

THE THIRSTY SOUL

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We thank God that the love of God is wonderful. From the book of Prophet Ezekiel, we want to read these few verses which tell about the mercy of God to the sinner, in bringing him into the new birth, the birth unto righteousness.

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

This is God's promise to the Children of Israel, the people who provoked God to jealousy. Because of the mercy and love of God towards them that they might not perish, God promised that He would bring them back to taste of His power through the new birth unto righteousness.

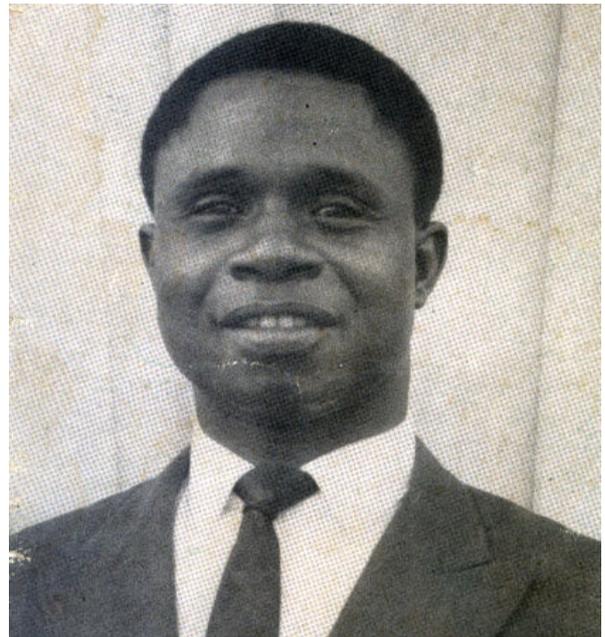
God repeatedly asked the Children of Israel: **"Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, and not that he should repent and live?"** The perfect love of God pleads with people, not because they are good but because God has no pleasure in their death. He pleads with them to repent, so that they can turn from their condition of woe, corruption, doom, indifference, and rebellion. When God was telling the Children of Israel these words through Prophet Ezekiel, they had not returned to the Promised Land. Although they had been there some time before, sin had caused them to be carried away into captivity. Acting contrary to God, and failure to follow the perfect will of the Living God, had opened the way for God's wrath to be visited on them. They had experienced hardship and problems so much on every hand that God said:

"For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land" (Ezekiel 36:24).

God declared His plan for them, that He would bring them out from among the Gentiles, and gather them from all the places to which they had been scattered. He, the Lord, would bring them back to their own country. When they returned, He promised that He would change their heart and also their mind. Why? Their heart, their behaviour and their deeds were not according to His wish. Their rebellious heart could not by any means, do what would please God. This makes us to understand clearly that, with sin in the heart, one cannot do anything that is satisfactory or acceptable to God.

It was necessary that God changed their stony heart and create a new spirit within them before they could do what was pleasing to God. That means that in our natural state as human beings, it is necessary for God to change our heart and mind, before our conduct can be acceptable to Him. We may feel that we know how to behave, we know how to comport ourselves, we have knowledge, wisdom and understanding. But by no means can any of these qualities, which we may possess, deliver us from corruption, stubbornness, or covetousness; neither do they deliver from filthy language, hatred or bitterness.

It is possible for us to have good manners, and be honoured and esteemed by people, yet be



an enemy of God. In as much as we are at enmity with, or rebellious to God or to His Word, we cannot be acceptable to Him. It is in order that these people might be acceptable to God, that He promised He would take the stony heart from them, and give them a heart of flesh. This promise was not limited to the Children of Israel alone; it is meant for all mankind. We read this in John's Gospel:

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

"Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13).

These are the words which were spoken by John about Jesus Christ, and about those to whom He came. **"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."** It was the Jews who were referred to in this text. They did not believe in Jesus. By this unbelief, the promise of the Living God to make them new creatures, to give them the new birth, eluded them. He went on to say, **"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."** Similarly, he let us understand that even when He came, it was only to those who received Him, that He gave the power to become the children of God. We see this as a testimony in the lives of those who were His disciples. It showed in their behaviour and attitude to such an extent that people testified that the disciples had been with Jesus. At Antioch, where they were again closely observed, they said these were disciples of Jesus Christ, these were Christians, because they saw in their lives the power which Jesus Christ brought into the world.

