

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 25: Dwight L. Moody: 19th c. Evangelist

From the Archives: The New Birth

Excerpts from a sermon that Moody preached at least 183 times.

I will direct your attention to the third chapter of John and the third verse: "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." ... If there are a thousand people here tonight who want to know what love God has for them, let them read the third chapter of John, and they will find it there, and find eternal life. They need not go out of this hall tonight to find eternal life. They will find it here in this chapter, and find eternal life before these services close....

Now, let me say what regeneration is not. It is not going to church. Very often I see people and ask them if they are Christians. "Yes, of course I am, at least I think I am; I go to church every Sunday." Why, I could say to them, the very Devil goes to church every Sunday, and no one goes more regularly to church than he does.... Why if going to church was regeneration—being born again—there is hope even for Satan himself. But there never was a church erected but that the Devil was the first to enter and the last to leave.

But still there is another class of Christians, or who think they are Christians. They say, "I am trying to do what is right—am I not a Christian? Is not that a new birth?" No; I tell you, no. What has that to do with being born again?

There is yet another class those who have turned over a new leaf and think they are regenerated. No; forming a new resolution is not being born again. That will not do you any good...

But another man comes and says, "I say my prayers regular." Still, I say, that that is not being born again. That is not being born of the Spirit.

It is a very solemn question, then, that comes up before us, and would that every one should ask himself earnestly and faithfully: "Have I been born again? Have I been born of the Spirit? Have I passed from death unto life?"

Now there is another class of men who say that these meetings are very good for a certain class of people. That they would be very good if you could get the drunkard here, or get the gambler here, or get other vicious people here—that would do a great deal of good. There are certain men that need to be converted, who say: "Who did Christ say this to? Who was Nicodemus? Was he a drunkard, a gambler, or a thief?" He was one of the very best men of Jerusalem; no doubt about that He was an honorable councillor; he belonged to the Sanhedrim [sic]; he held a very high position; he was one of the best men in the state; he was an orthodox man; he was one of the very soundest men. Why, if he were here today, he would be made a president of one of our colleges; he would be put at once into one of our seminaries and have the "Reverend" put before his name, "Reverend Nicodemus, D.D.," or even "LL.D." And yet, what did Christ say to him? "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

See Nicodemus. He, with Joseph of Arimathea, took down the body of Jesus and brought it away, and stayed by Jesus to the last. I never knew a man that had a personal interview with Jesus that did not stay by him. Oh, make up your mind that you will seek him and follow him until you have an interview with him; for never man spake as that man spake. He is just the man that everyone wants.

But I can imagine someone say, "If that is to have a new birth, what am I to do? I can't create life. I certainly can't save myself." You certainly can't, and we don't preach that you can. We tell you it is utterly impossible to make a man better without Christ, and that is what men are trying to do. They are trying to patch up this old Adam's nature. There must be a new creation. Regeneration is a new creation, and if it is a new creation it must be the work of God. In the first chapter of Genesis man don't appear. There is no one there but God. Man is not there to help or take part. When God created the earth, he was alone. When God redeemed the world he was alone. "That which was born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." ... A man might just as well try to leap over the moon as to serve God in the flesh. Therefore that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Now God tells us in this chapter how we are to get into his kingdom. We are not to work our way in, not but that salvation is worth working for. We admit all that. If there were rivers and mountains in the way, it would be worth swimming those rivers and climbing those mountains. There is no doubt that salvation is worth all that, but we don't get it by our works. It is to him that worketh not, but believeth. We work because we are saved; we don't work to be saved. We work from the cross but not towards it. Now it is written, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Why you must have your salvation before you can work it out. Suppose I say to my little boy, "Go and work out that garden," I must furnish him the garden before he can work it out. Suppose I say to him, "I want you to spend that \$100 carefully." "Well," he says, "let me have the \$100 and I will be careful how I spend it." I remember when I first left home and went to Boston, I had spent all my money, and I went to the post-office three times a day. I knew there was only one mail a day from home, but I thought by some possibility there might be a letter for me. At last I got a letter from my little sister, and I was awful glad to get it. She had heard that there were a great many pickpockets in Boston, and a large part of that letter was to have me be very careful not to let anybody pick my pocket. Now I had got to have something in my pocket in order to have it picked. So you have got to have salvation before you can work it out.

"It is to him that worketh not but believeth." When Christ shouted on Calvary, "It is finished," he meant what he said. All that men have to do now is just to accept of the work of Jesus Christ. There is no hope for a man or a woman as long as they are trying to work out their salvation. I can imagine there are some people here who will say, as Nicodemus did, "This is a very mysterious thing." I see the scowl on that Pharisee's brow as he says, "How can these things be?" It sounds very strange to his ear. "Born again; born of the Spirit? How can these things be?" A great many people say, "You must reason it out, but if you don't reason it out, don't ask us to believe it." Now, I can imagine a great many people in this hall saying that. When you ask me to reason it out, I tell you frankly I can't do it. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and you hear the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." I can't understand all about the wind. You ask me to reason it out. I can't. It may blow due north here, and up to Boston it may blow due south. I may go up a few hundred feet and find it blowing in an entirely opposite direction from what it is down here. You ask me to explain these currents of wind, but because I can't explain it, and because I don't understand it, suppose I stand here and assert, "O humph! There is no such thing as wind." ... My friends, you might just as well tell me tonight that there is no wind as to tell me there is no such thing as a man born of the Spirit. I have felt the Spirit of God working in my heart just as much as I have felt the wind blowing in my face...

