

A LEAP YEAR SERMON NO. 2663

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1900
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 29, 1880

[Although 1900 is not observed as a Leap Year, the last Sabbath in February is the nearest corresponding date to the Leap Year Sunday in 1880, when the accompanying sermon was delivered. It is therefore issued for reading on that day with the earnest prayer that it may be as profitable to those who read it as it was to those who were privileged to hear it.]

“One born out of due time.”
1 Corinthians 15:8

PAUL thus describes himself. It was necessary that Paul, as an apostle, should have seen the Lord. He was not converted at the time of Christ's ascension, yet he was made an apostle, for the Lord Jesus appeared to him in the way, as he was going to Damascus to persecute the saints of God. When he looked upon himself as thus put in, as it were, at the end of the apostles, he spoke of himself in the most depreciating terms, calling himself, “one born out of due time.”

Those who are acquainted with the Greek tongue know what a despicable term Paul here applied to himself—as though he was scarcely a man at all—at any rate, as the very last of the family, “born out of due time,” and not only the last, but also the very least, for he says, “I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” Scholars will know why I cannot exactly explain the word which Paul uses, but rather keep to the rendering of our translation, which, although it may not have the force and full meaning of the Greek expression, is perhaps none the less useful for public reading, “One born out of due time.”

Paul thought very humbly of himself, he reckoned himself less than nothing, and put himself down at the very lowest estimate, and mentioned that he was brought to Christ, and made an apostle, when the time for such a work was apparently over. Out of date altogether, beyond the period when it might have been thought that another apostle would be called of God, there was he found as “one born out of due time.”

My subject tonight is, first, *the singular time of Paul's spiritual birth*. There are many of God's true children who, like the apostle, were “born out of due time.” When I have expatiated upon that fact, I shall speak of *the sure evidences of his spiritual birth*, and show you that, although “born out of due time,” he was born, and there were sure evidences of his spiritual birth, which evidences, I trust, may be seen in many of us also.

I. First, then, let us think of THE SINGULAR TIME OF PAUL'S SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

There are still some who, like the apostle, are born to God “out of due time.” They are truly born again, regenerated, converted, *at a most unlikely season*. There have been multitudes brought to Christ, under earnest sermons, when the appeals of faithful men have thrilled the congregation, and the truth has been effectually carried home to the hearts of many of the hearers.

But there have also been times when God's ministers have waxed faint, when the sermon has appeared to be destitute of all force, when nobody has seemed to have felt the power of the discourse, and apparently, the truth has fallen quite flat, yet, on many such occasions, there have been some sinners converted to God when we should hardly have thought it to be possible.

Mr. Tennant, a famous American minister of Whitefield's time, one of the most earnest and seraphic men who ever proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, had a hearer, who remained unmoved under many

a score of his most faithful sermons. Others were saved, but not this man, he seemed unmoved and immovable, but it came to pass on a certain Sabbath, that a very unusual thing happened. Mr. Tennant had prepared his sermon with great care, it was what we are wont to call a laborious discourse, into which he had put all the thought and all the pains possible, but he had not been preaching long before his memory completely failed him, his mind refused to work, and after floundering about for a while, he was obliged to sit down in great confusion, and say that he could not preach to the people that day.

The man I have mentioned, who had never before been impressed under Mr. Tennant's ministry, was that day called by sovereign grace, as "one born out of due time," for he was led to see that there was a spiritual and supernatural force which had usually helped the pastor to preach, and that when this divine influence was withdrawn, he was as weak as other men, and could not speak with power, as he had been accustomed to do.

This truth, somehow or other—for human minds are strangely constituted, and things, which have no effect upon certain people, very greatly affect others who are present at the same time—this truth, I say, induced the man to think, thinking, he was led to believe in God, and to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of his soul. He was, without doubt, one "born out of due time."

