

The Spirit of New Life

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[0 : 0 0] On Sunday evenings, we've been working through a series on the Holy Spirit and so far we've said We've seen that the Holy Spirit is God that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of creation and of life from the very beginning He's the spirit of common grace. He's the spirit of Providence, he's the spirit of inspiration the one who brings to us The Bible and tonight we come to the fact that the Spirit is also the giver not only of life, but of new life and so we read a famous passage John chapter 3 and In this very famous passage Jesus gives a metaphor to describe how the Spirit gives new life and It's called the new birth or to be born again as Jesus puts it here Now you know it's a metaphor as soon as you read the passage that it's not physical But it's spiritual the new birth to be born again because Jesus says Nicodemus you've got to be born again and Nicodemus then says in verse 4

Does that mean that I'm to go back into my mother's womb and literally be born again? So Nicodemus like so many other characters in the Gospel of John does not understand the things Jesus says and Of course as you as the reader know that Jesus is not being literal. He's talking about something else But this theme of misunderstanding misunderstanding the new birth is important to mention because it doesn't just happen here with Nicodemus Actually commentators will point this out regularly that there's lots of different ways to misunderstand the new birth to be born again and One of the ways is to say that Most people in the modern world. I think in the United Kingdom and in the United States and probably well beyond that They know something even if they've never walked into the church. They've never been a part of a Christian community They've heard of being born again That's actually a popular term And so people even have it in pop songs every once in a while that people who are born again are spoken of born again

Christians and when the culture talks and thinks about a born-again Christian, you know What the outside world world thinks about that idea of being a born-again Christian?

You know the born-again Christians from the eyes of popular culture They're the scary ones, right? They're the ones that are radically anti-science and They want to convert you at all cost and they they impose their religion upon you and that's actually How the popular culture thinks they know the most radical Christians as the born-again Christians now look that that's an opinion And it's a subculture and it's a way of viewing things, but it's not at all here what Jesus is talking about But then if that's the left maybe there's also a right and that's what Christians sometimes think about being born again and there's a really big theological tradition of viewing new birth the coming of the spirit as Something that you can't really say that you've had until you've been knocked off your horse like the apostle Paul you know something where You were you were blinded by the light, you know You were walking along and then all of a sudden the spirit hit you and knocked you down Some kind of radical testimony some some story that you can tell where the spirit finally came into your life even though you've you've basically believed it all for so long but then finally you got the spirit and

That is that's not being born again either It's not the left the pop culture's view and it's also not that Christian version that Christian idea It's something different than both of those things here Jesus says that to be born again is something different and You can only get it by way of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit Can show you can give you what you need Can teach you about what you don't have and Then can tell you how to get it now that sounds like a three-point outline and it is The Spirit the Holy Spirit can show you what you need can teach you what it is and then show you how to get it Okay, so let's look at that first the Holy Spirit can give us tell us exactly what we need Now if you look down at verse 7 you'll see Jesus says to Nicodemus do not marvel that I said to you you must be born again Now two very important words there one of them is must and

[4 : 27] And it's very simple, but Jesus says to Nicodemus you must be born again And that means that Jesus says that the new birth is necessary That you have to have it that Nicodemus has to have it and he attaches it here in verse 5 to 7 He says that to be born again What you must have is to be born of water and spirit and we're gonna see in just a minute That to be born of water and spirit is a reference to the fact that when the spirit comes into your life He does a work on you. That's like cleansing refreshing water pouring over your soul and Washing away everything that's wrong the guilt and the shame that you've harbored from the time of your birth before the living God saying no to God Even though he says yes to you And that's that's what's inside and it says that Jesus is saying Nicodemus You need to have you need to be washed of that and only the Holy Spirit can do it You need water and you need spirit at the very same time

And that's the need now the other word that's important is the you not only that you must be but that you must be and Here the of course we know he's talking to Nicodemus He's he's talking directly to Nicodemus and saying you must be born again But in the Greek text that stands underneath this text. It's it's not the singular second person singular it's the second person plural actually and you know there's only one place in the world that really has a way to say this properly and It's it's y'all must be born again. It's y'all. I know you have used but doesn't it's okay But y'all it's y'all must be born again. You know, we don't really have any English a second person plural But that's exactly what you have here So Jesus doesn't just say Nicodemus you need to be born again. He says all of you do and So he's he's talking to one man, but he puts it in the plural and That's because he's saying that everybody, you know, if you've ever been born of a woman

