

THE SECOND BIRTH

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SCRIPTURE: 14th chapter of Mosiah, 185 thru 193 of the Book of Mormon
 I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; Behold, I am born of the Spirit. And the Lord said unto me, Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men, and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people must be born again; Yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; and thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in no wise inherit the kingdom of God My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was wracked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.

Whosoever believeth on my words, him will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit, and they shall be born of me, even of water and of the Spirit.

It takes a new creature to live a new life. If there ever was a time in the world's history when men have everything they need to shape a new life, it is today. In this nation, education is free and almost universal. We have multiplied knowledge until the brilliant scholars and scientists of a century ago would feel completely baffled in today's university classes and laboratories. We have multiplied inventions; we have flown our airplanes faster than sound, we have annihilated space, conquered the air and the sea, filled the ether waves with entertainment and pictures and music, banished the fear of old age and unemployment, boosted production to an all-time high, and gone a long ways towards conquering sickness and disease and death. Yet we are an unhappy, frustrated generation, living in momentary fear of war, uncertain of ourselves, drowning our sorrows and fears in unparalleled quantities of liquor, soothing our nerves with nicotine, aspirin, and headache powders, and wondering how long it will be before an H bomb blasts us all of the face of the earth. Why? Because in spite of the brave new world we have tried to create with our education, our science, our invention, and our skill, we are the same old man, with the same old appetites, urges, lusts, hates, fears, and worries that have plagued our forefathers back to Adam. It takes a new creature to live a new life; and we are still the same old men.

Not too many years ago, some optimists were freely predicting that we were on the verge of the golden age, when all drudgery would be lifted by mechanical inventions, all famine vanished by modern methods of irrigation and scientific, mechanized agricultural, all war banished by the League of Nations, all hate and intolerance banished by education, all injustice banished by a perfect democratic system of government. But these optimists failed to take into account a basic fact which is made plain in scripture, but discounted by men who choose to place their faith completely in mankind -- that despite his inherent possibilities for good and his spiritual kinship with God, there is in every son of Adam a nature which is carnal, sensual, and devilish -- which is an enemy to God -- which is rebellious and unrepentant and selfish. In every man there is a struggle between this nature and his higher nature. If man relies on his own strength alone, it is an unequal struggle, for the natural man does not want to repent of his sins, or of his rebellion towards God, or of his selfishness, or of his indifference.

Ye must be born again! It takes a new man, a new creature in Christ Jesus, to live a new life. If we are ever to have that brave new world about which prophets and seers and statesmen have dreamed, we can have it not by changing the world, but by changing ourselves. Men who are unregenerate, who live by their carnal, sinful

nature, simply take all the wealth, the science, the invention, and the education which we have devised in this enlightened age, and turn it to hellish and destructive purposes, or use it as a means of exploiting each other. Carnal, sensual, devilish men could make a hell out of heaven overnight, because as we have pointed out in previous sermons of this series, God gives every man his agency to use the materials and the laws of this good earth as he sees fit. THINGS in themselves are neither good or bad. They become good or bad only as they are used for good or evil purposes by good or evil men. A race of re-born men, who had repented of their sin, covenanted in baptism to serve Christ, and then received of his life -- his Spirit -- could take the same materials, the same inventions, the same scientific achievements which are making our world a hell today, and make the world a heaven almost overnight. The responsibility for today's world lies not in the things which surround us, but in ourselves -- in the character of men everywhere who need to be born again from above.

The Book of Mormon makes frequent mention of this need of man to put off the old, natural man and be born again, by yielding to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and becoming as a little child -- submissive, meek, humble, patient, and full of love. It warns that if man persists in his own carnal nature and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, he remains in his fallen state, and the devil has all power over him. Alma, another Book of Mormon writer and prophet, warned his people that they must repent and be born again, "for if ye are not born again, ye can not inherit the kingdom of heaven; Therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world....."

When King Lamoni was converted under the preaching of Aaron, he cried out, "What shall I do that I may be born of God, having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast, and receive his Spirit?" Then Aaron counselled him that if he would bow down and repent of his sins, and call on the name of the Lord in faith, he should receive the hope which he desired.

Another incident from the Book of Mormon is worth mentioning. One of the sons of the good king Mosiah, paid slight heed to his father's teachings, and became a wicked and idolatrous man. Then, miraculously, he saw the error of his ways, was converted, repented of his sins, and was born again. Then he exultantly declared, "The Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me from an everlasting burning, and I am born of God. My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was wrecked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more."

