

The Spirit's offer we cannot refuse

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Date: 02 May 2021

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're reading from John chapter 6, verse 35 to 51.

Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

But I say to you that you have seen me, and yet you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life. And I will raise him up on the last day.

[1 : 12] So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven. They said, is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

How does he now say, I have come down from heaven? How does he now say, I have come down from heaven?

He has seen the father, except he who is from God. He has seen the father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die i am the living bread that came down from heaven if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever and the bread that i will give for the life of the world is my flesh folks we're exploring started this in this teaching series exploring how we experience god's sovereignty and grace in our salvation and we're thinking we know we experience it we're trying to dig into some of the practicalities the process last sunday we established our starting point in ephesians chapter 2 and there was two simple points come out of ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 to 10 the first one is that by nature people are in a state of spiritual deadness when they're born in in our natural born state our spiritual dna if you wanted to call it that has us hardwired to rebel against god it's pretty pretty confronting sort of teaching isn't it from the bible and then we saw the state of sin that we're born in inevitably gives rise to acts of sin or rebellion rebellion because we're born in a state of sin and rebellion then we give expression to that in acts of sin and rebellion and though a person may not realize it by nature says the bible we're so radically affected by sin at every point of their being that we're totally unwilling and unable to respond to god as he intends us to a terrible plight but then we also saw last week into that very plight god acts severally ephesians 2 4 says and god made you alive that's what god does with spiritually dead people in the act of salvation he makes them alive purely and completely as an act of his grace nobody deserves it nobody can earn it nobody can command it it is purely and completely as an act of god's grace that god takes dead spiritual people spiritually dead people and makes them alive in other words he does for people what they could never ever do for themselves changes their spiritual dna creating new desire new ability to be the image bearers he created us to be and intended us to be this morning i want to dig into how this process of being made alive actually works in in our experience so here's a question and a scenario to get you thinking about how this process of being made alive actually works the question is this why does any given person become a christian why does any given person become a christian well you might say well that's that's an easy question they make they become a christian because they hear the message of salvation in jesus and against that they decide they want to be a christian they make a decision in response to what they hear so here's the scenario then at two friends fred and barney they get go to hear a talk about jesus as a guest of another friend so fred and barney are there each hears the same message each hears that they are rebels before god and without hope and without god in this world

each hear that christ's death was to rescue them was to save them from the the the guilt and the consequence of their sin and each hears the urgent plea of the preacher to turn to jesus and find life and each of fred and barney responds fred becomes a christian he recognizes suddenly his desperate need for christ his plight before god and his desperate need of salvation that could only come from god and he expresses a sudden new determination to give up autonomy and to live life under the lordship of jesus christ and in the same instant barney also makes a decision he thinks that's the biggest lot of rubbish he'd ever heard and he was really annoyed at his friend for wasting a whole evening now clearly each response involves a real choice driven by conscious desires but here's the question behind the question where did fred get his desire from why did he recognize his desperate need while his long-time friend barney standing beside him simply got offended it seems to me there's only two real alternatives to explain it either fred's desire came from within himself that is fred was more intelligent fred listened better fred understood better and so he used his native native abilities better and come to a better conclusion than barney at first glance you might think well that that's that's obviously what did happen but when you dig into that and look at barney then you think well actually no it doesn't work because barney also heard barney also understood enough to be offended to reject so barney's response was equally as strong but totally different barney's rejection was also on the basis of intelligent understanding barney barney barney wouldn't accept that god had a problem with him nor would he accept that he had a problem with god the only other alternative my friends is at least i believe the only other alternative is what the bible teachers the bible's answer that is is fred's desire the thing that made fred a christian brought him to be in a christian was something that came from outside of himself as the bible says it came as a sovereign work of god in fred's life and that's what the bible teaches the bible teaches that a person becomes a christian when god acts decisively in them creating both desire and ability to respond to the message of jesus now the biblical terminology for this in terms of classic theology terms is the effectual call of god and if you're following through on the notes you'll see that term written down there the word effectual is something we don't use much these days but it's the same word as effective so you could just read the effect of call of god in other words when god calls people it's always effective it always works it's irresistible in terms of historic theology the effective or irresistible call of god and it's another key aspect of god's absolute sovereignty and salvation

