

# In This Hope We Are Delivered

Romans 8:12-30

*Romans (no. 21 in the series)*

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*Video and audio versions available online:*

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*This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!*

## Recap

Two weeks ago, I ended our last sermon from the book of Romans, by putting this image on the Screen



And then I summarized the message of Romans chapter eight by saying: you will be judged but not by Judge Judy, Antonin Scalia, or Ruth Bader Ginsberg. You will be judged and have been judged by your Creator. And this is his judgement: “You must be born again.” The only place safe from that judgment is “hell.” But only for a time, for even there, the Judgment of God will find you.

“You must be born again.” That’s Jesus statement to Nicodemus, in John chapter 3. It’s after making that statement that Jesus tells Nicodemus that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that everyone, believing in him, should not perish but have eternal life—the life of the age to come. You didn’t decide to be born the first time, but because you were born you have decided all sorts of things. Perhaps you can’t simply decide to be born again, but because you are born again you can decide, you can have faith—the life of the age to come.

“You must be born again,” which can also be translated “You must be born from above,” or “begotten from above.” “You all (the ‘you’ is plural in Greek) must be born again.” Jesus said this to Nicodemus the Pharisee and, apparently, he also said it to Paul the Pharisee. And according to Paul in Romans eight, this truth isn’t just for a few Old Pharisees, this truth is for all of creation, including all of humanity.

1 Corinthian 15:49: “For just as we have born the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven...” Verse 52: “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed... the dead shall be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”

In other words, “You must be born again—born of water and born of spirit” How anyone, could not be begotten from above and then born again already, is one of the great mysteries of Scripture, for the One that spoke these words is the Word of God, by whom all things are created. In Genesis One God speaks his Word and reality happens, until on the seventh day, everything has happened, everything is finished, and everything is good. But on the Sixth Day, God speaks his Word and for a time, apparently, it doesn’t seem to happen.

God says, “let us make Adam in our own image and likeness” and in a million billion little ways, you and I say, “nope, let us not be, let us not love, let us sin, let us remain in darkness, lies, death and hell, let us not be the image of God.” And yet, even though we choose darkness, lies, death and hell, even though we descend into hades and hide from the eternal fire that is love, God’s word is simple and it’s clear, “you all must be born again.” That’s the Judgment; that’s the Gospel, and once you see it and begin to see it throughout all of Scripture, it’s only natural to ask, “Why, for the last 1600 years, have we so rarely heard it preached in the institutional church.”

Well, take a look at that picture on the screen—a judge with a gavel on the left and a newborn baby with an umbilical cord about to be cut on the right. Take a look at that picture, and as an authorized pastor in an institutional church, I’ll tell you why you often don’t hear this preached.



You see, I can do the thing on the left. I can give you knowledge of good and evil (the law) and I can teach you how to judge, even if that judgment is only an illusion, a bad dream. I can do the thing on the left; but I can’t do the thing on the right. At best, I can make a proclamation—that’s what it means to preach. And I can hope, that by the Grace of God, that proclamation contains a Word—a Word that is living and active, a Word that is an imperishable and promised seed. And I can pray that through the vicissitudes, trials, and traumas of this world, our hearts would be broken, open, and fertile, such that we would conceive of that Word and give birth to faith and be born into a new creation.

We’re conceived in this womb of a world and born into another world. I can do the thing on the left, but only God can do the thing on the right. And yet he does do it through us, his church—not an institution, but the Bride of Christ and His Mother. So, let’s pray.

## Prayer

Lord God, we ask that you would help us to preach your word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Message

Almost 34 years ago, I was playing guitar in our bedroom in California when I heard my wife yell from the bathroom “Keep up the racket and I’ll go into labor right here!” Of course, I kept

playing then I heard a scream. Her water had broken. She was five and a half weeks early. We drove like crazy all the way to the hospital with water, blood, and fluid all over the car. That night every woman in Northern California was having a baby. The maternity wing was like a mash unit. Susan had about 24 hours of hard labor. I had never ever witnessed a person in such pain. By the time, Jonathan was finally born, there was literally a bucket full of blood on the floor underneath my bride. She was passing out from pain and exhaustion. I was traumatized just watching and I remember saying to myself, “Peter, enjoy this child for if it lives, it will be the last you’ll ever have. For there is no way that she will ever want to do this again.” But the moment the doctor held our son in the air, the moment Susan got her head high enough to look, she just blurted out, “Ohhh... I want another one.” I remember thinking something, really strange, really weird, and really holy just happened.

