

NOTES ON JOHN III

Extract From Address Entitled -

"THE PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT,

AND NOTES ON JOHN III. 5-8."

By Mr. P. W. Heward,
At Wattam's Restaurant,
9th July, 1918.

(Extract from Address on "The Personality of the Holy Spirit, and Notes on John 3:5-8".)

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We now approach John 3:5-8. This passage has been perverted by ritualism, and is, I suppose, shunned by many because they fear it will be misused. The statement of the Lord Jesus is clear, in verse 3, "Unless anyone have been born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God", and in verse 5, "Unless anyone have been born out from water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which hath been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which hath been born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, it is necessary that ye have been born from above". We observe, therefore, that the preceding and succeeding contexts of verse 5 alike emphasize a spiritual birth, alike lay a stress on being born from above. Again we have in this very passage a reference to the personal wish of the Spirit of God, wrongly rendered in connection with the wind. The wind does not blow where it listeth, but the Spirit does breathe where He will. We have undoubtedly an allusion to the wind. The wind is a type of the work of the Spirit. Now if this is realised we can understand something of what is brought before us by the allusion to water. Here we have water and wind, both set forth in spiritual teaching. General interpretations may be thus summed up. Many have thought that Christ speaks of natural birth, -born of water, naturally, and of the Spirit, with a new birth. But this has no parallel in Scripture, and does not fit the context. Others have believed there is a reference to baptism, but birth and baptism are distinguished. Birth of the Spirit preceded baptism in ^{ing} the Spirit, and birth out of water preceded baptism in water, and coming up out of the

water. A large number have felt there is an allusion to the Word of God, and indeed it has been translated "spiritual water". I suppose we have no doubt that the laver containing water shows us water as a figure of God's cleansing truth. Eph. 5 will illustrate. But where water pictures God's truth, the suggestion is hardly that of birth, but of cleansing, a different aspect. We must be careful not to confuse the Holy Spirit's use of words in different contexts. May I illustrate what I mean. In John 19 we read how blood and water came out from the Lord Jesus. In 1 John 5 we have, This is He Who came through water and blood. To try and make the two passages similar is to lose the teaching of both. "Blood and water" has a very distinct aspect from "water AND blood". We must be careful that we take a passage in its context. Naturally we realize that the Lord Jesus frequently alluded to the earlier Scriptures. Indeed, if I mistake not, His references to entering into the kingdom have a very definite allusion to the entrance into the land of Palestine. Hebrews 3 and 4 will show this solemn teaching. Are there any passages which bring before us the parallel which Nicodemus should have understood? Are there passages in the Hebrew Scriptures which show us a reference to water and to the Spirit? The first is the very first chapter of the Bible "Darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters". Here is the opening reference to the Spirit and waters. I need hardly say what was the result. God said, Let there be light...and God said, Let there be a firmament, and God made the firmament, and God said, Let the waters be gathered together and let the dry land appear. There we have brought before us the dry land born out of the water in connection with the operation^(of) the Spirit of God, which is marked throughout that passage. That in Gen. 1 we have a figure of salvation, 2 Cor. 4:7 makes evident. We come next to Gen. 8. Here we have an allusion to the removal of the waters of the flood. "And God remem-

bered Noah and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark, and God made a WIND to pass over the earth and the WATERS assuaged". Here we have wind and water. Remember the word "wind" is the word for "spirit" in the earlier Scriptures. Wind and water once more, and what is the result? The earth is brought forth, there is a bringing out from water and the work of the Spirit of God & has changed everything. This is a figure, but it is a very precious figure. In Ps. 104 we have an allusion to God's mighty works. He stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain. He layeth the beams of His chariots in the WATERS, He walketh upon the wings of the WIND", and then we continue with a reference to the flood and its removal. "The waters stood above the mountains, at Thy rebuke they fled". We notice in this connection that in 2 Pet. 3 we have one of the closest parallels with "out of water". Says verse 5 "For of this they are willingly ignorant, that the heavens were of old, and the earth out from water and through water having stood together, by the word of God, through which waters the world that then was being overflowed with water perished away". Here then we have brought before us the earth standing out from water, then the perishing under water. Out from water therefore rather brings before us a position in relation to the water of wrath, and it is remarkable that in Acts 8:39 the same expression is used for the eunuch coming up out from the water. We must not identify baptism with John 3 any more than the Lord's Supper with John 6. But baptism was meant to picture what spiritually takes place in John 3 as definitely as the Lord's Supper illustrates what spiritually takes place at the partaking of Christ in John 6. In other words it is not that this is a picture of baptism, but baptism is a picture of this. Baptism is the type, and thus referred to the reality which baptism indicates. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as types of the present dispensation, look back to that which exists as a reality first,

though they both look on, in a "bodily" sense. In other words, in baptism we look back to the work of Christ, and in the Lord's Supper we look back to the work of Christ, but we also look back to an experimental work, a subjective work; that is, in baptism we look back to having been personally brought up spiritually out of the water of wrath. In the Lord's Supper we look back to a spiritual fact of personal food continued in the enjoyment of a new life in Christ. The bodily aspect of the types is future. And How? In baptism we look forward to the body being delivered, when saints are brought out from all physical ruin, and this mortal puts on immortality; and in the Lord's Supper we look on to the time when with a glorified body we shall sit down in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. In other words these symbolic actions are retrospective in their spiritual aspect, and prospective in their bodily aspect. If we have this thought clear in our minds I think we shall see the teaching of types in the present dispensation.

