

New Birth to New Life  
April 21, 2019  
Brian R. Wipf

Take a look at this pic (PIC). If this was our Christmas Eve service and I showed you this picture, it would produce a nostalgic smile across your face and it would warm your heart, wouldn't it? You would be like, "Oh, look! How beautiful! A white Christmas; that's exactly what I've been dreaming for." But today, on Easter morning, on April 21st - an entire month after the first day of spring - you hate that picture! All you can think when you see a picture like that is, "Get that off the screen, Brian! Show me the Easter bunny. Get with it." This picture makes us happy at Christmas time; it gets us depressed at Easter

We're all waiting for life to return to the earth, aren't we? We're beginning to see hints though, right? With the warmer weather and the sunshine, we're starting to believe more and more that spring is coming. For me, when I start seeing color that means spring has arrived. The green of the grass. The yellows of some of the buds of the flowers. Some of the bulbs in our gardens and in our landscaping are already starting to sprout even with snow still on the ground. Death is giving way to life.

That's what happens every spring; we see the rebirth of nature. Winter is a season of death (at least for us in Wisconsin). It's cold. It's dark. Nothing grows. Spring is the season of life. The flowers bud. The trees get their leaves. It's calving season. But it's not so much a brand new life; it's a renewed life. This all happened last year, and the same thing a year before that. Every year we see nature come back to life; it's reborn. And with it's new birth comes new life.

God has woven into the very fabric of life a time for rebirth. And that time is meant to signal for you and for me our own need for a rebirth. Today is Easter; more so than any other day in the entire year, we are reminded about the new life God brings to people who look towards Jesus Christ for life and salvation. The passage I picked out for us to read and look at today emphasizes new birth and new life. My hope for our time this morning is that every single one of us would awaken to our need for new life. Even though it's a special day to spend with family and we may have plans to look for jelly beans and Cadbury Eggs, we wouldn't let a moment like this pass us by to reflect and to get honest about our own need for life from God. So, if you would, let's turn in our Bibles to 1 Peter 1:3 (READ).

The first thing we notice about the Apostle Peter from vs. 3 is that he is a happy man. He's celebrating in this verse; he's thrilled. That's what the word *blessed* is getting at. That is an expression of joy and praise. And notice what he's happy about. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!* He's happy about God. He's thrilled about the God of heaven. He's not thrilled about some generic view of God; he's specific. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He's excited and enthusiastic about the God who Jesus has come to reveal. He's celebrating the Father of the Lord Jesus. Don't buy into the whole doesn't-everyone-believe-the-same-God argument. It's not true. The Father of the Lord Jesus is

different from the god's of the East; he's different from the god of Islam. Jesus' Father in heaven is not the same as the sun god of Greek mythology or Hinduism. Peter is celebrating, praising the Father God of the Lord Jesus Christ. Very specific - the One *Jesus* has come to reveal.

I would consider it a big win if the words we are going to read today get you enthused about the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. That God would develop in you a joy for him. That would change your life, friends. It would honor God and it would be good for you. My guess is that's not always the case for you; maybe that's never been the case for you. And look, I get it. I'm not always so excited about God, either.

Many of you know that I recently returned with a small team from Nepal and India. We spent 2 full weeks on the other side of the earth and do you know what they do not have in Nepal and India? Beef. The delicious and savory red angus meat raised in the Midwest of the good ole' US of A. They have some red meat in India and Nepal, but it's as tough as a leather belt. And every now and then you'll see a hamburger on the menu of a restaurant, but be careful. It's probably a yak burger. Yaks might be good scaling the mountains of the Himalayas, but they really don't please the palate of an American looking for a juicy burger. I was excited to get back home for a bunch of reasons. I was excited to see my wife; I was enthused to sleep in my own bed. But if I'm honest with you, I couldn't wait to sink my teeth into an American cheeseburger. Culvers was our first stop after leaving the airport and I relished every single bite.

