

# MILLIONS OF BABIES

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August 17, 2013

John 12:22-24<sup>1</sup>

“Want to hear about my 20 million babies,” said the pastor, one Sabbath in church. “Come back next Sabbath, because I am going to tell you about the 20 million babies I have at home.” You can be sure they asked their parents, “Please bring me back next Sabbath so I can hear about those 20 million babies!” And sure enough, they were there.

He had not been fooling them. He really did have millions of “babies” at home, for he had just planted a new lawn by scattering tiny little seeds all over. He was sure there must have been millions. And they had sprouted and there were little green things popping up all over. It was pretty.

But you know, each one was a miracle! He could not have “made” one little seed that would grow even if his life had depended on it. In that tiny little thing so small that he could hardly see it in his hand, was the truth of life. When it fell in the moist ground, and the warm sun came up to shine on it, it popped open and little roots began to go downwards and the little stem that makes the grass green began to go upwards.

All the great scientists in the world with their wonderful wisdom to do things, could not make one living blade of grass

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<sup>1</sup> 15 My Maker and My King; 101 Children of the Heavenly Father.

When Jesus was a Boy, He must have held one of those tiny seeds in His hand. He was learning something important from just watching it.

Then He knelt down and planted that little seed in the ground, buried it out of sight. If the little seed could talk, it might have cried: “Why are You burying me here out of sight? I want to see the sunlight all day, and now it’s dark down here in the ground. I am finished!” And it would wail. But that was the best thing that had ever happened to it!

What Jesus learned was something that apparently no one else in all the world had ever learned. Life comes from death! When He was having a hard time in the land of the Jews, and the leaders were rejecting Him and He knew they planned on crucifying Him, some big men came from a far-off country known as Greece. It was a wealthy place. They wanted to visit with Jesus and talk to Him.

Probably they invited Him to come over to their country; the people there would not try to kill Him or reject His teaching. They would listen to Him as a great Teacher. These visitors from Greece would tell Him, You don’t have to stay here where the people don’t like You and Your life is so hard!

At that time Jesus tells us about this lesson He had learned as a Boy from watching that little seed die in the ground alone: “A grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains.” He was thinking of His cross that was coming up soon. No, He says, I must stay here and

fall into the ground like a grain of wheat and die; only then can I save the world.

And when He spoke of the wheat “dying,” He meant the real thing, not just a temporary sleep. He must ascend the throne of His kingdom via the cross. Self-sacrifice is the law of His kingdom. “If anyone serve Me, let him follow Me, and where I am there, there will My servant be also” (vs. 26).

He sees that He Himself is the little “grain of wheat.” If He accepts this invitation to go to Greece and have a good life, then even if He saves His own life He will leave His people to perish in their sins. He could live and die in Greece and end up no more than Aristotle or Socrates (famous Greek teachers)—dead in their graves.

Two radio speakers in Massachusetts asked a question: “Explain how God has written in nature the ‘principle of the cross.’ Isn’t the Bible the only ‘book’ where that truth is taught? Is there a way to preach the gospel to Muslims and Hindus that we have not utilized?”

Yes, the Bible is the clearest revelation of the saving knowledge of God. But there is another “book” that is in harmony with it—“the book of nature,” the same God being the Author of both.

Some pagan Greeks came asking, “We would see Jesus.” Philip and Andrew told Jesus, who responded with a lesson from nature: “Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:22-24). In that simple lesson is the principle of the cross written all over the world.

God has written the lesson so plainly that “every one” can see it, but most of us go all the way through life up to our death beds, and never grasp the idea.

Not one ear of corn exists that has not come from a seed that “perished” alone, apparently forgotten, in the dark earth. Look at a giant Sequoia; try to grasp its immensity; then remember, it began as a tiny seed that didn’t want to be praised, flattered, on display in someone’s hand, but was willing to “fall into the ground and die.”

\* Jesus was telling the Greeks, You invite me to the philosophers’ paradise where I can be praised and “accepted” instead of condemned and crucified in Jerusalem; but let Me tell you, “He that loveth His life shall lose it; and He that hateth His life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” If I go to Greece to be accepted, My ministry will amount to nothing. I choose to be cast into the furrow of the world’s need. “If I be lifted up from the earth [crucified on the tallest ‘tree’], [I] will draw all unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die” (32, 33).

Then He told the lesson: “Whoever loves his own life will lose it [and we could include Himself in that “whoever,” for He is talking about Himself as well as about us!]; whoever hates His own life in this world will keep it for life eternal” (John 12:20-25). And think of what He has done by letting Himself be like a seed dropped in the ground! Yes, He was crucified; but He has risen from the dead and now He is the Savior of the whole world. The “many seeds” which have come to life because He was the

one seed that fell in the ground and died have become many, many millions of happy people redeemed for all eternity.

You are one of them! Jesus wants you to be happy as you grow up. “Whoever wants to serve Me must follow Me, so that My servant will be with Me where I am. And My Father will honor anyone who serves Me” (verse 26). That’s a happy thought to keep thinking, isn’t it?

