

You must be born again

John 3:1-21

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Before we come to the reading of God's Word, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we beg You now as we come to Your Word, speak, O Lord. We know that this Word is insufficient in and of itself. We need, O God, Your Holy Spirit to work in us and through us by the power of Your Word, so that we might not go from this place unaffected. O Lord God, we pray that You would change us as we read and as we look at Your Word together. So come, Father, come Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name, Amen.

John Chapter 2:23 through to John 3:21. Now when He, that's Jesus, was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew all men and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what we know and testify what we have seen, and you do not receive our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He that came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His

only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." This is the word of the Lord.

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. This is the main point of the first part of Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus. Picture the scene: An older man, a ruler of Israel, one of the 70 leaders in the Sanhedrin, a teacher of God's law, a Pharisee, Nicodemus, comes to Jesus at night. He's a Pharisee. He's committed himself to radical obedience to God's law. He's a teacher. He knows the scriptures. And he's coming to find Jesus. At this point, Jesus is probably around 30 years old. He's a carpenter who's turned into a public teacher very recently. He's just started gathering followers. And the last thing he did in John's gospel is cause a riot in the temple, throwing out the money changers and the sacrifice sellers. And yet Nicodemus comes to him at night. And as Nicodemus finds Jesus at night, he starts the conversation with Jesus with an introduction that's full of respect. "Rabbi," he says, "we know that you're a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." This is remarkably respectful given the circumstances. He calls Jesus rabbi or teacher. Nicodemus is probably older than Jesus. And Jesus has only just started his public ministry. Jesus has no formal training, no position in the leadership of Israel. And he's just done some fairly radical activity with a whip in the temple. And it's in this context that Nicodemus comes and calls Jesus rabbi and acknowledges that he's a teacher come from God. Nicodemus seems to believe that God is with Jesus. And there's no reason, I think, in this text for us to think that Nicodemus is being anything but sincere. This line from Nicodemus seems to me to be the introduction to something. He hasn't really asked anything at this point. He's just sort of leading in and setting the scene. And yet Jesus jumps straight in. He interjects. And he says this, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus would have understood exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said the kingdom of God. Israel had been waiting for centuries for God to restore a kingdom. Under David and Solomon, they had seen great peace and prosperity and security and the presence of God among them

in the temple. And the prophets of old had foretold of a time when God would send a new king from the line of David to restore this kingdom, to rule over Israel once more with peace and prosperity and security and the presence of God among them. In fact, Psalm 2 points us to the fact that this coming kingdom was expected to be not just a local kingdom in Israel but a global kingdom where the nations would come and bow down to the king of Israel. Imagine that. A global empire of perfect rule and reign with God with His people, with the nations submitting to Him, with provision, security, safety, and God living with His people. This is what every Jew was waiting for. The kingdom of God to come once again, to come in its fullness. And so Nicodemus was waiting for this as well. And he would have desperately wanted to be a part of it. Is that something you want to be a part of? The kingdom of God, the creator of the world, placing a king in charge, and everyone submitting to His rule, His benevolent, His good rule, peace, security, order, prosperity. Sounds like exactly the sort of thing I'd want to be a part of. And Jesus says, "You cannot access that kingdom, you cannot enter that kingdom, you cannot see that kingdom, you cannot be a part of that kingdom unless you are born again." And Nicodemus is utterly confused. "What are you talking about?" he says. "How can a man be born again when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?" Jesus, completely unfazed by the fact that he seems to have confused his student, doubles down. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who's born of the Spirit."

What on earth is Jesus talking about? It's very odd language. Being born again, the wind blowing where it wishes, and being born of the Spirit. Why would being a part of God's kingdom require this kind of thing? What even is this kind of thing? What is this new birth that Jesus is speaking of? Jesus is not being cryptic here. He's not trying to say super weird things to confuse Nicodemus or to confuse us. So much so that he tells Nicodemus that as a teacher in Israel, Jesus expects Nicodemus to understand these things already. Without him having to explain it, without Jesus even having to say it, Nicodemus should have known that this is a requirement. And the reason Nicodemus should have known is because he should have been studied in the Old Testament. Specifically, given the language that Jesus uses here, he should have known Ezekiel 36 and Ezekiel 37. In these chapters of Ezekiel, the prophet is speaking about how God's going to come and renew the people of Israel. In chapter 36, which we didn't read, he speaks about how God's going to wash Israel with water to cleanse them from their uncleanness and their idolatry. He speaks about how God's going to come and put a new heart in his people, to take out a heart of stone and to put

in them a heart of flesh so that they will serve God and be a part of His kingdom, submitting to the reign of His king. Does that imagery sound familiar? Water and the Spirit and a new life, a new heart. And as we keep reading into Ezekiel 37, we find even more connected imagery. We see a valley full of dry bones, which Ezekiel is told to prophesy over. And he speaks to the bones, "Behold, I will cause my spirit," which in the Hebrew could either be "my spirit" or "my breath" or "my wind," "to enter you, and you shall live." Do you see the connection? Jesus speaks of being born of the Spirit and how this experience is like a wind blowing, bringing new life to dead people. He's using language that Nicodemus should have understood to say that all those who enter the kingdom of God must have a supernatural experience where the Spirit of God breathes life into their dead soul. They must have their guilt washed away by the cleansing water and Spirit of God. They must be born again, not like a fleshly birth like they were the first time, but a spiritual birth.