Jesus said plainly, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," and a little later amplified his statement by saying, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter in the Kingdom of God." It is interesting to note that the form of the Greek verb used in these passages suggests as an alternative translation to "born again," "begotten from above," -- a rendering which is borne out by several verses in the first epistle of John, where the same Greek verb is used; for example 1st John 5:18: "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." Begetting spiritual life is the work of God, the Father, through his Son, Jesus Christ. "Through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God." (Doctrine & Covenants 76:3) And again, Jesus himself has said, "I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the first born; and all those who are begotten through me, are partakers of the glory of the same, and are the church of the first-born." (Doctrine and Covenants 90:4) Peter (1 Peter 1:23) speaks of "Being born again, or "Begotten from above" not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

Let us speak of these things in the form of illustrations or parables which may help us to understand. If I should bring into a greenhouse a pot of rich soil, with the intention of making red roses out of that soil, how would I go about it? The soil if left to its own strength and its own devices, could never -- world without end -- transform itself into red roses. Regardless of what the soil might wish, or long for, or aspire to, it would still be soil. It would still belong to the mineral kingdom, with no chance or possibility of ever belonging to the higher vegetable kingdom. But if into that pot of soil I place the life from a higher kingdom -- perhaps a seed -- perhaps a slip or a cutting, that life could take the materials of the soil, select it, organize it, transmute it into the substance of a higher kingdom. That life could take the soil and manufacture red roses or any other form of plant life from it, according to the life which was in the seed or bulb or slip. The life of a higher kingdom would reach down into the soil, and change, transmute, lift up the soil into the life of a higher kingdom -- the vegetable kingdom.

So it is with us. No man has the power to bring himself into God's kingdom. He is beset by sin. When he would do good, evil is present with him. He may struggle, and strive, and work, and toil, and hope, and yearn all of his three score years and ten, and yet unless he has some strength, some life outside his own in which to trust, he knows that death will be the end of all his striving, with no hope of anything beyond. He needs to have the life of a higher kingdom transplanted within himself, as the seed is placed in the soil; he needs to confess his own unworthiness and inadequacy, to place his faith in that new life, to surrender himself in meekness and repentance to that life, in order that the life from above may select, reorganize, and rebuild his own nature into a new nature endowed with the life of the kingdom of God. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor 5:17)

Let us change the metaphor and consider the re-birth in the light of Paul's statement that the church is the body of Christ. It is obvious that not all substances are suitable to be included in the body, for the body simply will not tolerate foreign substances which have not entered the body in a proper way. If the body is invaded by infection or hostile disease germs, the body musters all its energies to repel and expel the invader. If a splinter invades the skin and is allowed to remain for a short time, the body will begin to isolate it, and then to attack it and work it out by a process of festering. If the body is invaded by a bullet, a dagger, or poison, death is very apt to ensue, unless the invader is quickly removed, and the damage can be repaired. The body simply cannot tolerate foreign, extraneous material. It cannot even tolerate material which may seem at first glance to be exactly the same as its own. You all know how important it is to type the blood used in a transfusion, or reduce it to plasma, lest the injection of the wrong type of blood cause serious illness or death.

If you want to transmute the substance of a potato into the substance of your body, there is a certain process which is mandatory. You can't graft it to your skin; you can't make an incision and insert it; you can't dissolve it in water and inject it. There is only one way to make body tissue out of potato; that is, to chew it, then break it down and change it by digestion, and then to absorb and assimilate it into the bloodstream, and carry it to the part of the body which needs nourishment. But all this time it is still only potato -- partially changed, to be sure, but still potato. It remains potato until it crosses some mysterious line, and by some completely incomprehensible process becomes endowed with the life of the body. Then it loses its own identity; it submits itself wholly and unreservedly to the living processes of the body. No one understands the processes by which the dead potato becomes living cells of the body -- living flesh and bone and cartilage and tissue. No one can answer the simple questions of how, or when, or where, or why new life comes to the potato. But we know that this mysterious thing does happen, and that unless it happens, the potato still remains potato, and is discarded by the body.

When a man wants to become a part of the heavenly kingdom, he has no power in himself to transmute his own life into that higher life. He must be born again -- begotten from above. The life of Christ -- the life of Christ's higher kingdom -- must be planted within him. He must be willing to surrender himself utterly to the direction of that higher life. He must be willing to surrender complete his old identity -- to crucify the old man, come down in humility and repent of his sins, bury the old man in the watery grace of baptism, and be born again, to rise to newness of life, letting the new life take over, organize, and direct his new nature from that day henceforth. He must be completely broken down, changed, and assimilated into the life and the body of Christ, as the potato loses its own identity as it is broken down and assimilated into the body of a man who eats it. As Paul phrases it in Galatians 2:20; "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Belief in the Lord Jesus, and faith on him is the beginning of this new birth. But belief alone will not bring the new birth, unless belief is followed by repentance and by the authoritatively administered ordinances of the church which are designed to change the natural man into a form which is capable of receiving the new life. A man can no more be reborn again, and be endowed with the life of a higher kingdom without proper preparation for that change, than a potato can be endowed with the life of the body without the processes of mastication and digestion, or soil can be endowed with life without passing through the life-giving processes of the plant which is introduced into the soil.

The ordinance of the church which completes this new birth, and brings an endowment of Christ's life -- the life of the kingdom of God -- is the ordinance of laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. It was this new birth, through the laying on of hands, -- this baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire -- which John promised should come from one who came after him. It was this new birth which Jesus promised to his disciples, and which came to them on the day of Pentecost, after they had obeyed the preparatory ordinances of the church. When the bystanders saw and heard the results of this new birth, they gladly listened to Peter and the eleven, who preached to them and told them how they too might have the experience of the new birth. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Thus may you be born again, and become God's sons and daughters -- heirs of his kingdom.