

New Birth and Baptism with Holy Spirit

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, one of the things that you've probably noticed about Robin's testimony [given earlier] was the importance of taking definite steps. That might be a good place to begin to share a few things about the New Birth and the baptism with the Holy Spirit. For most of us here who are born of God the New Birth was a definite step for us. Now, we might only realize it when we look back on it, and we might not all be able to put a date and a time and a place to the moment we were born of God, but most of us know there was a time when we felt that God was the Creator of the world, separate from us. And then there was another time when we felt something like what Robin said; we felt we were God's child and we felt a Spirit within us crying, "Father" so for most of us who are born of God here this evening, there was a definite time.

John Wesley put it strongly, he says, "There was a change from darkness into light; a change from hell into heaven. It was a change from sadness and depression into joy and peace." Whether we all can say "Amen" to all those things, we would agree that there was a definite moment when we were born of God. I think for most of us here, it differed; for some of us it was like bells ringing and it was a great sense that our sins were forgiven and that we were on our way to heaven. For many of us, it was just a quiet time when we said, "Lord, my life is empty and I feel I don't know where I'm going, and I don't know who I am. My life is filled with things that apparently you regard as sins, and Lord, I do not know what to do. I do believe that your son Jesus has done something for me, so Lord I want him in my heart, and I want a relationship with you."

Then most of us knew that if we did confess our sins, he was faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So most of us did what I certainly did; I knelt down at my bedside and confessed my sins, one by one, as much as I could remember them. Then Jesus said, "Except you repent, you will all likewise perish," and I repented and believed what they said; that repentance was not just being sorry or feeling remorse, it was stopping the sins, stopping them. I had sins in my life that I felt I couldn't stop, but I felt that what God was requiring of me at that moment was a determination to stop them; to stop them at least that day, and he would give me grace for tomorrow. So I turned from the things that I was doing wrong and from living for my own selfish satisfaction and then I asked Jesus to come into my heart, the same as Robin did.

I was a fairly "good" kind of little boy in Ireland, but I certainly had real troubles when I came to seventeen years old with the feeling that there were things that were wrong in my life that I couldn't control, and they were things that were going to send me to hell unless they were forgiven. So I had a very definite sense that God had forgiven me my sins and that Jesus had come into my heart.

So for most of us who are born of God, it was a definite step like that. So maybe I could encourage you by asking, have you taken a definite step? It doesn't matter too much what feelings you have when you take that step that is virtually unimportant. But the important thing is that you take the step. And if you ask "Why"; because the best way of showing faith in the car that I have is getting in and turning the key and driving it. That's finally your declaration that you trust that thing; that's why a step of faith is important. It's finally saying, "God, as far as I can see in history you've gone out on a limb with your son's death, which is written into history; breaking

history into BC and AD. You've done things for me, and Lord God I will do things to show you that I believe that and I trust you." That's about it. If you say, "Is it very important to stop the sins?" Yes, just for that reason; it's not just for the sake of the effect it'll have on your friends or your relatives, or the kindness that they'll see, but it's you putting your actions and your money where your mouth is. It's you declaring to God, "I believe this and to prove it to you Lord, I'm doing this, and this, and this."

That's why many of us have actually been in that position where we've been at an altar and we have not been able, somehow, to sense that God had forgiven us and the Holy Spirit said to us, "Go and apologize to the person that you insulted yesterday." And we had to get up and go and apologize and come back to the altar and then everything just flowed through. And it wasn't for the sake of that person; it was because God required that if he acted to show his forgiveness of us, we would act before we would be able to receive it.

So it is important loved ones. I used to argue with those people who said, "Oh, you must have a definite time." And I thought, "No, I've always been a Christian." John Wesley says, "You know, there are those who say, 'I've always been a Christian. I've always loved God. I've never known the need for such a change.'" Well, that was my position for a long time until I saw that, no; God requires me to exercise my faith and declare it by doing something. And that's it loved ones; you receive Jesus by faith, and faith is action.