On Thursday night (which in Jewish reckoning is the start of Good Friday, the 6th day of the week) Jesus said to his disciples, “your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a human being has been born into the world.”<sup>i</sup>

And just a few days before, on Palm Sunday, sitting on the Mount of Olives and looking at the old stone temple, having just heard Jesus describe its destruction, the disciples ask, “When will these things be, what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” And Jesus talks about wars, and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes and he talks about rejection, division and hatred. Have you heard rumors of wars, famines, and earthquakes; have you experienced rejection, division, and hatred because of Jesus’ name? Well, Jesus refers to all those things as the beginning of the birth pains.

When Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, preaches the Gospel on Pentecost, he says to his fellow Jews, “You crucified Jesus” and “God raised him up, loosing the birth pains of death.” “Birth pains” is often just translated “pangs,” or “pain,” because “birth pains” doesn’t make sense to the translators; but it made sense to Peter. It means that the very worst thing—the death of the Messiah—is also the very best thing—the birth of the Messiah.<sup>ii</sup>

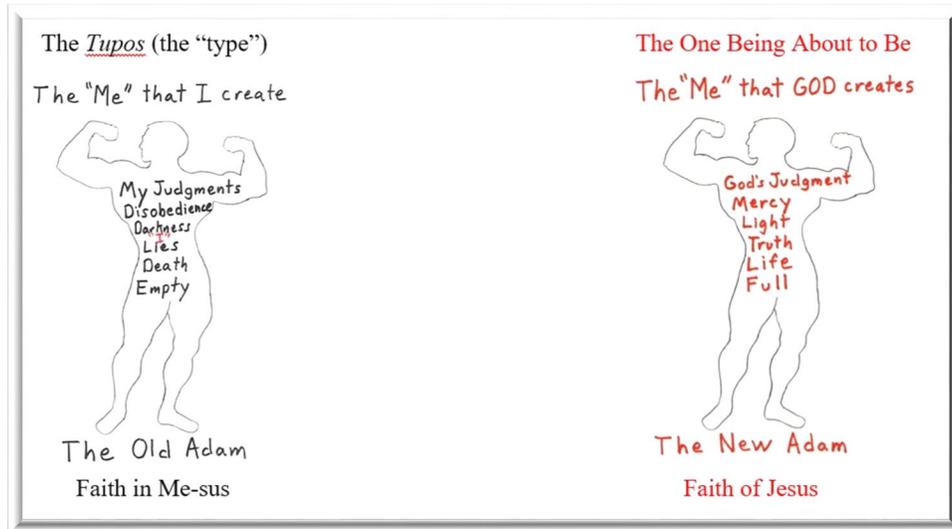
Susan just yelled “Oh I want another one.” And so last week, at the end of the message, I asked, “What if in a moment of great stress and failure, someone told you, ‘You’re not dying; you’re giving birth?’” And I told you the story of my friend who thought his girlfriend was dying, only to be told by a doctor, “She’s not dying, she’s giving birth.” That news turned a funeral into a party with streamers, balloons, and cigars; my friend lost his psyche and found it; And their sorrow turned into joy.

What if in a moment of great stress and failure, someone told you, ‘You’re not dying; you’re giving birth,’ or what if they told you, ‘You’re being born?’” Or what if they told you that both things were happening at once?

As Jesus and Paul taught, Humanity is Jesus’s mother. And that must be why Jesus called himself “the Son of Man. God is his Father and Man, humanity, is his mother. So happy Mother’s day. Y’all are giving birth.iii



We’ve also learned that “Christ in you,” is somehow the new you...iv Jesus the Christ is the Judgment of God in flesh, but the flesh is that thing you think you have built with your own judgment, the old you.

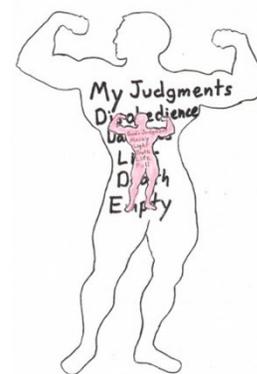


“How I am again in birth pains with you, until Christ be formed in you,” wrote Paul to the Galatians. So, Christ is born of Man (Old Adam), and together we all become the body of that Man—the Eschatos man, the Superman, the image of God.

