

Main Idea: In John 3:9-21, Jesus reveals that when the new birth occurs, there is evidence of it.

- I. Consider the necessity of the new birth (1-3).
- II. Consider the nature of the new birth (4-8).
- III. Consider the evidence of the new birth (9-21).
 - A. Nicodemus didn't have it (10-12).
 1. He didn't understand (10).
 2. He didn't accept (11).
 3. He didn't believe (12).
 - B. Jesus identified it (13-15).
 1. The evidence is faith.
 2. The evidence is faith that works top-down, inside-out.
 3. The evidence is faith in Christ and in His work on the cross.
 - a. Jesus clarified His identity—“the Son of Man.”
 - b. Jesus clarified His origin—“who came from heaven.”
 - c. Jesus clarified His purpose for coming—“must be lifted up.”
 - d. Jesus clarified His offer—“have eternal life.”
 - C. Jesus explained the worldwide extent of it (16-21).

Take It To Heart: When a person is born again, it shows.

1. Jesus made it clear what our problem is.
2. Jesus made it clear what our need is.
3. Jesus made it clear what the solution is.
4. Jesus made it clear what the effect is.

A couple of weeks ago *The Wall Street Journal* ran an insightful article entitled, “The Perils of 'Wannabe Cool' Christianity.” The author, Brett McCracken, who describes himself as a “27-year-old evangelical,” shares his thoughts as to why young people are leaving churches by the thousands once they reach their 20s. Let's listen to his assessment of the problem, and then to his perspective on the cause and solution.

My peers, many of whom grew up in the church, are losing interest in the Christian establishment. Recent statistics have shown an increasing exodus of young people from churches, especially after they leave home and live on their own. In a 2007 study, Lifeway Research determined that 70% of young Protestant adults between 18-22 stop attending church regularly.

Statistics like these have created something of a mania in recent years, as baby-boomer evangelical leaders frantically assess what they have done wrong (why didn't megachurches work to attract youth in the long term?) and scramble to figure out a plan to keep young members engaged in the life of the church.

Increasingly, the "plan" has taken the form of a total image overhaul, where efforts are made to rebrand Christianity as hip, countercultural, relevant. As a result, in the early 2000s, we got something called "the emerging church"—a sort of postmodern stab at an evangelical reform movement. Perhaps because it was too "let's rethink everything" radical, it fizzled quickly. But the impulse behind it—to rehabilitate Christianity's image and make it "cool"—remains.

There are various ways that churches attempt to be cool. For some, it means trying to seem more culturally savvy. The pastor quotes Stephen Colbert or references Lady Gaga during his sermon, or a church sponsors a screening of the R-rated "No Country For Old Men." For others, the emphasis is on looking cool, perhaps by

**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.

giving the pastor a metrosexual makeover, with skinny jeans and an \$80 haircut, or by insisting on trendy eco-friendly paper and helvetica-only fonts on all printed materials. Then there is the option of holding a worship service in a bar or nightclub (as is the case for L.A.'s Mosaic church, whose downtown location meets at a nightclub called Club Mayan).

"Wannabe cool" Christianity also manifests itself as an obsession with being on the technological cutting edge. Churches like Central Christian in Las Vegas and Liquid Church in New Brunswick, N.J., for example, have online church services where people can have a worship experience at an "iCampus." Many other churches now encourage texting, Twitter and iPhone interaction with the pastor during their services.

But one of the most popular—and arguably most unseemly—methods of making Christianity hip is to make it shocking. What better way to appeal to younger generations than to push the envelope and go where no fundamentalist has gone before?

Sex is a popular shock tactic. Evangelical-authored books like "Sex God" (by Rob Bell) and "Real Sex" (by Lauren Winner) are par for the course these days. At the same time, many churches are finding creative ways to use sex-themed marketing gimmicks to lure people into church. ..

But are these gimmicks really going to bring young people back to church? Is this what people really come to church for? Maybe sex sermons and indie-rock worship music do help in getting people in the door, and maybe even in winning new converts. But what sort of Christianity are they being converted to?

