

New Birth

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone, and welcome to our Vision Series for 2024. I'd be grateful if you had your Bibles open, but also the St Paul's app, which has an outline for today's message.

In the latter half of 2009, I received a letter from RMS, New South Wales Roads, requesting that I front up to a vehicle inspection station with the vehicle that I'd purchased about 18 months earlier. The letter stated that there was, for RMS, some concern that my vehicle wasn't adequately repaired from a major accident that it had had earlier, something that I was unaware of at the time.

I wasn't concerned because it was a great vehicle, no issues at all, drove really, really well. I arrived at the inspection station, handed over the vehicle, the keys, confident of where I stood.

After about 45 minutes of sitting there twiddling my thumbs, two inspectors came in, sat either side of me, and gave me the classic good news, bad news report.

[1 : 15] Well, the good news is your vehicle is in fantastic order and certainly roadworthy. The bad news is that this is not your vehicle.

This is what is known as a rebirthed vehicle. They explained that the rebirthed vehicle is a stolen vehicle.

Someone purchases what is called a repairable write-off, most likely from interstate, and instead of going through the costs of repairing the repairable write-off, they steal a vehicle that is exactly the same and transfer the numbers from the repairable write-off to the stolen vehicle, and then sell it as a repaired vehicle.

That way they don't go through the costly process of repairing it. It looks good. In fact, it looks exactly the same as what the original vehicle did on the outside before the accident, but all the identifying markers of the original vehicle are gone, and the stolen vehicle are attached to it. And then, of course, the original vehicle that they purchased interstate is chopped up and discarded or thrown in the bottom of the Parramatta River. I was then told by the inspectors to sit tight as major crimes were on their way.

[2 : 50] And four officers turned up, and within two hours, my vehicle, I watched it being loaded on the back of a police truck, and with it, \$25,000 gone.

They said, the vehicle that you have insured is most likely in the bottom of the Parramatta River right now. That's the good news, because if you had an accident with this vehicle, you weren't insured for it.

All this happened. The good news is that as a result of my case and the evidence that I gave, you can now buy a second-hand vehicle with confidence.

There is now a national register that identifies the entire history of every vehicle. You're welcome. This all happened on the day before our second child was born. One day, I'm dealing with rebirthing, and the next day, I'm dealing with an actual birth.

[4 : 00] And when she was born, the first time I looked at her, I went, oh yeah, she's ours. Immediately identifiable as ours, belonging to us.

At birth, we are all identified genetically as we share the genetic makeup of our biological parents. We also inherit an ethnic makeup, depending on where you're born.

You're also likely to have a national identity. And certainly for many years, as you were growing up, you share the socioeconomic identity of your parents.

That is, our birth identifies us in every possible way. And as we just read, Nick read out to us, Peter describes becoming a Christian as being reborn, a new birth.

This new birth doesn't change who we are ethnically, nationally, genetically, socioeconomically, but it does change our lives in such a way that we are fundamentally different people.

[5 : 19] Fundamentally different people. You may not look different on the outside, but you are fundamentally different on the inside.

Totally different on the inside. And that's what this vision series is all about. Over the course of this term, we are building up towards Easter and the celebration of the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity.

And as we build up to Easter, I've kind of reversed everything. I can't kind of change the date for Easter. As we build up to Easter, we're going to be looking at the resurrection.

And specifically, the resurrection impact on our lives now. What it does for us. And we're going to be going through sections of 1 and 2 Peter as we do that.

And for the first four weeks, I'm focusing on the first 16 verses of 1 Peter. So you're going to see that Bible reading again and again and again. Again, if you get your Bibles open and have it there with you, that'd be fantastic.

[6 : 30] Today, I want to lay the foundation of the new birth. What is the new birth? What does it do? How does it grow in us?

And who makes the new birth possible? That's kind of the three points for today. So what's the new birth? Verse 3, just read out to us. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In his great mercy, he has given us new birth. All Christians, that is, everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ, are described as being reborn.

