

God with us, the new birth

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] Welcome to this pre-recorded service for Calvary Church in Brighton for the 7th of June 2020.

! We're just emerging from lockdown regarding the coronavirus. Calvary Church is a church of people who live in the area of Brighton.

That's in Sussex in the United Kingdom. We believe in Jesus Christ. We are a church of about 80 or so people meeting on a Sunday mornings in normal times.

And we're just ordinary people. We're from different nations and different backgrounds. But we believe that God has brought us together to love and serve him. And that's what we're going to do our best to express in this time together.

A particular welcome to you if you've just sort of dropped in. Maybe looking for some spiritual guidance and comfort in this strange time that we're in. So the first 10 minutes or so I shall try and keep things very user friendly for you.

[1:06] And as we go further on I'll be thinking of the regular attenders. But please don't feel that you're excluded. I'll try and make the whole thing as accessible as possible. My name's Philip Wells as you can see on the screen there.

And I'm one of the elders here at Calvary and I'll be leading this morning. The other notices and contact details are on the screen and have been circulated by email to the regular people.

The plan of what we're going to do is on the screen behind me. And even in these unusual times we're just going to do the things that Christians normally do when they meet together.

We're going to sing or have sung to us. We're going to read the Bible or have it read to us. And I'm going to give a talk on the subject of God with us and the new birth.

This is part of a series of four talks based on the book of the prophet Isaiah, the last couple of chapters, 65 and 66 in the Old Testament.

[2:12] It would be really helpful if you can see the words for yourself. So please grab a copy of the Bible off your shelf. You can always pause and go and hunt for a copy or download it as a Bible app.

Or maybe you've got it there already all the time. So let me pray as we begin. Oh Lord, whoever we are and wherever we are, you are our creator.

What could be more important than finding you? So may we at this time genuinely draw near to you. And will you please draw near to us?

For we ask it through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. So this is a Christian meeting, a Christian broadcast.

So I'm going to spend the first few minutes asking this question. What actually is a Christian? Now over the years I've spent quite a bit of time visiting churches and friends in Sri Lanka.

[3:16] And one of the people that I met there told me that the definition of a Christian is, it is a person who does not smoke, does not drink alcohol and does not go to the cinema.

That is, so this person told me, the definition of a Christian. Well, we might smile a little bit at that. But I'm sure we have similar views.

There might be the view that a Christian is simply somebody who's brought up in a Christian country. And that would be a sort of ethnic answer to the question. Others might say, well, a Christian is somebody who lives a good life according to a particular moral code.

And that's a moral answer. And then still someone else might say, well, the definition of a Christian is somebody who goes to church. And that, if you like, is a religious answer.

But let's go back to the original source and ask Jesus, what would you say a Christian is? How do you define your followers or the people that you would like to be your followers?

[4:24] So I'm going to read a key section from Jesus' teaching. It's in John's Gospel, chapter 3, although I'm going to begin in chapter 2, because I think that's where the section starts.

It's a record of a conversation that Jesus had with a leading Jewish scholar of his day. I think maybe you'd call him a rabbi. He's not called a rabbi as far as I'm aware, but you might call him that. His name was Nicodemus. And at the time of the conversation, Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover, obviously a hugely important time of people getting together. He was there for the Passover ceremony. And the conversation pretty quickly moves to what's called the kingdom or the kingdom of God. And when there is this talk about the kingdom of God, it is meaning the place where God has his way, the place where his purposes are fulfilled, and the place where his blessing is found.

Of course, is that a geographical place or is it a place in some other sense? Well, Jesus goes on to tell us quite a bit about that. So let me just read it. It's in John, chapter 2, beginning at verse 23.

[5:38] Now, while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all.

He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man. Now, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

He came to Jesus at night and said, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. No one could perform the miraculous signs you were doing if God were not with him.

In reply, Jesus declared, I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.

How can a man be born when he is old? Nicodemus asked. Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born. Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

[6:53] Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again.

The wind, that's a similar word, well, that's a similar word to Spirit. The wind blows where it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.

So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. How can this be? Nicodemus asked. You are Israel's teacher, said Rabbi, and you don't understand these things.

I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. If I have spoken to you of earthly things and you don't believe, how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?

No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

[8:06] For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Well, I'll stop the reading there. It's a fascinating conversation, full of very deep truths that are well worth pondering, but I'll just make a few quick comments.