And so, this actually is our situation right now:

- Our Old Man is giving birth to our New Man.
- We cannot create ourselves, but we’re giving birth to ourselves.
- We are actually not the result of our own judgment or labor, but we will labor because we’re giving birth and being born and that’s the judgment of God.

**THE HOT MESS**



Well, as I was saying, up to that point, I had never witnessed a person in such pain as that of my bride when giving birth to my son. Up to that point—for when my son was born, I suddenly realized that travail is not only hard on the mom; its brutal on the one that’s being born. Jon had a black eye, was covered in bruises, and his head was literally pressed into the shape of a cone.

*“I believe . . . Help my unbelief!”*

And He wouldn't stop screaming, in obvious distress and abject terror. Being born is terrifying and painful, so painful you probably blocked it out and don't even remember—or maybe you do remember. It's no wonder that we're a bit stressed about being "born again."

Just imagine what it was like the first time: you're floating in a warm Jacuzzi (kept at a constant 98.6 degrees). Everything you need, (oxygen, nutrition) is supplied by the placenta and this amazing chord—the umbilical-chord. It's actually a part of you—what you think is the most important part of you, the part that attaches you to your womb-world you don't realize this but it's bringing life, that is breath and spirit, from another world.

Well imagine being born: Suddenly,

- Your security turns into insecurity
- Your sense of control is revealed to be an illusion
- Your entire world turns against you and begins to expel you

Travail, actually, crushes you; it forces the fluid from the lungs. In the womb a baby actually breathes water, and so breathing seems entirely pointless in the womb. Travail forces an infant to expire one world, in order to inspire an entirely new world, where breathing Spirit is far from pointless. But you, the infant, don't know that. You just know confusion and pain. You pass through a dark tunnel and into a blinding light. You're born naked and exposed. And then, someone takes what you think is the most vital and important part of you, that part that was your security, that part that brought you oxygen, breath, and nutrition, that part that kept you alive in the womb—the umbilical cord—they take it and cut it away, leaving a wound.

Imagine the trauma of being born. In the process you might wonder is there such a thing as a mother? Is there life after birth? Is there life beyond the womb? Imagine a twin watching the birth of a brother from inside the womb. Martin Luther said, "Watching the death of a child of God is like watching a birth from inside the womb." You feel the pressure and the pain... and then, you see your companion lose what seems to be everything to you, the entire womb world. That's what you see. But what you don't see is the party on the other side: laughing doctors, relatives with balloons, and cigars, a mother beaming with pride. And you don't yet feel the arms of the Father holding you tightly to his chest.

When Jon, my first born, was born, we were so relieved and so happy. But Jon was utterly traumatized. They let me cut the Cord. The nurse cleaned him up. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and placed him in my arms. But he still wouldn't stop shaking, trembling, and just wailing and who could blame him? Then the nurse said, "Talk to him. He knows your voice." I said, "Scooter..." (that's what we called him before we knew if he was a him or a her.) I said, "Scooter..." And the instant I spoke, Jonathan suddenly grew still; Sabbath—he was home.

And for the second time that terrifying day, I suddenly realized that something really strange, really weird, really wonderful, and entirely holy had just happened. And I wondered, how did he know my voice? Last October, when we preached through Romans one, I told you, I had taken an indelible black magic marker, drawn a big smiley face on Susan's belly, and every night I'd speak to her belly saying, "Scooter, I hope you're doing great in there. I can't wait to hold you out here. I love you."

So just imagine: When I spoke everything in his womb world would move; it would all vibrate to the sound of my voice. And yet my voice, my word, was not a thing in that world—it couldn't be found in that world or explained by that world. So, do you know of things in this world that cannot be found in this world or explained by this world, but everyone assumes in this world?

How about Truth, or Logic or Reason?

- You can't explain why truth is true, logic is logical, or reason is reasonable.
- You can't dissect them in a lab and put them in a box.
- You can't prove them, but everyone assumes them or is assumed by them, is known by them.

How about Love?

- Love is the opposite of the way of this world.
- Love is not the survival of the fittest, but the sacrifice of the fittest.

How about Life? How about Consciousness? How about Spirit? Some argue that there is no God, for they are aware (they are conscious), that their Life in this world is afflicted with a lack of truth, logic, reason, and love. But they don't stop to ask, "What is truth, logic, reason, love and life itself?" And what am I to be conscious of such things?