In his book, "The Courage to Be Protestant," David Wells writes: "The born-again, marketing church has calculated that unless it makes deep, serious cultural adaptations, it will go out of business, especially with the younger generations. What it has not considered carefully enough is that it may well be putting itself out of business with God.

"And the further irony," he adds, "is that the younger generations who are less impressed by whiz-bang technology, who often see through what is slick and glitzy, and who have been on the receiving end of enough marketing to nauseate them, are as likely to walk away from these oh-so-relevant churches as to walk into them."

If the evangelical Christian leadership thinks that "cool Christianity" is a sustainable path forward, they are severely mistaken. As a twentysomething, I can say with confidence that when it comes to church, we don't want cool as much as we want real.

If we are interested in Christianity in any sort of serious way, it is not because it's easy or trendy or popular. It's because Jesus himself is appealing, and what he says rings true. It's because the world we inhabit is utterly phony, ephemeral, narcissistic, image-obsessed and sex-drenched—and we want an alternative. It's not because we want more of the same.¹

I don't know what strikes you as you listen to that article, but for me it's the line from David Wells, "The born-again, marketing church [which is trying to increase business with younger people by being cool]...may well be putting itself out of business with God." Why would that be the case? Why are we putting ourselves out of business with God if we try to bring people into the family of God by catering to their fleshly interests?

¹ Brett McCracken, "The Perils of 'Wannabe Cool' Christianity," *Wall Street Journal*, August 13, 2010.

It's because God's agenda is to transform a sinner's corrupt heart, not gratify it. God knows that a sinner needs new and holy affections, new and holy desires, new and holy ways of thinking and living that please Him, and His agenda is to bring that about.

You see, there's an assumption in the church marketing approach. The assumption is that if we package the church in ways that appeal to people, we'll get them to join us (or convince them to stay with us, in the case of the twentysomethings who grew up in church). But the question is, is that our mission, merely to get people to *join* us or *stay* with us? It's not. The assignment Jesus gave us is to do with others what He did, and that's to *make disciples*. "Go, make disciples," He said in Matthew 28:19.

Okay, so how did Jesus make a disciple? When we look at the four gospels, we see how He did it. Did He cater to His audience to get a following? No, just the opposite. Case in point, in John 2:23 many people started coming to Him and even "believed in his name." His response? John 2:24 says, "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them [lit., "He did not *believe* in them"]."

Why not? Because they had a fundamental problem, and they could not become His disciples until that problem was corrected.

So how did Jesus correct it? We find the answer when we look in John 3 at what He did with one of those "unsaved believers." *He went back to the beginning* (and I mean *beginning*). He made it clear from the outset that a sinner needs to *be born again*.

We've been learning about the new birth in the past two weeks as we've examined what Jesus told a religious man named Nicodemus. Two weeks ago we pondered point one...

I. Consider the necessity of the new birth (1-3).

Jesus announced to Nicodemus in verse 3, "I tell you the truth, no one [including you, Nicodemus, a religious, upstanding, law-keeping man] can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Those words stunned this Pharisee who saw himself as one who was already on the fast track to the kingdom. But according to Jesus, if a person is going to enjoy the blessings of God's kingdom, that person must start his life all over again. He has to go all the way back at the beginning and be *born again*, literally.

How can he do that? That's what Nicodemus wanted to know. Which led to Jesus' second point, as we saw last time.

II. Consider the nature of the new birth (4-8).

What's true of the new birth? Jesus tells us seven things about it in verses 5-8. One, the new birth has *eternal implications*. Verse 5 begins, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." No one.

Two, the new birth is the *work of the Holy Spirit*. Verse 5 specifies, "Unless he is born of water and the Spirit." The background is Ezekiel 36:24-27. A sinner has two bottom line problems, and God announced He would take care of them both. A sinner must be washed from his sinful past *and* given the potential for a new future. That's what happens in the new birth. The sinner is "born of water," indicating that the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to wash that sinner from his past (see also Titus 3:5). What's more, the sinner is also "born of the Spirit," indicating that the Spirit uses the Word to produce new life in him (see also James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23).