I would like to break down, as Mr. Tennant did, if some of you would be born to God by that means, I would rather be dumb and win a soul for Jesus, than speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and yet men's hearts should not be impressed by the truth I proclaimed. How often I have found that, when I have gone home, and sighed, and cried, and groaned over a discourse in which I felt no liberty, but thought it was an utter failure, it has afterwards been proved that, here one, and there another, have come forward blessing and praising God for that very testimony, which seemed to me so faulty and feeble, but which the Spirit of the Lord has savingly impressed upon them. So, still, there are some who, in this way, are "born out of due time," through the Holy Spirit's use even of the preacher's weakness and apparent failure.

Another illustration may be taken from the opposite side of the same truth. Some are converted when they seem themselves to be in a state of mind in which they are the most unlikely to be impressible. I remember being in Dr. John Campbell's house one day, when he told me that a minister was preaching at Whitefield's old Tabernacle in Moorfields, one evening when there were present, under very strange circumstances, two young men who had fallen into dissipated habits, and who had made an appointment with each other for the commission of some gross sin that very night. Had they committed what they had planned, it may be that they would have plunged themselves into a career of vice from which they might never have been extricated.

They were passing by the Moorfields Tabernacle, which some of you remember, and as they wanted to know the time at which they were to meet for this unholy purpose, one of them said to the other, "Go in, and see the time, there is sure to be a clock in there." But the clock was not fixed as it is here, at the back of the preacher, but the other way, so the young man had to go some little distance further in than he intended, in order to see the clock.

If I remember rightly, the preacher that night was Matthew Wilks, and he was just uttering some quaint remark, something that arrested the young man's attention, and held him fast in the aisle. His companion waited outside for a time, but it was cold, so he thought he had better go in and look at the clock himself, and fetch his friend out. He went in, the arrows of the Lord pierced the heart of both of them, and the second of those young men was John Williams, the famous missionary, and at last the martyr of Erromanga. Thus, they also were "born out of due time."

You would not have thought it possible that those men would become, as they did, preachers of the Gospel, when they were at that very time, desperately set on the commission of a great sin against God, and their hearts were wholly given up to the pleasures and follies of this world, but so it happened, and our Lord still knows how to stop men as He stopped Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. He is the man who says that he was "born out of due time," and he is a wonderful instance of this method of divine interposition.

He has in his possession the letters from the high priest which will enable him to bind the saints, and carry them off to Jerusalem, he is riding towards Damascus, and is within sight of the city when, in the very midst of his highhanded course of persecution, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself intervenes, and smites him down to the ground. Presently, Paul rises to pray, and in his three days' blindness and fasting to seek the Lord, and then to find Him, to the salvation of his soul and the joy of his spirit, and thus to become an apostle of that very Savior whom, in his ignorance, he had been persecuting.

After such a triumph of divine grace, let us never despair of any sinner, however far he may have gone into sin. You know how Paul, writing to Timothy, said of himself, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

The God who blessed the broken sermon of Mr. Tennant can bless our imperfect work in the pulpit, the Sunday school, or anywhere else, and the God who saved such men as John Williams and his companion, when they least thought of such a thing happening, can also save some who have strayed in here tonight, little dreaming what designs of love God has toward them in bringing them at this time under the sound of the Word.

I consider next, that a convert may be described as one "born out of due time" when he is brought to Christ *after some great revival or notable religious movement has come to an end*. There are some of you who attended the recent special services conducted here by Messrs. Fullerton and Smith. What power there was in those hallowed gatherings! Some of your neighbors wept under conviction of sin, but you did not. Some of them came to Christ, and are now rejoicing in Him, but you did not come to Him. You were not even impressed during the meetings, though, possibly, you wished to be, or it may be that you began with a desire after better things, but you ended in indifference.

And now the special services are all over, and the good men who came amongst us to preach and sing the Gospel are gone, and you have been saying to yourselves, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Ah! but our Lord has a blessed way of picking up the stragglers behind the army. When the main body has marched on, with sound of trumpet, praising God, there are a few left behind, and the Lord Jesus sometimes comes, and picks them up.