Scripture claims that God is Love. And his Word is Truth and Reason: The Logos. And his Judgment, that is his Commandment, that is his Word, that is his Voice is Eternal Life, which is an endless communion of sacrificial Love. Well, perhaps. it's important to learn to trust his voice here, so that we would rest in his arms there. I suspect that those who say they don't believe in God, deeply resent God, for they long for God, but cannot comprehend God, contain God, or possess God—they have knowledge of God, but cannot grasp God. All they can grasp is what?—an umbilical cord. Martin Luther noted that if a baby in a womb could reason, surely that baby would wonder: What are hands for? What are eyes for? What is a mouth for? What are lungs for—they seem pointless? But then that baby might think, But this umbilical cord—it's life, it's everything!

Last time, I shared the vision that my wife received at communion a few years ago—she saw an umbilical cord running from Jesus Christ crucified to an old scar, on her belly, that I find rather attractive, we call it a "belly button." You know that one day your body will be unable to digest bread and wine. In fact, a day is coming when life will no longer flow through the bag of dust that you think of as yourself. We each have a physical body and a psychic body, and through them, for a time, Our Father in Heaven mediates breath from another world to us in this womb of a world. "The Spirit is life," but for a time, it is mediated through flesh. The flesh is temporal; and the Spirit is eternal.

Well Jonathan, knew my voice for his entire world vibrated to the sound of my voice, although I was not "a thing" in his world. And through that cord he received Spirit from my world in his womb world, but he wasn't destined to stay in that world. To pray constantly is to listen for your father's voice in every moment of space and time. And to come to communion is to breathe his breath through bread and wine in the Inner Sanctuary of your own soul.

Because Jon rested in me in that womb of world, he fell silent in my arms in this world, he knew he was home. But imagine the trauma of being born and imagine a twin in the womb watching a big brother or sister being born. In horror you might cry out, “Surely there is no mother, there is no father, and this is not right, and whatever you do, brother, don’t go toward that light.” Or, you might assume: There is a father, and he’s not right, so you better run from the Light and if you can’t run from the light, you better make yourself right; you better make yourself worthy of the light.

When Jon fell silent in my arms, I thought something utterly strange, weird, wonderful, and holy just happened. But the best thing that happened, happened about a year later. Jonathan was holding me with his hands, looking into my eyes with his eyes, and breathing my breath with his breath, when he said, “ba, ba, abba, da da, daddy,” he said my name. It was his spirit in communion with my spirit returning to me as a Word of Love—I received that word as the greatest of miracles, and called out to Susan, “Jonathan just said my name, he said ‘Daddy.’”

Then I set Jon down in the corner and said, “How dare you think that you are worthy to say my name before you dare to speak my name, I expect you to graduate from high school, get a master’s degree in Christian Counseling, maybe pay some rent, and then I’ll decide if you’re worthy or unworthy.” Actually, I didn’t say that. What could make Jon “worthy” to say my name? And yet, saying my name, gave him a sense of worth that made him who he is. And I think I’d die just to hear him say my name, for that is worth everything to me his dad, that’s my judgment.

Well, imagine the trauma of being born. And imagine the trauma of watching an older sibling be born. Paul wrote that Jesus is the firstborn of many brothers, firstborn from the dead, and firstborn of all creation. And we all know that Jesus is the Word of God our Father. This means, we don’t only hear the Word, the Voice, of our Father in creation all around us all the time. And we don’t only receive the Spirit of Life in the Sacrament of Communion. This means that the Word of our Father, who is the Life, wrapped himself in flesh and was born into our world...v

So that, even as we broke his body and he delivered up his spirit, even as we took his life and he gave his life, we could watch his birth from inside this womb of a world; we could watch him be born out of this world. And then, believe his words, as he returned to this world on Sunday, saying “My father is your father.” When you pray say “Our Father,” say “Abba.”

So, what’s the meaning of the cross? What’s the meaning of that judgment? Does it reveal that if you don’t find a way to make yourself worthy, what happened to Jesus will happen to you but not for a day, but instead for all eternity, forever without end, he will put you in a dark place, where you’ll experience endless travail, but never be born because you’re not worthy to say “Abba.” Or does it mean that you too, must be born, just as Jesus was born, for you are already worth absolutely everything to God our Father?