Three, according to verse 6, this new birth is *spiritual in nature*. Jesus said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." Something needs to come into

being in the unseen part of a person. That's why trendy marketing won't cut it. Oh, you might appeal to a sinner's fleshly desires that way, but you'll never change them.

Four, the new birth *doesn't make sense to a self-righteous person*. "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again,'" Jesus told Nicodemus." But he *was* surprised, because he'd always thought that entering God's family was merit-based, something you attained by your pedigree and actions. This made no sense to him.

Five, the new birth is the *fundamental need of every person*. "You *must* be born again," Jesus emphasizes. The sinner's greatest need isn't education or motivation, but a heart transformation.

Six, Jesus illustrated in verse 8 that the new birth is *like the wind*. "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." As with the wind, so with the new birth. You can't control it. You can't tell when it's coming or leaving. But you can tell when it happens.

And then, seven, the new birth is *personal*. Jesus said, "So it is with *everyone* born of the Spirit (8b)." There are no group rates and grandfather clauses when it comes to the new birth. It's personal, one by one by one, and it's accomplished according to the sovereign purposes of the person of the Holy Spirit.

Let me give you an example of how the Holy Spirit has been "blowing" in recent years. Consider what He's done in the country of Nepal in the last fifty years. According to *Operation World*, no Christian was officially allowed to live in Nepal before 1960. In fact, the first church in Nepal was formed in 1959 with 29 Christians. Today there is a church planted in every one of the 75 districts of Nepal and there are at least some believers in most peoples and caste groups of the country. By 1985 there were about 50,000 believers. At the climax of persecution in 1990 there were 200,000. By 2000 there were 400,000; some estimate even 500,000 in 3,000 or more congregations!

What's the secret to this growth in Nepal? Pastors with \$80 haircuts and cool worship services? Hardly. The secret, according to *Operation World's* assessment, is simply, "prayer, willingness to suffer for Jesus, dynamic Nepali initiative in evangelism and church planting, and God's miracle-working power."²

That brings us to point three. In verses 9-21 Jesus reveals that when the new birth occurs, there is evidence of it. Clear, specific, unmistakable evidence.

III. Consider the evidence of the new birth (9-21).

When I think of evidence, I think of something I've heard all their lives, statements like, "There's no question who those children belong to." Typically, they're talking about my youngest daughter, Katie. "She looks just like her dad," they'll say. Of course, when Katie was little, she'd hear that and say, "How can I look like my dad? He's a boy!"

Sorry Katie. That's the way it is when you bring a child into existence. There's evidence, sometimes more obvious than others, but there's always evidence. Check the DNA and there will be evidence. Check the physical features, and you'll probably see some physical resemblance, too, and perhaps some mannerisms and quirks. I'm not a geneticist and I can't explain how it works, but when you're born into a family, there's going to be some evidence.

² <http://www.operationworld.org/country/nepa/owtext.html#Pray1>

Is that true for God's kids? What about the person who claims, "I've been born again and I'm a child of God."? If that claim is true, what will follow? There will be evidence, right? Absolutely. And just what is the evidence of the new birth?³ The apostle John answers that question for us in three ways in our text, and the first is negative.

A. Nicodemus didn't have it (10-12). Notice verse 9, "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked." Literally, "How are these things able to happen?"

Nicodemus had three related problems, and they make it clear that he had yet to experience the new birth. First of all.

1. *He didn't understand (10).* "You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things?'" This isn't post-grad material, Nicodemus. You should understand what I'm telling you about the new birth. You know Ezekiel 36. You're Israel's teacher (lit. 'the teacher of Israel').

But the glazed look in this pupil's eye made it clear that the evidence just wasn't there. Nicodemus *didn't* understand what Jesus told him. A second problem...

2. *He didn't accept (11).* "I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony."

Notice Jesus shifted to "we." *We* speak, and *we* testify. Who is included in this "we"? Probably Jesus' disciples. And perhaps John the Baptist who has been preaching for some time now.

And what did Nicodemus do with this truth he'd received? Jesus underscores what he *didn't* do. He didn't accept it. And he wasn't alone either, for the "you" is plural (probably referring to the other Jewish leaders who likewise refused to accept the Savior's testimony).