You need to be born again by the Spirit and That's a big group those born of women. It's a large. It's a large amount of the people Everybody needs the new birth everybody now if you look at chapter 3 verse 1 where we're reading from you can see this Little word at the beginning in the ESV. It's translated now but it also can be and and it gives you a little clue of why he says all of you need to be born again because Jesus in the very verse just before that it said that Jesus knows all people He knows all men and he knows what's in their heart and he did need to be convinced of what's going on in the human heart And so it says that you know when Jesus came into the world. He knew what was going on in every single human heart That's exactly why he came and so that's why he says it's the it's the plural I don't need to be he says I don't need to be convinced of what's wrong with you. That's why I'm here But I do know that because I'm here you all need to be born again So we get that connection there and explains to us how he can talk to one person yet everybody at the same time because he knows

What's in everybody's hearts? He knew what was going on in all people and for all people Without the spirit not only of creation, but of new creation of new life coming into your life You cannot see the kingdom of God Jesus says Now before we move on from that let's ask the question and I think this is an important question Why does Jesus choose this metaphor the metaphor to be born again to say to talk to Nicodemus?

Because one of the things you can do is you can flip through the Gospel of John and You can see that Jesus has all these one-on-one encounters in John very significantly The next one he's gonna have in the next chapter is the woman at the well And he's gonna choose a completely different metaphor to explain to her what she needs But here you get a very specific metaphor for this man Nicodemus and if you think about him He's an older man. He's a ruler of the Sanhedrin the council in Jerusalem He's a Pharisee. He's on the top of his game in terms of religion He's very likely wealthy because the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin were wealthy. He's on the top of the culture And if he were alive today, he would you know be a religious public intellectual That they would be interviewing on the BBC for time to time to get the religious perspective He'd write for the times and the spectator and all these different places. This this is the kind of person we're talking about He was on he was on the top of life He was a winner in every way. He's not earthy and he's not gritty and

[9:11] Yet he comes in the middle of the night to Jesus Christ who is a poor man Who is a carpenter and who has just turned 30 years old and in that age in that culture It's not the most respectable age and do you see what he does? He says even more than all that success. He says rabbi teacher I see that you are from God because if you weren't from God There's no way that you could do all the signs that you've done and You see what he's saying. He's saying I I respect you I'm at the top of the food chain in terms of the culture and I'm coming to you and I know you're at the bottom but people seem to be attracted to you and We there's a faction of us. He says we know we know that you must be from God We respect you and you see what he's saying to Jesus. He's coming at night and he's saying I want to make a deal with you I want you I want to co-ops you and bring you into the inside the leadership So before you get drawn down by the people I'm gonna bring you to the top and we're gonna you because we respect you

We want to we want to do this the right way And so we want to bring you in and we want to help you but we've got to do it the right way We've got to first be quiet about it then we got to develop it and that's what he's saying and Jesus and one of the greatest Interruptions in all of the Bible from verse 3 2 to 3 He says Nicodemus says I know you must be from God and Jesus says unless you're born again. You can't even see the kingdom And what he's saying in that moment is How could you know that I'm of God?

Because if you've not been born again, you have no way of knowing things that are from God or not You know, you can't see the kingdom of God unless you've been born again and Nicodemus that means you're the last person that can judge whether I'm from God Because unless you're born again, you can't see the things of God. You can't see the kingdom of God Now it's an amazing interruption And what Jesus is saying in that moment to him why he chooses born again is because Nicodemus is coming Thinking that all it takes all it takes to see the kingdom of heaven is moral renovation moral reformation and He doesn't understand what Jesus is saying and Jesus is saying moral renovation is never enough That actually you don't need moral renovation Nicodemus. You need spiritual transformation From the inside out from the top to bottom you need the Holy Spirit of God to fall on you and the reason Nicodemus needs to hear this metaphor that you need to be

Born again is because he needs to wake up and see that there is absolutely nothing he can do. Let me ask you a question: how many of you were heavily involved, deeply involved, very active in your own birth? And that's why he says you need to be born again. And that's why we love to baptize babies because there's nothing better than to memorialize the reality of what new birth means: the new birth really is what God preaches to us in the sacrament. And you know what he says when we baptize a little baby. He's saying there's no better picture of ultimate passivity. The baby can do nothing; the baby can't help it, and the same thing has to happen when the Spirit comes into your life. And because Nicodemus thought that his own performances, that his moral reformation, his constant work on his own spirit was enough. He needed to hear, he needed to hear the metaphor. No, it's more like being born. You're completely passive and God is completely active.