Nicodemus, we notice, has no doubt that Jesus is a significant miracle worker. We know you were a teacher who has come from God. No one could perform the miraculous signs you were doing if God were not with him.

He knows that there is an impossibility here. It's impossible that he should do this without backing, or indeed sending, by God himself.

And then Jesus takes up the conversation and he picks up that thought of impossibility and he says, well, I'll tell you something that's impossible. It's impossible to see the kingdom of God unless a person is born again.

[9:06] Now, when he says born again, he's meaning something like a new life, a brand new start, a total new beginning. And Nicodemus takes him literally and says, well, how can a man be born when he is old?

Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born. It's just biologically and geometrically impossible. It's an impossibility.

And Jesus says, well, yes, it's impossible in human terms, in human limitations. I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

It is impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit. You should not be surprised, he says. You should not be surprised.

But this is the power of God. And you of all people should know this. You should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again. Now, the Spirit of God is unseen and powerful, a bit like the wind.

[10:19] And Nicodemus again comes back to this, how can this be? It's a question of mechanics. How can this be meaning within human possibilities and capacities?

But Jesus is saying, well, I'm not talking about what's within human possibilities and capacities.

There certainly is a humanness about this. There certainly is a human aspect, or if you like, a human side to this coin, because he talks about believing, people believing in him.

That's a human activity. But the other side of the coin is completely supernatural. This goes on by the power of God.

And I should also say that Jesus links it within a specific act within the human realm of history. In verse 14, he talks about Moses lifting up the snake in the desert.

Well, that was a human act in human history. But he links it with the Son of Man being lifted up, by which he means himself, the Son of Man, and the lifting up being what happens to him when he dies on the cross.

[11:27] So this whole narrative is actually very Jesus-centered. So we started off saying, how does this help us understand what Jesus' view, what a Christian is?

And he says, you must be born again. It teaches us basically two things. Number one, human inadequacy.

Human beings in their natural state are incapable of seeing, or as Jesus says, entering the kingdom. It is humanly impossible. And that means, of course, that all human achievements are irrelevant to this, or at least they get us nowhere.

So ethnically, which is a purely human thing, that gets us nowhere. Morally, being good, trying our best, turning over a new leaf.

Jesus says, that's just flesh. That doesn't get you anywhere. Religiousness. Going to church, reciting prayers, going on pilgrimages, whatever form of religiousness it is.

[12:33] Jesus says, well, that's just flesh too. Flesh gives birth to flesh. That doesn't get you into the kingdom. All of these things get us no further. Jesus says, no, you must be born again by the Spirit.

And so human inadequacy is my first point. And number two is supernatural intervention from God in his almightiness. Humans are inadequate. God is almighty.

So this new birth comes from God. Born, says Jesus, of water and spirit, or of watery spirit, or water-like spirit. Verse six, flesh gives birth to flesh.

Spirit gives birth to spirit. Verse eight, the wind blows where it pleases, invisible and not under human control. That is what it is to be a Christian.

Somebody whose life has been made completely new, changed from the inside by the power, the almighty power of God by his Holy Spirit.

[13:38] A Christian is a supernatural being, born again from God, certainly not yet perfect, but also certainly a new creation, a new creature. And if you're watching, if that's entirely new to you, I'll leave that with you.

Maybe that is what you've been looking for for a long, long time. Maybe that promise that God can make lives new and different is exactly the promise that you want. And even if it isn't what you want, it's certainly what everybody actually needs.

You must be born again. So we pray for God to intervene. Maybe you would want to pray for God to intervene in your life, to give you the new birth.

Maybe we will pray for him to work in you to produce the other side of the coin, that the faith that goes along with this. And pray particularly how he will show you how all this relates to Jesus, the Son of Man, who came down from heaven, who was lifted up on the cross. And everyone who believes in him has eternal life. I'm going to change gear and we're going to sing two songs.

[15:00] The first one is a psalm from the Psalms of the Bible. It's at number 100, or in our songbook 100A. It honours God as the shepherd and king of his people.

And we'll follow that straight away with the second song, which is very Jesus-centred, and thanks him for being the centre of this salvation, this entry into the kingdom, this new birth.

So we've got Psalm 100A, modelled on, the words that we sing, modelled on an ancient psalm. It's ancient, but it's fresh and alive.

And then a more modern song, Jesus, thank you. Song 100A, and Jesus, thank you. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice, Serve him with joyous praises now.

Come now before him and rejoice. Know that the Lord is God in need.

