

Main Idea: According to Jesus in John 3:1-21, what a good person needs most (and everyone else for that matter) is a second birthday. More specifically, according to Jesus a good person needs to come to grips with three truths regarding the new birth.

- I. We need to come to grips with the necessity of the new birth (1-3).
    - A. Nicodemus is like a lot of church-goers.
    - B. Nicodemus learned that he lacked something that he could not do for himself.
      1. He said that God was with Jesus.
      2. Jesus said that if he wanted to be with God he had to be born again.
  - II. We need to come to grips with the nature of the new birth (4-8).
    - A. The new birth has eternal implications (5a).
    - B. The new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit (5b).
      1. The Spirit uses the Word to wash us (Titus 3:5).
      2. The Spirit uses the Word to produce new life in us (James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23).
    - C. The new birth is spiritual in nature (6).
    - D. The new birth doesn't make sense to a self-righteous person (7a).
    - E. The new birth is the fundamental need of every person (7b).
    - F. The new birth is like the wind (8a).
      1. You can't control it.
      2. You can't tell when it's coming.
      3. You can tell when it happens.
    - G. The new birth is personal (8b).
  - III. We need to come to grips with the evidence of the new birth (9-21).
- Response: In light of what Jesus taught about the new birth...
1. There are implications for the way we do evangelism.
  2. There are implications for the way we raise our children.
  3. There are implications for the way we treat worship.

This message carries with it a great burden and I want you to know what it is from the outset. I'm convinced the American church is filled with people who wrongly think they are going to heaven. I wish I were wrong. I hope I am wrong. But quite simply, what Jesus told a religious man named Nicodemus in John 3 ought to cause every religious person in the world today to take inventory.

*You must be born again.* That's not my opinion. That's what Jesus said. In order to enter the kingdom of God a person must be born again.

But what does that mean? What precisely is the new birth, and how does it happen, and what are the evidences that it truly has happened in a person's life? The answers to those questions are eternally significant. And thankfully, Jesus answered each of them for us in clear fashion in the text before us.

I want to give you the outline, and then begin with a story.

The skeletal outline of John 3:1-21 is simply this (and we'll put some meat on it momentarily). According to Jesus, what a good, religious person needs most (and everyone else for that matter) is a second birthday. And more specifically, according to Jesus a good person needs to come to grips with three truths regarding the new birth: one, the necessity of it (verses 1-3); two, the nature of it (verses 4-8), and three, the evidence of it (verses 9-21).

It's the third point that convinces me that we need a story before we go any further. That's because, as I shared last time, in person after person the evidence isn't there. In 2007 pollster George Barna said there were 95 million born again adults in America by their own profession. In a Gallup survey in 2003 42% of Americans interviewed called themselves “born again.” But similar studies show that there's virtually little life-style difference between huge numbers of those who profess to be born again and those who do not. The evidence, which Jesus said *will be there*, isn't there.

What the necessary evidence is we'll focus on next week in verses 9-21, the Lord willing. But it's not complicated. When it's there, you see it clearly and so does everybody else. So

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

let me give you a story to illustrate the new birth, and then we'll learn from Jesus how it happens.

In AD 386 the Holy Spirit produced new birth in the heart of a man named Augustine, and he, nor the world, was ever the same again. John Piper tells us what happened in his helpful book, *Finally Alive*:

For Augustine, the idol that kept him from Christ was sex. He had given way to his passions for the last sixteen years. He had left home at age sixteen, but his mother Monica had never ceased to pray. He was now almost thirty-two. "I began to search for a means of gaining the strength I needed to enjoy you [O Lord], but I could not find this means until I embraced the mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ."

Then came one of the most important days in church history. It was late August, 386. Augustine was almost thirty-two years old. With his best friend Alypius, he was talking about the remarkable sacrifice and holiness of Antony, an Egyptian monk. Augustine was stung by his own bestial bondage to lust, when others were free and holy in Christ.

There was a small garden attached to the house where we lodged....I now found myself driven by the tumult in my breast to take refuge in this garden, where no one could interrupt that fierce struggle in which I was my own contestant....I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity. I was dying a death that would bring me life....I was frantic, overcome by violent anger with myself for not accepting your will and entering into your covenant....I tore my hair and hammered my forehead with my fists; I locked my fingers and hugged my knees.