Now two things before we move on: one is this, there are two verses. One in John one, the commentators will say: That everything that John wants to say to us in the Gospel of John is all there in the prologue of the Gospel, John 1:1 to 18, and remember John one 10 to 13: it says that many he came into the world and that his own people did not know him, they rejected him. But those who did know him knew him how?

[13:27] Not because they were born, not because of their bloodline, and not because of their religious works, but because quote they were born of God and Here it is being played out in the life. He's telling us here exactly what John started with, but then another verse. And we'll move on chapter 11, verse 10. Jesus says in chapter 11: if anybody walks in the daytime, he doesn't stumble. Because he sees the light of the world, but if you walk in the nighttime, you stumble because the light is not in you, not in him. And right here we learn what it means for Jesus in John's Gospel. What he means when he says: are you walking in the night?

Are you walking in the darkness? Nicodemus comes in the darkness and it's not a coincidence. Because walking in the darkness, we learn here is when you walk by the darkness of your own morality. It's when you try to walk towards the kingdom of God by the dirty deeds of your own good works. And that's exactly what Nicodemus was trying to do, and so he needed to hear: you need to hear tonight that you've got to be born again, and you don't contribute to that now. Secondly, the Holy Spirit shows us not only what we need, but also then teaches us what it is now. We haven't said a word yet about what the new birth is. We've only said that we need it. And the Holy Spirit also comes into our lives, the spirit of new life, and teaches us what the new birth is. It's not, it's not an evangelical subculture of super religious people. Contra the pop culture, it's on the one side. It's not on the other side, a

Radical experience, not necessarily not at all, and instead we've already mentioned that in verse 3, Jesus gives that massive interruption. You know, Nicodemus says you must be I recognize you're of God, and Jesus says: There's no way you can because to say that you've got to be born again to see the kingdom, and Here what he's talking about. I think we can talk about in three ways. Let me give you very quickly three things that the new birth is: to be born again. And the first thing I think we see here is that the new birth is when God gives us new roots, new roots. We've already said this, but one pastor puts it like this. It's not moral change. It's actually getting a new heart altogether, and so what he's saying to Nicodemus is this: the new birth is when the Holy Spirit comes into your life and actually plucks you up out of the ground, like a plant, and replants you all together.

It's to be uprooted and replanted And what the Holy Spirit does is he gets down in the soil and he digs the rocks out and then he puts you back in again And that's the basic picture of the new birth Jesus Christ is not here to bring Nicodemus the rest of the way, you know He's not saying to Nicodemus you've done really well so far and You've come all this way and now I'm gonna get you across the finish line He's saying that you've actually got to be completely uprooted and replanted again in your soul That you need total spiritual transformation not at all moral renovation Now that's why some of the commentators will point out that and if you have a hard copy of one of our Bibles You'll see this that there's gonna be a little footnote in the Bible that says that Perhaps a better translation of being born again is to be born from above Born from above that actually something from above has to come down into your life Now secondly and we're gonna come back to that secondly

It's not only when you get new roots, but it's also When you get when you get a new self you can see in verse 6 he says That which is born of the flesh is the flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit Now flesh here is not in Contrast to the immaterial So flesh here is not at all talking about the physical Instead the flesh is in contrast to the spiritual and the word flesh for Jesus like Paul means basically to be corrupted The world of corruption the kingdom of corruption That's in our hearts and that's outside of us and he said you need to be uprooted Your flesh needs to be pulled out and you need you need to be made spiritual and That means here the same thing that Paul means When he says you actually need to put on a new self Altogether you need a new self when the when the spirit of God comes into your life and he uproots you and replants you What happens you actually get a new identity?