[16:31] He fought us all without our aid. We are the flock he loves to feed, The shepherd by his hand are made.

O enter then his gates with praise, And in his courts his love proclaim, Give thanks and bless him all your days.

Let every tongue confess his name. The Lord Almighty God is good, His mercy is forever sure, It is true that all times early stood, And shall from age to age and endure.

The mystery of the cross, I cannot comprehend the agonies of Calvary.

You, the perfect Holy One, Christ your Son, who drank the bitter cup reserved for me.

[18:39] Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank you. The Father's wrath completely satisfied, Jesus, thank you.

Once your enemy, now seated at your table, Jesus, thank you.

The Father's wrath By your perfect sacrifice I've been brought near Your enemy you've made your friend Pouring out the riches of your glorious grace Your mercy and your kindness knows no end Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank you.

The Father's wrath completely satisfied, Jesus, thank you. Once your enemy, now seated at your table, Jesus, thank you.

Lover of my soul I want to live for you Lover of my soul I want to live for you Lover of my soul I want to live for you Your blood of my soul

[21:07] Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank you. Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank you. The Father's wrath completely satisfied, Jesus, thank you.

Once your enemy, now seated at your table, Jesus, thank you.

Well, we've sung those two songs, and now I'm going to pray a prayer, invite you to say Amen at the end of it, if you've agreed with it.

We come in this unusual way, Almighty God, to humble ourselves before you and to lift our hearts and our souls and our thoughts and our love to you in adoration and devotion.

You are the God who has made us. You are the shepherd. We are the sheep. You are the Almighty One. We are the dependent ones. And we want to honour and worship you. We want to thank you for the wonderful power and patience, compassion that you have exercised over us and in our lives. You know our frame that we are as dust.

[22:48] We are as dust. And as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. We want to come before you in fear and respect, in reverence and honour.

We come to you as our creator and our shepherd and our redeemer and our king, the one who has gone to great lengths to save us, the one who sent his son, Jesus, to be lifted up on the cross so that he might pay the price for our sins and enemies become his friends.

Jesus, Jesus, thank you. Jesus, thank you. We come with gratitude to you, Lord. We pray for your blessing on this world with all its problems.

We thank you for the mercy by which the current crisis has not been extended too long. Thank you that you've seen us through, at least thus far.

And we want to be grateful to you. We still pray for those who suffer. We still pray for wisdom for our governments and leaders. And we still pray for those who so bravely work at the front line, putting their lives at risk for the good and welfare of others.

[24:13] Please enable us as individuals and as nations to learn the lessons of this, to learn humility before you instead of the arrogance that we might otherwise have had.

We pray for your blessing on the world and we pray for your blessing on your people. And as a particular church in a particular place, we pray for our brothers and sisters known to us. We pray, think of them by name in our hearts. Think of those who are on their own, those who are older, those who are struggling perhaps with all this change and isolation and stress and perhaps fear.

Please bring your peace into the hearts of your people. Please banish fear from the hearts of your people. Please give each of us the ability to live in this world with our eyes on the certainties of the world to come.

So we pray our prayers. And I just pause a moment for anybody to add their own prayer in the quietness of their hearts where they may be.

[25:27] We lift our prayers to you in and through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen. We're going to sing another song or have sung to us another song.

It's called The Splendour of the King. The Splendour of the King.

The Splendour of the King. The Splendour of the King. The Lord in majesty, let all the earth rejoice. Let all the earth rejoice. Let all the earth rejoice.

He wraps himself in light. The darkness cries to hide and trembles at his voice.

And trembles at his voice. How great is our God. Sing with me, how great is our God.

[26:42] And all will see how great, how great is our God.

And age to age he stands. And time is in his hands. Beginning and the end.

Beginning and the end. The Godhead free in one. Father, Spirit, Son, the Lion and the Lamb.

The Lion and the Lamb. How great is our God. Sing with me, how great is our God.

And all will see how great, how great is our God. Name above all names.

[27:47] Born with me, how great is our God. How great is our God Sing with me How great is our God And all those see How great, how great is our God And as I said earlier, we're thinking of Isaiah chapter 66 and Rosemary has kindly sent in the reading of this which we'll now listen to.

Isaiah chapter 66, reading from verse 1 This is what the Lord says Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool Where is the house you will build for me?

Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things and so they came into being, declares the Lord? This is the one I esteem He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word But whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man and whoever offers a lamb like one who breaks a dog's neck Whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig's blood and whoever burns memorial incense like one who worships an idol They have chosen their own ways and their souls delight in their abominations So I also will choose harsh treatment for them and will bring upon them what they dread For when I called, no one answered When I spoke, no one listened They did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me Hear the word of the Lord You who tremble at his word

Your brothers who hate you and exclude you because of my name have said Let the Lord be glorified that we may see your joy Yet they will be put to shame Hear that uproar from the city Hear that noise from the temple It is the sound of the Lord repaying his enemies all they deserve Before she goes into labour she gives birth Before the pains come upon her she delivers a son Who has ever heard of such a thing?

Who has seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labour than she gives birth to her children Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?

[31:01] says the Lord Do I close up the womb when I bring to delivery? says your God Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her all you who love

her Rejoice greatly with her all you who mourn over her For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts You will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance For this is what the Lord says I will extend peace to her like a river and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream You will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees As a mother comforts her child so will I comfort you and you will be comforted over Jerusalem When you see this your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass The hand of the Lord will be made known to his servants but his fury will be shown to his foes

See, the Lord is coming with fire and his chariots are like a whirlwind He will bring down his anger with fury and his rebuke with flames of fire For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment upon all men and many will be those slain by the Lord Those who consecrate and purify themselves to go into the gardens following the one in the midst of those who eat the flesh of pigs and rats and other abominable things They will meet their end together declares the Lord And I, because of their actions and their imaginations am about to come and gather all nations and tongues and they will come and see my glory I will set a sign among them and I will send some of those who survive to the nations to Tarshish to the Libyans and Lydians famous as archers to Tubal and Greece and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory They will proclaim my glory among the nations and they will bring all your brothers from all the nations to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord On horses in chariots and wagons and on mules and camels says the Lord They will bring them as the Israelites bring their grain offerings to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels and I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites says the Lord As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me declares the Lord So will your name and descendants endure From one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another All mankind will come and bow down before me says the Lord And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me Their worm will not die nor will their fire be quenched and they will be loathsome to all mankind Thank you Rosemary for reading to us Before we think carefully about this passage in the Bible we're going to pray and Ray is going to lead us in a prayer about asking that we would hear what God is saying to us Thank you Ray Father we've come to you today to ask your blessing upon us as we gather together in this rather strange way Lord over the internet whether it's by audio or by YouTube Lord and we do thank you for this ability to still be able to meet in this way We do thank you too Lord for the way you've helped Philip and others Lord who have been preaching in these difficult times of the pandemic and Lord we do pray for today as Philip has prepared as he's recorded and prepared the video and the voice recording for us

Lord we do pray that you would help us as we listen as you have as we pray that our ears might be opened Lord that our hearts might be prepared to receive and our minds Lord too would be open to what you are teaching us today and Lord we do pray that you would help us each one in our varying needs in our different situations that Lord we do thank you for the way you have provided for us and Lord as you have provided bread to eat our food to eat we do pray and now Lord that this spiritual food Lord because man shall not live by bread alone by every word that comes from your mouth and so Lord we do pray for that word today that Lord by your spirit we might be greatly blessed we might be greatly encouraged we may be greatly built up and strengthened in these difficult days and so we do commit Philip to you now in Jesus name we pray Amen Thank you Ray for your prayer and now we're going to change gear again and look carefully at this passage together

[36:30] Well we prayed so we're going to look now at our passage Isaiah chapter 66 and around the first 14 verses For the believer the Christian believer there are many wonderful things about God's salvation which we ought never to lose sight of and two of them are these this wonderful thing how can God be interested in living with me how can God be interested in living with me or living in me and here's another wonderful thing how much I needed to be changed and what an inner miracle God has done for me in changing me in the depth of what he has done who can fathom the depth of what he has done for his believing people so in New Testament terms these are the issues of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the current age and the miracle of the new birth as it would be as the New

Testament calls it but these are not simply New Testament matters they're actually they're not things that spring out of nowhere but they are fulfilments of passages like the one we're looking at today so God with us and the new birth let's just put this briefly into context in Isaiah the book we've been reading through these latter chapters as we've said before could well have been written with the