Well, that was the introduction to the sermon, let’s read the text.

**Romans 8:12-20:**

**So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—<sup>13</sup> for if you live according to the flesh, you will [are about to] die [as he told us in v. 6 the mind of the flesh is death]; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.<sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption [*huiiothesias*: “sonship”]. When we cry, “Abba! Father!”<sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ [And remember he inherits the cosmos]—joint heirs with Christ—~~if, in fact~~ [*eiper*—since], we suffer with him [*sympascho*] so that we may also be glorified with him [*syndaxozo*].<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.<sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;<sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility [“subordinated to pointlessness” is how David Bentley Hart translates the phrase]**

The Word translated “futility” is the Greek word that was used by the Jews to translate, the Hebrew word, *hebel*—that means something like vapor—and then gets translated into English as “vanity.” So, according to Solomon in Ecclesiastes, “Vanity of vanities all is vanity and striving after wind [*Ruach*, Spirit]” We strive after wind, our entire time in this womb of a world, only to discover that the Wind of God has always been striving after us. Well.

**Romans 8:20:**

**for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope”**

Subjected to futility. So, that wasn’t us. If you thought this world was messed up simply because of human choice, Paul appears to place responsibility elsewhere. There can actually be no human choice unless God first chooses to give that choice to humans; unless he first chooses to plant a tree of knowledge and a tree of life in the middle of a garden, and leave two naked, half-baked, ignorant humans alone with an evil talking snake, that obviously slithered into that garden, from someplace else that was already futile. God subjected creation to futility; He subordinated it to pointlessness, in hope.

That means that there is a point to all the pointlessness. Perhaps the point of pointlessness is to make us all long for the point?

- The purpose of purposelessness is to make us long for The Purpose.
- The purpose of the dark is the revelation of the Light.
- The knowledge of evil prepares us to be known by the Good.
- The reason for chaos is the revelation of the logos.
- The reason for sin is the glory of grace.
- The reason for condemnation is the glory of justification.
- The reason for desecration is the revelation of our own creation.

- The reason for striving after wind is to know that the wind has always been striving after us.
- The reason we can't get anything done is to know that we are the something that has been done.
- The reason for lungs in a world of water, is that you and I are being prepared to breathe the Spirit in another world.

**Romans 8:20-21a:**

**...creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation [NOT some of the creation]—that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay...**

Physicists are mystified by decay and by time. They see no reason why we seem to move in only one direction in time. And they're puzzled by the fact that the only way we know which direction we are moving in time, is the fact that things only decay in one direction, and so we decay and we're slaves to time—It's the 2<sup>nd</sup> law of thermodynamics: In a closed system, entropy increases; all things decay, in a closed system. Sin is a closed system, but God is Love, and God is Eternal. He is I AM that I AM.

**Romans 8:21:**

**...creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.**

If you read The Revelation, you'll find out that God himself is the glory of the children of God. He is filling us and will fill all things in time. And yet he is all-in-all in eternity. So, space-time is like a womb in the eternal reality that is our God. This old creation, and your old self, are each a womb that contains your new self, who is the very presence of your Creator. "Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, the Good, the Faith" in you, is not just you, but Christ in you in communion with you in the eternal now of the inner tent in the temple of your soul. Fear of Condemnation cannot exist in a place like that, for Judgment has been made, and all the judgements are good.<sup>vi</sup> The Fruits of the Spirit are the judgments of God made in you and made in perfect freedom—for there in the inner Sanctuary, you will what you want, and you want what you will, for what you will is called "reality"—it's our eternal home. And what you thought was home—was something more like a bad dream.<sup>vii</sup>

**Romans 8:22-23:**

**We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption [*uiothesis*: "sonship"], the redemption of our bodies.**

Our true self is imprisoned in our false self and so we groan. But we need not groan in despair; we must groan in hope, for our old man is giving birth to our new man and an entire new creation, in which every futility will be transformed by eternity.