[10 : 25] and ultimately explains why and how a person becomes a christian and that's what i want to jump into a little bit this morning making two points firstly is the bible teaches that both the fact and necessity of god's effectual call in short the bible teaches that god saves sinners now the fact of god's powerful calling is established throughout the bible and every time you see god's calling or it's described or you or you or you see it in action in somebody's life it's a practical display of god's intervention in a person's life in an absolutely sovereign way and it results every time in renewing renewing and reorientating a person's life and relationship with god and so if you track through the old testament you can see it in lots of places abraham was called by god while he was just away off in the distance getting on with his own life man in his own business he was called by god uh disciples were called by god while they were um ill-educated uneducated illiterate fishermen and they were transformed as a result of that call paul was particularly called by god when he was actively rebelling against jesus and trying to destroy anything to do with jesus in the church he was called by god radically renewed and reoriented to the things of god into relationship with god so each of those was a display of god's sovereign creative power love and purpose god intervenes in the lives of individuals he establishes new relationship with them and he radically changes their orientation of these individuals towards himself how does he do that because he renews their hearts he renews their attitudes he renews their desires he gives them both the ability and the desire from the inside out that's the fact of god's effect of call the necessity of god's effective call is all we also taught in john chapter 6 so we're going to jump into a few verses and i'm not going to spend lots of time in these uh this passage i just want to lift out some verses uh that's that say the things i want i want you to hear this morning so the context of john chapter 6 and we're picking the story up at the verse 35 is that jesus has fed miraculously this huge crowd and he's speaking to the crowd afterwards and what he does is he bluntly jesus bluntly accuses the crowd of being interested in him but not true disciples he says effectively he says you guys are following me for opportunistic reasons you're not really following me because you see who i am and you see your need to be engaged with me as god and savior they didn't see him as the source of spiritual life and if you look at verse 36 and verse 37 jesus responds fairly harshly to them but i said to you that you have seen me and yet you do not believe in other words you can see me physically with your eyes but you can't really see me spiritually with through your hearts you can't see my significance all that the father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me i will never cast out the fact that this whole crowd are is not really believing him is not really seeing him as he truly

is doesn't faze Jesus at all in fact in these verses he responds quite positively he said there will be some who believe this crowd the vast majority aren't those people but there will be some who believe and they are guaranteed life and salvation how are they described here how is this group who will believe they're described as all that the father gives me will believe now the story continues and Jesus response initially offends the crowd even further there are religious people and they're deeply offended but Jesus would suggest they don't have a living vibrant relationship with God and so Jesus speaks even more bluntly to them in response verse 43 and 44 so the idea of the verse 41 the Jews grumbling about and that's the idea of being really deeply offended and angry how dare Jesus speak to us like that we are religious people we are Jews and that's the idea of being the truth verse 43 Jesus answered them do not grumble among yourselves no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him that word is also calls me calls him and I will raise him up at the last day no one is able to say Jesus no one has within themselves the power to come to Jesus or respond to Jesus as God and savior unless Jesus powerfully and sovereignly in their lives give them that ability give them that desire drawing them or calling them to himself now Romans 8 28 to 30 makes the same point and we're told there those who are first loved by God and called according to his purpose and salvation there you go that word call again God's work of salvation from start to finish first loved then called ultimately saved so the fact of God's call is simply and easily discerned in scripture how do we respond to it well can I suggest you this morning that this is a wonderful truth to discover there's nothing to fear in understanding and discovering how God works in a person's life how God has worked in your life if you're a Christian see because what it means is that God speaks of God's character and that God pursues is sinless is sinless lifeless people by definition if you're dead in your sins you can't do a thing you're just lying there you're just immobile that's the whole picture of a corpse well against that bleakness we have a picture of God pursuing his sin his um spiritually deadened people pursuing them until he's made them alive it's a wonderful picture he knows God knows that unless he moved towards us we would never of our own abilities have moved towards him by definition we're dead we're corpses spiritually unresponsive we would not move towards God we could not move towards God because we're not we were by nature spiritually dead towards him