Would you like to be a tumbleweed? You see them sometimes along the highway. When the rains water the thirsty ground, little seeds sprout and then the tumbleweed becomes a big plant.

The rains stop, and the big tumbleweed gets dry. Soon the tumbleweed’s root snaps, and the wind tosses the big almost-light-as-a-feather weed everywhere, this way or that. It has nothing to hold it, nothing to tie it down to the root that once caused it to grow. Sometimes when you’re driving down the highway, this huge tumbleweed sails across just in front of you, to lodge helplessly up against some fence. It’s world famous for being blown this way or that!

No matter how hard the wind blows, a healthy plant just stays put where it grew up. Then when the wind finally stops, it just stays there happy.

People young and old have a problem with wind blowing—standing alone when the crowd around them is blowing the wrong way. Peter had that exactly same problem. The crowd around him were blowing against Jesus, laughing and ridiculing Him. Peter felt alone. He wished he could just mingle in with the crowd; he didn’t want to be laughed at.

Why did he feel so alone? He had separated himself from Jesus.

Peter became a moral tumbleweed, tossed by the wind of this fickle crowd of godless people. That’s when he made that awful mistake of denying Jesus three times. He didn’t really want to do it, but it was because he had cut himself off from his root.

He didn’t know it, but the whole world was watching him—the Father in heaven, all the holy angels, too (they were crying, I am sure), and we. Peter was wrong to feel like he was alone against a great crowd of people. All the good people in the world were standing with him, and all the holy angels, too. But he didn’t believe that. When he denied Jesus, he separated himself from all those good people and holy angels.

Someday you will think you’re alone in school, in your classroom, or even at church, or in a Bible study class. You won’t be alone. It looks backwards, but it’s true: those who deny Jesus are the small group; those who are loyal to Him are the far bigger group watching you.

All this time He has been strengthening you so your “root” will go down deep into the earth. Then when the wind blows, yes, if even a hurricane blows you, you will stand firm! And then you will be so happy!

In the great kingdom of heaven in eternity, you will someday meet Peter face to face. He will not try to hide anything; he will tell you honestly that he had denied Jesus in a weak moment. But he will shake your hand and he will thank you for learning from

his mistake, since you stood up firm and free, not afraid of the crowd, and stood loyal to Christ!

Psalm 14:1 says that the fool has said in his heart there is no God. And Romans 1:19, 20 says that the invisible God has made Himself visible by the things that He has made so that we can understand His eternal power and Godhead.

There are people everywhere who feel like orphans—they wish they could know God but they have been taught either to doubt His existence or to doubt that He personally loves them and cares for them.

Looking at a simple acorn will help us understand something. Look at that little seed: there is a mighty oak tree wrapped up within it. You cannot see it, it is invisible, but your common sense tells you that it is there. Just plant it in the ground, give it some water, and wait 100 years and see the giant tree that has come from that tiny acorn. The evolutionist says all this evolved mysteriously over millions of years; the Bible says that God created that tree and the mysterious principle of life that makes it possible, and that He made it to be an oak and not an apple tree.

Now for the punch line: Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the words of the Bible are like a living, sprouting acorn, a seed that grows in the human heart and produces the miracle of a new character: “The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” And Colossians 3:16 says, “Let

the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” In other words, don’t stop it. Let it get planted in your heart. Don’t uproot it.

An oak tree scatters its acorns everywhere, so the Lord, by His Holy Spirit is scattering these seeds of Bible truth. Welcome them, receive them, and they will grow in your heart to transform your character into the likeness of the Creator who is also our Savior, Christ Jesus.

Is it hard work to be “born again”? We know that we need to be changed from the inside out. Years of being what we are have made us set in our ways, we feel. Our problems are a part of us, through and through, whether it’s lust, appetite, jealousy, or whatever vice has a hold on us. How can we become really different than what we just are?

We can change the color of our hair but how can we change the color of our eyes? If we were born to be short how can we become tall? For a selfish person to become unselfish seems as impossible. And most poignantly, for a lustful, sexually impure person (a rapist? an abuser?) to become pure in heart seems totally impossible—so say our courts of law.

And now here comes Jesus telling us that “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:3). To many people it sounds like a death-knell. “I am what I am, and there’s no way I can be different! If only blue-eyed people can enter heaven, I’m sunk for I have brown eyes!”

Sit down and read the whole of John 3. Nicodemus asked precisely the same questions. You’ll be surprised how much better is Jesus’ Good

News of the new birth than what we have thought it is:

(1) Because of what Jesus accomplished on His cross, the Holy Spirit has become everyone's new "parents." When He impregnated the Virgin Mary to bring Jesus to birth, He impregnated everyone with a divine seed of a new life to be formed within. The new birth is not you "born-ing" yourself anew (excuse me; we need a new verb); "the wind bloweth where it listeth," says Jesus; "so is everyone that is born of the [Holy] Spirit." He is constantly casting seeds into human hearts, for Christ is "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (1:9). The "seed" is the Light of Good News in Christ.

"You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:7, 8, NIV).

Surprising as it may seem, the Good News is very good: (a) the Holy Spirit does the new-birth work, and (b) He will do it if you don't frustrate Him. (People who love Bad News won't like this.)