3. *He didn't believe (12).* That's verse 12, "I⁴ have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" By "earthly things" I take Jesus to mean things that happen on earth and pertain to the earth (like the new birth). That's opposed to things that happen in heaven and pertain to heaven (for instance, like a conversation between the Truine Godhead, as Jesus will later share with His disciples in John 17) There's no way Nicodemus could handle that kind of heavenly teaching!

The point is this. For Nicodemus, the evidence of the new birth simply wasn't there. Yes, he was religious, and yes, he was a good man, at least on the outside. But he didn't understand Jesus' words, nor accept them, nor did He believe them.

To reiterate, he should have. According to 2 Timothy 3:15, "The Scriptures [referring to the Old Testament] make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Here's a man who knew the Hebrew Scriptures better than most and thus should have understood, accepted, and believed in Christ that night. But his legalistic system blinded him to the truth that stood right in front of him.

The lack of evidence speaks loudly, my friend. You can claim to be God's child all you want, but if the evidence isn't there, the fact remains. You're not in the family. You need to be born again.

That reminds me of a friend that Sherry and I have named Janie. Janie grew up in a Christian home. In fact, her dad was a pastor. She professed faith in Christ as a young person, was baptized, and started serving in church. Later she went to a Christian

³ That's the question the apostle John answers in 1 John. He identifies about a dozen identifying marks of a person who belongs to God's family (i.e. obey his commands, 2:3; walk as Jesus walked, 2:6; love, 2:10).

⁴ Jesus returns to the first person "I" again.

college, met a godly man, got married, and began to work alongside her husband who himself was a pastor of a solid, Bible teaching church. She taught her kids about Jesus, too. And then one day, as she was preparing a lesson to teach a class at church, the Lord opened her eyes to a stunning reality. What she was teaching to others had never truly happened in her own life. She needed to be born again. And by the grace of God, she was.

It starts by acknowledging you don't have it. As long as you think you're okay, my friend, you'll never experience the life-changing wonder of the new birth.

As far as the evidence goes, Nicodemus didn't have it. So what is the evidence?

B. Jesus identified it (13-15). “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 [emphasis added].”

There it is. Do you see it?

1. *The evidence is faith.* Notice the verb “believe” (which of course is the verbal form of the noun “faith”). Jesus uses it throughout this section. He told Nicodemus in verse 12, “You do not *believe*.” Verse 15—“Everyone who *believes* in him may have eternal life.” Verse 16—“Whoever *believes* in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Verse 18—“Whoever *believes* in him is not condemned, but whoever does *not believe* stands condemned because he has *not believed* in the name of God's one and only Son.”

It's not complicated. When the new birth occurs, the evidence is faith. A person who has been born again *believes*. As John explains in 1 John 5:1, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” Who believes? The person who has been born of God. What does the person who has been born of God do? He or she *believes*.

So the evidence is faith. Just any kind of faith? No. Jesus is talking about a very special kind of faith here. Let me put it this way...

2. *The evidence is faith that works top-down, inside-out.* What do I mean by *top-down*? I mean the faith comes from God down to man. It's not something we manufacture. It's a gracious gift from the Sovereign One, as Jesus emphasized throughout this conversation.

Verse 5—“No one can enter...unless he is *born of water and the Spirit*.”

Verse 6—“*The Spirit* gives birth to spirit.” Who takes the initiative? The Spirit does.

Verse 8—“So it is with everyone *born of the Spirit*.” And notice the final verse...

Verse 21—“So that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been *done through God*.”

So faith works *top-down*. We enter this world dead in our sin, but when the Holy Spirit performs the miracle of the new birth in our hearts, we instantly exhibit the evidence of that new birth and *believe*.

But faith also works *inside-out*. A legalistic system can't produce faith. Keep that in mind, parents. You can't legislate faith from the outside. Yes, you can provide structure for your kids (and should). And you can provide an environment conducive to heart change (and should). You can model faith for them (and should). And you can urge them to put their faith in Christ (and should). But you can't give it to them. True faith works *inside-out*. Hear Jesus again. “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but *the Spirit gives birth to spirit* (6).”