I'd say once more, before talking about the baptism with the Holy Spirit, if you are sitting there and like me, you're saying, "I believe all you're saying. I think all that's true. I agree with it all -- why can't I sense that God has forgiven me?" It's because you don't "think" your way into a relationship with God, you act your way into a relationship with God. You do something. If you're not born of God this evening, I'd stay behind after service. I'd come up to the stage and I'd kneel down and pray, or I'd sit in my seat and pray, or I'd go to the prayer room, or I'd go upstairs, but I would take a definite step tonight.

You notice that's what made a difference in Robin's life; when you take a definite stand. Brothers and sisters, you would not believe how important that is. Honestly, I thought I was an academic sophisticate and thought, "That's for poor old coalmen in Ireland who didn't go to university and didn't know anything." But no, it's for all of us. It's for all us; whether we think we're clever or whether we think we're not, whether we think we're dumb or we think we're sophisticated. There's only one way into the New Birth, and that's to put yourself out on a limb say, "God, you put your hand there. I put mine there." And for most of us, it is an honest confession of our sins, and an honest repentance, and an honest receiving of Jesus into our hearts.

Many of us have done that and have walked reasonably well for the first few months and have been able to witness, read the Bible and pray, and have been able to obey God in the things that he was telling us. And then it varies, sometimes it's after three months, sometimes it's after six months, sometimes it's after a year to two years after you're born of God, this is what happens; you're life goes up, then down, up, then down; the old switchback life. You begin to find periods when you go down in your awareness of God's presence and times when you go up. Easter services you go up and then you go down during the summertime, and then you up again in the fall when everything gets going. And then they get sharper and they don't go with the seasons but they go with the times you're able to obey God, and the times you're not able to obey God and you begin to find that there is within you something besides the voice of Jesus.

One of the beauties of the New Birth is that you very quickly find a voice inside you that makes you know what God wants you to do, and you find an urging within you that makes you want to do it. Three months to two years after you're born of God, you begin to find a different voice and a different urging within you; a voice that says, "No, no, that's not really important. It's not really important to get up and read the Bible every day. It's not really important to pray every day. No, it's not a big thing that you didn't speak up in that discussion in the office, it doesn't matter. No, it doesn't matter, really, if you're tired, just ease back." And gradually, gradually, you begin to ease back from some of the commitments that you made to God.

Now, the strange thing is that along with that suggestion of rationalizing your obedience, there comes within you a growing desire to have your own way. And for most of us it is shocking because it is worse than what we had before we were children of God; it is something that makes us hate God, it seems, at times. It makes us want to rebel against him. It makes us sick and tired of many of the people who say they're Christians, makes us sick and tired of many of the things we read in the Bible. The Bible says, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." And we find, "No, no, I can't do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me. I resent that person and I can't help my resentment. I have a critical attitude to that person and I can't help it, I can't do anything about it. So I can't do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

And then we begin to read verses like, "Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin," and we begin to realize that the Bible says that anybody who knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. So we go home after work is over at night and we go in and lose our temper with a roommate or with a loved one that we live with. We know it, and we know it before we go in, but something happens and we lose our temper. So we find that there is within us a hard knot of self that we are increasingly unable to deal with. Now loved ones that's the defeated Christian life; that's the carnal life.

Maybe you should note that a person who isn't born of God can't live the carnal life. A person who isn't born of God is normally fairly happy and has arranged enough drugs, or enough alcohol, or enough fun, or enough excitement to make life reasonably bearable. It's only a person who is born of God, who has tasted of Jesus' Spirit and has something of his Spirit within them that experiences the exposure of the self life, because until Jesus' Spirit comes into you, that carnal life cannot be exposed. But the longer you walk on in this way, the worse it becomes.

That's what happened certainly, in my life; I tried to walk on in an outwardly victorious, obedient life, and inwardly I had this problem with inward sin, with a desire, increasingly, to have my own way. I had an increasing desire to stand up for my own rights, a desire to be impatient, resentful, irritable, and selfish, and all the things that are listed as the works of the flesh. Loved ones, for many of us, that has become the normal Christian life for us. It isn't the normal Christian life; its agony and its torture, because you're trying to keep up an outward appearance and all this stuff is inside.