John went further: **"Even to them that believe on his name."** Likewise, it is those who believe on His name that will experience the transformation of lives. He further explains the manner in which they become children of God.

'Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'

It is not in the manner that human beings are born - this birth is not physical, but spiritual. It is a regeneration wrought in the life of a person by the Spirit of God. It is an act of God. Don't misunderstand me, I am not saying that when a baby is born, it is not from God. It is similar to the question that Nicodemus asked Jesus Christ, when Jesus told him that except a person is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus started to think like this: 'Oh! At my age, must I return into my mother's womb and be born the second time?' Jesus told him that it was not so. Those who are born physically are of the flesh, but those who are born of the Spirit are spiritual. We are talking about those who are born of the Spirit. It is on those people that the power of God of Heaven descends. He changes their heart of stone, and gives them a heart of flesh, as He promised the Children of Israel.

In order to have our heart changed, it is necessary that we acknowledge our faults, confess to Jesus that we are sinners, and promise that we shall not return to our sins. We must cleave to the Blood that He shed and His promise to save us. The power of God will come down, and the Spirit of God will bear witness with our spirit that we are children of God. This is what gives us the assurance of being born again.

It is this change in the heart that is called the born-again experience. When the seed of God dwells in our heart, we become new creatures, and old things pass away.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

It is then that the heart of stone is changed to a heart of flesh. The heart of rebellion, stubbornness, disobedience, stealing, covetousness, fighting, strife, wrath, fury and all such evil habits like drunkenness, greed and drug addiction, pass away altogether. **"Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."**

To become a new creature in Christ Jesus demands our conversion. This is only possible through the Word of God.

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23).

"Not of corruptible seed," shows that the new birth is not what money can buy. We can use the words of our mouth to correct our situation. Sometimes, when people want to achieve an objective in the world, they would approach others whom they know are in a position to influence the matter in their favour. They would meet them secretly, saying "My matter is coming up before you very soon, please consider my case and lend your support to the matter, so that **I** may be successful." And when the matter comes up before them, they too would speak for him, and the matter would be decided in his favour. But this is not possible with God, because He is not partial.

This new birth comes through the Word which is incorruptible, which liveth and abideth for ever. It is the incorruptible Word of God that has power to search our heart. It is the Light which cannot become dim, and which the darkness of the world cannot overcome. Sin cannot hide before it. There is nothing in this world that is not manifest before it. The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. It exposes the heart. It pierces the heart even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. It is the discernor of the intent of the heart. Whenever evil or iniquity, unrighteousness or sin is hiding in the heart, it is the same Word of God that discovers it. It is this very Word of God that can do the work of the new birth. It shows us our guilt. It condemns sin in the heart, with the backing of the Holy Spirit. It also enlightens the sinner, by making him realise his lost condition. It is for this very reason that we must allow the Word to enter our heart. We must allow it to examine our heart. If we do not believe it, if we do not prepare our heart for it, it will not be able to do anything there. That is why John tells us that, **"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."**

Let nobody think within himself, "When **I** continue to come to this Church for a long time, sitting among the people, the Word will search out my heart." It will not, except you submit to it. If it were something that force could achieve, when Jesus was on earth, in as much as it was to these very Jews that He was sent, and those present there were His parents, family, relations, friends and contemporaries, he ought to have forced them. No, He did not force them. 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not, but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.'

Do you know, when one fails to believe the Word of God, the Word which would have saved him, would condemn him.

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

"He that believeth on the Son bath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:18, 36).

These two verses make us understand that it is by believing in Jesus that we have the privilege of the new birth or the regeneration of our heart. But in rejecting Him, one becomes distanced from

the Living God, and brings the judgment of God upon oneself

We should not just sit down indifferently, we should seek the grace, which the Word of God brings into the heart. We should believe and pray that God should use it for the benefit of our soul. When God promised that He would create a new heart in us, it is our responsibility to seek the experience. If we do not seek it, we shall not be able to receive it. We must yearn for it. If we do not want to remain in our old ways and thoughts, in our self-will which would lead into destruction, we must seek the mercy of the Living God. We shall become new creatures, all the old and corrupt ways of life would pass away, and a new heart will become ours. It is necessary for us to seek it. We must apply our heart to do so. How? By believing the Word of God. As John has told us, **"As many as received him..."** As many as received Him is not limited to one hundred or two hundred. That number is more than hundreds of thousands. No matter how many they may be, if they believe, He will send down power from Heaven to make them new creatures, to make them quickened souls and to give them eternal life.

