

Part II: Word Pictures

Lesson Five

Death, Birth, and Life

Introduction

What's the point of the familiar saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words"? **A photograph or painting can communicate pages worth of information and emotion. A sunset, a coral reef full of fish, a mountain range.**

The Bible doesn't come with photographs or drawings, but it does often use words as pictures. The word pictures of the Bible have many similarities with the symbols used throughout Scripture. Symbols tend to be understandable only if you've been taught their meanings (sort of like a divine shorthand) (e.g. **Revelation numbers, beasts, women, riders**), while word pictures are much more basic and universal. They take some of the most fundamental concepts we know and use them to illustrate great spiritual truths. **For the next 4 lessons, we'll focus on pictures)**

Studying God's Word

There are two human experiences that all people share: birth and death. In this lesson, we study how God uses those to illustrate the true nature of spiritual life.

Born dead

Read Ephesians 2:1.

1. What does God say was our natural spiritual state? **We are dead. Who is we? Every human being, from when? Conception**
2. What is Paul's point in using this word picture? (What are the ramifications of our natural state?) **(Hint: What can dead people do?) We can't do anything to save ourselves, or please God, or believe in him.**
3. In what ways do some churches deny man's natural spiritual deadness? **Synergism (RC, Methodists) teaches that humans cooperate with God for their salvation, faith and works. Monergism teaches that God does all the work. Arminianism teaches that I have a free will to choose to believe that Jesus died. I'm not completely dead.**
4. Sin is more than something we think, say or do. It's something we are, by nature. Why is it important to remember that? **If I think the only thing wrong is what I do, I'll use the law to try to get me and others to stop doing those things. If my problem is my nature, I'm hopeless. I need to turn to someone to change who I am, not just what I do. Also, I can give credit where it's due (God)**

Coming to new life

Read John 3:1-6.

5. Why did Nicodemus struggle with Jesus' statement about being *born again*? **He knew it was impossible for a human to be physically born twice. He didn't comprehend spiritual rebirth (because he didn't see himself as spiritually dead)**

6. Explain the illustration of being born again. Think of who is the active partner in a physical birth. What is Jesus' point? **The mother does all the work. The child is passive. It "is born" not "it birthed itself" So also spiritually. God does the "birthing." We are completely passive (even as adults)**
7. How is this birth accomplished according to Jesus? **Through water and the Spirit (baptism)**
8. Are you a born-again Christian? **What does that mean for many? Claiming to be a born again Christian means they've made their decision to accept/follow Christ. It's sometimes used to distinguish them from those who they perceive to be lukewarm, because they were baptized as a child. In reality, this phrase is redundant. You can't be a Christian without being born again. The definition of a Christian is someone in whom the Holy Spirit has worked spiritual life (a new birth).**
9. Agree/disagree: If you are not baptized, you are not born-again. **A person can be a believer (born again) without the opportunity to be baptized, but rejecting baptism is a rejection of the gospel. "It's not the lack of baptism that damns; it's the rejection of baptism."**

Life without end

Read John 5:24,25.

10. What event is Jesus referring to with these words? How do you know? **Though it may seem to be a reference to the final resurrection, it's not. This time has NOW COME. It's a reference to spiritually dead people coming to faith.**
11. What will cause a person to cross over from death to life? **Hearing Jesus' word and believing the Father who sent Jesus.**
12. Agree/disagree: For a Christian, eternal life begins at the moment of death, or when Jesus returns in glory—whichever comes first. **No, actually, true spiritual life begins the moment I believe. My status as a forgiven, child of God goes on forever.**
13. What blessings do you enjoy as someone who has "crossed over from death to life"? **I will not be condemned. No fear of eternal punishment; I have/am a New Man, no fear of death, it's just the passage to heaven. I'm a child of God, God is on my side. I can enjoy my life, God's creation. Cf. John 10:10 I have come that they may have life and have it to the full, more abundantly"**

Read John 5:28-29.

14. What event is Jesus referring to with these words? How do you know? **Judgment Day. People are in the graves; this time is coming, not yet here.**
15. Who will rise to live? **Those who have done good. Salvation by works? No. The only good works are those done by believers. Notice, only believers will continue to "live."**

Summary

Key Points:

- The picture of death impresses on us that we're unable to do anything to improve our condition before God.
- God gives us a new birth through the gospel. This is completely his doing, by his grace.
- Even now on earth believers have been raised to new life. We can live in peace before God, free from guilt and the fear of physical death.

May God's people live in peace and confidence!

During the Week

1. Read Martin Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed for an excellent reminder and explanation of how you were saved.
2. Think of people you know who don't seem to know Jesus. Remind yourself that just as you were saved by the gospel others shared with you, so the people you have in mind will be saved only by the Word someone shares with them. Pray and look for opportunities to do so!
3. If you don't already know them, look up the dates for when you and your family members received new life through Baptism. Put those dates on a calendar and plan to do something special to rejoice in what God has given you: Sponsor flowers for your church's altar on those weekends, or read John chapter 3 or Titus chapter 3 on those days.