Babylonian exiles as the target audience maybe as they're in Babylon or maybe having returned from Babylon and so the chapters embrace extremes like the extreme and desperate need of sinful human nature 59.12 our offences are many in your sight and these chapters are also extreme in emphasising the nature of God's grace grace meaning God acting out of sheer one-sided kindness 64.1 O that you would rend the heavens and come down and these chapters also reach the very high point of declaring the fullness of God's purposes those purposes not a higher law or a false hope of humans bettering themselves I don't know why I put the apostrophe there but a factory reset for creation itself a new heaven and a new earth behold

I create a new heavens and a new earth chapter 62 verse 17 so they produce they present rather a radical view of God's future which absolutely astoundingly includes the Gentiles as fellow heirs of the promises along with Israel nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising chapter 60 verse 3 so our passage and we're just going to look at the first half of this chapter what does it say and to my mind it seems to gather neatly around two themes although to be perfectly honest the commentators are never quite agreed on how the divisions of the chapters like these work out but to me it seems to gather neatly around two themes one the temple where God and humans meet so in verse 1 it says where is the house you will build for me where will my resting place be and in verse 6 it talks about the temple hear that uproar from the city hear that noise from the temple so the temple is here in this passage there's the temple set on the holy mountain number 2 birth the birth of a new people there in verse 7 before she goes into labor she gives birth before the pains come upon her she delivers a son and in verse 13 as a mother comforts her child so will I comfort you you will be comforted over Jerusalem so those two ideas the temple and the birth the pregnant woman giving birth to her child and although it might seem a strange thing to us to compare a city with a woman it's actually commonly featured

Old Testament and New Testament the city as a woman Jerusalem Zion New Testament Jerusalem is the bride dressed for her husband so let's take those in order then number 1 the temple the temple the place where God and humans meet now the temple in the heart of the city has been something that Isaiah constantly comes back to right at the beginning he was saying the mountain of the Lord's house the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains and all the nations will flow to it so there's the the city with as I've drawn it rather roughly there the temple in the middle of it set on a mountain and all the nations stream to it it's there in chapter 2 and the temple of course is the one place on earth where heaven and earth meet a little bit like Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28 verse 10 which he named

Bethel the house of God so where heaven and earth meet in the temple where God meets people and this is only possible because it is also the place of animal sacrifice that's to say blood sacrifice so there's the temple and Isaiah's take on this is rather shocking actually so in 66.1 he raises a query over the adequacy of a humanly built house for God this is what the Lord says heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool where is the house you will build for me where will my resting place be has not my hand made all these things so that they came into being declares the Lord so this whole question if God is so great where does that leave this tiny human made building what significance can it possibly have it certainly can't capture God and that question was actually always present from the beginning when Solomon inaugurated the temple 1 Kings 8 27 he was very conscious of this heaven even the highest heaven cannot contain you how much less this temple that I have built so we come smack up against the very incredible greatness of God and this question how can God possibly really in any sense interface with human beings it's a mighty question will God the God of heaven the creator

[43:33] God really dwell with us and the second thing that Isaiah questions is the acceptability of animal sacrifices and we've seen these are a key part of the temple so not only is he querying the very thought of the temple but he's very strongly querying the acceptability of animal sacrifices in verse 3 whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a

man whoever offers a lamb is like one who breaks a dog's neck whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig's blood whoever burns memorial incense is like one who worships an idol they've chosen their own ways their souls delight in their abominations well highly critical of these animal sacrifices and the people offering them so let's put a question mark over that but you say well surely these are vital a vital part of this whole temple set up and as I was saying well there are some circumstances at least some circumstances where they're not vital in fact they're not they're not even acceptable these sacrifices that were the ones that were laid down they ought to be surely you'd think they ought to be valid and precious but no they're as unclean as well as unclean as murder it's like one who sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man or as unclean as pig's blood which would be absolutely repellent to Isaiah's audience so it's a very shocking take even this beautiful god-ordained temple well there are big question marks over it and the question mark here is linked with the lack of person to person response from the people of god verse 4 i will bring upon them what they dread for when i called no one answered when i spoke no one listened they did evil in my sight and chose what i delight that in which i delight not i called no one listened so these rituals become repellent without personal relationship that's a very crucial statement the

Isaiah vision of the future is of a people who are linked to god not through ritual but through relationship personal relationship and Isaiah seems to point to a different temple rather a radical thing he's mentioned the temple in chapter chapter 66 verse 2 but then in the second part of verse 2 he says well here is the one i esteem the one who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word so we've talked about a building with paraphernalia!