I do earnestly pray that some of you may be thus picked up by Him just now, so that you may be able to say, "We were not born for God when many others were, like Saul of Tarsus, we were 'born out of due time,' but blessed be God, we were born again by the effectual working of His Spirit, we were brought to Christ, to the praise of the glory of His grace, and now we also have become children of God by faith in Jesus Christ." Pray that it may be so, dear friends.

O you Christian people, bow your hearts before God, and ask that it may be so! Perhaps the very fact that those services are over, and that a gracious opportunity has gone, may be impressed upon the minds of some who were present during the meetings, but who were not converted, and they may now seek the Savior, and find Him to their everlasting salvation and happiness.

The Lord can bless strange methods to the awakening of the ungodly. When Puritanism seemed to be trodden under foot in the reign of James I, and the king issued the Book of Sports, and gave commandment that every clergyman was to read from the pulpit on Sunday, that it was the royal will and pleasure that the young people should play at football, cricket, and other games and pastimes on the Lord's-day afternoon, godly ministers who really loved the Lord, did not know what to do.

One of them thought, perhaps, it would be well to do as the king ordered, and to say something beside, so when the Sunday came for reading the Book of Sports to the people, he said, "I am commanded by the king and the authorities to read to you the following document, but it grieves my heart and conscience to have to read it. I know it is wicked, and wrong, and shameful, and abominable to desecrate the Sabbath as you are invited to do, and I wonder what will become of my country when even from the church itself Sabbath breaking is recommended."

So the good man spoke, to the relief of his own conscience, and in hope of awakening the consciences of others. It happened that there was in the congregation that day, a young man who had

always been a ringleader in the Sabbath sports, he was no sooner out of church in the morning, than he was on the village green, fast and furious in all the amusements of the time, but when he heard that Book of Sports read, he said to himself, “well, I acted in that way on my own account, and it was wrong enough for me to do so, but now I say, with the minister, ‘What is to become of all the country if everybody is to be as bad as I have been? What will happen to the nation if this kind of thing is to go on?’”

The thought struck him so forcibly that he became first a serious character, and then a true seeker after God, and afterwards a genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. So it came to pass that, when the devil thought he was going to have everything his own way, that very day, this young man was born to God—truly, “born out of due time.”

I recollect reading a very striking saying of Mr. Bunyan’s. He said he had good reason to believe that in the generation after him, there would be many more saints than in the one of which he formed a part, and his belief was based upon the fact that, wherever he went, he found that there were so many great sinners that he hoped they would be converted, and become eminent servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, there was a blessed truth at the back of that hope of his, for very often, where sin has abounded, grace does much more abound, and when the Word of God seems to grow scarce, and the candle of the Gospel burns but dimly, we may pray and expect that even then, some may be “born out of due time” to the praise of the glory of that grace which saves as it wills, and often selects the very chief of sinners to be the subjects of its almighty power.

There have been some dear friends, who may be said to have been “born out of due time,” for they have been converted to God *after it seemed impossible that they ever should be*. I recollect well reading of one who imbibed skeptical notions, and became exceedingly furious against the preaching of the Word. One day in Edinburgh, he heard it said that a certain eminent minister of the Gospel intended, if he met him, to speak with him about his soul, whereupon the man uttered some very strong expressions, and amongst other wicked things, he said, “I shall never be converted unless I lose my senses.” All who were acquainted with him, and who knew how desperately he was set against the Gospel, thought that his was indeed a hopeless case, but in the infinite mercy of God, it turned out to be quite the opposite.