So which happens first, believing or being born again? In his helpful book on the subject of the new birth, *Finally Alive*, John Piper explains, “Your act of believing and God's act of begetting are simultaneous. He does the begetting and you do the believing

in the same instant. And—this is very important—his doing is the decisive cause of your doing. His begetting is the decisive cause of your believing.”⁵

Again, that’s what *top-down* means. God takes the initiative, produces the new birth in the sinner’s heart, and the sinner consequently exercises faith in his heart that will in time show up in his life. That’s what *inside-out* means.

Now chew on this thought for a moment. These two activities happen at the same time, yet one causes the other. How can that be? I appreciate Piper’s helpful analogy:

“If you have a hard time thinking of one thing causing another thing if they are simultaneous, think of fire and heat or fire and light. The instant there is fire, there is heat. The instant there is fire, there is light. But we would not say that the heat caused the fire, or the light caused the fire. We say that the fire caused the heat and the light.”⁶

Likewise, God’s act of granting you new birth was the cause of your faith, even though both actions occurred in the same split second. Your faith was a gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9) and therefore came from God.

So the evidence of the new birth is faith that works top-down, inside-out. But faith in what? What’s the object of the saving faith that the Holy Spirit produces? Does He produce faith in Buddha? Faith in yourself? Faith in the tooth fairy? Jesus answers that question very clearly in our text. When the Holy Spirit regenerates a sinner...

3. *The evidence is faith in Christ and in His work on the cross.* Take a close-up look at the content of saving faith as revealed by Jesus in verses 13-15.

a. Jesus clarified His identity—“the Son of Man.” That’s the title He used for Himself at the end of verse 15, “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the *Son of Man*.” Why that title? Where did it come from? Nicodemus knew.

It’s in the book of Ezekiel over 90 times, and five of those are in the key passages that provide the backdrop for Jesus’ teaching on the new birth (Ezekiel 36:1, 17; 37:3, 9, 11). “Son of man, can these bones live (37:3)?”

It’s also in the prophecy of Daniel 7:13, “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.”

Who is Jesus? He’s the one the prophets foretold, *the Son of Man*. And when the Holy Spirit regenerates a sinner, that’s the person in whom that sinner puts his faith, the One of whom the prophets foretold, the Messiah, the Son of Man.

b. Jesus clarified His origin—“who came from heaven.” That’s verse 15 again, “No one has ever gone into heaven except *the one who came from heaven*.” Who is Jesus? He’s the one who came from heaven?

Notice Jesus’ reference to His pre-existence. He did not begin to exist on the day He was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. He had always existed. On that day He merely took a trip, so to speak, and came from heaven to earth.

This isn’t the last time in John’s gospel we hear about Jesus’ origin. In John 6:62 Jesus asked, “What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!” The apostle John made it clear in John 13:3 that Jesus “had come from God and was returning to God.” Jesus announced in John 16:28, “I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

⁵ John Piper, *Finally Alive*, p. 102.

⁶ Piper, p. 102.

My friend, do you want to go to heaven when you leave this world? Then you'd better make sure you are putting your faith in someone who's been there and knows the way. That narrows the options considerably. Mohammed didn't come from heaven. Neither did Confucius, or Joseph Smith, or Mary Baker Eddy. But Jesus did.

c. Jesus clarified His purpose for coming—"must be lifted up." Notice verse 14, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up."

Why did Jesus leave heaven and come to earth? Hear His answer? *To be lifted up.* What did He mean by that? He's referring to the cross. Later He announced in John 12:32, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

That's why He came, and that's what true faith affirms. The Son of God came to earth on a mission, and His mission was to be lifted up on a cross. Then, once He completed his work on that cross, He would be lifted up yet again, not in disgrace, but in victory as He left His tomb and forty days later ascended back home to heaven (see Acts 2:33 & Phil. 2:9).

My friend, it's not enough just to "believe in Jesus" in generic terms. Lots of people do that (we met some at the end of chapter 2). Saving faith acknowledges the validity of what Jesus did while on earth, and why He did it.