It's a new birth. That is, every Christian is born again. That term is not just for a certain kind of Christian.

You know, there's Christians and then there's born again Christians. That's not biblical in any way whatsoever. All Christians are born again.

[7 : 38] And we're not told much here about what the new birth is that the Christian has received. We know from other parts of the Bible that the new birth is a new life and a new vitality.

New life and a new vitality. When a person is born again, they experience new life. That is, we are told in Ephesians that we are spiritually dead.

And being born again, spiritual life comes into you. God puts his very life into us. His eternal life into us. And the new birth comes to us in different kinds of ways.

That is, there's no one type of experience that everyone must have. For some, their experience of new birth is like lightning bolt.

And you can identify, which someone like I can identify, on the day, 30th of May, 1993, when the lightning bolt struck.

[8 : 49] For some, it's a gradual process where it's hardly even recognisable. So it's important not to insist that it happens in a certain way.

Even though the new birth comes to us in different ways, and at times this new birth might be subtle, it is nevertheless astounding and powerful.

The New Testament, the original New Testament word for it, is palagenesia. Palagenesia.

It means regeneration. The book of Titus tells us that when we are born again, we experience regeneration. And Titus uses the word palagenesia.

In Matthew 19, verse 28, Jesus says this, Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, what Jesus is talking about there in Matthew 19, is the end of all things.

[9 : 59] When he rules the universe, God's power will come into the world and renew the entire world. He'll make it all right. Everything that's wrong, everything that's stained, everything that's evil, everything that's deformed, broken about this world will be fixed in that moment, in a twinkling of an eye by Jesus Christ at his second coming.

Death and evil and suffering will be gone. All tears, sadness, anxiety will be wiped away. And despite all the superpowers and the wealth and the technology of the world, we cannot fix it.

So think of what is required to bring about that kind of renewal in our world. And Jesus describes that time as the renewal of all things and he uses the Greek word, palogenesisia, in Matthew 19.

So the Apostle Paul here, sorry, the Apostle Peter here, in 1 Timothy, sorry, the Apostle Paul, has the audacity to use the exact same Christian word to describe the new birth of the Christian in Titus. Palogenesisia. The renewal of all things. The tremendous power that renews all things at the end comes into the life of the Christian now in order to effect rebirth through faith in Jesus Christ.

[11 : 49] Can I just say, therefore, if you are a Christian, you, like me, are putting up with a whole heap of stuff in our lives that we don't have to.

The potential for change in our lives is astounding. Incomprehensibly astounding because that power is present right now.

This is the new life we get with the new birth. So particularly, where does this new birth operate in the life of the Christian?

What does it do? The new birth operates especially in the hopes of the Christian, which is what we read there in 1 Peter 3.

The new birth, the reason the new birth changes our, changes the Christian so much is because it changes our hopes so much.

[13 : 05] If you change a person's hopes, you change everything about them. Back in verse 3 again, Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you. The direction of every person's life is set on what they hope the most.

So if you offer a person a life-giving, imperishable hope, then their life is changed forever. All of us, every human being, has certain desires and expectations.

And there are desires like meaning, significance, security, purpose, and then you work out what you think will fulfill those desires.

[14 : 18] And whatever we believe in to fulfill those desires is what we set our hopes and our hearts on. Which is another way of saying, we are all hope-driven people.

And our hearts, in order to fulfill our hopes, might be set on our careers, might be set on money, might be set on accomplishments, it might be set on status, it might be set on love, romance, beauty, our children, might be a political hope, might be social causes.

every single person chooses something to believe in that will fill their hopes. We are unavoidably hope-based creatures.

Proverbs 13, 12, in the Old Testament tells us that hope deferred makes the heart sick. we experience our present in radically different ways depending on what our future hope actually is. Imagine I have two people and I give them the exact same pair of scissors and I say, I want you to cut the church grass with these scissors.

[15 : 50] Pull one of them aside. Their experience of that, I mean I heard the groans already, you know like, their experience of that cutting the grass with a pair of scissors will be quite different based on the conversation I have with each of them privately.