Now, this implies that Nicodemus was not born again at this point. He still needed to experience this. That's what Jesus is telling him: "Mate, if you want to see the kingdom, you must be born again." It's necessary. And this is an implication for us as well. Given the fact that you are here before me this morning, I know that you've been born of the flesh. That's what it means to be born by the flesh, to be alive. But in order to see the kingdom of God, you must be born a second time. It means that when you were born of the flesh, you were not born of the Spirit. This is absolutely vital for us to understand. When we come into this world, born of the flesh, we are like the bones in Ezekiel's valley. Spiritually speaking, we are dead and dry and unresponsive towards God. When you're born from your mother, you cannot understand spiritual things. You are not born into the kingdom of God. You are not only dead, but you are full of sin, like we see in Ezekiel 36. You are unclean before God. You have idolatry running rampant in your life. And you must have God come and cleanse you from it. You and I are born sinners. We're born dead in our sin. We are born into lives that are characterized by uncleanness and idolatry.

Something that strikes me as I consider this encounter with Nicodemus is this: This is an evangelistic conversation. He is speaking to Nicodemus, who is not in the kingdom. He's not a Christian. He doesn't trust in Jesus yet. And he leads with this: "Nicodemus, you must have an experience occur to you. You must have something happen in your life that you cannot control. The wind blows where it wishes." This spiritual life that needs to be breathed into you, this awakening that needs to occur to you, you cannot affect it. You cannot change yourself. You are dead. Dead people don't raise themselves from the dead. Why would Jesus lead with this? How is this going to help Nicodemus get into the kingdom?

I believe that the answer to this is that this talk of the new birth shows Nicodemus that inquiry is not enough. Respect for Jesus is not enough. Being well-researched in the Bible is not enough. Being devoted to rigorously keeping God's law is not enough. Being born into a nation that has known God in the past is not enough. Being born into a family of Christians is not enough. Going to church is not enough. Being a great teacher is not enough. None of these things will give Nicodemus entry into the kingdom, and none of these things will give you entry into the kingdom of God. Dead, dry bones need miraculous rebuilding. Unclean sinners need divine cleansing. Those born in the flesh need to be reborn by the Spirit of God Himself.

Not only were Nicodemus' qualifications irrelevant for entering the kingdom, but the other point that Jesus is making is that entry into the kingdom is a huge shift. There is a massive difference between dry, dead bones and a lively, breathing body. There is a stark distinction between someone who's only been born of the flesh and someone who has been born of the Spirit. There is a radical change that must occur for someone to go from being unmoved by the wind of God to being moved by the wind of God. And I believe that Jesus is making this point to Nicodemus: There's no incremental way to Jesus. There's no inquiry that you just sort of slowly chip away at and then you get there. There is a radical change that must occur. And that message is true for us today as well.

You might be here this morning because you're interested in Jesus. You want to know more about Him. You've heard about Him. You think He's a great teacher, perhaps. He said some pretty wise things, something about loving your neighbor as yourself, or do to others as you would have them do to you. He sounds pretty interesting. Perhaps you think you're almost a Christian, as you're edging your way into the kingdom. You're moving slowly towards Christ. You're gradually improving your life, and then one day you'll sort of be enough. But Jesus is saying it does not work like that. Entry into God's kingdom is a radical change produced by God. A work of the Spirit where your stony heart that hates God and is unresponsive to His rule and reign is transformed into a lively heart of flesh that loves God and wants to submit to His rule.

Entry into God's kingdom is as dramatic as being born. One minute you're inside a womb, not breathing, in the darkness, unaware of the outside world, and the next minute, by no act of your own, you're thrown out into a world of light. Your lungs are filled with air. You start making noises you never made before. You're alive. That is the sort of change that takes place in the life of everyone who enters God's kingdom, in the life of every single Christian who is genuinely a believer in Jesus.