It's a bit like Robin said, "You have to go to this meeting but you feel, 'The last place I want to be is that meeting.'" So you're doing Christian things, but you don't feel Christian inside; you feel the very opposite of Christian. Now that's what many of us have experienced who have not been baptized with the Spirit. And really loved ones, there's no mystery in the baptism of the spirit. The meaning of the Greek word is "a good guide." "Baptizo" in Greek means to be immersed and that's what being baptized with the spirit is; it is to be immersed in the Holy Spirit, who already dwells

within you.

Now if you say, "Well, why can't you realize that you should be immersed at the very beginning of your New Birth?" I don't know. Maybe we don't know what it is. Maybe we don't know enough about it to even understand it. Maybe it's like you bring a candle into a dark room and it's only then that you begin to see how dark the corners of the room are. Before the candle comes in you don't see the darkness of the corners. But for some reason we are not able to realize the depths of that self until the Holy Spirit comes into us and then we realize that he is in us, but we are not immersed in him, we are not baptized with him, and that's actually what God is beginning to try to bring home to us.

He's saying to us, "There is part of you that wants to do my will, but don't you see there's a hard knot inside you that hates my will and that does not want it. I want to tell you what my Son actually did for you on Calvary." And it's then that God began to point to the truth that Jesus had died for me and I had died with him and that the reason I was not immersed with the Holy Spirit or baptized with the Holy Spirit; the reason I was not filled with him completely was that I actually was not willing to be crucified with Jesus, and I was not willing to die with him. There were all kinds of things in my life that I wanted for myself. I was willing to serve God with some of my life but I wasn't willing to serve him with all of it. I wasn't willing to be at his beck and call.

I wasn't willing to be made a fool for his sake. I wasn't willing to give up my job and go somewhere abroad if he told me to. And actually that wasn't the worst; the worst was that I wasn't even willing to get up out of a chair when he told me, and walk over to a door and trust him to have somebody there for me to speak to. I wasn't willing to trust him for even four steps, when it came to it.

I discovered that I was very much in control of my own life and I remember reading those words that I shared with you some time ago where Jesus said to Peter, "When you were young you girded yourself and you walked where ever you wanted, but there's going to come a time when somebody else will gird you and they will take you whither you do not want to go." Then it says in the next verse, "Jesus said this to show Peter the death that he would die," because it's reckoned that Peter died the same death as Jesus; on a cross. It was then that God's Spirit began to get through to me and say, "You're not in that position, are you? You're not willing to go wherever I lead you. You only want to go where you think it's wise to go and if it hurts you or if it destroys your pride, or destroys your reputation you don't want any part of it." And I began to see that this was so.

Loved ones, for most us there comes a time in our lives when we need to come to a new consecration of ourselves to Jesus. I don't fully know why it is, maybe it's that you see him first as your Savior and then he begins to show that he has to be your Lord as well or you lose him even as your Savior. Maybe it's because he calls us to follow him and brings us along some fairly easy paths at the beginning and then he begins to show us what he wants us to do in this life for him. Because it seems for many of us the crucial decision is are we going to live our lives for ourselves or are we going to be utterly at his disposal to do whatever he wants?

That's what it was for me, especially with career -- that was the issue: was I going to continue to live my career the best way I could for my own satisfaction, or was I going to be willing to do whatever he wanted me to do? Then there came a time in my own life, it must be a glorious fifteen years ago, when I came to the point where I said, "Lord, even if you want me to be nothing for you, if you want me to be a failure for you, that's all I care about, Lord Jesus. To be with you on the cross, is dearer to me than to be with anybody else in heaven. So whatever you want Lord and

wherever you want to take me or whatever you want to do with me, that's it."

