**Spiritual Birth Series**

**“Complications that can occur at Spiritual Birth”**

**Introduction:**

Last week I began a series of sermons of Spiritual Birth. We looked at the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus in John’s Gospel chapter three where Jesus stresses the necessity of spiritual birth saying, “*Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”* By using the phrase “born again,” Jesus is not talking about adopting a philosophy, or embracing a morality, or identifying with a certain religious sect. Jesus is talking about a supernatural work of God in a person’s heart that brings them to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Nicodemus had difficulty understanding, so Jesus separates natural birth and spiritual birth saying, “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh* (natural birth)*, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit* (spiritual birth).The point Jesus making is that as certain as you know you were born naturally so you must know that you have been born spiritually.

Actually, natural birth can be a good analogy for explaining certain aspects of spiritual birth. Today we are going to consider “Complications that can occur at Spiritual Birth.” While the overwhelming majority of pregnancies result in the birth of healthy babies without complications, some complication can occur. Special intensive care units have been built in hospitals to care for these precious patients. And so it is with spiritual birth. Sometimes new believers struggle at the beginning of their Christian experience to surrender every aspect of our lives to Christ. Instead of surrendering they tend to hold on to certain things that can cause complications with their spiritual growth.

This morning we are considering “Complications that can occur at Spiritual Birth.” And I’m offering you some instruction this morning to help you address those possible complications in your spiritual growth. Our text this morning comes for Luke’s Gospel chapter nine. Luke chapter nine is a busy chapter that includes the sending of the twelve disciples preaching the gospel, the death of John the Baptist, feeding the five thousand, and the Transfiguration.

At this point of Jesus was at the height of His popularity and “great multitudes” of people were following Jesus, witnessing His miracles, and listening to His preaching and teaching. All of this led Jesus to ask His disciples, *“Who do the multitudes say that I am?”* (Lk.9.18)

*They answered and said, “John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again.” And He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.”* (Lk.9.19-20)

Possibility sensing a shallow commitment from some of these new followers, Jesus says to them all*, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”* (Lk.9.23) The context is very interesting – Peter had just made a clear and positive profession of faith declaring Jesus as Christ. For many this would be enough – many would say that confessing Jesus as Christ is enough for someone to be identified as a follower of Christ. But Jesus confronts this “Easy Beliefism” by issuing His own definition of a follower of Christ saying, *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”* And Jesus gave this definition “to all” of the would be disciples. Jesus intended that **this** definition would be use for all of the newbies that had joined them. Jesus intended that **this** definition would be use throughout the ages to identified true followers of Christ. A true follower of Christ not only confesses Jesus as the Christ but they deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus.

Jesus is clearly speaking against “Convenient Christianity” – a bred of Christianity that is very common today. The convenient Christian is one who confesses Jesus as the Christ but doesn’t get involved with anything that is beyond their comfort zone or that would cause them inconvenience. Those who attend the church of Convenient Christianity have a casual commitment to worship, fellowship, and spiritual growth. But Jesus wants nothing to do with that type of Christianity and calls true believers to a lifestyle of surrender by denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Him. No matter how large the multitudes get Jesus calls each one of His followers to a deep commitment and lifestyle.

Luke chapter nine ends by Jesus resolutely setting His face to go to Jerusalem, which would led to His death on the cross. As they were traveling to Jerusalem, Jesus has a conversation with three new followers. Two of these men volunteer to be Jesus’ followers and one whom Jesus calls to follow Him. These three men are examples of possible complications that occur at spiritual birth. These three men are examples of surrender issues that can cause complications with our spiritual growth in Christ.

Hear now the Word of God,

*As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.” And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” Another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.” But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

(Luke 9.57-62)

**Complications that can occur at Spiritual Birth**

Jesus’ response to these three men comes at a surprise. At first one might conclude that Jesus is harsh towards their willingness to follow Him. It looks as though Jesus does not want any new followers and is trying to drive people away. But we need to remember that we can only observe “outward appearance,” while our Lord “looks upon the heart. (ISam.16.7) It seems that Jesus discerns that there are underlying issues of the heart that could cause complications in the lives of these three followers if not dealt with directly.

This episode is also recorded in Matthew’s Gospel where two of these men are identified as “disciples.” (Mt.8.21) It seems that these men had made some sort of commitment to Christ but Jesus discerns that there are issues of the heart that could cause complications if not dealt. If you are uncomfortable with the idea that the Lord is going to call you out then you really have a problem. The Lord is going to speak to your heart because He loves you and wants the best for you. We should read an episode like this and ask ourselves, “Is that me?” We should read an episode like this and pray, “Search my heart O God.” That’s what the Lord does – He calls us out - and this episode is recorded in Scripture so that the Holy Spirit can call us out.

**The First Follower**

Seemingly unsolicited the first follower tells Jesus, *“I will follow You wherever You go.”*  You would think that Jesus would be overwhelmed by this man willingness and unshackled enthusiasm. But instead Jesus calls him to examine his heart saying, *“The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”* What’s going on here?

Matthew tells us that this man was a scribe. (Mt.8.19) As a scribe this guy would had been accustomed to a quiet and easy life. Scribes were human copy machines. They spent hours in solitude scribing the Word of God from one piece of parchment to another. They had hours to reflect on the Scriptures and were often asked to share their insights. The first follower would had enjoyed honor and respect from others in his community and wasn’t familiar with reproach, poverty, or persecution. It seems that Jesus knew that even though this guy showed eagerness on the outside he was soft on the inside. Jesus knew that while everything was good this guy would be ok but what happens when things go bad. What happens when he only has a rock for a pillow?