He began to suffer from great incoherence of thought, his mind gradually wandered when he was trying to speak, he often spoke utter nonsense. He became unfit for business, and had to be put into the custody of someone who watched him as his keeper. Reason was not actually gone, but it was reeling upon its throne, and while he was in that sad state, the case of Nebuchadnezzar came to his mind, and he wondered whether God had given him up altogether, on account of what he had said—that he would never be converted while he was in his senses. He turned his mind, all shipwrecked and battered as it was, towards God, and out of the depths of his half bewildered spirit, he cried unto the Lord as Nebuchadnezzar did, and his mind returned to him, and he became a humble, gentle, holy believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you not think, dear friends, that he also was “one born out of due time”? The time of salvation seemed utterly past as far as he was concerned. He had made a covenant with death, and a league with hell, he had cast off those ordinary beliefs which many men hold even though they do not obey them, yet notwithstanding all that, the surprising grace of God dealt with him after its own sovereign manner, and laid him low, that it might bring him up again.

I do not pray that such a thing may happen to anybody here, but I do pray that God may bring you to Christ somehow, and anyhow, and if, in order to attain that end, you have to be driven to the very gates of hell—so long as you do not actually pass through them—I will rejoice if, afterwards, you are led to flee to Christ for refuge.

Another instance of “one born out of due time” occurs in the case of one *converted after the spiritual father is dead*. We sometimes see posthumous children, that is, those who are born after the father is deceased, and there is generally much sorrow mingled with the thought of such births, for the poor widow’s heart is doubly troubled by the extra care needed for the little stranger who arrives after the

breadwinner of the family is taken away. But if a man is the means of bringing another to Christ after he himself is dead, there need be no sorrow about that matter.

There have been many, many instances, in which earnest Christian people have sought the conversion of their relatives or friends, they have prayed for them, and wept over them, and pleaded with them, but all their efforts have been unsuccessful, yet after their death, the memory of their holy zeal has touched the conscience of the one who would not yield before, and brought him to Christ.

I wish, dear friends, that your godly mother who is in heaven, and who died leaving her son unsaved, might seem to come to you just now. I ask for no apparition, but that she may be consciously present to your mind and that her dying words may ring in your ears, for perhaps the remembrance of what she said may be blessed to you even now. When I am taken away, I can but wish that any true and faithful word that I have spoken may still continue to speak to you from my grave.

When good Mr. Payson died, he begged that his people might come and see him if they wished, before he was interred, and those who did so read these words on his bosom, "Remember the word which I have spoken unto you being yet present with you." It was thus his desire, you see, that he should have posthumous spiritual children, that they should be born to God even though they should seem to be "born out of due time."

Ah! you wives, who have been praying for your husbands these many years, never give them up, because they may be brought to Christ when you yourselves will be in heaven. Mothers and fathers, never cease pleading for your children, for they too, may be brought to Jesus when you are among the angels.

Up in one of the northern counties of England, there was a woman, a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose prayer went up continually for her husband, but he never entered the house of God, and despised her for doing so. She was accustomed to go to her usual place of worship alone, so far as any human companions were concerned, yet she was not quite alone, for there was a dog that always went with her. This dog curled himself up under the seat, and lay quite still during the service, and then walked home with his mistress.

The first Sunday after she was dead, the poor dog went off to the meeting house as usual, and curled himself up in his old place. He did the same the next Sunday, and the husband, noticing the dog start out so regularly, was struck by its action and wondered where the dog went now that his mistress was gone, so he thought he would go and see. The dog went before him to his mistress's old seat, and curled himself up, the man went in after the dog, and sat down in his wife's place, and God helped the minister that day, to show him that his good works and self-righteousness, in which he had always trusted, would not be sufficient for his salvation, and he preached to him the full salvation of Christ Jesus, and the man believed and lived. Was not he also "born out of due time," for his wife's prayers for him were all over, and she was gone? Yet he was brought to Christ.

The subject is one upon which I might enlarge indefinitely, but I would rather have you to supply further instances of similar blessing, by urging you to persevere in prayer, you who are seeking the salvation of others.

Some have been "born out of due time" because they have been *converted to God in extreme old age*. I would like to encourage any very aged person who is here, and still unsaved, and to drive away altogether the notion that it is too late to seek the Lord. It is never too late so long as life lasts, and there is the power to repent of sin and to turn to the Lord.