I can't tell you the simplicity that came into my life that Saturday morning because at last I was listening to only one drummer and listening to only one voice. Life became simple and clean and clear from that moment and brought a great victory into my life and brought the external blessing of the gifts of the Spirit and ministry. But loved ones, it seems for most of us that there needs to come that time in our lives. Now, if you say to me, "Well, did it happen that way in the New Testament?" I think normally in the New Testament, as you would say, "They got the whole ball of wax;" they entered into the fullness of the Spirit. It seemed that that was the normal experience.

Except that there were two occasions that have been recorded in the New Testament and presumably, there must be more that weren't recorded, indeed three if you think of Paul, but there were certainly two occasions; one when Phillip's converts and then Apollos' converts were baptized, and you should listen to this, they were baptized by John's Baptism. They were baptized into John's baptism for the repentance of sins. Peter points out that John's baptism was a baptism into the name of him who was to come -- Jesus. And neither of those groups seemed to be filled with the Holy Spirit until Peter and John came down and prayed for them.

And I wonder is that some kind of clue? I wonder do many of us in these days and I know you won't like it, but I wonder do we in fact become "good Jews" where we think we've been born of God but we're really baptized into John's baptism for the remission of our sins. Because the Jews were able to have their sins remitted, in the sense of covered; their sins were not imputed to them. They were able to do that and they knew baptism for the freedom from the guilt of their sins and I wonder do many of us enter into that instead of entering into, as Paul would explain to the people who are about to be baptized, "Don't you know that those of us who have been baptized into Jesus' have been baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Are there any of us here this evening perhaps, who have never actually been baptized into Jesus' death? I wonder are some of you like me? I was horrified when I first thought of the idea. I thought, "Look, that was the whole deal I entered into, that Jesus died for me so that I wouldn't have to die. Now, the Bible is telling me I have to die." And I wonder are any of us like that, where we feel, "Yeah, we've been baptized into Jesus' name for the remission of our sins and we know our sin is forgiven, but certainly our lives are not victorious lives." In that case, I wonder; do we need to come the same way as Apollos' converts and Phillip's converts, and actually enter into the immersion with the Holy Spirit which, maybe I should point out, has not anything to do necessarily with water. I don't think the water creates or causes anything internally in us, but the important thing is that we would enter into identification with Jesus in his death because that's what Romans 6 says, "If we were buried with him, we shall certainly rise with him." And that's the meaning of the New Birth; that our old self is buried and destroyed and a new self is born, a new creation is born; anybody in Christ is a new creature.

Now, I don't know where you stand, but I think some of us might be in that same position as some of the loved ones from the New Testament, even though the norm was that you'd enter into the fullness of the Holy Spirit at the same time as the New Birth. Yet even in those days, there were those two groups, plus Paul himself who entered in in two steps. If you say to me, "Well, what's your definition of the baptism of the Holy Spirit" Jesus gave us the final word when he said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth. No one knows the sound thereof, where it goes, or where it comes from.

So is the Holy Spirit.”

I do believe that each one of us here should see that the glory of our position is that God has a separate arrangement with each one in this room. That's right. You are not the same as anybody else in this room and you are not the same as anybody in the whole world. Your dear Father made you and you're unique, and he has a unique way to go with you and it seems very dangerous to try to tar us all with the same brush. Different ones have entered into the fullness of the Holy Spirit in different ways. Some of us have had just great a sense of cleanliness and victory. Some of us have had a great experience of a sense of praise of God. Some have spoken with tongues. Some have had no sense of emotion at all. It seems that we've come in in all kind of ways. It seems the mode is not important. What is important is that you determine yourself, what you have actually taken a stand for in your own life. Are you born of God? Have you victory over sin and have you a victorious witnessing life and a victorious life at home? Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit and are you going on into the depths of Jesus? It seems those are the questions that we should be dealing with.

Now any questions, loved ones, because it's really that important that you ask and that I try to answer in sensible ways that you will understand.

Question: Robin leads the New Birth seminar, and he's saying, is a real understanding of the New Birth really the fullness of the Spirit?