**Romans 8:24-25:**

**For in [this] hope** (in Greek, there is an article before the word hope—so Paul is talking about the hope he has just described... an entire new creation.) **In this hope we were saved.** (In this hope we were delivered). **Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it [*apekduomai*: eagerly expect it] with patience.**

Sometimes Christians talk as if we should never groan, but if we never groan, we never hope, and it is in this hope that we are saved. The more you know our Lord, the closer you come to Joy, and yet the deeper you will groan, for the more you will know, this world is not your home.<sup>viii</sup>

**Romans 8:26:**

**Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs [literally: “groanings”] too deep for words.**

Do you see? God chooses to be born in us, through us, and with us. So even if you groan, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” It’s not just you but him in you, being born again with you.

**Romans 8:27:**

**And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**

God talks to himself about you, in you, and through you all the time.<sup>ix</sup>

**Romans 8:28:**

**We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.**

Who has God not called according to his purpose?

**Romans 8:29a:**

**For those whom he foreknew...**

Who does God not know, other than that which is an illusion—like your false self, the “me” that you think you have created?

**Romans 8:29-30:**

**For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn ~~within a large family~~ [“among many brothers (and sisters)”] <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined<sup>x</sup> he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.**

You might notice that all of that is in the past tense. That means that it has already happened. And that my friends, is a solid hope, for that is the eternal judgment of God. “In this hope we are saved.” “In this hope we are delivered from our old body of sin and death and joined to a kingdom of eternal ecstatic and unspeakable life.”

When my last son, Coleman, was born, we had the kingdom all prepared. I was a pro by this point. So, I had streamers, balloons, cigars, a birthday cake for him, and a birthday cake for Susan—it was her 34<sup>th</sup> birthday. All the relatives were waiting, his brother and sisters were waiting, and of course Susan was waiting, but the moment he was born, he wasn't born. We didn't hear a cry. The doctors didn't hand him to Susan or to me. They looked terrified and Coleman's head was entirely blue. The umbilical cord was wrapped, like a noose, twice around his neck and strangling him to death. Thanks to the quick action of the doctors, it was soon cut; Coleman let out a scream; blue turned to pink. Then they put him in my arms. I spoke, and he grew still; He was home.

But just think of it: What seemed so important in the womb—what brought him life: that cord—was now killing him in the New Creation. And what seemed so pointless in that womb of a world became sheer delight in this New World:

- His lungs breathed air – (wind – Spirit – it's all one word in Scripture).
- His eyes saw light – (clearly for the first time – God is light.)
- His hands grasped and his skin felt, what he'd only heard as distant murmuring in all the months of darkness.

He felt his Father's arms and drank his mother's milk...he was home. And his umbilical cord? His everything in the womb world? Well, it was cut away; it was judged and thrown in the trash 27 years ago. He doesn't even miss it. It's ironic, but seizing control, trying to save yourself, and so hanging on to this world IS what traps us in death. And, it's trusting the voice of our Father, and surrendering control that sets us free, and all of creation with us. The voice of the Father says, “You must be born again.” And Paul writes, “In this hope we are saved.”

Sometimes people ask, “Why preach the Gospel if in the end everyone is saved?” And I'm always tempted to respond, “Because it sounds to me like you're not, but are trapped in hell and sinking deeper, right now.”<sup>xi</sup> If you don't hope in a new creation, you won't want to go there when the time comes.<sup>xii</sup> If you don't trust the light, you'll run from the light, and hide in the dark, in the depths of the womb that we call space and time. You may lose your physical body, but you'll be trapped in your psychic body,<sup>xiii</sup> your soul, your old psyche of sin and death, your ego for a time, perhaps even a long time. But, even there, the judgment of God will find you (or has found you). As Isaiah prophesied, “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust awake and sing for joy. For the dew on you is a dew of light and the earth will give birth to the raphaim—the ghosts.”

Why? Because “you must be born again” And just by hoping in that judgment, it has begun just now.

## Communion

So, Jesus took bread and broke it, saying this is my body given to you. And, in the same manner, he took the cup, saying this is the covenant in my blood. The life is in the blood; the Spirit is in the blood. And “Christ in you” is “the hope of Glory.”

But before long you’ll be unable to digest bread, or even lift a glass of wine. Before long, your body will wither, like an old umbilical cord. Before long, you’ll see that light, brighter than the sun. And all your judgments, will be exposed to the eternal judgment of God.

You’ll be tempted to run from the light, but you must run to the light. You’re not dying; you were dead but now, you’re being born. So, look directly into the Light and say, “Dad...” say “Abba... I’m home.” Let’s worship.