This reminds me of the Parable of the Sower when the seed of the Word of God falls on rocky heart. This rocky heart hears the Word and it receives it with great joy but has no firm root. So when affliction or persecution comes this one falls away. (Mt.13.20) Why, does this one fall away because the Gospel had not penetrated deep into their heart and soul? Their relationship with Christ is just beneath the surface so when hard time comes they get swept away with the torrents of life.

Hard time will come. The rains will descend, the floods will rise, and the wind will blow but as a follower of Christ we must make sure that our security rest upon God’s Word. (Mt.7.24-27) Like a south Floridian we must prepare before the hurricane comes. We cannot wait until the storm is upon us to protect ourselves. For this reason the Bible tells us, Blessed is a person whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and in God’s law they meditate day and night. That person will be like a tree firmly planted by the streams of water, which yields it fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and whatever happens they grow in the Lord. (Adapted from Psalms 1)

**The Second Follower**

Unlike the first follower, who willing told Jesus that he would follow Him, Jesus is the One calling the second follower. *And* Jesus *said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.”* Was Christ telling this man not to attend his father's funeral? I don’t think so.

Many scholars believe that the man’s father had not died yet or even ill. Therefore, this “disciple” is asking Jesus’ permission (“permit me first”) to go home until his father dies and then he will catch up with Jesus later. This is delayed commitment, which is common in modern culture too. “First let me enjoyed High School then I will follow You Lord.” “Come on, Lord, let me enjoy my college years then I’ll follow you.” “First allow me to be launch my career and then I’ll follow You Lord.” “Lord, I have a wife and little kids. Let me raise my family then I’ll follow you Lord.” I’ve heard it hundreds of times, “I accepted Christ as a child but you know . . . High School . . . College (wow – college!) . . . Then life – you know how life can just suck you in . . . but here I am . . . better late than never – right?” What was the Lord’s response, *“Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.”*

I don’t believe that Jesus is discouraging family relationships or family obligations. That interpretation would go against the 5th commandment to honor our parents (Ex.20.18) and the biblical admonition to care for our families. (ITim.5.8). What Jesus is saying is to put first things first. We must have Kingdom priorities. We must seek first the Kingdom of God. (Mt.6.33) We must demonstrate to the world the rule and reign of God in your lives now. We should not put it off. We should do it now. At every phase of life a follower of Christ should put the Kingdom of God first and not allow years to go by putting off following Christ.

**Third Follower**

The third follower like the first willingly volunteers to follow Christ saying, *“I will follow You, Lord;* but he has a condition. *“But first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.”*Let me say that when someone says, “I will follow you, Lord; but,” usually doesn’t work out so well. We must be careful that the “buts” in our lives don’t overshadow our following Jesus. Each of us needs to examine the “buts” that have the potential of causing complications with our spiritual growth in Christ.

In some ways this third follower is like the second guy saying, “*first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.”*What problem would Jesus have with someone saying good-bye to those at home? Well, I think we gain understanding in Jesus’ response. *But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”* It seems that the problem wasn’t saying good-bye – the problem was letting go of those at home.

Let me explain from my personal experience. As a teenager I had been rebellious towards God and man and had gotten involved in a wayward lifestyle. As I shared last week, my father led me to Christ in June of 1976 right after I had graduated from High School. God had done a supernatural work of grace in my heart bringing me to faith in Christ. The problem was the influence I allowed my friends to have on my life. The problem wasn’t my friends even though we all had a lot of problems. I was the problem. The problem was the influence I allowed my friends to have in my life. Five godly people would tell me the right then to do and one of my friends would tell me the wrong thing to do and I would do the wrong thing. I wanted to do the right thing. I wanted to serve the Lord. I wanted to put my hands to the plow but I kept looking back. And once I looked back, I would get off coarse with following Jesus.

Looking back has always been a problem for followers of Christ. The children of Israel kept looking back to pleasures of Egypt and caused them to drift off coarse for 40 years wandering in the desert. Lot’s wife looked back on the pleasures of Sodom and she turned into a pillar of salt. (Gen.19.26) Demas, one of Paul’s missionary companions, looked back on the pleasures of this present world, deserted Paul, and fled to the pleasures of Thessalonica. (2Tim.4.10)

The point is that Jesus saw in this third follower’s heart a complication with those at home. The problem wasn’t saying good-bye the problem was looking back on the pleasures of this world. In my case, my parents saw my weakness and gave me an opportunity to leave home and go to college in Florida. My parents open the door for me to put my hands to the plow and not look back and that opportunity was the first solid step in my growth in Christ and my sanctification.

**Triangle Illustration**

* You and Comfortable
* You and Stages of Life
* You and Friends/Relationships

**Conclusion**

Jesus looked into the hearts of these three followers and saw the potential for complications in their spiritual growth – complications in following Christ. Let’s allow the Lord to look into our hearts today to reveal complications in our own hearts. Lord is there anything in my heart that can hinder my spiritual growth – hinder me from following you?

Is Jesus King of your heart? So, no matter what storms may come you will follow Christ. No matter what stage of life you are in you will follow Christ. No matter what others might want you to follow you will follow Christ and not look back. The main point is – Is Jesus King of your heart?

**Call to Prayer**

*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.* (Gal.2.20)

**Benediction**

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,**to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.* (Jd.1.24-25)