

Begotten us again (Quality: Good)

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Preacher: Howard, Kenneth (1921-1992)

- [0 : 00] We turn this afternoon to the words found in the first epistle of Peter in the first chapter and at the third verse.
- The first epistle of Peter, chapter 1, verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith, unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
- Now, here the apostle, as I have already indicated, is setting forth the comfort of the gospel to the Christian pilgrim, of his own day and of every day.
- And it is at this time of the year, perhaps more than any other, that we think of a Christian as a pilgrim.
- And we're reminded of the changing of the years, the changing of the times, that here have we now a biting city, that we're on the move, we're going somewhere.
- [1 : 32] Well, this epistle is written to strangers, pilgrims, on the face of the earth. And there is no denying the fact that being a Christian is a hazardous business, in terms of worldly wisdom.
- Nothing is plainer than that the Christian's only answer to the jive and the taunt and the uncertainty of life in the world is the sheer blessing of being Christian.
- Well, the apostle sets forth these things here. And the basis of his comfort to unsettled pilgrim Christians is to remind them what they are, because they are Christians.
- What God decrees in eternity, he works out in time. They're strangers, they're elect. They are tossed about in the world, but they are in a position of certainty.
- In the heart of their God and their Saviour. So, he comes now to speak in these verses of the nature of the gospel blessings.
- [2 : 52] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He begins with God. God is the first of all blessings.
- And this morning we considered this whole matter of blessings. And how we should view them. That it isn't enough just to count them.
- But rather, we need to weigh them. There are blessings of the first rank, of the second rank, and of the third rank. Before Peter mentions anything about Christian blessings, he blesses God himself.
- For without God there is no blessing of any God. He's the fount, and he's the son. Having done that, he goes on to mention spiritual blessings.
- Those that relate ourselves to him. And then after that, in the third rank, which he doesn't actually mention here. There are nevertheless those blessings that are of a temporal kind.
- [3 : 59] That have to do with our life in this world. So, now this afternoon, I want to come to look at the particular blessings of being Christian.

The blessings that the Apostle names. When we stand at the parting of the years, as we do, what are those things that mean most to us?

Well, the first of these great cardinal blessings that the Apostle mentions is the blessing of being made the children of God. Blessed be God.

Which hath begotten us again. God has begotten us again. To beget is to give birth.

To beget is to give life. And that which is begotten is a child. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again.

[5 : 20] So we have set before us here the whole notion of God as Father and man as his child. It is the mystical and spiritual use of a natural and a physical relationship.

Father and child. Now here again, here is a term that has been much misunderstood and much misconstrued.

The expression, the children of God. There are those who argue for universal salvation.

On the basis of God. On the basis of the idea that God is the Father of all men. That expression has come into being.

The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. If God made man, he's their Father. If God made all men, then all men are brothers. The fatherhood of God.

[6 : 21] The brotherhood of man. That is the basis upon which all men are saved and all men are Christians. And all men will be perfectly all right at the last.

There is such an idea. Current. It has been current for a long, long time. Then over against that, there are those who reply to that idea by saying, No.

God is not Father to any man. Unless that man be a Christian. Well, my friends, the scripture shows that both those views are wrong.

Scripture makes a distinction that both those extremes. It is a distinction to which the apostle introduces us in our text. He says, God hath begotten us again.

Again. Again. That's the operative word. God hath begotten us a second time.

[7 : 32] The apostle doesn't say, God hath begotten us. If he said simply that, it would mean something quite different.

But Peter clearly echoes what our Lord says to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, when he says, ye must be born.

Again. Again. A second time. That was Nicodemus' problem. He could see how birth could happen the first time, but he couldn't see how it could happen the second time.

Again. Now, here's a vital distinction. What Peter is saying is, we. The Christians, the pilgrim, strangers to whom he speaks, and all the people of God.

We were the children of God, in one sense, before. But now. We are the children of God in another.

[8 : 36] A different. A quite superior sense. God begat us to begin with. But now.

He hath begotten us. Again. There's no point in saying, again. If he doesn't mean, a second time. Now, let us, once and for all, sort this matter out.

In one sense of the term, all men are the children of God. Because God is the creator of all men.

We do not believe in evolution. We believe in creationism. And creationism is, in short, that the human race is a unity descended from Adam and Eve.

And Adam's father was God. God created. Adam. Whence the whole human race came.