and protocols that god says well actually let's focus on this person the one who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word there's the word of god and this person trembles at his word and here is this very radical exchange from the huge and sophisticated system program of the temple to this person the lowly soul god so this is the one i esteem here is the preferred meeting place in this humble one and of course this truth is important for christian spirituality it's important for the mindset what does god require of you to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with god the one who is humble and lowly in spirit it says contrite it's not meaning necessarily having things to apologise for but it means lowliness and humility it's important for our own psychology isn't it please we don't surely christian believers don't think they're so important that we can demand from other people that they bow down before us and say how good we are and how right we are and that we have the right to apologise for every slight they inflict on us surely we don't that's not the psychology that god loves in this humble and contrite person certainly important in leadership the greatest among you shall be your servant those who aspire to greatness must learn lowliness this is the one i esteem he who is humble and contrite in spirit and who trembles at my word the word of the lord the word of the lord this one who is highly esteemed that one who is that one who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at the word of the lord this one who is highly esteemed well there is somebody of whom god specifically says he is my chosen one in suit whom my soul delights i highly esteem him and this one who while it's not said that he trembled at god's word had such a deep deep respect for the word of his father he always did his father's will whatever the father showed him he did it and this one who like the temple is the place where heaven and earth meet in whom the fullness of the godhead dwells bodily i think that's probably the old translation colossians 1 19 and 2 4 2 5 saying in him all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form this mystery that in this one person the fullness of god is contained the mighty one contained within in some sense contained within the humanity of jesus and this one who epitomized humility and lowliness of spirit so that he could actually say i am gentle and humble in heart remarkable that jesus could say that without batting an eyelid i am gentle and humble in heart come and learn of me yeah it was jesus jesus of nazareth the one whom i esteem and of course following on from him from his mindset you can see it there in philippians chapter 2 he humbled himself and took on himself the nature of a servant and the

writer says of him let this mind be in you which was also in christ jesus you have the same lowly mindset as he so the temple so second thing now the birth birth of a new people and here we have the idea of zion the city as not only a city but also a mother and we've had this before 54 1 sing o barren woman who never bore a child more of the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband speaking of zion and the text at 54 verse 13 i will make your battlements of rubies your gates of sparkling jewels all your walls of precious stones all your sons will be taught by the lord and great will be your children's peace actually quoted in the gospels by jesus they will all be taught by god and just in passing we notice that those quotes from chapter 54 are following on from and i would say dependent on the content of chapter 53 and if you know your bible you will know that chapter 53 is the chapter of the suffering servant and because he suffered zion is not barren now in chapter 66 coming back to chapter 66 verse 7 before she goes into labor she gives birth before the pains come upon her she delivers a son who has ever heard of such a thing who has ever seen such things i know some women have very swift labors they do have labor and this is saying well before she goes into labor she gives birth it's unheard of verse 8 can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children do i bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery says the lord do i close up the womb when i bring to delivery says your god rejoice with jerusalem and be glad for her all you who love her so here is the nation born instantaneously and it raises the whole question of what the what the prophets have in mind when they look forward in terms of the nation the prophets envisaged the future for israel well isaiah talks about a return from exile talks about a highway so there's a a traveling metaphor a geographical metaphor ezekiel talks about dry bones coming alive from the dead the rattling of the bones and they come together and indeed they're in breathed with the ruach the spirit the spirit of the lord is in them so there's a rising from the dead metaphor and here the metaphor is instantaneous new birth now i'd suggest that these are not empty pointless random metaphors but there's something quite significant about each of them and here of course we're looking at the birth this new birth and the idea of this city then giving new life instantaneous new birth being born again and i really do wonder whether this was what jesus had in mind when he said to nicodemus and you will see the passage in john chapter 3 that we read right at the beginning you must be born again nicodemus is completely baffled by this thought isn't he and jesus says well you are israel's teacher and do you not understand these things shouldn't you have known wasn't it there in your scriptures wasn't that exactly what your scriptures said that there will be there must be a new birth the necessity of a complete new beginning not as a rock in the sky or of a rabbit out of a hat but as foretold in scripture nicodemus you should have understood that you should have known that and you need to have it you must be born again and that must surely carries with it a promise that that's something that god can do it is a god thing you can't make yourself be born can you it's something that comes to you from outside but the idea that we have a god who is so sovereign and gracious and almighty and life giving that he can give new birth to the dead oh lord do that for many people maybe do it even for some listening to this just now and the second thought here of