This afternoon, we're looking at some testimonies of people amongst us who profess to have come to know Jesus Christ. This is the change we are saying has taken place in them. But Christians, I think, who believe in the necessity of the new birth, sometimes obsess over the precise details of when that happened. I think this text is actually helpful for us in that regard. Our testimonies become, "Let me just nail down for you precisely the moment I was born." But Jesus says, "Hang on, the wind blows where it wishes. You hear the sound of it, but you can't tell where it comes from or where it's going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

My house had a whole lot of wind the other night, and I know that it did because I could hear it outside, and I went out in the morning and stuff was blown all over the yard. I could hear and see the effects of the wind. I could see that stuff had moved. I didn't know when it moved. I just knew that it had been moved by the wind. It's what it's like with the new birth. You don't have to know the precise moment the wind started. You don't need to remember your spiritual new birthday. But we should be able to see the effects of the wind. Where once you hated the Scriptures and the Bible, you now love God's Word. Where once you disliked the idea of coming to church, now you can't get enough of fellowship with God's people. Where once you had no inclination whatsoever to pray, now you want to pray more. Where once you loved your sin, now you hate it. Where once you walked happily in your sin and you ran after it, now you are grieved every time you sin. Where once you're bored by God, now you get so excited hearing about how God works in this world.

Nicodemus desperately needed to know about this. He needed to know that his ancestry, his learning, his position, his respect for Jesus, his seeking of Jesus, none of it could give him entry into the kingdom. He needed to be born again. Are you born again? In every gathering of people of this size, it's probably safe to assume that there are some of us who are not. And if you get a pair of glasses and put them on and see spiritual realities, some of us would be sitting here with spiritual life, lively, breathing, hearts beating, responsive, aware of the realities of this world, hearts that are longing after God. And in some seats, if you stood up here and put these glasses on, you'd see a pile of bones. Have you experienced a new birth? What does God see when He looks at your soul?

Now, whatever your answer is to that question, I think we end up in a similar situation to Nicodemus. What are you going to do about it? Nicodemus keeps coming back with this same question: "How can this be? How can this be? How can this be?" "How am I meant to be born again?" is essentially what he's asking. "Am I meant to go back into my mother's womb? What do you want me to do about this, Jesus?" Now, Jesus answers this question in a surprising manner. We might expect Jesus to say something

like, given you can't enter the kingdom of God except by a radical new birth that you cannot affect by yourself, but you need the Spirit of God to work in you, you should just sit back and wait and see if the wind blows. It might feel like that when Jesus is teaching us about the necessity of the new birth in our life, that Jesus is just setting us up for failure and inactivity. If we can't do this to ourselves, if we can't make ourselves be born, then what are we meant to do? How can I get in the kingdom?

But Jesus' explanation of this and where he goes with this in verses 13 through to 21 is far from fatalistic and passive. The essence of his explanation is this: you must be born again, and by the way, when he says that, he's not saying this is a command; he's saying this is a reality. It's necessary that you're born again. You must have radical change in your life in order to enter the kingdom, and he's saying, "I have made a way." I have made a way through my atoning work on the cross. That's Jesus' answer, and he gives us four statements showing us just how much he has done so that we might have access into the kingdom, that we might have this radical change in our lives.

In verses 11 to 13, Jesus says that he has come down from heaven to show us this way. Look at verse 13: "No one has ascended to heaven but he who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." He's talking to Nicodemus, saying, "I'm teaching you these things because you need to know them, and no one would have known these things unless heaven had come down and taught us." It's a recurring theme throughout the next few verses that God has come down in order to teach us these things, in order to show us these things. In verse 17, God sent His Son not to condemn but to save. In verse 19, the light came into the world.

The fact that we are by nature dead spiritually, unclean, and full of sin, and that in order to enter God's kingdom we must have a radical life-transforming event happen to us, means that we are absolutely without hope unless God comes down and acts. And here is Christ saying that that's what He's done. He has come down from heaven. No one else can teach us these heavenly things. No one else can teach us of eternal realities and of the spiritual necessity of being saved. We need God to come down. We need a heavenly teacher. We need the condescension of Christ Himself. That's a remarkable thing that God would come down in order to tell a bunch of dry bones that they need life. There's nothing in it for Him in that regard.

But Christ's condescension to come down and teach us heaven realities was not enough. We needed to have more. And Christ shows Nicodemus this by referring to an Old Testament event. In verses 14 and 15, Jesus says, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must

the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." He's referring to an event that occurred in Numbers 21. While the Israelites were wandering around the wilderness, they grumbled against God, complaining about their circumstances. And so God sent fiery serpents into the camp. The serpents bit people, and the people died. And as the people called out to God to rescue them, God told Moses to make a serpent and to put it on a pole so that whoever looked at the serpent would live. And that's what Moses did. And everyone who looked at the bronze serpent hanging on that pole were healed and lived. And Jesus is saying here that this is a picture that God wrote into history of the work that Jesus would do on the cross.