- [9 : 50] In that sense, God is the father, the maker, the creator, of all men. Now, this doctrine is spelled out in many ways in the scripture.
- And I don't stay to weary you with a great many passages. Let me just give you one from the Old Testament and one from the New. Malachi chapter 2, verse 10.
- The prophet says, Have we not all one father? Have not one God created us?
- Now, that is the doctrine of the brotherhood of man. The fatherhood, in a creaturely sense, of God. You come to the New Testament and you listen to Paul preaching on Mars Hill.
- And this is what you hear him say, Acts 17, verse 26. God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation that they should seek the Lord if happily they might feel after him and find him.
- [11 : 08] For in him we live and move and have our being. As certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.
- Now, Paul quotes, remarkably, a heathen poet who said, We are also his God's offspring. But Paul quotes it with approval.
- Men, all men of all nations and all races, are the offspring of God. By virtue of the fact that they are God's creative handiwork.
- Men didn't just happen as a result of a bitter protoplasm getting washed up on the seashore. Man was the special creation of God. And in that sense, God is, as we read in Numbers, chapter 16 and verse 22, God is the Father of the Spirits of all flesh.
- There is a creaturely relationship taught in the Scripture that makes God the Father of all men and all men his children.
- [12 : 28] And as a father provides the natural life and sustenance of his family, so God, as the creative Father of all men, by common grace, provides the natural life and sustenance of the human race.
- He opens his hand and gives of his bounty. But the question that now has to be asked is, what does this creative childhood of man to God mean?
- Well, let me spell that out because that's the bit that isn't followed by most of the people who shout about the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. What does the creative childhood of man to God mean?
- It puts all men under God's law. It makes all men responsible to God.
- It requires every living man to obey his creative father. That is what it means and that is all it means.
- [13 : 48] It doesn't give men power to keep the law of God. It doesn't enable them to obey him or to love him.
- It doesn't help men to discharge their obligations of obedience towards God. In other words, this creaturely childhood of man to God loads man with responsibility toward God, but it doesn't save him.
- It makes him responsible. But he doesn't save him. It gives him no spiritual power.
- It gives him no spiritual blessing. So all men everywhere are made of one blood which came from Adam and God made Adam.
- They're creatures of God, they're children of God, of God's natural family, of which Adam was the human progenitor. And they are thereby under obligation to fear and honor and obey their creator.
- [15 : 06] Yet, in their sin, they are totally unable to do it. Now, my friends, that is the biblical view of the natural or creative childhood of man to God.

There's nothing fascinating about it. There's no suggestion of universal salvation in it. And there's no comfort in it either.

Children called to obey their father unable to do so, they become what Paul in Ephesians 5 calls the children of disobedience.

That is men by nature. Children of disobedience. And under God's wrath because of their disobedience. The father-child relationship between God and men at large in this creative sense, biblical doctrine, but it is thoroughly unflattering so far as the children are concerned.

It makes them responsible but it gives them no power to obey and it gives them no hope of salvation whatever. Rather, not only is there no universal salvation in this creative relationship, but there is universal condemnation.

[16 : 44] so much so that our Lord once said of unbelieving men, ye are of your father the devil. Now why am I saying all this?

Well because this is the setting, this is the background against which we see that other sense in which some men are the children of God by being begotten again, a second time.

The blessing of the Christian man is that having been once begotten into this creaturely childhood as a disobedient rebellious offspring, he is now begotten again, anew, a second time, to a childhood that is spiritual, that is altogether distinct and different.

Out of this general universal childhood, this whole humanity that sprung from Adam, there is selected a special and a peculiar, a unique category of persons who are children of God, sons of God, in a sense in which no other may not.

To them, God is father in another, a different matter. Now, this is the distinctive blessing of being Christian.

[18 : 29] fatherhood, and I have spelled out this double sense of fatherhood in order that we might be quite clear about it in our minds. God has begotten us again.

The whole point of saying begotten us again is because God begat us all. Thanks. In the human family that he began in Adam.

But in that human family, we're children of disobedience. In this other family, we are made his people. And so, you get the statement again and again in scripture, about God's people being his children, in a special sense.

Exodus 4.22, Israel is my son, my first born. Moses says, Deuteronomy 14.1, ye are the children of the Lord your God.

again, Deuteronomy 32.18, he says, Jehovah is the rock that began thee. And John says in his first epistle, beloved, now are we the sons of God.

[19 : 45] Divine sonship. The blessing that God works for and in his people. he makes them his children.

And this is the peculiar blessing of the man whom God hath begotten again. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again.

it's the again that matters, my friends. You can say as long as you like, but I'm a child of God, I belong to the race that he made.

That's true, and you'll go to hell with it, if that's all you can say. But if you can say, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten us again, afresh, and new, a second time, we have to watch the distinction between the once born and the twice born.

Between the begotten who have God as their creative Father, and the begotten again, who are God's children by creation and by redemption.

[21 : 15] Charles Wesley summed this up so perfectly as he so often did. In a verse he says, Thy lawful servant Lord, I owe to thee whate'er is mine, born in thy family below, the natural family, the human family, and by redemption thine.

I owe thee whate'er is mine, all that I have in nature this is worth having, I have to by redemption thine, all that I have by redemption and grace, the blessing of being made, the children of God.