[18:17] Your spirit awakens your consciousness opens up the God that you were rejecting now you're saying yes now you're submitting to you get a new self You get a new identity from the inside out. That's what Jesus is talking about here Have you ever had one of those moments I was thinking about this this week had one this week where you you read a book Or you listen to a TED talk podcast something like that you have a great conversation with a friend and All of a sudden you turn to your spouse your friend your parents whoever it might be in your life and you say You know this conversation I had this book. I read it really changed my life and You kind of realized I hadn't I had an epiphany I had an epiphany I had a moment of inspiration that struck me Whenever I read this book and I got to then and I changed my schedule and I started making my bed Well, I haven't started that yet, but some of you that's what happened to you You started making your bed and you know you got more responsible

You change the way you do your schedule you started being consistent at the gym, whatever it might be you had an epiphany And it really did matter Now those are really good things and that's sort of what we're talking about here, but not really at all and And and it's you know, it's not being struck and inspired in a moment It's not all of a sudden like like you've had you've had a moment of genius. It's more like when you say This is when you know the new births come into your life The new self you have a new self. It's when you say something more like this. I once was lost But now I'm found I was blind But now I see I Said no to him, but he said yes to me and Then you then you submit and that's when you know that the new births come into your life You've got a new self a new consciousness That the spirit has uprooted you and replanted you now thirdly and finally a New hope is the third thing here and you see it very clearly in verse three and verse 15

You know the spirit is the spirit of creation We said at the beginning of the series and we said from the very beginning He's the spirit of new creation that the Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity that Perfects the things of God until they're finished The new birth when the spirit comes into your life the new birth is not about the new birth not at all Now the new birth is nothing but a means but it's not the point and you can see the point here He says to Nicodemus if You want to see the kingdom of God You need to be born again and Then you look down at verse 15 and he says whoever believes in him may have eternal life And he's saying here that the point of the new birth is something more than the new birth It's that you would see the kingdom or have eternal life and we covered this a few weeks ago on Sunday morning But that word eternal life in the Greek text is literally the age of life and

So he's not opposing immaterial immaterial here nothing like that. He's saying He's saying that the point of the new birth is that you might enter the kingdom of God Which is the very age of life as opposed to the age of death Now to get a clearer picture of that There are two kingdoms that are presented to us all throughout the Bible Two kingdoms there the kingdom of this world as it's often put and the kingdom of God and those two kingdoms are in total antithesis against one another their enemies and the kingdom of God's going to win because the Spirit's gonna bring it about and Augustine captured this the great Bishop of Hippo in the fourth and fifth centuries Now he read a big old book called the city of God and in it He says there are two cities that you can belong to everybody that's born of a woman is born right into the city of man and It's the city of the flesh. It's the city of the world as we know it. It's the city under which we are choked by death disease disaster by

Football match riots and hurricanes that destroy cities and every other horrible thing. That's the age of death But that when God comes into your life, you can be transferred as a citizen from the city of man into the city of God And so what Jesus is talking about here is that when the new birth comes into your life It is a citizen citizenship transfer from the kingdom of this world into the kingdom of God and That means that the kingdom of God seeing the living God in the age of life not death is actually the point of Being born again Now let's close with this thirdly and finally and that's how can you get it?

[23 : 24] How can you get it? Jesus is saying to us tonight That you don't need moral change you need to save your you need spiritual Transformation from the inside out you need the Holy Spirit to come into your life and to cleanse you You need the water and the Spirit the washing of regeneration as the New Testament puts it And we see it all the way back in Ezekiel 36 Jesus is very likely here alluding to Ezekiel 36 Ezekiel 36 says God says I will sprinkle upon you clean water and you will be clean from all your uncleanness and From all your idols I'll cleanse you and I'll give you a new heart and a new spirit Jesus is working with that the very next chapter after Ezekiel 36 is when the dry bones come to life again That's exactly what he's talking about. There's an Old Testament precedent of the new birth now look Let's close with this If if you've if you've heard Jesus's words tonight

Maybe there's a question that's popped up in your mind It's a question that definitely should be there and the question is this if you're telling me that I need to be born again And being born again is also actually a lot like being born of a woman You know, you don't you don't contribute anything to your first birth And you don't contribute anything to your second birth either the birth by the Spirit and if that's the case Then it almost sounds like what we're preaching what Jesus is preaching is you need to wait around and You know, what did he say he said the wind blows where it wishes You can't control the wind you can't control the Spirit So it sounds like Jesus is saying to you tonight just sit and hope beyond hope That before you die you can get the Spirit Because he can't be captured. He can't be possessed You've got a hope that he comes upon you now look That that is true at one register and one register only