Notice that there's a close connection between the curse that the Israelites were saved from and what was lifted up on the tree. Serpents were killing them, and so they must look at a serpent to be saved. And the same is true with Christ. As Jesus has just implied with his teaching about the new birth, we must be saved from our uncleanness and our idolatry and our sin. We must be saved from our lifelessness, from our spiritual death. And so Jesus came not only to teach us heavenly truths but to be raised up on a cross to become death, to take upon Himself our sinfulness and our uncleanness, to lose His life so that all who believe in Him, all who just look at Him as their only hope of salvation, will receive eternal life. He lost His life so that we would receive eternal life, new life, spiritual cleanness, and the kingdom of God. Jesus' atonement, being lifted up on the cross as a sacrifice, gives life by bearing the curse of death. We look at Him and we see someone laden down with sin, and we are delivered from our sin. The new birth is not a cheap exercise. It's not easy to secure new life for God's people. It costs Jesus the incarnation. It costs Jesus the atoning sacrifice on the cross.

But Jesus is not done yet explaining how God's provided us with access to this kingdom. The next verse, we read one of the most famous statements in the Bible about God's provision. Verse 16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." You see, it wasn't just Jesus who went to great lengths to solve our problem of our deadness. The Father wanted to bring people into His kingdom. And so He sent His Son, He gave up His Son, to suffer and die and rise again so that whoever believes in Him would have this eternal life, would be raised from death to life.

Notice that just after Nicodemus, Jesus has told Nicodemus of the radical nature of entry into the kingdom and the fact that what we need is something that can only be produced by God. You know, the Spirit will blow where it wishes. Just after saying this, Jesus then proceeds to give one of the most universal welcomes to eternal life that we find in the Bible.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Can you hear the broad, open call there? There are plenty of debates that go on around what exactly the word "the world" means, but one thing's for sure: it's a broad statement. And there's another word to pay attention to: the word "whoever." In the Greek, that word means "whoever." Whoever believes in Jesus, anyone, all you must do is look to Him, and you will be saved.

Which dead bones can live again? Whoever. Whoever believes. There is nothing stopping you from coming to Christ right now. From experiencing that radical transformation that you so desperately need. From moving from death to life. All Jesus says you must do is look to Him. Believe in Him. Look to His atoning sacrifice on the cross. Look to the gift that the Father has sent. Look to Him and be saved. Receive life. Jesus is emphasizing—I can't say the word—Jesus is saying that He is not trying to make entry into the kingdom impossible. He's not saying you can't do it. He's not saying don't do anything. He's saying it is radical. It is incredible. It is requiring a miraculous work, and He has paid the price to make it achievable. That's amazing.

Yes, our state is desperate. Yes, we're born spiritually dead, under a curse, sinful, unclean, a bag of bones in urgent need of a life we cannot manufacture. But Jesus came to make a way for those dead bones to live by simply believing. He did not come to condemn the world. He didn't come to preach a message of the requirement of the new birth so that we would all sit here going, "Well, we're stuffed." He does not walk around the valley of dry bones that Ezekiel saw, take a look, and say, "Well, you're pretty dead." No, He comes down, and He makes a way for that dead carcass of my life to be made alive. To solve a problem that I cannot solve. He came to do that for all who believe. Have you experienced the new birth? If the answer to that question is no, if you're sitting there this morning and you're saying, "You know what? I don't feel it. I'm unresponsive. I can't change myself. I don't even care what you're talking about, Tom," you're dead. You are dead in your sins; you're a bundle of bones on a chair, and Jesus says, "Look to me and live." Believe in Him today.

And then, just in case we haven't got the point yet, Jesus comes at the same truth from another angle. Because when Jesus came into the world, light started shining. And if you choose not to believe in Jesus Christ today, then Jesus says you do so by your own will. You do so because you love darkness. You do so because you want to stay dead. Look at verses 19 to 21: "This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light,

that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

To come to Jesus requires that you come to the light. You must acknowledge that you are dead in order to receive life. You must confess that you are unclean in order to receive cleansing. You must confess your sinful thoughts, desires, and actions in order to enter the kingdom of God. The light of Jesus, as He came down from heaven, teaches us the way to life. But it also exposes us for what we are. It exposes us in all of our deadness, in all of our sinfulness, in all of our coldness, and in all of our uncleanness. But a sick man should want an MRI. A patient who is bleeding out should want the lights on in the operating theater. If Jesus is right—and He is—that we are dead by nature, sinful, under condemnation, spiritually unresponsive, then we should want all the light we can get so that Jesus, the great physician, can go to work. Your sin is not worth hiding. It's shameful. Oh, I've done shameful things. But Jesus has a cure. Come into the light. Confess your sin, admit your desperate need of God, stop covering over your guilt, come into the light, and find life.