But he began to see more clearly that the gain was far greater than the loss, and by a miracle of grace he began to see the beauty of chastity in the presence of Christ. The battle came down to the beauty of continence in fellowship with Christ versus the "trifles" that plucked at his flesh.

I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears which now streamed from my eyes....All at once I heard the singsong voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain "Take it and read, take it and read." So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting...seized [the book of Paul's epistles] and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: "Not in reveling in drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites" (Rom. 13:13-14). I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.

Augustine was born again. He never turned back to the old ways. The Wind blew in a garden. It blew with a child's voice. It blew through a word of Scripture. And the darkness of his heart was dispelled.<sup>1</sup>

My friend, the message I'm about to preach is for every person in this room. If you've been born again, you will rejoice as you hear this message for you are about to learn about the miracle that God graciously worked in your life. If you are not a Christian, then you need to be born again, and you are about to hear how that takes place.

Notice point one...

#### I. We need to come to grips with the necessity of the new birth (1-3).

We explored this point carefully last week, but we need to return to it briefly if we are to appreciate what follows. Notice what happened in verses 1-2, "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Finally Alive*, pp. 9-11.

night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.’”

Please notice a couple of things about Nicodemus.

**A. Nicodemus is like a lot of church-goers.** He’s a good man and religious, too. He reads his Bible and teaches it. He’s a community man who serves on the ruling council for the good of his nation. What’s more, he has a high view of Jesus—that’s what he came to Jesus this night, to learn from the Master. And he’s a believer of sort, for he acknowledges that Jesus truly did miracles. Sounds like one of us, doesn’t he?

But take a look at what Jesus told him in verse 3, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” Talk about a shocker!

**B. Nicodemus learned that he lacked something that he could not do for himself.** Remember...

1. *He said that God was with Jesus.* His words? “Rabbi, we know you have come from God.” But Jesus didn’t return the pleasantries. Instead...

2. *Jesus said that if he wanted to be with God he had to be born again.* Let me remind you that you had nothing to do with your physical birth. You didn’t choose your parents. You didn’t convince them to bring you into the world. So if Jesus’ words are true, that you need to be born again, then you need to experience something that you cannot do for yourself.

How can that be? That’s the very question Nicodemus raised in verse 4, “‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!’”

It’s a good question. How do you unwind the clock of your life? How do you go back and start over again?

Don’t miss the gravity of this. To become a Christian Jesus says it’s not enough to add something to your present life, even something good like joining a church, or getting baptized, or resolving to live a better life. No, you must start all over again, all the way back at the beginning. You must be born again.

That, of course, is humanly impossible. You can’t do it. Sure, you can clean up your life, or try. You can get religious. You can work at self-reform. But you can’t cause yourself to be born again.

No wonder Nicodemus responded, “How can this be?!” My friend, let’s not water down the staggering implications of Jesus’ words. The natural man lacks the power to bring about what Jesus said must take place if he is to experience eternal life. Jesus Himself later put it this way in Mark 10:24, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!”

So how does it happen? That brings us to point two.

## II. We need to come to grips with the nature of the new birth (4-8).

Listen to verses 5-8, “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 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.’”

Jesus teaches us seven things about the nature of the new birth in these verses.

**A. The new birth has eternal implications (5a).** “I tell you the truth, *no one can enter the kingdom of God* unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” As we saw last time, when Jesus refers to the “kingdom of God,” He in essence is talking about “eternal life.” If a person hasn’t been born again, he will not see (verse 3), let alone enter (verse 5) God’s kingdom. That person will be cut off from God and God’s kingdom blessings forever and ever.

**B. The new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit (5b).** Verse 5 again, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God *unless he is born of water and the Spirit.*”

Did you notice Jesus’ variety in how He describes the new birth? He said in verse 3, “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is *born again,*” and used the same expression in verse 7, “You must be *born again* [literally, “*born from above*”].” But in verse 5 He says, “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is *born of water and the Spirit.*” And in verse 8 He says similarly, “So it is with everyone *born of the Spirit.*”

Why the different terminology? Jesus is actually using different expressions to describe the same event. Born again. Born from above. Born of water and the Spirit. Born of the Spirit. It’s all referring to the same thing. It’s called *regeneration* in other texts, as we’ll see. And it’s always the work of the Holy Spirit.