I can't help believing in the regeneration of man when I see men that have been reclaimed...

Look you, down there in the dark alleys of New York is a poor drunkard. I think if you want to get near hell, go to a poor drunkard's home. Go to the house of that poor miserable drunkard. Is there anything nearer like hell on earth? See the want and distress that reigns there. But hark! A footstep is heard at the door, and the children run and hide themselves. The patient wife waits to meet him. The man has been her torment. Many a time she has borne about for weeks the marks of blows. Many a time that strong right hand has been brought down on her defenseless head. And now she waits expecting to hear his oaths and suffer his brutal treatment. He comes in and says to her: "I have been to the meeting, and I heard there that if I will I can be converted. I believe that God is able to save me." Go

down to that house again in a few weeks and what a change! As you approach you hear someone singing. It is not the song of a reveler, but they are singing the "Rock of Ages." The children are no longer afraid of him, but cluster around his knee. His wife is near him, her face lit up with a happy glow. Is not that a picture of regeneration? I can take you to thousands of such homes, made happy by the regenerating power of the religion of Christ. What men want is the power to overcome temptation, the power to lead a right life.

The only way to get into the kingdom of God is to be born into it. If the archangel Gabriel was to wing his way here tonight, and we could have a chance to tell him all our wishes, we couldn't ask him for a better way of getting into the kingdom of God. Christ has made salvation ready for us, and all we must do is just to take it. Oh, may we not hesitate to take it! There is a law in this country requiring that the president must be born in the country. When foreigners come to our shores they have no right to complain against such a law which forbids them from ever becoming presidents. Now hasn't God a right to make a law that all those who become heirs of eternal life must be born into his kingdom? An unregenerated man would rather be in hell than in heaven. Take a man whose heart is full of corruption and wickedness, and place him in heaven among the pure, the holy, and the redeemed, and he wouldn't want to stay there. My friends, if we are to be happy in heaven we must begin to make a heaven here on earth. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. If a gambler or blasphemer were taken out of the streets of New York and placed on the crystal pavement of heaven and under the shadow of the tree of life he would say, "I don't want to stay here." If men were taken to heaven just as they are by nature, without having their hearts regenerated, there would be another rebellion in heaven. Heaven is filled with a company of those that are twice born. When I was born in 1837 I received my old Adam nature, and when I was born again in 1856 I had another nature given to me.

It is impossible to serve God a right unless you first make up your mind to be born again. If a house is built upon the sand, it falls; but if it is founded upon a rock, it stands firm against the wind and wave. Our faith can never endure unless it is founded on Christ. We may travel through the earth and see many countries, but there is one country—the land of Beulah, which John Bunyan saw in vision—that country we shall never see unless we are born again—regenerated by Christ. We look abroad and see many beautiful trees, but the tree of life we shall never see until our eyes are made clear by faith in the Savior. You may see the beautiful rivers of the earth—the Ohio, the Mississippi, the Hudson—you may ride upon their bosoms, but bear in mind that your eye will never rest upon the river which bursts out from the throne of God and flows through the upper kingdom. God has said it, and not man. You will never see the kingdom of God except you are born again. You may see the kings and lords of the earth, but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords you will never see except you are born again. When you are in London you may go to the Tower and see the crown of England, which is worth millions, and is guarded there by soldiers; but bear in mind that your eye will never rest upon the crown of life except you are born again. You may come to these meetings and hear the songs of Zion which are sung here, but one song—that of Moses and the Lamb—the uncircumcised ear shall never hear that song unless you are born again. We may see the beautiful mansions of New York and the Hudson, but bear in mind that the mansions which Christ has gone to prepare you shall never see unless you are born again. It is God who says it. You may see ten thousand beautiful things in this world, but the city that Abraham caught sight of—and from that time he became pilgrim and a sojourner, you shall never see unless you are born again. Many of you may be invited to marriage feasts here, but you will never attend the marriage supper of the Lamb except you are born again. It is God who says it, dear friend. You may be looking on the face of your sainted mother tonight, and feel that she is praying for you, but the time will come when you shall never see her again except you are born again. I may be speaking to a young man or a young lady who has recently stood by the bedside of a dying mother, and she said to you, "Be sure and meet me in heaven," and you made the promise. Ah! You shall never see her again except you are born again. I believe Jesus of Nazareth sooner than those infidels who say you do not have to be born again. If you see your children who have gone before, you must be born of the Spirit. I may be speaking tonight to a father and mother who have recently borne a loved one to the grave, and how dark your home seems! You will never see her again except you are born again. If you wish to meet your loved ones you must be born again...

Yes, we all have an elder Brother there. Nearly 1,900 years ago he crossed over, and from the heavenly shores he is calling you to heaven. Let us turn our back upon the world. Let us give a deaf ear to the world. Let us get our heart in the kingdom of God, and cry, "Life! Life! Eternal life!" Let us pray that God may keep every soul now here from going out of this building tonight without being born again!

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