The choice is before you today. Your and my need is great. We need radical transformation. In fact, Christian, we need this every day. To be alive, you must keep breathing. We need God's breath, God's Spirit, at work in us every day. Our need is so huge. To move from being dead bones to being alive is a transformation that only God can give. But God's provision is greater than our need. Christ has come into the world and taken the curse of sin and death upon Himself as He suffered under the judgment of God that we deserved. The Father sent His Son, and the Holy Spirit has been shining the light of the gospel across the world ever since. You have no excuse. You can choose. Stay in your condemnation, remain in your guilt, live out the rest of your life as a spiritually unresponsive corpse with no breath in your lungs, or come into the light. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, look to Him, expose your sin, see Him hanging on the cross, and see the one who offers life, new life, rebirth, eternal, spiritual life. I beg you, if you don't know Him, look to Him today.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, our sins, there are many, but Your mercy is more. We confess to You, Lord, that by nature we are in a destitute state, and we are in desperate need of Your Spirit to give us life. And we thank You, Lord, that despite all Before we come to the reading of God's Word, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we beg You now as we come to Your Word, speak, O Lord. We know that this Word is insufficient in and of itself. We need, O God, Your Holy Spirit to work in us and through us by the power of Your Word, so that we might not go from this place unaffected. O Lord God, we pray that You would change us as we read and as we look at Your Word together.

So come, Father, come Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name, Amen.

John chapter 3, and we'll be reading—actually, I'm going to read from verse 23 of chapter 2 through to verse 21 of chapter 3. Now when He, that's Jesus, was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew all men and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what we know and testify what we have seen, and you do not receive our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." This is the word of the Lord.

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. This is the main point of the first part of Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus. Picture the scene: An older man, a ruler of Israel,

one of the 70 leaders in the Sanhedrin, a teacher of God's law, a Pharisee, Nicodemus, comes to Jesus at night. He's a Pharisee. He's committed himself to radical obedience to God's law. He's a teacher. He knows the scriptures. And he's coming to find Jesus. At this point, Jesus is probably around 30 years old. He's a carpenter who's turned into a public teacher very recently. He's just started gathering followers. And the last thing he did in John's gospel is cause a riot in the temple, throwing out the money changers and the sacrifice sellers. And yet, Nicodemus comes to him at night. And as Nicodemus finds Jesus at night, he starts the conversation with Jesus with an introduction that's full of respect. "Rabbi," he says, "we know that you're a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." This is remarkably respectful given the circumstances. He calls Jesus rabbi or teacher. Nicodemus is probably older than Jesus. And Jesus has only just started his public ministry. Jesus has no formal training, no position in the leadership of Israel. And he's just done some fairly radical activity with a whip in the temple. And it's in this context that Nicodemus comes and calls Jesus rabbi and acknowledges that he's a teacher come from God. Nicodemus seems to believe that God is with Jesus. And there's no reason, I think, in this text for us to think that Nicodemus is being anything but sincere.

This line from Nicodemus seems to me to be the introduction to something. He hasn't really asked anything at this point. He's just sort of leading in and setting the scene. And yet, Jesus jumps straight in. He interjects. And he says this, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus would have understood exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said the kingdom of God. Israel had been waiting for centuries for God to restore a kingdom. Under David and Solomon, they had seen great peace and prosperity and security and the presence of God among them in the temple. And the prophets of old had foretold of a time when God would send a new king from the line of David to restore this kingdom, to rule over Israel once more with peace and prosperity and security and the presence of God among them. In fact, Psalm 2 points us to the fact that this coming kingdom was expected to be not just a local kingdom in Israel but a global kingdom where the nations would come and bow down to the king of Israel. Imagine that. A global empire of perfect rule and reign with God with His people, with the nations submitting to Him, with provision, security, safety, and God living with His people. This is what every Jew was waiting for. The kingdom of God to come once again, to come in its fullness. And so Nicodemus was waiting for this as well. And he would have desperately wanted to be a part of it. Is that something you want to be a part of? The kingdom of God, the creator of the world, placing a king in charge, and everyone submitting to His rule, His benevolent, His good rule, peace, security, order, prosperity. Sounds like exactly the sort of thing I'd want to be a part of. And Jesus says, "You

cannot access that kingdom, you cannot enter that kingdom, you cannot see that kingdom, you cannot be a part of that kingdom unless you are born again." And Nicodemus is utterly confused. "What are you talking about?" he says. "How can a man be born again when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?" Jesus, completely unfazed by the fact that he seems to have confused his student, doubles down. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who's born of the Spirit."