[55:47] Zion is that of comforting feeding nourishing her children it's in verse 11 for you will suck I think is the translation really you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts you will drink deeply and delight in the glory of her abundance or is it the abundance of her glory translated as the overflowing abundance for this is what the lord says behold I will extend peace to her like a river and the glory of the nations like a flooding stream and you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees as a mother comforts her children so will I comfort you and you will be comforted over Jerusalem well it's full of maternal comfort isn't it the baby suckled at the comforting breasts of the mother

Jerusalem and that repetition of comfort in verse 13 as a mother comforts her child so will I comfort you and you will be comforted over Jerusalem now I did look it up Hebrew forgive my pronunciation I think it's and in the Greek version it's paraklesis which you will recognise as the paraclete the comforter and it's the same couple of words or the two Greek and Hebrew translations of chapter 40 verse 1 comfort comfort my people says your God very famous chapter and I notice that in Luke chapter 2 verse 25 we find Simeon who was in the temple when the baby or perhaps the child

Jesus came and he was waiting for the consolation or perhaps better the comfort of Israel waiting there waiting for the paraklesis of

Israel and when he saw the baby Jesus let me look it up try and get it right Luke chapter 2 verse 25 there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon who was righteous and devout he was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ moved by the Spirit he went into the temple courts when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was the custom of the law Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying sovereign Lord as you have promised you now dismiss your servant in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel well that was Simeon seeing the comfort the consolation of

Israel in the person of Jesus Jesus being himself the comfort of Israel and here in this passage there is great comfort and nourishment and succor for the people of God it's put in terms of breast feeding isn't it of being satisfied and sucking at the comforting breasts of Zion and I'm just thinking of the New Testament where we're told like newborn babies crave the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up in your salvation the older version of that would have said the milk of the word but my modern translation doesn't say that but what is it there are things that nourish the people of God and we are to suck as much of that as we possibly can and surely that includes the word of God and the ministry of the comfort bringing spirit of God the comforter so here's my summary on this chapter these two wonderful topics that we've looked at the temple where God and humans meet and we find that rather than having to go to some bricks and mortar edifice that God deigns to meet with the humble lowly soul and he does that because first of all the humble lowly soul in whom God meets human humanity is Jesus himself and the second thing we've looked at is this prophecy of the birth and the birth of a new people or the new birth of people the foretelling of the new birth by the spirit of God and that necessity that Jesus enunciated and spelt out you must be born again and that's still true you must be born again the great preacher

[61:03] George Whitfield in the 1700s I think it was preached for up and down the land you must be born again somebody once said to him Mr Whitfield why do you so often come to this theme and repeat this message you must be born again to which he replied to the lady asking him madam because you must be born again!

and let's suck and let's suck on the spiritual milk that God gives us let's not be dried up and empty but let's be comforted as it says here and let's also learn the humility of the great servant the one in whom God dwelt let us learn the humility of the great servant and be ourselves in a in a lesser way obviously but a true way the people in whom God lives Amen So I hope you found that talk spiritually stimulating and helpful and for some of us maybe answering some questions in a remarkable way and perhaps raising new ones the contact details for further thoughts and conversation are on this channel and are up on the notices beginning and end somewhere of the broadcast so in a moment we're going to sing a song but let me now pray a prayer the song is glorious things of you are spoken

Zion city of our God and I just give the explanation that I often give we're not talking about a particular current city when we say Zion we're meaning that ideal city the true headquarters that God has the centre of the community that he's gathering at this moment that's the city of which we're speaking glorious things of you are spoken Zion city of our God so let me pray a prayer now may grace and mercy and peace be with us all from God who is Father Son and Holy Spirit now and forevermore Amen so for the time being it's goodbye from me glorious things of you are spoken bye bye glorious things of you have spoken

Zion city of our God he whose word cannot be broken found you for his own abode on the rock of ages founded what can shake your sure repose with salvation's walls surrounded you may smile at all your foes see the streams of living waters springing from eternal love well supply your sons and daughters and appear of want removed who can faint while such a river ever flows their first to strange grace which like the

Lord the giver never fails from age to age round each habitation hovering see the cloud and fire appear for a glory and a covering showing that the Lord is near thus they march with the pillar leading light by night and shade by day daily on the manner feeding which he gives them as they pray saviour sins of Zion city

[66:47] I through grace have never had let the world deride all pity I
will glory in your name fading are the world's best pleasures all its
boasting pomp and sure solid joys and lasting treasures none but Zion's
children know Amen.