You know, I hate that I don't always have that enthusiasm for God. And he's far better than a cheeseburger. He created the beauty all around us. Absolutely everything good in this world that we do enjoy comes from him. There's a great passage in Psalm 107; it paints the picture of weary travelers who desperately need refreshment and rest - a lot like we were, tired after our long journey, but listen to where satisfaction is found (READ vs. 4-9). Do you hear? God satisfies the longing soul; God fills the hungry heart with good things. This passage is meant to remind us that God is the one who we should be excited to see, enthused to experience. Oh, how I pray God would give you spiritual sensitivities and perspectives this morning to rightly and appropriately excite your heart about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's normal that we struggle in this way, but don't be OK with it. For us to be unmoved and unenthused about God is simply a revelation how badly we're missing what's most important in life.

Look why Peter is enthused about God in 1 Peter 1. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who caused us to be born again*. So, here we have that direct reference to rebirth that I mentioned earlier. Look how he spells it out: Peter is super excited about God, but because God did something (or is the kind of God who does something awesome); God causes us to be born again. Let's make sure we know what he's talking about.

I think two things are important to see. First of all, what does it mean to be born again? This idea of being born again is all over the NT. You might hear the phrase *born again Christian* from time to time; it gets a lot of play in the news come election time because that phrase is

sometimes used to describe followers of Jesus as a single voting block. As you'll see from the Bible, that has nothing to do with being born again (so, when you hear "born again Christian" on TV you should probably think, "They really don't know what they're talking about"). Jesus himself says in John 3:3, "Truly, truly, I say to you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." So, being born again is pretty important, isn't it?

One of the best verses to understand what it means to be born again is Ephesians 2:4-5 and it reads "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved." Instead of talking about new birth in this passage, Paul talks about new life, which is what we get when we are born again. We are dead, Paul says. We are dead in our trespasses, which means sins. Our sins make us spiritually dead. Because of our sin, just like winter, we are cold, we are dark, nothing good grows from us. I bet if you're honest, you can relate to that. Maybe you look at your struggling marriage where nothing good is growing; where it's dark and cold - you see sin, don't you? It's also true of other relationships; it's also true of you.

And what do dead things need? They need life - new life. And that's what Eph 2 says God brings. Even though we are dead in our sins, God makes us alive! Notice why God brings new life. *Being rich in mercy... because of the great love with which he loved us... by grace you have been saved.* The author wants you to see that this new life is solely due to God's merciful, gracious, loving work.

That's the second thing I want you to see from our key phrase back in 1 Peter 1 - God *caused* us to be born again. He doesn't suggest it. He doesn't create the conditions for it to happen. God doesn't get it started and then we finish it. No, God causes us to be born again. He makes it happen from beginning to end. It's all a work of his wonderful and merciful grace to us. We will revisit this at the very end this morning, but reading that phrase shows me not only just how good God is (that he would make me born again even though I was dead in my sins), but how much I need God; only he can make me born again. I can't do that for myself; only God can by his love, mercy, and grace. That's the first thing we see about Peter's excitement about God.

Let's look at the second part of 1 Peter 1. God causes us to be born again to a living hope. Do you see that there in vs. 3? What is this living hope? Hope is about the future. It's about looking ahead and believing something good is coming. In our culture, hope is kind of like wishful thinking, like, "I hope it doesn't snow again this year." You're kind of crossing your fingers, but remember, you live in Wisconsin. In the Bible, hope isn't so much about wishful thinking; there's confidence in one's hope. Being born again gives us a kind of confidence in the future.

And then we get the word *living* or some translations say *lively* - a lively hope. I think Peter is kind of playing with words. Remember, he just told us God makes us new, makes us

born again. The opposite of life is death, which we emphasized from Eph. 2. So it's a hope for life, I think. But because it's still a hope, it's still in the future; we haven't fully received it yet. And because we haven't quite received it we might be tempted to think it's not coming.