What on earth is Jesus talking about? It's very odd language. Being born again, the wind blowing where it wishes, and being born of the Spirit. Why would being a part of God's kingdom require this kind of thing? What even is this kind of thing? What is this new birth that Jesus is speaking of? Jesus is not being cryptic here. He's not trying to say super weird things to confuse Nicodemus or to confuse us. So much so that he tells Nicodemus that as a teacher in Israel, Jesus expects Nicodemus to understand these things already. Without him having to explain it, without Jesus even having to say it, Nicodemus should have known that this is a requirement. And the reason Nicodemus should have known is because he should have been studied in the Old Testament. Specifically, given the language that Jesus uses here, he should have known Ezekiel 36 and Ezekiel 37. In these chapters of Ezekiel, the prophet is speaking about how God's going to come and renew the people of Israel. In chapter 36, which we didn't read, he speaks about how God's going to wash Israel with water to cleanse them from their uncleanness and their idolatry. He speaks about how God's going to come and put a new heart in his people, to take out a heart of stone and to put in them a heart of flesh so that they will serve God and be a part of His kingdom, submitting to the reign of His king. Does that imagery sound familiar? Water and the Spirit and a new life, a new heart. And as we keep reading into Ezekiel 37, we find even more connected imagery. We see a valley full of dry bones, which Ezekiel is told to prophesy over. And he speaks to the bones, "Behold, I will cause my spirit," which in the Hebrew could either be "my spirit" or "my breath" or "my wind," "to enter you, and you shall live." Do you see the connection? Jesus speaks of being born of the Spirit and how this experience is like a wind blowing, bringing new life to dead people. He's using language that Nicodemus should have understood to say that all those who enter the kingdom of God must have a supernatural experience where the Spirit of God breathes life into their dead soul. They must have their guilt washed away by the cleansing water and Spirit of God. They must be born again, not like a fleshly birth like they were the first time, but a spiritual birth.

Now, this implies that Nicodemus was not born again at this point. He still needed to experience this. That's what Jesus is telling him: "Mate, if you want to see the kingdom, you must be born again." It's necessary. And this is an implication for us as well. Given the fact that you are here before me this morning, I know that you've been born of the flesh. That's what it means to be born by the flesh, to be alive. But in order to see the kingdom of God, you must be born a second time. It means that when you were born of the flesh, you were not born of the Spirit. This is absolutely vital for us to understand. When we come into this world, born of the flesh, we are like the bones in Ezekiel's valley. Spiritually speaking, we are dead and dry and unresponsive towards God.

When you're born from your mother, you cannot understand spiritual things. You are not born into the kingdom of God. You are not only dead, but you are full of sin, like we see in Ezekiel 36. You are unclean before God. You have idolatry running rampant in your life. And you must have God come and cleanse you from it. You and I are born sinners. We're born dead in our sin. We are born into lives that are characterized by uncleanness and idolatry.

Something that strikes me as I consider this encounter with Nicodemus is this: This is an evangelistic conversation. He is speaking to Nicodemus, who is not in the kingdom. He's not a Christian. He doesn't trust in Jesus yet. And he leads with this: "Nicodemus, you must have an experience occur to you. You must have something happen in your life that you cannot control. The wind blows where it wishes." This spiritual life that needs to be breathed into you, this awakening that needs to occur to you, you cannot affect it. You cannot change yourself. You are dead. Dead people don't raise themselves from the dead. Why would Jesus lead with this? How is this going to help Nicodemus get into the kingdom?

I believe that the answer to this is that this talk of the new birth shows Nicodemus that inquiry is not enough. Respect for Jesus is not enough. Being well-researched in the Bible is not enough. Being devoted to rigorously keeping God's law is not enough. Being born into a nation that has known God in the past is not enough. Being born into a family of Christians is not enough. Going to church is not enough. Being a great teacher is not enough. None of these things will give Nicodemus entry into the kingdom, and none of these things will give you entry into the kingdom of God. Dead, dry bones need miraculous rebuilding. Unclean sinners need divine cleansing. Those born in the flesh need to be reborn by the Spirit of God Himself.

Not only were Nicodemus' qualifications irrelevant for entering the king-

dom, but the other point that Jesus is making is that entry into the kingdom is a huge shift. There is a massive difference between dry, dead bones and a lively, breathing body. There is a stark distinction between someone who's only been born of the flesh and someone who has been born of the Spirit. There is a radical change that must occur for someone to go from being unmoved by the wind of God to being moved by the wind of God. And I believe that Jesus is making this point to Nicodemus: There's no incremental way to Jesus. There's no inquiry that you just sort of slowly chip away at and then you get there. There is a radical change that must occur. And that message is true for us today as well.

You might be here this morning because you're interested in Jesus. You want to know more about Him. You've heard about Him. You think He's a great teacher, perhaps. He said some pretty wise things, something about loving your neighbor as yourself, or do to others as you would have them do to you. He sounds pretty interesting. Perhaps you think you're almost a Christian as you're edging your way into the kingdom. You're moving slowly towards Christ. You're gradually improving your life, and then one day you'll sort of be enough. But Jesus is saying it does not work like that. Entry into God's kingdom is a radical change produced by God. A work of the Spirit where your stony heart that hates God and is unresponsive to His rule and reign is transformed into a lively heart of flesh that loves God and wants to submit to His rule.