Notice carefully the phrase “born of water and the Spirit.” There are several different interpretations of this.<sup>2</sup> Some say it’s talking about physical birth *and* spiritual birth. They say that “born of water” refers to the amniotic fluid that flows from the womb just before birth. But there’s a lack of clear evidence that the ancients understood the physical birth in those terms. And more significantly, the very language Jesus uses here suggests He has *one* birth in mind with this phrase, not two. Again, the phrase “born of water and the Spirit” means the same thing as “born again” in verses 3 & 7.

Others say that “born of water” refers to baptism. They say Jesus is talking here about both water baptism<sup>3</sup> (“born of water”) and Spirit baptism (“born of the Spirit”). That’s possible, but unlikely for a couple of reasons. One, Nicodemus didn’t know about Christian baptism since it didn’t exist yet. Two, while Nicodemus did know about John’s baptism, a baptism of repentance<sup>4</sup> (see 1:26), it seems strange that if baptism was indeed a required response for salvation, we don’t see Jesus emphasize it again in the chapter. How does a person obtain eternal life? Verse 15—“Whoever *believes* may have eternal life.” Verse 16—“Whoever *believes* in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Verse 18—“Whoever *believes* is not condemned.” If baptism is required for eternal life, why doesn’t Jesus include it alongside His call for faith in these other texts?

The question is, how would Nicodemus have understood that phrase “born of water and the Spirit”? He’s the person to whom Jesus said it, and Jesus wasn’t speaking in code, for according to verse 10 He expects Nicodemus to understand what He’s saying. So what Jesus meant by “born of water and the Spirit” must have been familiar to Nicodemus. And indeed, it was familiar to him because he knew his Hebrew Bible.

As John MacArthur points out, “*Water and Spirit* often refer symbolically in the Old Testament to spiritual renewal and cleansing (cf. Num. 19:17-19; Isa. 4:4; 32:15; 44:3; 55:1; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 13:1).”<sup>5</sup> Specifically, Nicodemus surely knew what the prophet Ezekiel predicted in Ezekiel 36:24-27:

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean **water** on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new **spirit** in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my **Spirit** in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

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<sup>2</sup> I’m indebted to John MacArthur’s helpful explanation and analysis of the various views; pp. 104-5.

<sup>3</sup> Luther’s view; see Leon Morris, p. 217. Luther says: “Here Christ is speaking of Baptism, of real and natural water such as a cow may drink..” He then says that the water “is connected with God’s Word and becomes a very spiritual bath through the Holy Spirit or through the entire Trinity.”

<sup>4</sup> That may be what Jesus is emphasizing here, that unless a man repents (is “born of water”) and is regenerated (“born of the Spirit”), he cannot see the kingdom.

<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, p. 105.

Note that *water* here is connected with *spiritual cleansing*. And spiritual cleansing is the work accomplished by the *Holy Spirit*. That's what you need, Nicodemus, a spiritual cleansing of your heart that's the Holy Spirit alone can produce. I think that's what Nicodemus heard that day.<sup>6</sup> He heard that he needed to start all over again with a heart cleansing, to be "born of water and the Spirit."<sup>7</sup>

How does the Holy Spirit do it? By turning to the New Testament epistles we'll find out how He does it, namely that He works *through the Word*. Listen to Ephesians 5:26, "...to make her holy, cleansing her *by the washing with water through the word*." Notice that...

1. *The Spirit uses the Word to wash us (Titus 3:5)*. That's what our sin-stained hearts need, a washing. And that's what the Holy Spirit uses His Word to bring about when He performs the miracle of regeneration. Here's how Paul describes it in Titus 3:5, "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us *through the washing of rebirth* and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

When we look at some other texts we find out that...

2. *The Spirit uses the Word to produce new life in us (James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23)*. That's what James 1:18 says, "He chose to give us birth *through the word of truth*, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." So does 1 Peter 1:23, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, *through the living and enduring word of God*."

You say, "I'm burdened for my friends at work. What can I do so they will be born again?" Notice carefully. You can't cause them to be born again—that's the work of the Holy Spirit. You can't produce conviction in their hearts. You can't wash their hearts. You can't cause those dead hearts to come alive. You can't produce genuine repentance and faith in them. Only God's Spirit can do those things. Your assignment is to share the Word with them about Christ, for that's the tool the Spirit uses to perform His work.