***"While the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return."***

I will not quote cases, but I have a vivid recollection of a good many persons who have been saved at the age of seventy or eighty. We have had persons, past both of those periods, baptized upon profession of their newly found faith. The world's proverb says, "It is never too late to mend," but Christ

would tell you, if He were here in bodily presence, that it is never too late for Him to mend you, or rather, for Him to make you anew, for that is the work He undertakes to do. It is never too late for Him to stretch out His pierced hand, and help the man, who is tottering on his staff, to become a babe in Christ. Yet, surely when very old men are born again, they seem to be “born out of due time.”

Many of you have not yet come to old age, yet if God should save you tonight, you would be as those who are “born out of due time,” because you are *on the very brink of the grave*. Consumption has laid its cruel hand upon you, and pulled down all your strength. In all probability, you will not be long in this world. You have come out tonight, but you are half afraid that you have done wrong in coming in the state you are in, with that terrible cough that you have, yet you have not found the Savior.

O my dear young friend, wherever you may be, it is a sad, sad thing to be carrying about with you your death warrant, as you certainly are doing, and yet to have no warrant to believe that when you die, it will be well with you! Oh, I pray you, do not let Satan tempt you with the idea that, now, when sickness is upon you, there is no hope for you! Come to Jesus, however consumptive you look. Come to Jesus, young man, with that chest that scarcely allows you to breathe. Come unto Him, for He will not cast you away.

I remember one, whom I met at Mentone, who had gone there in the hope of lengthening his life, but that was quite out of the question, for he was too far gone when he came. He had two sisters, who were sent for to come to him, for it was certain that he could not live long. He himself was under deep concern of soul, earnestly seeking the Lord, but he could not find Him. Day after day, week after week, he had been getting worse and worse, and showing all the signs of his approaching departure, but he could not find peace with God.

At last, his sisters came from England. They arrived just in time. They found him very anxious about his soul, that night they spoke with him of Jesus, and in the morning, early, when they woke, they went to him, and he was sitting up in bed, all pale and ghostlike. He said, “Sisters, Christ has forgiven me,” And he fell back on his pillow, and he was gone home. There was an end of his suffering and weakness here below, but the consolation of that last word to them, and of the joy that beamed from his poor eyes, was enough to make them gladly commit his body to the tomb.

“Sisters, Christ has forgiven me.” Ah! He was indeed “born out of due time”—born between the very jaws of death, but death’s jaws could not close upon him till he had received forgiveness from his Savior. I beseech any of you who are in a similar condition to his, do not put off seeking the Lord, but hasten to find Him even now.

Once more, there are some who are “born out of due time” because they *are born all of a sudden*. They suddenly come to Christ, they suddenly find peace, they are suddenly saved. I wish that might happen to some here tonight. There is no need of any set period for this all-important matter, time is no element in the case. God can work conviction and conversion in a single instant. You know that sometimes, you see a flash of lightning, and then you wait several seconds before you hear the thunder, but when a storm is right overhead, the flash and the clap are simultaneous, and down comes the pouring rain at the same time. And in like manner, the Lord knows how to send a flash of conviction, and at the same instant, to make His deep voice of mercy to be heard in the soul, and to send the water floods of grace upon the spirit there and then. Why should He not do so tonight for any of you who need these blessings?

Now I will tell you the special reason why I chose this text, that is, because this is the 29th of February, and it is a Sunday. There are a large number of you who never saw a 29th of February on Sunday before, and there is a larger number still who will never see the 29th of February on a Sunday again. I suppose it will be eight and twenty years before that will occur again.