Since God has given us this promise, we know for sure that if we reject Him, eternal condemnation and judgment await us. Why will our souls not choose the blessing which God offers? In the first place, He has shown us the great privilege that, once we are in Christ Jesus, and our lives have become His, and He dwells in us, we shall become new creatures. That is, all the bad habits that we have been identified with, probably, drunkenness, smoking, gambling, telling lies, gossiping, fighting and bitterness of mind, God will totally remove.

Even if it is for this alone: that you can walk freely all over the place, and the neighbourhood can have rest — it is enough. People also ask, "Old fellow, is this you? We no longer see you in the beer parlour, have you quarrelled with the bottle?" "Yes, the bottle and I have become enemies." The pool agent also says, "Ha! I don't see you in the pool house again to fill your coupon." Your response is, "Ah! God has put hatred between me and gambling. He has set a boundary between us." Even if it is for this one reason: that money remains in your pocket, it is enough. Above all these, God will give you eternal life instead of eternal torment. Why won't you, for this cause, decide to seek the mercy of the Living God?

Jesus told Nicodemus, **"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."** It is the same thing that He is telling you. Maybe there has been a thirst in your heart about how you could enter the Kingdom of God that you have been hearing about, and you desire; He is now telling you that it is necessary, if you want to see it and enter into it, you must be born again. You cannot change your heart by yourself. But the Word of God can. What you need to consider is how the Word of God will change your heart.

Many of us who hear the Word of God leave it on the bench. We fail to take it away with us. What we need to do is to meditate on the Word. It is the power in it that we must ponder about in our mind. When we don't put our mind on this, even if we go to pray, we will just pray in vain. A sister testified that for about two years, she was held down by a disease in her leg. But of recent, she started to meditate and ponder in her heart about the power in the Blood of Jesus Christ. She started to see how great the power was; she started to meditate on this Word, - **"This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."** Oh! She started to think about the chastisement of our peace which was upon Him and His stripes by which we are healed. Her heart started to melt. You need to start to meditate upon the Word of the Living God, which tells you that He will change your heart, He will remove your heart of stone, and replace it with a heart of flesh. It is God Who has promised, and it is when you begin to meditate upon this promise that the power of God will come into your heart.

God tells us through John, that as many as believe on the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, are the children of God. You may not be able to see Jesus Christ face to face like John and

Peter did, but you can believe that He is your Saviour. He will save you from your sins. It is written of Him that He shall save His people from their sins. If you believe that He will save you from your sins, He will; but you need to meditate on His Word and apply your heart to it.

Jesus used to pass in the area where Zacchaeus was. But on the day that Zacchaeus' heart started to thirst and he wanted to see Jesus Christ, he decided: 'Today I will see Him. Each time Jesus passes, I do not see Him because **I** am of a small stature. Therefore, I will go and climb the sycamore tree, so that I can see Him.' Jesus had known his thoughts and seen the longing in his heart. He knew he didn't just want to see Him for the fun of it, but because he wanted the power of Jesus in his life. When Jesus got there, He said, 'Zacchaeus, come down. Before you climbed the sycamore tree, I had seen you.' Do you know that if you too begin to think about the power in the name of Jesus Christ to save His people from their sins, to make them new creatures, to forgive their sins, and give them new life, this power will come down into your soul?

It was after Jesus called down Zacchaeus that people started to look at him. Oh! they would think within themselves, "Out of all of us in this place, look at me, I am as tall as a giant, and so hefty, Jesus could not call me or any other person, except this publican. Certainly, this man is not a prophet, He ought to look for someone who is holy." Jesus Christ said that He has not come, for the righteous, but to seek and save sinners. He said, 'Zacchaeus, this day is salvation come into your house.' Glory be to the Living God. These people did not know that there had been a longing in Zacchaeus' heart to forsake his sins totally, and Jesus had seen all the yearning. To establish this, Zacchaeus said, "**Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.**"

If you say that you have no sin, you are deceiving yourself. But if you confess your sins, it is certain that the Living God is faithful and just to forgive your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. The unseen King, has seen your heart. He knows what He needs to change in your heart and life. He is the One from Whom you ought not to hide. If you hide from Him, you will have eternal condemnation. He is the One Who will give you peace if you expose yourself to Him. He will give you everlasting life