**C. The new birth is spiritual in nature (6).** "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but *the Spirit gives birth to spirit*." The *Spirit*—that's the Holy Spirit—gives birth to *spirit*—that's the unseen part of the newly born child of God.

Again, just as you had nothing to do with initiating your physical birth, so with your spiritual birth. You and I did not tell our parents, "Give me life." Nor did we inform the Lord, "Give me spiritual life." How did it happen? "*He* chose to give us new birth," explains James 1:18.

And what precisely is this new life that the Spirit generates in the spirit of a man? It is not a mystical spiritual experience. It is vital connection with the person of Jesus Christ Himself. It is Jesus Himself who is life, as the rest of the Gospel of John reveals.

John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the *life*."

John 6:35 "I am the bread of *life*."

John 20:31 "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have *life* in his name."

So when the Holy Spirit regenerates a dead sinner, the Holy Spirit actually connects that sinner to the Living Savior, Jesus Christ. And once connected to Christ, that newly born creature now possesses all the merit of Christ's perfect life, substitutionary death, and triumphant resurrection.

Remember Jesus' words in John 15:5? "I am the vine, you are the branches." Different metaphor, same wonderful truth. If you're a branch connected to Me, you who were once dead now have my life flowing in you and through you.

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<sup>6</sup> Calvin took this view, as Leon Morris explains, "He used the words *Spirit* and *water* to mean the same thing... By water... is meant simply the inward cleansing and quickening of the Holy Spirit ." Leon Morris, p. 217 (footnote #20, citing Odeberg)

<sup>7</sup> See John Piper's helpful explanation, *Finally Alive: What Happens When We Are Born Again*, pp. 38-40.

**D. The new birth doesn't make sense to a self-righteous person (7a).** Notice the Savior's words to Nicodemus in verse 7, "You should not be surprised at my saying..." Jesus said that because what He had just told Nicodemus went against everything that Pharisee had ever believed. He'd always thought that salvation was based on merit, something a person did for God (like keeping the commands of the law, observing the right ceremonies, etc). And until this day he'd been clinging to his legalistic religious system, just sure he was a prime kingdom prospect.

But with one statement, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again," Jesus burst his self-righteous bubble. Salvation is not merit-based. It's not the prize for what we do for God. It's something God must do for us, something to which we contribute absolutely nothing.

Let me be straightforward with you. I am burdened for two types of people as I preach this message. One is the person who thinks, "I'm too far gone for God and beyond hope. I could never be a born again Christian." Not so! And the reason it's not so is because you don't have anything to do with being born again in the first place. It's a work that the Spirit of God does, and He does it without your help. That's why there is hope for you. Just ask Him today. Humbly ask Him to give you a new heart.

But the other person on my heart is the person who's convinced he's okay but *shouldn't* be. The self-righteous person. The unregenerate church member. The Nicodemus. John 3 is for both of you, my friends, the down-and-outer and the up-and-outer, the prodigal son and the self-righteous older son.

Perhaps you're not convinced, so consider a couple of texts...

Galatians 6:15 says, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is *a new creation*." He's talking about religious activity. It's insufficient. It can't produce what's needed. What's needed is to become a *new creation*, and becoming a new creation begins with experiencing a second birth.

Here's another text, 1 John 3:9, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been *born of God*." Who is the person who can break free of destructive sin habits? Augustine couldn't. Sin was eating him alive. Until he was born again. No one who is *born of God* will continue to sin.

**E. The new birth is the fundamental need of every person (7b).** "You must be born again." While it's not apparent in our English Bibles, Jesus just broadened the scope. In the original, *you* is plural. It's not just Nicodemus. The fundamental need of every person on the planet is to experience a second birth.

And "must" is a strong word, indicating there is no other way to obtain eternal life except by being born again. Jesus didn't say, "I suggest you have this experience." Nor, "Your life will be more fulfilling if you do." Rather, you *must* be born again.<sup>8</sup>

The implications are crucial to see. What about the devout pantheist in the heart of the African continent? Is he on his way to heaven merely because he is sincerely doing the best he can with what he knows? And what about the devout Muslim who does everyone his faith asks of him. Is he merely taking a different but legitimate road to paradise? Hear Jesus. You *must* be born again.