Answer: The way God has led me to preach on Sunday mornings is to go for everything that the New Testament shows us. It does seem that because so many of us have been brought up in what I would describe as perhaps less than full gospel preaching, that many of us have entered into a New Birth that may be very close to simply what the Jews experienced. So it seems to me we do have to deal with that. I don't think we should ignore it all and say, "I think I'd have been in real trouble if the person that told me about it had said, 'Oh, no you've been born of God, and then you have everything. That's all you need.'" It seems to me very important to recognize that a great number of us have entered into something that is less than a full experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

I think it's possible also, that God does lead many of us through two steps. I think it is possible that maybe, the old illustration about the candle doesn't prove anything because you can't prove theology from an illustration, but maybe the illustration is some indication of the way God rules us with his Spirit so that the candle first, has to come into the room before you can see the darkness round about. And there's no doubt there is some sense in which you can hardly be aware of carnality until you're aware of the Spirit of Jesus within you, moving you towards God. So there does seem some wisdom, Robin, in making a distinction especially, in the New Birth seminar, and urging loved ones to at least take the first step with God.

There is a little difference in this way, the New Birth is often a very selfish thing and God probably allows it to be. It's often very concerned with our guilt, and our need of forgiveness, and our need of heaven, whereas the baptism with the Spirit is essentially an unselfish thing. It's, "What can I do for Jesus and for his glory?" So it does seem there is a difference of emphasis in the two experiences that you can draw out. Often, the first experience is concerned with the forgiveness of sins; the second experience is concerned with cleansing from sin. The first experience is concerned with the guilt of sin -- getting away from that; the second, with the freedom from the power of sin. [John] Wesley would have said, "First is the restoration of the

favor of God; the second is the restoration of the image of God.” So it does seem that one is concerned with our relationship with God; the other is concerned almost with a relationship with the world and a real change.

Question: It seems to me that Jesus meets our need and pointing to our purposes, he gives us a personal purpose, and then when you're in that relationship where we have some idea [inaudible 30:12] then we realize that secondly, we shouldn't even be in a position to recognize it, really, and then we accept it.

I do tend to agree Robin, with Clyde that it does seem that God woos us that way. It's as if we're going in all directions and he has to at least get us going down this road before he can get us into the middle of the road. It seems almost as if he has to get our attention first. And that's why many of us would testify probably, to the first need being a forgiveness of the guilt that we felt because of our sins. That was my concern, it was my sins. Whereas my concern with the baptism of the Holy Spirit was my sin, my inward independence of God, which often didn't show itself in outward sins, but it was there all the time.

Question: Is it possible Pastor that in John 1:12, where we're told that receiving Jesus gives us the power to become his child, and that second experience that you referred to is beyond that to the point where we're now making a commitment for life which would be the bride to the groom, the extension – the extending of the hand that Jesus says, “Here is my engagement ring, will you accept it?” And the bride says, “Yes.” If you can remember, the church is the bride and the marriage hasn't taken place yet but he still has that engagement, which is a commitment over and beyond that childish commitment that we had when we first received Jesus.

Yes, that's right. It does seem that there's an abiding in Christ that begins at the baptism of the Holy Spirit that is partial, perhaps, when we're born of God. And it's interesting that you brought up the verse because I think I could save you even from the exegesis that you found difficulty with there, because the Greek word is not power it's “exousia” and it's right too, as many as received him he then gave you right to become the children of God. So you're right; that gives you the right to regard yourself as a member of the family but the fullness of the Spirit gives you the power to be a member of the family, so it is true.

Robin and I were talking before we came in to service and he was saying, “It's a miserable thing being a weak Christian” and it is. You'd be better way out in the world, knowing nothing of God than to be a defeated Christian who is not baptized with the Holy Spirit. It is a hideous position to be in; it is the most difficult and the saddest position, it really is. It is far easier and far more joyful and satisfying to surrender everything to Jesus and to go all the way with him.