Look around you, friend; look around our state, our country, and our world. Does it look like our better days are ahead of us? For many years now, there's been a particular poll that's tracked to gauge the optimism of our country. It's the, "Are we on the right track" question. Year after year the results are the same; a large majority of Americans believe we are going in the wrong direction. Now, I know that poll is largely politicized and with just a little bit of optimism there are many, many things we could bring up to show that life is pretty good. But I think the poll is consistently negative because we feel this gnawing pessimism about our future. In spite of all the good that's happening around us, a pessimism about our future still persists, I think, because we know the darkness and death that lives deep inside our own soul. There are a lot of self-esteem messages and self-improvement conferences trying to convince us that we're really pretty good, but that's only the case because we know the opposite is true. We try to conceal, hide, and deny the reality of the darkness and death that lurks in our soul, but it takes a perfect combination of lies from Satan to convince us otherwise. So, we're rightly pessimistic; we are rightly depressed about the future.

But that's without God. That's without his life-giving grace and mercy. Without God there isn't a lot to hope for. But with God, we have a living hope; a hope for life. But we don't see this life perfectly and while there are plenty of things that convince us that maybe it's not coming, it will. We can have confidence.

Why? Why can we have such confidence? That's the third critical statement in our key verse this morning. Vs. 3 says God has caused us to be born again to a living hope *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*. Basically, because Jesus is raised from the dead, we can have a sure and living hope. We can have absolute confidence in the life God promises because Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

Now, I want to make sure you know what the Bible means by resurrection. Don't think that this is some fancy religious word that speaks of some mystical, out of body experience. Resurrection describes something concrete, something you can see with your own two eyes. It describes the new life Jesus was given after he was murdered on the cross and lay in his grave for 3 days. To show you this resurrection of Jesus, listen to the actual report of his resurrection from the Gospel of Matthew (READ 28:1-10).

Did you catch all of that? Jesus died on a Friday; the first day of the week was a Sunday. He was dead; in fact, the Romans wanted to make sure he was dead so they shoved a spear up into his abdominal cavity. But God raised him from the dead; Jesus was resurrected. Just like it was reported in Matthew, Jesus was no longer lying still in his grave. Instead, he was meeting his followers on the road.

Here's what Peter is saying: you can have a sure and living hope that you will receive all of the born again benefits God has for you because Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Jesus being resurrected is God's proof to you and me that sin will not win, that death will not get the last word, that Satan and all the powers of darkness in this world and even in your soul will be defeated and thrown into the pit of hell so you can experience nothing but joy and life and power from God. This is why Easter is such a big deal for us who follow Jesus, for us who believe in God's word. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is God's way of guaranteeing that He is absolutely real, absolutely true, and absolutely good.

I wonder if you are born again; I wonder if you are now experiencing the beginnings of God's life in you instead the death of sin. That's how this all gets kicked off. something that happens when one is born again. First of all, one's own sin and darkness becomes painfully clear. And it's not just that we know that we've done wrong things, but that makes us guilty before God. Our conscience is burdened by this guilt; we recognize that our sins deserve punishment. We understand that we will stand before God and give an account of our sins.

Thankfully, there's more. If that was the only message it wouldn't be good news. The second thing that happens when we are born again is that we see and savor the glories and beauties of Jesus. We see Jesus as a merciful, kind, gracious Savior and Lord. We look upon the cross that Jesus died upon and count that a gift for the forgiveness of our sins. We begin longing and desiring to know God more and more because we are grateful and appreciative of the gift God is giving to us.

Has this happened to you; have you been born again? Did you notice that it's not quite a decision you make, but it's an act of God in your life. You do make a decision; you do say, "God I'm guilty; and Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for me. I am going to trust you and follow you with my entire life." You must decide to follow Jesus. But more than a decision it's an awakening; it's a new birth. When a plant begins to grow in the spring after the death of winter, it doesn't decide to sprout and reach for the sun. It just does because it is alive! And I hope that is happening in some of you. Yes, decide! Yes, follow Jesus! That's the only way you will receive the forgiveness of your sins and the new life that comes from God. But someone born again can't help but say yes to Jesus.