But when you come down to the lower register You have to remember that if we would have read one more verse If you have a Bible you can see what the next verse is the one more verse that goes beyond the passage we read tonight You might have heard of it. It's John 3 16 John 3 16 it's the very next verse after John 3 15 And in John 3 16 God says that I so loved the world that I sent my only begotten Son And if you believe whosoever believes anybody will not perish but will have the eternal life I just told you about that you need the Spirit for And you see that means that you can never take John 3 8 and pit it against John 3 16 John 3 8 says there's nothing you can do to save yourself you need the Spirit and John 3 16 says if you would believe Then you have the Spirit and you have eternal life And both of those things are true at the exact same time

And so let me give you this word as we close Jesus says right after that Right after that No one knows the things of God verses 13 to 15 unless he is the Son of man who has ascended and descended And Jesus is saying in other words nobody really knows what the kingdom of God is like except for me Nicodemus says I know what the kingdom of God is like except for me Nicodemus by the way I Descended I condescended and I'm gonna us in and only I know what the kingdom of God is really like And he said and here's how you can have it the very next verse as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness So must the Son of man be lifted up Now Jesus is referring there to numbers 21 And in numbers 21, it's a very very strange story to us modern people But these snakes come out and they bite the Israelites and all the Israelites are dying from snake bite poison And God says if you will lift up your eyes and look at the pole upon which I have cast a dead serpent

You will be you will be saved And you think what in the world does that mean what is that about and Jesus is saying Jesus is saying if if you want to see the kingdom of God you need to lift your eyes up To the serpent on the pole just just like numbers 21 you need to see Not only the Son of man ascended into heaven. You needed to see the Son of man lifted up And in numbers 21 what what was happening was that the people were to look up and see Representative poison representative death hanging dead on the pole for them And that was God's pronouncement to them that if you will look upon representative death for you I will save you And Jesus Christ comes tonight and says to Nicodemus Nicodemus and you you need if you want the new birth you simply lift up your eyes And look at the man who was lifted up who became serpent like not because he is a serpent

[28 : 42] He's holy and righteous, but he who knew no sin became our son And that means he ate the poison he drank it all the way to the drugs and he was lifted up for it And he so he says to Nicodemus if you want the new birth you just lift up your eyes and you see The serpent lift you see the Son of man lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness Substitutionary death for you now In John 19 and this is truly the last word John 19 Do you know what happened in John 19?

It says that Jesus dies and Joseph of Arimathea who was the disciple of Jesus Asked Pilate that he could take away the body of Jesus to bury it and Pilate gave him mercy So Joseph of Arimathea came and he took away Jesus's body And Nicodemus also who earlier had come to Jesus by night Came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloe And they took the body and they wrapped it and they buried it There's a little detail in John 19 that says that this man who came to Jesus by night Was there and we don't have all the details but you know what I think happened I think Nicodemus stood underneath the cross and he lifted up his eyes And he remembered exactly what Jesus said to him That if he would look up and he would believe in the in the Son of man lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness that he could have eternal life And he said that day this really is the Son of God

And now we're going to look at the Son of God And we're going to look at the Son of God that day this really is the Son of God And now he's he's burying Jesus's body with Joseph of Arimathea And you know why you know what it says about Joseph it says that he was afraid of the Pharisees And so he did it secretly he asked Pilate secretly but here's a Pharisee doing it right there with him And even more than that even more than that If you're a Pharisee if you want to be religious there's one thing that you do not do the day before the Sabbath And that's touch a dead body Because if you touch a dead body you are unholy and unclean and you cannot enter the presence of God and Nicodemus throws it all away And he touches the body of Christ and you see he woke up he had the new birth He realized John 3 16 hit him and he believed and it was counted to him as righteousness and that means he was born again born from above And that's that's for anybody that's for you tonight. That's for every single one of us here tonight First John 5 4 says everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world gets the kingdom of God

Not the age of death the age of life and this is the victory that has overcome the world Faith Faith overcomes the world because it is the instrument of receiving the new birth Do you believe tonight then you can say I'm born again And that's an invitation as we come to the supper Let's pray father we ask that you would help us to believe and we cast our weak belief before you and recognize that we need new birth And so we pray for the spirit of new birth of regeneration to come into this place and to or change somebody's heart for the first time And change our hearts again that your gospel and your mercies would be new and fresh to us and we pray this as we come to eat and drink your body and your blood and we pray this in Christ's name Amen