and so likewise god knew that it would never be enough simply to send jesus into this world to atone to pay for the penalty for our sin to redeem us from the power of sin it would never be enough for jesus just to do that and as it were set up on the table and say okay it's over here guys come and come and help yourselves when you want to god knew it would never be enough why because we wouldn't want to help ourselves we wouldn't be able to help ourselves no god knew that he had to bring salvation to us and not only that but he had to make it effective in us by his sovereign power he brings jesus to us and he calls us to jesus what a beautiful picture what a beautiful picture god actually and effectively applies the benefits of the death of christ the individuals like you and me by working powerfully inside us this is not a truth to fear my friends this is a truth that should prompt us to say all glory be to god all glory be to god what's manner of love is this that god should move towards us pursue us even while we're so busy rejecting him second point i want to make this morning is is the mechanics or the process of god's effective call that is how does god make people alive well put simply god's call in its entirety is the process that we call conversion and the bible uses various terms in this zone of conversion terms like the new birth regeneration adoption adoption conversion or union with christ now there's a number of terms and others that are inseparably linked but not altogether identical realities there are shades of difference between each of those terms but essentially they come together to describe what we would call conversion each describes a spiritual fresh start each describes a radical new creation a resurrection from spiritual deadness to spiritual liveness new relationship with god and each of those things is a one-off event that we experience in our innermost being this is something god does and as a result of these one-off things we are new in christ and together they deliver us into this new life which is an ongoing reality so one-off events there ongoing reality which is the life we live as christians and that life is expressed in another conglomerate of terms that we come across in in the bible at repentance faith being sanctified or growing more like jesus as we continue in the life of of service discipleship loving the brethren and so on and so forth there's a whole heap of terms there that come together to describe the struggle of living as christians having been once off made alive so focusing on this part how does god's call actually work or happen in a person's life

well to that to do that i just want to illustrate through john chapter 3 remember that famous interaction between nicodemus and jesus and you remember the context jesus came nicodemus came to jesus by night nicodemus came as a religious professor he was a guy who taught others about the detail of god's word and god's salvation plan in history he came as a very educated man he came as a man who was deeply religious and deeply interested in jesus he came to learn more about jesus he loved god and he assumed that because of all the religious things he had been doing over his lifetime that god would love him but jesus king hits him not just once but twice in verse 3 and verse 6 i'm not going to get into the text you can look at it for yourself later jesus king hits him by saying this and this is a man who spent his whole life serving god jesus says nicodemus you need to be born again you need to be reborn you need to be regenerated if you're to be saved his religious life spent teaching about god and serving him did not mean acceptance before god or by god he needed as jesus said to be born of water and the spirit now there's lots could be said about that i'm just going to give a very quick summary water and spirit you know they're both pictures from the old testament of renewal and purity purification nicodemus this is what you're like on the outside a religious man but on the inside you still need something a refreshment you need a renewal you need something reborn you need regenerated on the inside what's on the outside won't get in in the way that you need it you need something new on the inside which will flow out in a new way and so the new birth is a picture or metaphor in nicodemus's life for the radical renewal that god must effect if a spiritually dead person is to be saved they don't come any more pure and religious from a human point of view than did nicodemus but jesus said no on the inside you need renewing desires attitude and heart in verse 8 jesus declares that to be the work of the holy spirit and again uses picture language the work of the holy spirit says jesus in verse 8 of john chapter 3 it's a bit like the wind you know the wind is real but you can't actually see it jesus saying when i'm talking to you nicodemus about this need for a rebirth this something on the inside refreshment purification on the inside then it's the work of the holy spirit which like the wind is real but unseen so in summary then how does it all work well firstly there's an outward call of the gospel that is what you and i experience we hear somebody speak or we read about the work of jesus we're confronted at some point in some form or other by the work of jesus by the fact that we need to be saved by the fact that we're up in a spiritually desperate situation before god by the fact that