Entry into God's kingdom is as dramatic as being born. One minute you're inside a womb, not breathing, in the darkness, unaware of the outside world, and the next minute, by no act of your own, you're thrown out into a world of light. Your lungs are filled with air. You start making noises you never made before. You're alive. That is the sort of change that takes place in the life of everyone who enters God's kingdom, in the life of every single Christian who is genuinely a believer in Jesus.

This afternoon, we're looking at some testimonies of people amongst us who profess to have come to know Jesus Christ. This is the change we are saying has taken place in them. But Christians, I think, who believe in the necessity of the new birth, sometimes obsess over the precise details of when that happened. I think this text is actually helpful for us in that regard. Our testimonies become, "Let me just nail down for you precisely the moment I was born." But Jesus says, "Hang on, the wind blows where it wishes. You hear the sound of it, but you can't tell where it comes from or where it's going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

My house had a whole lot of wind the other night, and I know that it did because I could hear it outside, and I went out in the morning and stuff was blown all over the yard. I could hear and see the effects of the wind. I

could see that stuff had moved. I didn't know when it moved. I just knew that it had been moved by the wind. It's what it's like with the new birth. You don't have to know the precise moment the wind started. You don't need to remember your spiritual new birthday. But we should be able to see the effects of the wind. Where once you hated the Scriptures and the Bible, you now love God's Word. Where once you disliked the idea of coming to church, now you can't get enough of fellowship with God's people. Where once you had no inclination whatsoever to pray, now you want to pray more. Where once you loved your sin, now you hate it. Where once you walked happily in your sin and you ran after it, now you are grieved every time you sin. Where once you're bored by God, now you get so excited hearing about how God works in this world.

Nicodemus desperately needed to know about this. He needed to know that his ancestry, his learning, his position, his respect for Jesus, his seeking of Jesus—none of it could give him entry into the kingdom. He needed to be born again. Are you born again? In every gathering of people of this size, it's probably safe to assume that there are some of us who are not. And if you get a pair of glasses and put them on and see spiritual realities, some of us would be sitting here with spiritual life, lively, breathing, hearts beating, responsive, aware of the realities of this world, hearts that are longing after God. And in some seats, if you stood up here and put these glasses on, you'd see a pile of bones. Have you experienced a new birth? What does God see when He looks at your soul?

Now, whatever your answer is to that question, I think we end up in a similar situation to Nicodemus. What are you going to do about it? Nicodemus keeps coming back with this same question: "How can this be? How can this be? How can this be?" "How am I meant to be born again?" is essentially what he's asking. "Am I meant to go back into my mother's womb? What do you want me to do about this, Jesus?" Now, Jesus answers this question in a surprising manner. We might expect Jesus to say something like, given you can't enter the kingdom of God except anything by a radical new birth that you cannot affect by yourself, but you need the spirit of God to work in you, you should just sit back and wait and see if the wind blows. It might feel like that when Jesus is teaching us about the necessity of the new birth in our life, that Jesus is just setting us up for failure and inactivity. If we can't do this to ourselves, if we can't make ourselves be born, then what are we meant to do? How can I get in the kingdom?

But Jesus' explanation of this and where he goes with this in verse 13 through to verse 21 is far from fatalistic and passive. The essence of his explanation is this: you must be born again—and by the way, when he says that, he's not saying this is a command; he's saying this is a reality. It's necessary that you're born again. You must be born again, you must have

radical change in your life in order to enter the kingdom, and he's saying, "I have made a way." I have made a way through my atoning work on the cross. That's Jesus' answer, and he gives us four statements showing us just how much he has done so that we might have access into the kingdom, that we might have this radical change in our lives.

In verse 11 to 13, Jesus says that he has come down from heaven to show us this way. Look at verse 13: "No one has ascended to heaven but he who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." He's talking to Nicodemus, saying, "I'm teaching you these things because you need to know. Before we come to the reading of God's Word, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we beg You now as we come to Your Word, speak, O Lord. We know that this Word is insufficient in and of itself. We need, O God, Your Holy Spirit to work in us and through us by the power of Your Word, so that we might not go from this place unaffected. O Lord God, we pray that You would change us as we read and as we look at Your Word together. So come, Father, come Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name, Amen.

John Chapter 3, and we'll be reading—actually, I'm going to read from verse 23 of Chapter 2 through to verse 21 of Chapter 3. Now when He, that's Jesus, was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew all men and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what we know and testify what we have seen, and you do not receive our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell

you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

This is the word of the Lord.

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. This is the main point of the first part of Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus. Picture the scene: An older man, a ruler of Israel, one of the 70 leaders in the Sanhedrin, a teacher of God's law, a Pharisee, Nicodemus, comes to Jesus at night. He's a Pharisee. He's committed himself to radical obedience to God's law. He's a teacher. He knows the Scriptures. And he's coming to find Jesus. At this point, Jesus is probably around 30 years old. He's a carpenter who's turned into a public teacher very recently. He's just started gathering followers. And the last thing he did in John's gospel is cause a riot in the temple, throwing out the money changers and the sacrifice sellers. And yet, Nicodemus comes to him at night.