I say to one of them at the end of this job, when you're all finished, I'm going to give you \$20. to the other person, I say at the end of this job, when you're all finished, I'm going to give you \$200,000. One is going to whistle when they work, the other will not, depending on the end goal. And when they have a break, one of them is going to go, I can't believe we're doing this for this.

Like, this is, you look at the conditions we're dealing with here, the other one's going to go, I don't care that it's going to be 30 odd degrees today, I don't care. Hope makes all the difference of our current experience.

My point is we are hope driven and the new birth changes our hopes. The new birth gives us a hope that is imperishable. And that is the contrast with every other hope that this world offers us.

[17 : 11] It perishes, it fades, it spoils. Put your hope in a career, you'll have to retire. Put your hope in money, you're never secure.

Hope in your family, it's potentially the last one left. So how does this new hope grow in us? How do we wrench our hearts away from hopes that will fade and perish and put it into a hope that will never perish, fade or disappoint in any way?

How do you make that shift? There are multiple ways that that happens in the New Testament, but the main way that 1 Peter talks about growing in new life and new hope and therefore to become more like Jesus in character, more stable in life, more loving and joyful, the more shaped into his image and his priorities.

The 1 Peter speaks about one way primarily that that is affected in your life. The new birth grows in you and the hope grows in you and it's surprising for us.

It's suffering. Suffering. In fact, I think I would declare, I'm assuming someone else would say the same, that apart from the book of Job in the Old Testament, 1 and 2 Peter, but particularly 1 Peter, are the greatest books of the theology of suffering in the Bible.

[18 : 47] Suffering. Now, I'm going to say a lot more about that in a few weeks, so I don't really want to steal all that thunder now, but here's a taste.

Verse 6, In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

The first words of verse 6 say that the Christian rejoices in their hope. rejoices in their hope.

The word is in actual fact a present tense. You're rejoicing in your hope now. What makes that remarkable is that the words suffer grief are connected to it.

And the words suffer grief actually mean to be in agony, lots of pain, pain. It doesn't say you used to rejoice but unfortunately now you're suffering agony.

[20 : 13] Nor does it say that because you've got lots to rejoice about, you're not actually really in pain, you know, get over yourselves, move on, take some Panadol, have a lie down, it's not really that bad.

both the feeling of the agony and the rejoicing are both present tense. They are concurrent activities.

And what 1 Peter says here, when we do both of those things at the same time, it's like putting gold into a furnace. it refines you and grows you as the suffering drives you deeper and deeper and deeper into your real hope, the hope that can never perish, spoil or fade.

And yet, this is almost never our view of suffering. in a day and a culture that suggests our personal happiness is of the highest importance, then anything hard, anything difficult, anything unpleasant is considered bad, wrong and evil.

And it's God's job to take it away from me in order that I might be able to rejoice. we therefore cannot possibly imagine because we've been so marinated in such a culture, we cannot possibly imagine why God would allow suffering and hardship come into my life at all.

[21 : 54] So, imagine a forestry worker. They have marked out a bunch of trees, they're going to cut them down and they're going to get set off to the sawmill and then they come in to do their job and they notice at the top of one of this tree they're about to cut down, there's this bird, a lovely bird, making a nest, it's building a nest in the top of the tree in the forest where it goes, you know, so they bang on the tree, make lots of noise to get the bird to move on and much to their delight the bird flies and moves to the next tree.

Oh, starts bang on that tree, bang, bang, bang, lots of noise, get the bird to move on, bird moves on to the third tree, oh, here comes the forestry work of the bird, what is wrong with this person?

Like, seriously, give me a break here, I'm just trying to build my nest, trying to raise a family, you know, like, what is wrong with this forest? Bang, bang, bang on the tree again and the bird gets up and flies off and lands on a rock, starts to build the nest and notices the forestry worker leaves them alone.

The older we get, we realise that every tree, every hope will come down. will come down.

We don't believe it when we're young. When we're young, we think that whatever tree that we try to plant our nest in will be there all the time.