## Benediction

So, Lord, we sing Holy are you, we sing it’s all about you, and then we get a good look at you—we see your hands, we see your feet—and we discover that you have made yourself and all creation about us. Because you’re Holy and you are Love and you’re bound and determined to make us in your own image. Thank you, Amen.

When Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples, He showed them something. Do you remember what it was? He showed them wounds on his hands, his feet and his side. They represent those places where his body had been cut away from the womb-of-a-world. Jesus showed them the Stigmata of the 2<sup>nd</sup> birth. You all have Stigmata of the 1<sup>st</sup> birth. We call it a “belly button.” And since I lost a few pounds, I’ll show you mine. Every now and then, gaze at your navel and just think...there was a time, when I existed alone in the darkness, thinking that I was probably all that there was. I had no concept of a mother, and yet in her I lived and moved and had my being. And I had no concept of a father, and yet he lived in me; I am his Seed. And what mattered most to me then, was this Cord, attached to my belly, where now there is only a scar. And I thought lips and mouth and lungs were just futile. And one day, my entire world turned against me and cast me out. I thought I was dying, and I was being born.

And then, look up and into a mirror. Look at your body—it may be old, worn out and shriveled like an old umbilical cord, and if it isn’t, it soon will be. Look up and say: “You used to mean the world to me... I’m grateful for you, but I don’t need you anymore. I’m predestined to freedom; I’m predestined to eternal life in another world.”

If you do that every day, this world will begin to lose its grip on you; the devil will begin to lose his grip on you. For he keeps us in lifelong, or agelong, bondage through the fear of death. But now you know: The fear of death is the fear of birth, which is the fear of the Commandment of God, which is the fear of the judgment of God.

John 12:50 “I know that the Father’s Commandment is Eternal Life,” said Jesus. And so, to old Pharisees like Nicodemus, Paul, and you, God issues his judgment: John 3:7, “Y’ALL MUST BE BORN AGAIN.”<sup>xiv</sup> In this hope, you are saved. Believe the Gospel, Amen.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> John 16:22-21

<sup>ii</sup> There was a time during the most horrible persecutions of the Jews by the Nazis in Poland that an old Jewish cemetery keeper came into the cemetery one morning and found that during the night a woman had crept into an open grave and there given birth to a son. And she had died. He found this child, and he said to himself and to others about, "This must be the Messiah, for only the Messiah could choose to be born in a grave."

Well, it wasn't the Messiah; the child died before noon of that day. But the truth of which that cemetery keeper spoke is absolutely accurate. Only the Messiah of God could choose to be born in a grave. Only a God who loves as our God loves could come into the midst of all the pain of life and death and here brings his grace.

- Bruce W. Thielemann, "Hark! The Herald Angels," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 63.

<sup>iii</sup> Richard here: To paraphrase the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart (1260–1327), “We are all meant to give birth to God.” As a man who has taken a vow of celibacy, I will never know what it is like to physically give birth, nor have I ever held the hand of a woman I love in labor—neither sister nor friend. However, I have experienced the birth of Christ in the world many times throughout my life—in big ways and small, sometimes through grand gestures, but more often through simple acts of patience, love, and mercy. To incarnate the Christ is to live out the Gospel with our lives, as faithfully and fearlessly as a woman in labor who holds nothing back in order to bring new life into the world.

--Richard Rohr in newsletter 12-11-20

<sup>iv</sup> "To live is to be slowly born." - Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

<sup>v</sup> So that we actually could *grasp him*, and *nail him down* and *put him in a box*; So we could take his life—but his life was not his body of dust, just as oxygen is not an umbilical cord...

<sup>vi</sup> Love is an awaiting of redemption, so great that it need wait for no time or event. Not-knowing, it already apprehends God; and apprehending, it no longer knows the vanity of our existence. Love of God is therefore the unobservable place where the consummation of all things has already been completed. -Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (paperback), p 320

<sup>vii</sup> Dreams are so fascinating. In dreams our consciousness is trapped in a reality of our own making. So, when our dreams turn into nightmares, it's the greatest gift to be delivered from the false reality that we have created. Then, suddenly, what seemed to be so real is revealed to be nothing but an illusion.... Time and time again, Scripture seems to indicate that we're trapped in a bad dream of our own creation, and yet God is so good, that he enters our nightmare and wakes us to his reality, and in the process uses our knowledge of the evil (that we dreamt) to make us delight more fully in the Good that is his very self. The bad dream gives birth to a deeper love of the reality in which we always existed.