jesus came into the world particularly to solve the problem to rescue us to give us new life if only we will trust in him that's the outward call of the gospel fred and barney heard the outward call of the gospel but there's also an inward call of god it also is real but unseen because it happens in our innermost being and historically this has been called the quickening of the spirit now the quickening is an old-fashioned word again it was the word it used to be used to describe the moment a mom felt her baby kicking in the womb it was the first signs of life in those days when they didn't have um all the scans and stuff they they now have the quickening of the spirit used to describe the first time we sense that god has touched our lives and brought life to us previously spiritually dead people in other words it's the time when god acts sovereignly to change our heart to change our attitudes to change our desires to change a person giving them what they need to engage with jesus and to embrace jesus as a savior he says he is so the quickening of the spirit is god's sovereign activity in the life of a person giving them a level of understanding a spiritual living level of understanding that previously they they'd heard the words but they didn't grasp the deep significance for them personally and when they grasped that deep significance then suddenly all the pieces of the jigsaw fall into place and fred collapses in tears on the one hand so aware of his plight before god on the other hand tears of joy that god would would presume to save him and lift him out of that and barney he's just what an idiot both heard the outward call of the gospel only fred experienced the inward call of the spirit giving them eyes to see and ears to hear in a way it hadn't previously done and when god's spirit acts in this way in this real internal unseen way then the result is always life always renewal in the person the bible is clear that god's effect of calling by definition is effective god's spirit cannot and will not be rejected or resisted why can he because he's affecting the purpose and command of god to bring his dead people to life to bring them into the kingdom so they might be safe with them forever now when we talk about this effect you'll call this sovereign work in of the spirit in a person's life we shouldn't think of a brutality like the work of a rapist now that's not what the bible describes it it's the gentle wooing it's the drawing of a lover that so changes the attitudes and desires that when a person becomes a christian at that particular moment in their in their outside form that's precisely what they want to do in fact there's nothing else they can think of they would like to do and i know that many of you out there have experienced that moment in your own lives

[30 : 35] that's how it was for lydia in acts chapter 16 verse 14 i've always well not always but for the last 30 40 years i've always loved this little phrase when that when the lord describes how lydia was converted converted it it says the lord opened her heart to believe that which you'd heard lord opened her heart it's such a beautiful tender yet strong concept the first desiring the first stirring of desire to find salvation in jesus for lydia was the result of the spirit's work unseen work within her she also was part of a crowd and that stirring the spirit that quickening of the spirit resulted in her external response of trust repentance and faith and we can see the contrast in lydia's life go go and read it for yourself in acts chapter 16 just as when dead in sin her natural choice would have been to hear god's word and reject it a la barney so now for lydia with the gentle powerful work of the spirit she acts on a new desire she finds within herself a desire to respond a desire to love and serve jesus a desire to go to him for the forgiveness she now realizes she needs and this new orientation this new orientation to jesus these new desires these new attitudes are foolproof evidence of the new birth by the power of the holy spirit at work within her and with fred and with so many here this morning now friends the last couple of minutes let me let me just mention three wonderful assurances which come which flow from this truth first one is this in our personal daily struggle to serve jesus now when you become a christian you realize that life actually gets a whole lot harder before you're a christian you didn't really care about what you did and the consequence of what you did unless you might think well i'll try and not not run afoul of the law but wherever you see a person responding to the word of god that is trusting jesus for the new life they desperately need we see them struggling to master their sin and trust in god where they become more and more aware of their sin and more and more desperate to be free from sin and live the life of obedience and purity that they want to live under the lord jesus when you say that then you can be sure that you're saying and experiencing a person who's been regenerated by the work of the holy spirit because those desires are the reflection of the evidence of the spirit's work within you we often get it the other way around we often think that because we struggle in the christian life that that's evidence that we're not we're not right with god that's quite the opposite you go and look at your non-christian friends and tell me how many of them are actually so concerned about their state before god in the way they're living it just doesn't happen yet christians are sometimes crippled by that concern why such a profound awareness of their sin because of the spirit's renewing power