Well, now that leaves us with one question. What does it mean? This familiar homely expression, the children of God, this unique relationship that leads a Christian and a Christian only to lift his heart and cry, Abba, Father.

There is in him a look of recognition, there's a tone of recognition, there's a spirit of recognition. A child recognizes its father, and a Christian recognizes his father.

he hath begotten us again. What does it mean? Well, first of all, it has to do with the status, the standing, the position, the relationship of a Christian.

[22 : 58] Where does he stand in relation to God? That's the question. That's the greatest question. We all like to know our standing in relation to different persons with whom we have a relationship.

In relation to our employer, our landlord, the law of the land. If you're not certain of your relationship, if you're not certain where you stand in relation to any of those categories, well, if there's ambiguity there, you'll have uncertainty and fear and trouble in everything.

we like to know where we stand. We must know where we stand. So I say nothing can ever be of greater consequence than a man standing in status and position before almighty God.

And here what the apostle tells us is that the standing of a Christian is that he's a child, he's a son, he is an heir, he has been begotten again into this position of this rank.

As a creature child, he was a child of disobedience. He was under judgment, displeasure, wrath. Responsible to keep God's law, he couldn't and didn't.

[24 : 30] but now someone has kept it on his behalf, someone has obeyed for him vicariously, someone has suffered for him vicariously.

God's blessed son has done it. He carried the sin, he bore the penalty of God's people. God has accepted his sacrifice and his satisfaction.

And on this ground, God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, hath begotten us. Again, the first begetting was into a natural relationship, the second begetting is into a spiritual relationship.

So Peter says in verse 23 of this chapter, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.

Children of God, it's a question of status, it's a question of standing, it's a question of knowing where you stand. So the Christian is a man who is bound by ties of filial affection, and once a child, he's always a child, as in nature, so in grace.

[25 : 59] Nothing alters that status. If a man is the child of a certain man, his immediate ancestor, that is irreversible, that is irrevocable.

A million years and a million years couldn't alter it, in terms of fact. God graciously chooses this father-child relationship to define the status of his people to himself.

Who God hath begotten again, he is God's child, and God's child forever. Neither man, nor devil, neither time, nor eternity, neither death, nor judgment, nor heaven, nor hell, can undo what God has done.

The blessedness of being made the children of God, is on the one hand, the comfort of knowing where he stands before God.

High, says Isaac Watts, high is the rank we now possess. sons of God, we don't deserve it, we haven't earned it, we're not entitled to it, but God has done it.

[27 : 28] He hath begotten us again, not to an uncertain salvation, but to the full blessing and standing and status of a child to himself.

Says Peter to these pilgrim Christians and to us, you're looking for comfort, you're looking for gospel comfort, the biggest comfort I can give you, says the apostle in effect, is to remind you who you are, what you are, to remind you that you're begotten again, and because you're begotten again, you know where you stand, you know where you stand in relation to God, and a man who knows where he stands in relation to God, my friends, is a man who can face anything.

Children of God. It concerns our standing, our status. Then in the second place, this matter of being children of God concerns also the character, the nature of a Christian.

when God makes men his redeemed children, he does more than change their status, changes their lives.

You can have your status changed in certain things without realizing it, and without entering into your full privilege. But when God makes a man his redeemed child, God begets us again, he sends forth into our hearts the spirit of his son.

[29 : 16] He gives us the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father, out of grateful hearts. He gives a new spirit, a new disposition toward himself, and that surely is the crux of the matter.

Creature children of God have no natural love for God. Man by nature does not love God.

But redeemed children find a spontaneous desire in their hearts to love him. Creature children dislike God.

Regard him with jealousy, regard him as suspicious. The first thing they do when something goes wrong in their lives, in their affairs, is to blame God. They dislike him, they're jealous of him, they're suspicious of him, carrying forward the disposition of their progenitor, Adam, in his fallen state.

But redeemed children are not like that. Redeemed children are changed. in their disposition towards God, in their attitude towards God, they have the affectionate confiding character of children.

[30 : 39] We love him, not only because we're told he first loved us, but because we feel he first loved us, but because we know he first loved us, because we want to love him.

We trust him, not only because he has proved himself trustworthy by begetting us again into his family, but because we want to trust him. He, God himself, leads us to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, to fear him, without being afraid of him, to confide in his infinite wisdom and goodness.

God God is God. Now, my friend, surely this is the true, the real character of children. This is the very thing that is absent from man as the creature of God.

And I have never noticed that those people who have most to say about the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men are marked by any particular passionate love for God.

They are usually social gospel people. But those whom God has begotten again find this love of God in their souls.

[32 : 01] I choose my word carefully. They find that love there. They don't put it there. They don't drug it out. They don't manufacture it. God puts it there.

It's a part of the seed of the new love that comes with the new birth. Now here my friends is one way to test your Christian profession.