But why? Why is the new birth so necessary? Jesus doesn't answer that question here, but as we investigate other passages we discover the reason is *sin*. "The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23)." All human beings are sinners, and because of sin all men enter this world "*dead* in transgressions and sins" (as Eph 2:1 states).

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<sup>8</sup> Regarding this word "must," Hendriksen explains, "It does not refer to the realm of moral duty, but to that of divine decree. When Jesus says, 'You *must* be born again,' he does not mean, 'By all means see to it that you are born again.' On the contrary, he means, 'Something has to happen to you: the Holy Spirit must plant in your hearts the life from above.'" William Hendriksen, p. 134.

That's our state, my friend, and it's true whether we were born in Wheelersburg or Timbuktu. We entered this world physically alive but spiritually dead. And in that dead condition we lack the capacity to keep the law of God, which means we cannot please God until His Spirit does something in us to change our hopeless state.

Hear Jesus. *You must be born again.* It is your greatest need as a human being (and that's no exaggeration). Have you taken it seriously?

You say, "I'm having trouble grasping this concept. It's too abstract. I need something tangible, some illustration." Okay, here's one. According to Jesus...

**F. The new birth is like the wind (8).** "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."

Perhaps the Judean wind was blowing that night as Nicodemus struggled with Jesus' apple-cart-upsetting charge. And so Jesus, the Master teacher, brought His point home with this comparison. It's like the wind you're feeling in your face right now, Nicodemus.

How so? How is the new birth like the wind? In three ways, says Jesus.

1. *You can't control it.* It "blows wherever it pleases."
2. *You can't tell when it's coming.* Or when and where it's going, either. But...
3. *You can tell when it happens.* You hear its sound. You see its effects. That's the way it is with the wind. And the new birth.

There's actually a play on words here. The word for "wind" (*pneuma*) is the same Greek word for "breath" and "spirit." And what is wind? As Leon Morris points out, "Wind is nothing more than a lot of breath moving in a hurry."<sup>9</sup> And that's what the Spirit is doing today, moving in a controlled, sovereign hurry to fulfill the Father's plan.

Do you know where the wind of the Spirit is blowing strongest in the world today? Did you realize there's a powerful spiritual awakening taking place south of the equator right now? There is. According to a 2005 study by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Africa is leading the charge with 390 million Christians, more than three times than 35 years ago.<sup>10</sup>

Where next? The study says that based on current trends, Africa's numbers are likely to grow by another 200 million by 2025, and that the number of Christians in Europe is expected to shrink by 17 million over the next two decades. Will that be the case? We don't know, do we? The wind blows wherever it pleases.

As a devout student of the Scriptures, Nicodemus surely remembered Ezekiel 37 at this point. In that text the Spirit of the Lord took the prophet Ezekiel to a valley full of dry bones and asked him, "Son of man, can these bones live (37:3)?"

Ezekiel responded, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know." Here's what happened according to verses 4-14:

"Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath [i.e. 'wind'] enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

"So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

"Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"

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<sup>9</sup> Leon Morris, p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20050228/fastest-growth-of-christianity-in-africa/index.html>

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Then he said to me: ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.’”

Can dead men live again? Hear the Lord’s answer, “Indeed, they can and will. When I tell the wind to breathe on those dried up bones, those who were once dead are going stand up on their feet and live again! That’s going to happen, Ezekiel. And I want you to tell the bones that. Prophesy to them. Tell them that I’m going to put my Spirit in them, and they will live. And my Spirit will take my Word proclaimed from your lips and there will be new life!”

**G. The new birth is personal (8b).** Notice that word, “So it is with *everyone* born of the Spirit.” *Everyone*, said Jesus. The Spirit may be blowing across Africa right now, but He’s bringing people into the family of God one birth at a time. There are no surrogate births. It is *personal*.

Earlier I told you Augustine’s story, how the Spirit rescued him from his vices after 32 years of wicked living. Is every born again experience like Augustine’s? No. The outcome is the same, but the details are as diverse as the people themselves.

I can still recall lying on my bed at night as an eleven year old boy and feeling the weight of my burdened conscience bearing down on me. As I recall I hadn’t felt that way prior to going to a Bible-teaching church, which began as the result of a family move. And there in that church, week after week hearing what God’s Word had to say about my sinfulness and God’s holiness, I felt a growing conviction that I was in eternal trouble.

I tried to shake it at first with the notion, “I’m not that bad.” And “I’m just a young boy. Surely God will accept me and take me into His heaven, won’t He?”