So, this is a Sunday thrown in, as it were, it is an odd kind of day, an extra day in the calendar. If you ask our friends of the Greek Church, the Russians, they will tell you that there is not such a day at all, for they keep to the old system of reckoning time. This plan of putting in an odd day, every four years, to make our days square with the sun, is a very good and proper one, still, it is a kind of a day thrown in,

and it seemed to me that if the Lord would convert some souls on this odd day in this leap year, it would make the 29th of February, that came on a Sunday, to be specially memorable. You will not forget it if it is the day of your conversion, you will say to your children, it may be, eight and twenty years hence, if you are alive, “Ah! I recollect when the 29th of February last came on a Sunday, and that was the day when I sought and found the Lord. Mr. Spurgeon said that I was like the apostle Paul, ‘one born out of due time,’ and so I was, yet I was born in due time, I know, according to the covenant of grace.”

Oh that the Lord, in His infinite mercy, having given us this special day, would now give us a special blessing, and bring many to Himself this leap year! Oh, that all of you, who are still unsaved, would make a leap right out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son, His Holy Spirit enabling you so to do by a simple act of faith in Jesus Christ! And you Christian people, pray for a special and unusual blessing, a 29th of February blessing. Ask God to give it to us, in His infinite mercy, that many and many a soul may be “born out of due time” this very night.

Who shall it be? And where shall the work of repentance begin? Does not somebody over there say, “Lord, let it be me”? There is said to be a special opportunity of making proposals in leap year, but I can tell you, if you make a proposal to come to Christ, that He has long ago set His heart on you. You would never have thought of proposing to Him if He had not first of all ordained to bring you to Himself. If you come to Him, He will receive you, and oh, in His great mercy, may the Holy Spirit incline you to come to Him this 29th of February that falls upon a Sunday.

II. Now I have only two or three minutes left for the second part of my subject—THE SURE EVIDENCES OF PAUL’S SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

Though Paul was, in a spiritual sense, “born out of due time,” he was truly born again, and those persons, who have been converted at singular times, and under strange circumstances, have been really converted. How do we know that Paul was born again, and that he was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ?

I answer, first, because *he had seen the Lord*. After mentioning those who saw the risen Christ, he says, “Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.” The first evidence that he was an apostle was that he had actually beheld the Lord. Now, in a spiritual sense, one of the marks of a true believer is that he has seen the Lord. My dear friend, if you have looked to Christ for forgiveness, even though you have only looked to Him tonight, and this is an odd night—the 29th of February, yet, if you have by faith seen Jesus on the cross, and truly trusted Him, you are as much saved as the man is who believed in Christ fifty years ago. Looking to Jesus is the evidence that we are born again, and happy is everyone who can truthfully say, concerning Christ, “He was seen of me also.”

*“I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agonies and blood.”*

I looked to Him, He looked on me, and we were one forever. I trusted to Him, and therefore I am saved. If you can say that from your heart and the Holy Spirit bears witness that what you say is true, you need not raise any question about your new birth. If you are trusting in Jesus, it is well with your soul in time and to eternity.

The next evidence of his spiritual birth, which Paul gave, was that *he confessed his sin*. Read the verse following our text, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” See how he confessed his sin and forsook it. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but who confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

Are you, dear friend, willing now to confess your sin? Do you turn from it with loathing? Do you desire, henceforth, to be delivered entirely from it? Well, then, your repentance is another sure evidence that you are born again. If you have seen Jesus taking your sin upon Himself, and suffering its dread penalty, if you have confessed your sin, and by faith laid it upon Him as your Sacrifice and Substitute, you are born again, though you may have been, in a certain sense, “born out of due time.”

Next, we are sure that Paul was really born again because *he was thoroughly converted*. Never was there a greater change in any man than there was in him, he never went back to his former life, and he had no hankering to return to it. With him, old things had passed away, and all things had become new, he was, indeed, a new creature in Christ Jesus.

I am sure he was converted, also, because *he praised the grace of God*. Read the tenth verse, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” Even when he truthfully says, “I laboured more abundantly than they all,” he humbly adds, “yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” It is a sure sign of conversion when a man knows that he is saved by grace alone, and does not attribute it to his own merit, or his own work, but praises and adores the sovereign mercy and grace of God. Have you that evidence, dear friend? Then you are born aright, even though “born out of due time.”