Do you find that you love God? Or let me put it like this for I would be as tender as I can. Do you find that you want to love God? Does it come easier to you to love him and adore him and worship him?

not to criticize him and to blame him as the man of nature does. For this is the character, this is the nature of a Christian, this is the kind of person a Christian is.

There is within him an instinctive love for God, for his father. This is the spring and the source of everything he does in the service of God.

[33 : 14] His service isn't the energy of the flesh, his service is the effect of the fact that he's been apprehended of Christ Jesus, he's been laid hold of by God, his father.

He has a new nature, a new character, a new disposition. can you see something of yourself in that description? The blessing of being a Christian is to have this kind of nature, this kind of character.

These are the children of God. What then does it mean, this homely expression, the children of God, those whom he had begotten again?

Well, it means first to know where we stand, it's a matter of status. Then it means secondly to have the character of a child.

But I will finish with this, we have to notice the relationship of these two things, standing and character, brought into the relationship of children, formed into the character of children.

[34 : 33] Now, those are the two elements of Christian blessedness. This is why, this is why the apostle is reminding these people, he's out to comfort them.

They're pilgrims, they're strangers, they're passing through this world with all its uncertainties, out to comfort them. These are the two elements of Christian blessedness.

they are the fundamental things of the Christian salvation and you can't separate them. You can't have the character of a child if you don't have the status of a child.

A slave cannot have the character of a free man until he's set free. A child bears the family likeness because he comes from the very being, the very flesh and blood of his parents.

And the family likeness of the children of God rests on the fact that God has begotten them again to the rank and the status of children.

[35 : 44] Having that relationship, the character of the child is formed within. them. Yes, but this blessing of being made the children of God is even higher than this.

Because I remind you quite simply and how frequently this comes out in the scripture. This business of begetting, of giving birth, belongs to parents.

it's their initiative. The child has nothing to do with it. No child begets himself. And God does be godness again.

Regeneration is too holy a task for sinful men. And if it is a tremendous blessing to us that we are the children of God, it is all and utterly and only due to the mercy and the grace of God.

His is the initiative and his is the glory. He has begotten us again, not we ourselves.

[37 : 06] what then of our belief, our trust, our faith, because the gospel call says, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

Well, belief and trust and faith in Christ and in God are not the characteristics of creature children.

They are not instinctive in man as he is by nature, but belief and trust and faith are the marks of the redeemed child.

They flow from his status as a child of God. By grace are you saved, through faith, and that is the gift of God.

It is his gift to those whom he has begotten again. In other words, my friends, let's have this matter perfectly clear.

[38 : 23] If you are the children of God, you were not born again because you believed. you believed because you were born again.

In the matter of chronology, in the matter of order and sequence, the man who believes, the man who puts his faith in Christ is the man who is born again.

The new birth precedes faith. God doesn't give faith to a dead sinner. he gives faith only to a living child.

Belief, faith, trust, are indispensable to soul, that. But they are also impossible except a man be born again.

You may say that's a paradox, you may say you can't understand it. Neither can I understand it. But that's what the scripture says. These are the things that belong to the twice-born man.

[39 : 37] The once-born man doesn't have, tied up in his soul, faith and repentance. There's no faith, there's no repentance in any man until he's twice-born, until he's begotten again.

But then, when he is begotten again, his eyes are open, his soul is alive, he can see his sin, he can see his saviour, he has faith, he is told in the gospel what to do, and he does it, and he can do it, with the hands of faith and repentance.

What a blessing, to be so favoured as to be given a second birth by almighty God.

No wonder the apostle says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again. No wonder some people undervalue their Christian blessings when they feel that they are saved by their own faith, their own decision, their own effort.

Those people who say, well it's all so easy, all you've got to do is to believe, all you've got to do is to save, you trust the bus driver when you ride on the bus, you trust the train driver when you trust on the train, so trust God to save your soul, you can do it.

[41 : 12] That's the way they talk. I say, no wonder they undervalue the blessing of salvation and their salvation so-called is cheap and flippant and glib.

No, no, no. The work worth having is the work of God. And it is God who begets again those who are the children of his household to the rank of sons, to the character of his redeemed children.

And in that character he gives all the faculties of growth into the full status of a man in Christ.

That full status it may be is not reached in the body. But it is there in embryo, it is there in terms of possibility.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy have begotten us again, to God be the glory, great things he has done.

[42 : 38] My friend, if he's done that for you, you have all you need to face a new year. You have all you need to face all the years.

You have all you need to face life and death. You have all you need to stand in God's eternal presence.

blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which hath begotten us again.

Blessed be his name. And may he send us into this year with a sense of the blessedness of his glorious name. And with the blessing of the experience of his redeeming grace.

Once born or twice born? That is the question. The Lord enable us to give an answer that will glorify him and bring blessing to our own souls.

[44 : 02] Amen.