We now turn to another Psalm, and we find the 18th contains helpful language as to God's gracious deliverance from wrath. "He rode upon a cherub and did fly, yea He did fly upon the wings of the WIND...He sent out His arrows and scattered them...the channels of WATERS were seen... He sent from ABOVE". You recollect "born from above" in John 3. "He drew me out of MANY WATERS". Here we have plainly the work of the Spirit of God lifting up by a mighty power from above, and a bringing out of waters. I do not say John 3 alludes to Ps. 18, but Ps. 18 pictures an experience in David's life which illustrates John 3. I think you will follow what I mean. David says, "The sorrows of hell compassed me about, and the snares of death prevented me". Did he physically die? Nay, but in his experience he had a realization of what wrath must be, therefore the deliverance was a picture of deliverance from wrath. Therefore it was a picture of salvation, and thus it was prospective of the feeling

which should belong to those who have that which the Lord sets forth in John 3. The chief difficulty with some may be this: - Out from water and spirit. Why should the word "out from" in one passage have an allusion to a deliverance out from the sphere, and in the other to a quickening power placed within? This would be a problem if we did not realize the different effects of water and air upon a man. Birth out from water cannot mean anything else but bringing out from the sphere. Birth out from air must allude to that which goes WITHIN as well as that which SURROUNDS; this is the property of air. Birth OUT FROM air with separation from air, would be an impossibility to conceive. Hence the language which is used deals with the difficulty and removes it. The more so as Christ spoke particularly enigmatically to Nicodemus. He did not wish to make everything too definite. He would speak in a way which was suited to Nicodemus' condition. He would reprove as well as encourage. The passage is thus made parallel, moreover, with Christ's action when Pharisees approached Him at another time. He said, The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? In other words He referred the Pharisees to John. So here He refers to that which John's action had set forth in type. Israel did not realize their lost condition. They did not realize that keeping the law was a failure on the part of man. Baptism sets that forth. Circumcision deals with a portion. Baptism dealt with the whole. Baptism was a death-knell to Judaism, it removed all thoughts of any blessing except by the substitutionary work of Another, and a blessing on resurrection ground. Hence Christ's testimony to Pharisees about baptism and about that which baptism set forth was the very message they needed in their pride that because they were Abraham's seed therefore they were sure of eternal blessings. Not only so, but the Holy Spirit is pleased to use elsewhere the word "out of" with different aspects in the same contexts. "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but

that thou shouldest keep them out of the evil. They are not out of the world". There we have the word three times with shades of meaning. Or we have the well-known 1 John 2. (Might I point out in passing that the EPISTLE of John often explains the GOSPEL, and several times contains the expression "born out from God".) In 1 John 2 we read, "Out from us they went, but they were not out from us, for if they had been out from us they would have remained with us, but that they might be manifest that none of them were out from us". There the word plainly has two very definite meanings. One is the "out" of origin, and the other is the "out" of separation. So born out from water, - separation; "out from water and of the spirit", -separation AND quickening. Just as we have in Genesis that the earth was brought out from the water. God caused the manifestations of life within it. Further, the Holy Spirit in various passages links together two statements which we should put separately. The apostle says, I gave you milk to drink and not meat. How strange that sounds. How could he give them meat to drink? This is called in Greek a "zeugma". Two expressions are put together in a way we should hardly anticipate. In Gen. 4:20 we read of those who inhabited tents and cattle. Now they did not inhabit cattle in the same way as they inhabited tents, but the language is brief for an especial purpose. In like manner we read of seeing no similitudes only a voice. There is a reason for such language, a deep reason, and I have no doubt that every difficulty is concentrated blessing and that oftentimes instead of looking on that which is included in this very compressed blessing, we throw it away instead of seeking to discover what the Lord has placed there for us. I trust, beloved friends, that sufficient has been said to show that the Lord was teaching Nicodemus that we in mercy need to learn more and more fully, that there is no entrance into the Kingdom of God for men in the condition of sinful flesh. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. There must be a bring-

ing out from the wrong POSITION, a bringing out from the wrong CONDITION. The work of the Lord Jesus Christ deals with wrath upon us, and with our deadness within. If we were brought out of wrath but remained dead, we should still be in a helpless position. Hence as the work of Christ has a twofold aspect. He brings out from water, but He quickens. To lift us out from the earth and out from the ruin of the world would be of no avail unless there were the INworking of the Spirit of God. So we see the wondrous blending of thoughts, and oh that we may desire not only to talk of the Spirit of God, but, having realized this, to seek grace that we may enjoy more and more the love of the Spirit, for the Personal Spirit beareth witness with our Spirit that we are children of God, and it is possible to be guided by Him. He is not an influence that WE guide, but He is a Person Who guides US. May we humbly rejoice to have this direction, and so shall we follow on to know the Lord, for the mark of the Spirit of God is thus summed up "He shall glorify Me". An the servant in the parable of Luke 14, He comes forth to compel that every sent shall be filled, because that he operates on the lines of Christ's finished work. As the servant of Gen. 24 He is obtaining a bride for the One Who is the Son of promise, and He causes the members of that bride to unite with Him in the precious prayer, - "Come". Yes, the Spirit and the bride say, Come, and the individual believer should echo the longing-- EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS.