[23 : 41] As you get older, you realise every tree, every hope will eventually come down. And yet every generation thinks it'll be able to do what no other generation has been able to do before it.

Our hearts are not designed to be completely fulfilled by anything or everything in this life. We simply don't realise the greatness of our souls and the depth of our desires and our hopes.

And the best thing that God can do for us while we live in this body, in this world, before Jesus comes back, is to bang on every tree that we build our lives on.

until we reach the solid rock, the sure foundation that is the gospel of Jesus Christ alone. An imperishable hope, a greater hope, a sure foundation.

The worst thing that can happen for us is to be left to our own devices to build our nests at the top of the tree, build our lives on something that will in short time come crushing down.

[24 : 54] So who then makes this new birth possible? How can Peter say that if you're a Christian, this new birth, you have a new birth, you have a living and perishable hope?

How's that possible? How can he say that when we know of ourselves, we constantly fail God, we fail each other, how can he say, we even fail ourselves, how can we possibly have that kind of hope, sure hope?

None of us have loved God and loved our neighbours ourselves all of the time. We haven't done it, we never will. How can Peter promise us a hope that will never, ever perish, never come crashing down, never fade?

Verse 10, concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and the circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

[26 : 19] Even angels long to look into these things. What is the gospel that the prophets revealed centuries before and that the apostles preached?

What is the gospel? It is that Jesus Christ suffered. He suffered. The Son of God, the Creator of all things came as the rescuer and the ruler of all of humanity in weakness.

Not in triumph, in weakness. He died on a Roman cross for the sin and the failure of humanity. He died the death that we should die.

We, the weak and the perishing, have a glorious and imperishable hope in Jesus Christ, the glorious and the eternal one because he perished in shame for us.

Our new birth and glorious hope are not based on our performance. It is based on the performance of the imperishable one, the one who died but rose again and lives forever and reigns forever.

[27 : 42] The Christian's ultimate glory is assured because he emptied himself of his glory.

So it's all his work. So what are we called to do then in order to build this hope? If you're a Christian, what do you do?

It says there that the angels never get tired of looking at what Jesus has done for us. In fact, the word there means, the word too long there means to lust for something.

The angels are lusting after the work of Jesus. That is, there's nothing greater for an angel to do than to look at and ponder more and desire more what Jesus Christ has done for humanity in salvation.

I find that astounding because it's a present lusting. What I find astounding about that is that how long have angels been around for? people, I'm assuming they're around for a long time, like a lot longer than a human being, you know, for millennia.

[29 : 02] and it says here that their hearts never grow weary of the gospel. Searching it out, its implications, seeing connections, never grow weary of it.

And that is how we heal our hearts of the despair that we have. keep looking at the gospel and his living hope will grow in our hearts and it will change us more and more into the likeness and the priorities of Jesus Christ.

Never get tired of the gospel. Lust after the gospel. Now, I'm also mindful that not everyone here is a Christian, tuning in either building or tuning in online.

Very mindful of that and you are very welcome. We love to have you here, that you might discover something of this living hope. And I've realised that I've covered a huge topic in a very short time. I've got a few more weeks to go. And I've made statements and claims that I haven't unpacked that are very worthy of being unpacked more and more.

[30 : 25] I'm aware that on any given Sunday, we are all at different stages of this journey of understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so maybe I've made some assumptions today that are not your assumptions.

And I would love to invite you to explore that more with us. Have the conversations about that. At the end of this month, we are starting a seven-part course called Alpha that explores the big questions of life and the Christian faith.

It's a relaxed, it's a safe place to explore deeper, and I want to just invite you to be part of it. Get your phone and get to the QR code and be part of that, to explore with us what this new birth is, what this imperishable hope in Jesus Christ is.

But maybe you've already taken the steps of exploring it, but today it's pressing in on you.

Pressing in on you. God is, by his spirit, pressing on you to take that next step. Take the next step of coming to Jesus and receiving new birth today.

[31 : 46] If that's you, I'd be delighted to have a conversation with you afterwards.