And lastly, Paul proved that he was a true citizen of the New Jerusalem because he became, of all men, *most zealous for Christ*, zealous for the Gospel, zealous for the winning of souls. He seemed to try to do all he could to undo the mischief he had wrought in the days of his unregeneracy, and to work with both his hands and all his heart to establish and extend the kingdom which once he tried to overthrow.

O God, by Your great mercy, cause another Paul to be born in this house of prayer tonight! You can do it, will You not bring to Yourself, by the power of the Eternal Spirit, some wild, threatening, blustering, blaspheming hater of Christ, lay him at the dear feet of the Crucified, and cause him to look up and live? Pray for this, dear Christian people. Pray for it tonight, when you reach your homes as well as now, and then we shall have special reason to recollect this 29th of February.

Possibly, someone, who will in days to come, stand on this very spot preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, will say to you, “Do you remember the 29th of February, 1880? Do you recollect the text, ‘One born out of due time’?” I trust that some of you will be here to hear him say, “I recollect it better than any of you do, for that was the night when I was born to God, glory be to His holy name!” Now pray for it with all your hearts, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JOHN 3:1-18

If you were sent for to visit a dying man, and you wished to select a chapter which would set the truth before him very briefly and very clearly, you could not make a better choice than this third chapter of the Gospel according to John. So, as we are all dying men and women, let us read it with that same desire, and may the Holy Spirit apply it to our hearts as we read it!

Verses 1-2. *There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night,—*

That was better than not coming at all. “Better late than never.” Better come to Christ in the dark than not come to Him at all.

2. *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.*

This was good reasoning on the part of Nicodemus. If he did not at first go as far as he afterwards did, it argued well for him that he went as far as he could. O you who are troubled with unbelief, believe as much as you can, and then cry, “Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief; and especially, help me to get rid of it.” Confess to Christ what you do believe, and He will add more to your belief.

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.*

He cannot understand what it is, he cannot know anything about it, he cannot see it.

4-5. *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? 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.*

If the “water” mentioned here relates to baptism—which I greatly question—then certainly, it shows the way of entrance for a believer, publicly, into the kingdom of God. But if it relates to the purifying power of the Spirit of God—as I believe it does—then it teaches us that no man enters into the kingdom of God, and becomes a partaker of its privileges—which is something more than merely seeing it—except the Spirit of God shall be to him as water purifying him from sin. This is the reason why a man cannot enter into the spiritual kingdom until he is born again, born from above.

6. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh;*

And “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”

6. *And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

And only the new creature, which is thus born, can by any possibility, understand or enter into the possession of the spiritual things which belong to the kingdom of God.

7-8. *Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit is mysterious, like the wind, and so is the creature that is “born of the Spirit.” The spiritual man often cannot understand himself,—he is so mysterious a being—how then shall he be able to fully comprehend how that wondrous new life is created within him? All we know is, that he is a new creation, as much the work of eternal power as our first creation.

9-10. *Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Are you a master of Israel, and know not these things?*

“These things” that lie at the very root of everything. “Art thou a Rabbi, and dost thou not know this?” Alas, good Master, there are still many Rabbis who do not understand this, many who have taken the highest degree the University can give them, yet do not know in their own souls what it is to be born again!

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.*

Spiritual men declare that there are spiritual things. They know them, and have seen them, and they have a right to be believed, for they are not liars. They are honest men, and speak what they do know, yet, often, their witness is not received. They need not be surprised at this, for it was the same with their Master.

12. *If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*

If these elementary truths about the new birth stagger you, what is the use of My going on to anything higher? You would not understand it, or receive it.

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.*

He alone knows the secrets of God who has been with God, who has come from God, and who is still with God.

14-18. *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 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.*

God give us, even now, deliverance from condemnation through faith in His dear Son, and prevent our being condemned through our unbelief, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—416, 222, 511

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.