And loved ones, could I put this to you -- there is no other way to go. I mean, waken up! There is no other way to go. This is God; this is our God. We who have got to the point of believing that there's a God and that he's the Father of Jesus while the atheist may pretend, “No, it's not true, and therefore there is an alternative way to go,” but we who once we took the first step of saying, “We believe in God,” and then the second step that he's the Father of Jesus, what other way are you going to go? What way are you going to live your life if it's not wholly and totally for Jesus? Are you going to live it for yourself and then get to heaven, which obviously if you believe this much you believe there's and heaven and hell, and then you're going to get to that gate and what are you going to say? You can't say, “Well, I went halfway with you” because God will say, “But I went all the way for you. I gave everything for you.”

Loved ones it's foolishness this talk about a half-converted life or a defeated Christian life. Only insane people would try to run that kind of controlled surrender. Now, I agree with you, I did the same as you but we're deceived; Satan deceives us into thinking that this is the best life and this is the right life. It's no life. It's no life because "the good that I would I cannot do and the evil I hate, that's the very thing I do."

So loved ones maybe for most of us here this evening the first step is taking a stand tonight. Maybe you can't take a whole stand, but maybe you can move a bit as Robin moved, you can take a stand tonight in the quietness before God and say "Lord, I am not baptized with the Holy Spirit. I do not have the fruit of the Spirit in my life. I often feel dryness. I often feel I have to force myself to go to a prayer meeting or to go to this church. I often find myself letting you down with other people. So Lord, I need something. I don't know that it's what those people in the Pentecostal church got or what this Pastor says he got, I don't know if it's that But Lord I need something and for want of a better name, I'm gonna call it I need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. But Lord, I need that, so I acknowledge that before you tonight." That's an important first step, loved ones and God would honor that action because that's putting your money where your mouth is. That's taking a stand in faith, acknowledging what you feel, and for many of us here that might be the right step to take.

Now there are others of here who need to see that the glory is -- it's all been done --that's the glory of it. The glory is that each one of us here has already been remade. I know it boggles your mind if you haven't come into it, but that's the truth. We all have been remade. Christ has died and we have all died with him and we've been remade, and there is a perfect you that can be made real this very moment if you have faith.

There's a faucet on the wall and you say, "There's water in that faucet," and you will get it as soon as you turn it on. I can sit here and say, "Oh, I believe it, I believe it." But only when I go over and turn the faucet on will the water come out. It's like that; there's a new you that the Holy Spirit can make alive this moment, one who is able to obey God totally if you simply have faith in that and act on that basis. That's it; if you simply, from this moment on, would act and speak and think as if your old, miserable, self had been crucified with Christ and you had a new perfect creation that was exactly like him, replacing it, then that's what you'd experience. That new creation would exist that very moment filled with the Holy Spirit. I know it's baffling, but it's true.

Let us pray.

Dear God, we're so used to struggling, struggling, struggling, and we almost hate to give up the struggle, and yet we see that the victory is not won by struggling but that it is true; we have been crucified with Christ, and if we've been buried with him we'll certainly rise with him. And that means that if he is already risen and now has been raised to the right hand of God, then we also have been raised with him above every rule and authority and dominion and power, and that's where we are this very moment. And the moment we believe that and act on it, that moment all the powers of Jesus are available to us; the powers to heal sicknesses, the powers to live joyously and obediently. Lord, I for one intend to live that way and each of us would say in quietness what we intend to do. We thank you, Lord.

Dear Lord, we're tired of living this half-life, tired of living by faith in ourselves. Lord, we do

believe that the way out is a glorious way and not this miserable, trying, striving way that we've been at. Lord, we will step out with you tonight. Lord Jesus, thank you that you did destroy us with yourself on the cross, and thank you that we have been made new in you and Lord, that there is a new me that is taking place inside me at this very moment, as I believe. Thank you, Lord Jesus that the victory is by faith and we can believe that now, tonight, and act on that and Holy Spirit, you will direct our steps and all we have to do is follow. We would do that now, tonight, so that our lives will be your lives, Lord Jesus, led by your Spirit for your glory.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and ever more. Amen.