

THE NEED FOR A NEW BIRTH

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Text: John 3:1-8

People have always had a curiosity about heaven, but they have not always agreed on how to secure their place there. Invariably, someone will have the idea or hope that he or she can earn a place in heaven through good works.

Therefore, it is not surprising that 55 percent of Americans believe “a good person can earn his way to heaven,” but an alarmingly high percentage of professing Christians believe the same thing. Recent studies by George Barna show 40 percent of those in America who say they have committed their life to Jesus Christ agree with the statement, “If you are a good person or do enough good things for others, you can earn a place in heaven.” Such thinking runs contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture (Ephesians 2:8–9), dilutes evangelistic fervor, and gives scores of people fictitious hope.

Moody, March/April 1998, p. 46; Baptist Standard, March 12, 1997, p. 8

Perhaps Nicodemus, a Jewish man, a descendant of Abraham, and evidently an important person in the theological circles of the Jewish faith had realized that his heredity and position in life might not be enough to secure him a place in heaven. Perhaps it was this concern that brought him to Jesus on this occasion.

But before Nicodemus could finish breaching the subject, Jesus, knowing the heart of Nicodemus and why he had come searching Him out on this night, appears to interrupt Nicodemus with an answer to the question that He knew Nicodemus was going to ask. The question was, “How does one receive eternal life?”

In the text we hear what Jesus has to say in response to that burning question to which Nicodemus, and all of us, want to know the answer. Listen as Jesus points out two important *truths* concerning our pursuit of eternal life.

I. THE NATURAL BIRTH OFFERS ONLY THOSE THINGS CONTAINED IN THIS PRESENT LIFE.

A. Our natural birth only contains the seeds of a natural existence.

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. John 3:5-6 NIV italics added

B. Nothing of this natural life can secure for us an eternal life.

The plan of salvation seems to be simply defined in Scripture, but so many people continue to look for eternal life through other means. Rodney Hines was a thirty-six-year-old from Chico, California, when he was arrested for stealing, eating, and snorting the cremated remains of four people. He told the police he snorted some of the ashes and sprinkled others on his food because he wanted to obtain "everlasting life." The lost need to hear and the saved need to proclaim, "Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life." --Houston Chronicle, Dec. 31, 1995, p. 15A

However,

II. THE SPIRITUAL BIRTH SECURES ALL THAT IS A PART OF AN ETERNAL LIFE.

A. Our spiritual birth or re-birth is a creative act of God alone—it cannot be accomplished by us.

NOTE: Jesus asserted that the entrance into the kingdom of God that Nicodemus desired could not be achieved by legalism or outward conformity. It requires an inner change. Membership in the kingdom of God is not a prerogative of any particular race or culture, nor is it hereditary. It is given only by the direct act of God. The origin and the destination of the wind are unknown to the one who feels it and acknowledges its reality. Just so, the new life of one born of the Spirit is unexplainable by ordinary reasoning; and its outcome is unpredictable, though its actuality is undeniable." *Expositor's Bible Comentary*

B. Jesus alone has purchased and secured the eternal destiny of those who will believe.

It is amazing how people will invest their time and money in the pursuit of making this life as comfortable and enjoyable as possible, yet they fail to appreciate the investment that Jesus has made in purchasing for us an eternal place of rest and peace.

“Given the opportunity, how much would you pay for a place in heaven? A recent survey asked the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans that very question. This elite group of about one million households earns at least \$250,000 per year and has a net worth of at least \$2.5 million. These millionaires gave the following breakdown of what they would spend on certain unique opportunities. For great beauty, the average price they would willingly pay was \$83,000. For talent, they would spend \$285,000. Great intellect commandeered \$407,000. They said true love was worth \$487,000. The highest bid on any subject went for a place in heaven. To secure their spot in eternity, these wealthy Americans said they would part with \$640,000. Isn't it interesting that even if heaven could be bought, those who have the most money don't want to spend more than 25 percent of their net worth to get there. What a stark contrast to the 100 percent investment Christ made to secure our eternal destiny.” --HomeLife, July 1998, p. 66

CONCLUSION

Superstitious beliefs have made it impossible to get a hotel room on the thirteenth floor because that number is skipped when counting the floors of a high-rise building. Mild superstition may also cause you to think twice before leaving your car on space thirteen in a parking garage, but the powers of evil use superstition in mighty ways to imprison the beliefs and actions of many people. During July of 2000, this was made very evident through a most bizarre wedding ceremony in Mohanpur, India. In this village just thirty-five miles north of Calcutta, a four-year-old girl was married to a stray dog for the purpose of removing an evil influence on her life. Anju Karmakar had suffered fractured bones, several illnesses, a severe burn, and once fell into a pond. An astrologer advised her Hindu father, Subal

Karmakar, that a wedding ceremony would transfer the evil effects of the planet Saturn from the girl to the dog. So with over 150 guests present, Hindu priests chanted hymns while the little girl and dog were married. One resident who attended the ceremony said, "He is superstitious, but why should I care if he wants to waste money and give us a feast." In response to such criticism, the young bride's father replied, "I did the right thing for my child. My grandfather had arranged a marriage of a relative with a dog forty years ago and the remedy worked." Experiences like this remind us why Jesus said he came to set the captives free.

--Houston Chronicle, July 15, 2000, p. 24A

Ultimately, we are faced with the decision to either trust in our own ability to save ourselves or to place our trust in Jesus Christ whom the Word of God declares to be the only one who can transform our eternal souls. Only one remedy will work. Choose wisely!