the things of the spirit runs it give rise sorry the spirit gives rise to the things of the spirit secondly we can be relaxed in in in terms of evangelism we can be relaxed and confident as we speak about jesus and long to see them saved as we ourselves have been saved very practical truth at this point and here's how evangelism work god calls us to do what we can do and that is issue the outward call of the gospel god calls us to speak about jesus we don't have to make it up we just transmit it we just we're the conduit of telling people about jesus that's the outward call of the gospel and then we can relax knowing that god will do what only he can do and that is issue the inward call of changing somebody's hearts and desires and attitudes i can't change somebody's attitudes so i can in evangelism be confident to do what god asked me to do simply speak about jesus and relax and let god do what only he can do and that is take those words with the power of the holy spirit and make them into life in a person's soul boy that takes a lot of pressure off it takes a lot of pressure off i just have to concentrate and tell on people and that's not hard to do i'm excited about that and let god do what only he can do and thirdly we can luxuriate in the sweetness of god's glory and grace it's just lovely to know as we struggle with sin on a daily basis that god's sovereign purpose will have the last word in our world and in our life not sin when c.s lewis was converted he wrote of how he fought a tooth and nail against god and against any idea of becoming a christian he tried to be rid of all that god stuff but he says that all that god stuff just wouldn't go away it just pestered him and in a sense he felt himself being worn down until one night he says it all came to a crunch for him and he kneeled in prayer in his room at oxford and simply confessed that god was god and in that moment he then wrote later that he thinks he might have been the most reluctant christian in all of history not that he saying that god was in a sense twisting his arm and dragging him in the kingdom against his will but just expressed how much he fought against god's pursuit of him and he writes the words he writes that the words of jesus and one of jesus well-known parables go out and compel them to come in he meditated in those words compel them to come in and he said they were so sweet to him because that was how he experienced god's grace he says there was a beautiful gentle irresistibility about god's grace that was quite necessary to bring him to life and repentance and faith and life a life lived in service of the lord jesus christ from that point forward he knows that had he been left to his own devices he would simply have rejected anything he heard he even tried to do that but that gentle compelling irresistibility were sweet words of grace in c.s lewis's mind that the lord pursued him all the way into the kingdom

he had to live in the kingdom of the kingdom of the kingdom of the kingdom of the kingdom of the kingdom friends very very simply i'm just going to divide you now into two groups if you're not yet a christian here this morning and i'm sad to say there's some here in that category at least as far as i can discern humanly if you're not yet a believer pray for this gentle irresistible experience of god's grace god's pursuing you god loves you if you are a christian here this morning there's many of us thank thank thank the lord for that then savor this sweetness of god's grace and glory savor it daily and from that point ask the question how then do you want me to live as one who shows deep and consistent appreciation for your love and your grace in my life let me pray lord it's a strange thing that sometimes we fear studying your character lest it be overwhelming and too confronting for us and yet on every page of your bible lord we see you repeating over and over again that your first desire is to bless your people your first desire to give life to your people your last resort is to bring condemnation and judgment to people lord i pray that we might see your character for all its positivity for all its love first grace and that we might truly savor that truth of your sovereign intervention in our lives that's sweet but compelling and irresistible move of your spirit within us to move us from death to life first of all and then move us from that new life to a lifetime of growing consistency and serving you help us in our daily struggle lord because sometimes it doesn't feel like that on a day-to-day basis help us to be aware of our sin help us to lament our sin help us to be determined to move away from our sin but lord help us also not to get caught up by our sin as though somehow or other an awareness for sin and a sense of failing is evidence that we're not saved help us lord to see that that this also is evidence of your spiritual renewal within us i pray these things in jesus name amen it wasn't an early mark but hopefully it might have been profitable thank you