about our Savior, our lives will be evidence of the very truth we are seeking to proclaim to others.