But the wise Spirit of God wouldn’t let me cling to my foolish rationalizations. And then one glorious Sunday, in my pastor’s study before an open Bible, He opened my blinded eyes to the beauty of Jesus Christ who died for me and conquered the grave for my salvation. And I have never been the same again!

My friend, has the wind of the Spirit blown into your life? Has He caused your dead and barren bones to stand up, start moving again, and start living for the living God? Has the Spirit of God performed the miracle of the new birth in you?

If He has, you have reason to celebrate, don’t you? And for some, perhaps, even now the wind of the Spirit is blowing. Yes, right now you’re hearing His sound, His voice, as He speaks to you personally through the Word I’m proclaiming. “It’s time to start living,” He’s saying. “It’s time for you to be born again.”

You say, “How can I know if it’s happened?” The answer is, as we’ll see the Lord willing next time in verses 9-21, there will be *evidence*.

“What’s the evidence?” you ask. I’ll tell you this. There was no evidence in Nicodemus’s life, not that night, for according to verse 11 he refused to accept the truth he heard. Thankfully, it came. About two years later in an incident recorded in 7:50-51 he defended Jesus before the Sanhedrin. And then following Jesus’ crucifixion he stepped forward along with Joseph of Arimathea, in 19:38-39, to prepare Jesus’ body for burial. Standing up for Jesus. Using what you have to serve Jesus. Making it public that you believe in Jesus. What are those actions? They’re evidence. Of what? That the wonderful miracle of the new birth has truly occurred!



Response: In light of what Jesus taught about the new birth...

Are there implications to what we have just learned? Yes, tremendous implications, and this evening we're going to meet in our deacon care groups and discuss them. But let me get you started by highlighting three.

1. *There are implications for the way we do evangelism.* How so? Just think of the advice often given in evangelistic presentations...

"You don't want to go to hell, do you? You want to enjoy heaven, right? Then repeat after me and pray this prayer, and you're in! It's that simple!"

Really? Listen to 1 Peter 1:3 (ESV), "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again..."

How did the new birth happen for these Christian readers? Peter says, "He [that's God] caused it." The question is, in our evangelistic efforts are we willing to wait for God to do what He alone can do?

Too often, the answer is no. We want results. We think we can produce those results. But Jesus says that only the Spirit can produce the new birth.

Far too often our problem is that we don't want to wait for the Spirit to do what the Spirit alone can do and must do if a lost person is to be brought into God's family.

"So we're supposed to just sit around and wait?" you ask. No! The Holy Spirit works through means to produce the new birth. He uses the Word of God. He uses preaching. He uses prayer. He uses the example of a godly life. So let's do what He commands us to do as we wait on Him to do what He alone can do.

Brothers and sisters, God is interested in magnifying His matchless grace in our salvation. So how do you talk about your spiritual birthday? I urge you to use language that exalts Him. Not, "I found the Lord," but "He found me." Not, "I gave my life to Christ," but "He gave me new life when I was dead in my sins." Not, "I got saved," but "God in His amazing grace saved me."

2. *There are implications for the way we raise our children.* Beloved, our children don't need just Bible information. They need a heart transformation. Is that true? If it is, then our children need something *we* can't give them, something that only God the Holy Spirit can produce in them.

Do you believe that? It's what happened in your life, didn't it? That's what Ephesians 2:4-5 says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, *made us alive* together with Christ."

How did you become a Christian? When you were dead in your sins, God made you alive with Christ. And that's what your children need, too. I hope your parenting goal isn't simply behavior modification. That's needed, for sure, but it doesn't go far enough (better said, *deep* enough). Raise them with their heart in mind. Take advantage of God given means to expose their hearts to the Spirit's work. Are you sure you want your ten-year-old on a traveling ball team if it means he's going to miss Bible study opportunities at church? Is a trophy more important than his soul?

That brings us to a third set of implications...

3. *There are implications for the way we treat worship.* If I was dead in sin and heading for a certain and eternal hell, which I was, but then the Spirit of God birthed me into the family of God, what's the appropriate response? It's *worship*. It's to declare the worth of the amazing Person who saved my soul, to *worship* Him.

That's why a church's worship services are so important. And so are your daily devotional times. Not duties to perform, but opportunities to worship the One who brought you into His forever family.