So why was He lifted up? He tells us why. He gave us an illustration that Nicodemus knew well. *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so I will be lifted up.*

Why did Moses lift up a snake? You'll find the answer in Numbers 21. He did it because his people were dying, and they were dying because they had sinned against God. *The wages of sin is death.*

The Lord sent venomous snakes to bite the sinners, and many began to die. The people cried out to Moses, "We have sinned (Num. 21:7)!" And in His mercy the Lord made a provision for them. He told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then if anyone who was bitten by a snake looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

It was that simple. If a person looked in faith, he lived. If he didn't, he died. No matter how sick the inflicted person was, no matter how close to death's door he happened to be, if he merely *looked in faith*, God granted him life.

That's why Jesus came, my friend. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up." Don't overlook that word "*must*." The death of Jesus is not one option among many. It is the *only* option. He *must* be lifted up. And true faith is placed in the One who was lifted up. There is no other remedy for the dying sinner.

The sinner must look, not to snake on a poll but to a Savior on a cross. And on the basis of that simple look, the sinner lives.

For how long? Until he sins again? Is that God's offer? Look to my Son and you will live, until you sin again, and then you'll need to look again. No.

d. Jesus clarified His offer—"have eternal life." That's what He said in verse 15, "that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

God's gift is *eternal life*. This is the first time we've seen reference to "eternal life" in John's gospel, and we'll see it in another fifteen verses before the end. The word for "eternal" is the Greek *aionios*. It means "pertaining to an age." The Jews viewed time in terms of two ages. There is *the present age*, and there is *the age to come*. When Jesus talks about "eternal life," He's talking about the kind of life associated with the age to come.

What kind of life will that be? Yes, it's life that will never end, *eternal life* (which in the Bible is synonymous with *everlasting life*). But it's also the life of the age to come, *kingdom of God* life. That's what Jesus promises His followers. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the *kingdom of heaven* (Matt. 5:3)." "The important thing about eternal life," writes Leon Morris, "is not its quantity but its quality."⁷

And notice the present tense. Jesus says to those who put their faith in Him and His cross work, you *have* it. If you have exercised real faith, then you right now in the present possess real and eternal life.

But is this offer just for Jews like Nicodemus? Amazingly, no.

C. Jesus explained the worldwide extent of it (16-21). Notice the very next word out of Jesus' mouth.⁸ Verse 16 begins, "For," which indicates an explanation is about to follow. "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."

Where can you see the evidence of the new birth, just in Israel? No, says Jesus. You'll see it all over the world, for my Father's intent is to build a family made up of people from every nation, tribe, and language. More about that, the Lord willing, in our next time together.

Take It To Heart: When a person is born again, it shows.

It's not complicated. How does it show? It shows up in *faith*. That's the evidence. Top-down, inside-out, faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. You say, "I'm not sure if it's there in my life." Okay, let me put it another way as simply as I can. Jesus made four things perfectly clear for Nicodemus and for us.

1. *Jesus made it clear what our problem is.* Our problem isn't what's happened to us in life. It's what is true of us. We're sinners and as such we are spiritually dead.

2. *Jesus made it clear what our need is.* It's not to clean up our life. It's to go back and start life all over again, to be *born again*.

3. *Jesus made it clear what the solution is.* You must be *born of the Spirit*. You must experience the heart-changing, life-giving work of God the Holy Spirit.

4. *Jesus made it clear what the effect is.* When the Spirit regenerates a sinner's heart, the effect is that sinner looks to Jesus in simple faith and in looking he begins to live. No matter how deep he is enslaved to his sin, no matter how far he has gone away from God, no matter how long it's been since he darkened the door of a church or opened a Bible, no matter how wicked his mind has been, no matter how vile his life choices have been, the unchanging promise of God remains. If he will *look*, he will *live*.⁹

This is God's offer. Look to His Son, and you will live. And once you look, you'll know it's because His Spirit gave you eyes to see.

⁷ Leon Morris, p. 227.

⁸ Some say that Jesus' words enter at the end of verse 15 and that the apostle John's commentary begins in verse 16. I see no reason to end Jesus' instruction to Nicodemus before verse 21.

⁹ I love Kent Hughes' reminder that what God requires is not a perfect faith, but "the simple gaze of faith." p. 83.