That "wind" is forever blowing seeds of heavenly truth into minds and hearts. No one is wise enough to tell where they come from, for the grace of God has been working on human hearts in multitudinous ways ever since time began. What parents have said, friends, songs of praise, Bible messages heard or read, sermons, expressions of true love—all can be ways that the Holy Spirit uses to plant "Good News" ideas in the heart.

These "seeds" may lie there deep, unrecognized for years, but they are certain to germinate because each one has within itself the mysterious principle of eternal life. Each "seed" of Good News truth "is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).

Here is another illustration of how the divine word of truth accomplishes its purpose: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:10, 11, NIV).

Christ's illustration of the wind blowing "wherever it pleases" is a picture of God's compassionate concern for every person. As surely as you have felt the wind blowing on your cheek, so surely is the Holy Spirit trying to convert you. "God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34, NIV).

It's exciting, for at times you can almost feel those seeds of truth germinating within your soul like a pregnant woman can feel the baby growing within her. She is thrilled with new life forming. What greater joy to experience something even more wonderful—"I'm being born again!"

But if the new birth is so easy, why isn't *everybody* born again? The answer is clear: many, perhaps the majority, practice a form of new-birth-abortion. They are endlessly snuffing out the new life that the Spirit of God imparts.

This is disclosed in Stephen's words to the Jewish leaders of his day. They were only doing what

comes naturally to unconverted human nature: “You stiff-necked people ... ! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51, NIV).

It’s active alienation or enmity against God. It doesn’t make sense to do that, but let’s face reality—that’s what we do. It’s like starving people diligently uprooting every little food-bearing plant that comes up out of the ground. It’s crazy!

The embryonic new life is snuffed out before it can grow. Jesus told a parable to illustrate the fate that most of His seeds of truth meet.

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, [a] some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. [b] Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. [c] Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants” (Matthew 13:3-7, NIV).

He went on to explain His story. The farmer represents Himself, sowing His seeds of “Good News” truth in all human hearts everywhere through the work of the Holy Spirit, the “wind.” But, He says, “this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes” (verse 15, NIV). It’s no use sowing seed in earth packed beneath the tread of multitudes in the path. Even if plenty of seeds fall on hard hearts, they cannot take root.

What Jesus explains is so simple a child can easily grasp it.

[1] “When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

[2] “The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

[3] “The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful” (verses 19-22, NIV). So far, it’s Bad News.

But wait, there is some Good News left in this story:

[4] Some “seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” This is “the man who hears the word and understands it,” Jesus explained (Matt. 13:8, 23, NIV). He is the one who *believes* the Good News, who receives it, welcomes it, cherishes it.

He *lets* it get into his heart instead of inviting the birds by the wayside to snatch it up, or letting the thorns choke it out, or leaving hidden “rocks” of cherished lust to dwarf its roots. *He simply does not perform an abortion of unbelief to kill it.* This is a Good News view of Jesus’ parable.

No one has yet seen what is the dynamic factor that *produces* the new birth, because love can never be seen. Jesus told Nicodemus in advance the story of His cross, which of course he couldn’t

understand that night. But what he heard stayed deep in his mind until he saw what happened; then it all came together, and he stepped out of his closet to identify openly with Christ.

No new birth would be possible without seeing and appreciating what happened on the cross. Jesus explained further:

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:13-15, NIV).

He alludes to something that happened during Israel’s wilderness wanderings. The people were journeying through the desert to their Promised Land (yes, there were hardships). But true to form for all of us humans, they had to make their difficulties worse by believing Bad News: “The people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert?’” (Num. 21:4, 5, NIV). They were not about to die, for God was leading them; this was a specter of doom that they themselves invoked, without reason (see Psalm 105:37). Their doubt became pure unbelief, borrowing troubles that were only figments of their faithless imagination. *But to do so was sin.*

Then the poisonous snakes struck. The people’s sinful unbelief and murmuring had deprived them of God’s special protection which would have been theirs by right. Moses’ making a snake of brass and

holding it up high on a pole was an acted prophecy of Christ to be uplifted on His cross.

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.’ ... Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived” (Num. 21:8, 9, NIV).

But how could a poisonous snake represent Him? Here is the answer: He was “made ... to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21, KJV). We see how close Christ has come to us. He never sinned, but He identified with us so closely that He “took” our fallen, sinful nature. He was “made” to be something that He was not. In that reality is our salvation from the “serpents.”

Note how easy the healing was: *all the people had to do was look.* Jesus is telling Nicodemus: there is something to *see* on that cross—*look*. But it is more than gazing at a crucifix. “Looking” is believing in the sense of a heart appreciation of what it cost the One who died there to “be made sin for us,” and save us. (It meant that He died the death that we have deserved.)

An appreciation of what He did is what brings healing to a sin-sick person. And, of course, healing is exactly the same as that new birth.

Then Jesus spoke the well-known words that have become the most loved verse of the entire Bible: “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).

Obviously, the power is in the One on that cross, not in its wooden beams. How can believing or appreciating God's act of loving and giving do anything to change sinful hearts?