<sup>viii</sup> But in our transitory life that we live here in our sensory being we do not know what we are; later we shall truly and clearly see and know our Lord God in the fullness of joy. And therefore it must needs be that the nearer we are to our bliss, the greater will be our longing, both through nature and through grace. We may have knowledge of ourselves in this life through the continuing help and strength of our higher nature, a knowledge which we may develop and increase with the help and encouragement of mercy and grace, but we can never know ourselves completely until the last moment, the moment in which this transitory life and customary grief and pain will come to an end. And therefore it is right and proper for us both by nature and by grace to long and to pray with all our might to know ourselves in the fullness of everlasting joy.

--Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 107

And all those under heaven who shall come there shall do so by longing and wishing; and this wish and longing was shown in the servant standing in front of the Lord, or, to put it differently, in the Son standing in front of the Father in Adam's tunic; for the wish and the craving of all mankind that shall be saved appeared in Jesus; for Jesus is all who shall be saved and all who shall be saved are Jesus; and all through God's love, along with the obedience, humility and patience, and other virtues which pertain to us.

--Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 122-123

These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a county we have never yet visited. . . . That is why the poets tell us such lovely falsehoods. They talk as if the west wind could really sweep into a human soul; but it can't. They tell us that “beauty born of murmuring sound: will pass into a human face; but it won't. Or not yet. For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day give us the Morning Star and cause us to put on the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. . . . At present, if we are reborn in Christ, the spirit in us lives directly on God; but the mind and still more, the body receives life from Him at a thousand removes—through our ancestors, through our food, through the elements. The faint, far-off results of those energies which God's creative rapture implanted in matter when He made the worlds are what we now call physical pleasure; and even thus filtered, they are too much for our present management. What would it be to taste at the fountainhead that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating? Yet that, I believe, is what lies before us. The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy.

--C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

<sup>ix</sup> A beautiful picture of this is Revelation chapters two through three where Jesus has John write letters to “the messengers” in the Seven Churches, which I believe are the seven spirits of the seven churches. Spirits that are His Spirit, such that the churches overhear Our Lord’s conversation about them and to His Spirit resident within them.

<sup>x</sup> Notice that Paul is clearly saying that we are all PREDESTINED to FREEDOM.

<sup>xi</sup> You won’t save anybody, by teaching everybody that God may not be Salvation. You won’t help people hope in God, by teaching people that his love is dependent on them—that will only make them twice the children of hell. And you cannot help people hope in an entirely new creation, by teaching them that most of that creation is endlessly tortured by our Creator.

<sup>xii</sup> If you hope in something, don’t you usually talk about that something?

<sup>xiii</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:44 “It is sown a natural [*psychikon* (psychic, soulish)] body and it is raised a spiritual [*pneumatikon*] body.”

<sup>xiv</sup> Once upon a time, twin boys were conceived in the womb... The spark of life grew and each tiny brain began to take shape and form. With the development of their brain came... perception... They discovered that life was good, and they laughed and rejoiced in their hearts. One said to the other, "We are sure lucky to have been conceived and to have this wonderful world."...

Weeks passed into months and...they noticed a change in each other and in themselves...

An unsettling chill crept over the two. They were afraid of birth, for they knew that it meant leaving their wonderful world behind.

Said the one, "Were it up to me, I would live here forever."

"But we must be born," said the other. "It has happened to all the others." Indeed, there was evidence inside the womb that the mother had carried life before theirs...

"How can there be life after birth?" cried the one. "Do we not shed our life cord and also the blood tissue when we are born?... Has anyone ever re-entered the womb after birth to describe what birth is like? NO!"... "If the purpose of conception and our growth inside the womb is to end in birth, then truly our life is senseless."... "And if this is so, and life is absurd, then there really can be no mother!"...

Thus, while the one raved and despaired, the other resigned himself to birth and placed his trust in the hands of his mother... And soon it was time. They both knew their birth was at hand, and they both feared what they did not know. As the one was first to be conceived, so he was the first to be born, the other following.

... And when they were sure they had been born, they opened their eyes-seeing life after birth for the very first time. What they saw was the beautiful eyes of their mother, as they were cradled lovingly in her arms. They were home.

--"Life Inside the Womb", Hot Illustrations for Youth Talks, pg. 105-106