

The Sound of The Word

In the often quoted reference of 2 Timothy, we read that: “all scripture is given *by inspiration of God*, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ...” (2 Tim. 3:16). Where we read the words “*inspiration of God*”, other renderings have it “*God breathed* - the idea being that all the words of Scriptures are breathed out by the Father, and written by the human penmen selected to record the words spoken.

Again, in Isaiah 55, we read of the words spoken by Yahweh:

“as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: *so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth*, it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:10-11).

Notice the highlighted phrase: the Inspired Word is that which goes forth out of the mouth of the Creator (i.e. breathed out), to accomplish the purpose of Yahweh. We see this same principle in the Genesis Creation account: the Creator gave the command (i.e. “Let there be light”), and it was so (and there was light): the command was spoken (i.e. breathed out), and it accomplished that which the Speaker pleased.

Interestingly, the Creation account is alluded to by the Apostle in this context:

“...*God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts*, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

The first spoken words in Scripture comprised the command “*let there be light*,” and the inspired Apostle is here drawing a comparison: this is the same way that light shines into the hearts of men: i.e. through the speaking of the Gospel. Just as the word breathed out caused the natural creation to be formed, even so by the breathing out of the words of the Gospel, a New Creation is formed, with light being caused to shine into the hearts of men by the Word received, understood, and believed. And of course, Messiah being the “light of the world” (Jno. 1:9), he is also pre-eminently the Word “made flesh” (Jno. 1:14), sent forth to accomplish that which his Father pleased. These principles, as we shall see, provide the background for some of the sayings of Messiah as recorded in the New Testament reading of John chapter 3.

JOHN CHAPTER 3

The context of this chapter is that Nicodemus approached the Master one night - under the cover of darkness - and expressed his belief that Christ was “a teacher come from God”. The

Master then replied: “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”. Nicodemus requested further clarification, to which the Master replied “... 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. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit” (Jno. 3:1-6).

We find then, that there are two ‘births’ which a man must undergo as a prerequisite for entry into the Kingdom: 1. Born of water, 2. Born of Spirit – which we shall consider in turn.

BORN OF WATER

Being “born of water” would appear to be a reference to Baptism, the means by which a believer seeks to identify with the death of Messiah by being “buried” in water, emerging to a newness of life. So the apostle describes: “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, *even so we also should walk in newness of life*” (Rom. 6:4). This “newness of life” is elsewhere associated with a rebirth. So we read the following: “... being *born again*, not of incorruptible seed, but of incorruptible, *by the Word of God* which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:23). Notice the point here: the rebirth is a spiritual new life, and the means by which this takes place is through the influence of the incorruptible seed of “the Word of God”. Hence it is said that the believer is “born again ... by the Word of God”. The exhortational principles here are obvious: in baptism and onwards through life, the believer must live as one who has been raised to a newness of life, being devoted to the doing of the Father’s Will.

It is sometimes suggested that being “born of water” is a reference to natural birth, the means by which we are brought into the world at the beginning of our physical lives. However the fact that Jesus refers to it as being a prerequisite for entry into the Kingdom would appear to exclude this, and as we shall see, being “born of water” comprises a rebirth for believers, whereas being “born of Spirit” can only apply in the first instance, to the Lord Jesus Christ

BORN OF SPIRIT

Being “born of Spirit” is also a necessary step to entry into immortality, without which a man “cannot enter into the kingdom of God”. There is a parallel passage to this teaching, in 1 Corinthians 15, which it is profitable for us to consider:

Firstly, the Apostle speaks of the resurrection: “it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body...” (verse 44). This compares with Messiah’s teaching that “that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit” (Jno. 3:6). The Apostle is here speaking of the resurrection to life and immortality:- comparing the two statements of the Apostle and the Master, we find that being “born of Spirit” is being raised “a spiritual body”. (Interestingly as an aside, Psalm 110 speaks of the resurrected saints as coming “from the womb of the morning” (Psa. 110:3)).

Secondly, 1 Corinthians 15 teaches: “as is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly” (verse 48) – this also parallels the words of the Master, as cited above.

And Thirdly, 1 Corinthians 15 describes: “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor. 15:50) - which parallels the Master’s teaching that without a rebirth it is not possible to enter the kingdom.

The point is further made in Matthew chapter 19, where the Master addresses his disciples: “Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in *the regeneration (Greek: rebirth)* when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mat. 19:28). Here, the resurrection is described as a “rebirth” – or, as Jesus taught Nicodemus, being “born of spirit”.

THE SOUNDING OF THE SPIRIT

Having demonstrated the need for a twofold rebirth, Messiah continued in this theme, to show the means by which this takes place. We began by considering the importance of the Gospel-Word being preached, for that is the basis upon which we are ‘begotten again’. The Word is “breathed” out, to accomplish the Will of the Almighty. Returning to this theme, we read the further words of our Master in John 3:

“the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit”

Here, the Greek word for “wind” is the usual word for “Spirit”. Bro Thomas translates this: “*The Spirit breathes where he pleases*” – which is in accord with our considerations above. The Spirit breathes out words as the fiat of Divine Will. Those words comprise the sounding of the Spirit exhaled, so to speak – words which are sounded forth, but seldom understood. Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, “**Thou** hearest the sound thereof, *but canst not tell* whence it cometh and whither it goeth” (Jno. 3:8). Nicodemus heard the words, but could not comprehend their meaning just yet. In fact, this was true of the Jews generally. We have already spoken of how Messiah was the Word “made flesh” – but compare these words of Christ with those spoken to the Jews in that capacity:

“... I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go” (Jno. 8:14)

The sounding of the Spirit went forth in the words of Messiah, but for the majority, it was not understood - and Messiah’s own origin and destiny was similarly not understood. Again, there is a powerful exhortation here: rather than be in ignorance of the holy things of God,

like the Jews were, we must endeavour to learn all that we can, to know the divine origin of Messiah, and whither he is to go to accomplish the purpose of God in him.

The Master concluded his saying in this place thus: “so is everyone that is born of the Spirit” (Jno. 3:8). We saw earlier the being “born of the Spirit” is to rise from the womb of the dust to a new life. In this sense therefore, it is plain that so far there is only One who can claim to be born of the Spirit – Messiah himself.

By contrast to the Jews who knew not Messiah, and whither he was to go the apostle Peter asked him directly “wither goest thou” (Jno. 13:36). To which Messiah replied: “*whither I go* thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards” (Jno. 13:36). Christ has gone before as a forerunner to prepare many abiding places in his Father’s House for his disciples. As it is written again in 1 Corinthians 15:

“... in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: *Christ the firstfruits*; afterwards they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:22-23)

There is also the sense in which Peter would “follow” Christ though suffering. Peter was later moved by the Spirit to describe how: “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). In the immediate sense, Peter was to follow Christ’s steps in suffering, but in the ultimate sense, he will follow Messiah through the suffering into the glory that is yet to come.

We find then, that the principles embodied in this chapter relate to Christ as the Word Made Flesh, but also “so is everyone that is born of the spirit” (Jno. 3:8). Being as that Christ is the only one who has been “born of the Spirit” to inherit the kingdom, these words apply directly to him. But we also seek that kingdom soon to come, when we might also be born of the Spirit. Knowing that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, we look to the time when by Yahweh’s mercy we might be raised up from the grave, to inherit glory, honour and immortality.

Christopher Maddocks