And as Nicodemus finds Jesus at night, he starts the conversation with Jesus with an introduction that's full of respect. "Rabbi," he says, "we know that you're a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." This is remarkably respectful given the circumstances. He calls Jesus rabbi or teacher. Nicodemus is probably older than Jesus. And Jesus has only just started his public ministry. Jesus has no formal training, no position in the leadership of Israel. And he's just done some fairly radical activity with a whip in the temple.

And it's in this context that Nicodemus comes and calls Jesus rabbi and acknowledges that he's a teacher come from God. Nicodemus seems to believe that God is with Jesus. And there's no reason, I think, in this text for us to think that Nicodemus is being anything but sincere. This line from Nicodemus seems to me to be the introduction to something. He hasn't really asked anything at this point. He's just sort of leading in and setting

the scene. And yet, Jesus jumps straight in. He interjects. And he says this, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus would have understood exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said the kingdom of God. Israel had been waiting for centuries for God to restore a kingdom. Under David and Solomon, they had seen great peace and prosperity and security and the presence of God among them in the temple. And the prophets of old had foretold of a time when God would send a new king from the line of David to restore this kingdom, to rule over Israel once more with peace and prosperity and security and the presence of God among them. In fact, Psalm 2 points us to the fact that this coming kingdom was expected to be not just a local kingdom in Israel but a global kingdom where the nations would come and bow down to the king of Israel. Imagine that. A global empire of perfect rule and reign with God with His people, with the nations submitting to Him, with provision, security, safety, and God living with His people. This is what every Jew was waiting for. The kingdom of God to come once again, to come in its fullness.

And so Nicodemus was waiting for this as well. And he would have desperately wanted to be a part of it. Is that something you want to be a part of? The kingdom of God, the creator of the world, placing a king in charge, and everyone submitting to His rule, His benevolent, His good rule, peace, security, order, prosperity. Sounds like exactly the sort of thing I'd want to be a part of. And Jesus says, "You cannot access that kingdom, you cannot enter that kingdom, you cannot see that kingdom, you cannot be a part of that kingdom unless you are born again." And Nicodemus is utterly confused. "What are you talking about?" he says. "How can a man be born again when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?"

Jesus, completely unfazed by the fact that he seems to have confused his student, doubles down. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who's born of the Spirit."

What on earth is Jesus talking about? It's very odd language. Being born again, the wind blowing where it wishes, and being born of the Spirit. Why would being a part of God's kingdom require this kind of thing? What even is this kind of thing? What is this new birth that Jesus is speaking of? Jesus is not being cryptic here. He's not trying to say super weird things to confuse Nicodemus or to confuse us. So much so that he tells Nicodemus that as a teacher in Israel, Jesus expects Nicodemus to understand these

things already. Without him having to explain it, without Jesus even having to say it, Nicodemus should have known that this is a requirement.

And the reason Nicodemus should have known is because he should have been studied in the Old Testament. Specifically, given the language that Jesus uses here, he should have known Ezekiel 36 and Ezekiel 37. In these chapters of Ezekiel, the prophet is speaking about how God's going to come and renew the people of Israel. In chapter 36, which we didn't read, he speaks about how God's going to wash Israel with water to cleanse them from their uncleanness and their idolatry. He speaks about how God's going to come and put a new heart in his people, to take out a heart of stone and to put in them a heart of flesh, so that they will serve God and be a part of His kingdom, submitting to the reign of His king. Does that imagery sound familiar? Water and the Spirit and a new life, a new heart.

And as we keep reading into Ezekiel 37, we find even more connected imagery. We see a valley full of dry bones, which Ezekiel is told to prophesy over. And he speaks to the bones, "Behold, I will cause my spirit," which in the Hebrew could either be "my spirit" or "my breath" or "my wind," "to enter you, and you shall live." Do you see the connection? Jesus speaks of being born of the Spirit and how this experience is like a wind blowing, bringing new life to dead people. He's using language that Nicodemus should have understood to say that all those who enter the kingdom of God must have a supernatural experience where the Spirit of God breathes life into their dead soul. They must have their guilt washed away by the cleansing water and Spirit of God. They must be born again, not like a fleshly birth like they were the first time, but a spiritual birth.

Now, this implies that Nicodemus was not born again at this point. He still needed to experience this. That's what Jesus is telling him: "Mate, if you want to see the kingdom, you must be born again." It's necessary. And this is an implication for us as well. Given the fact that you are here before me this morning, I know that you've been born of the flesh. That's what it means to be born by the flesh, to be alive. But in order to see the kingdom of God, you must be born a second time. It means that when you were born of the flesh, you were not born of the Spirit.

This is absolutely vital for us to understand. When we come into this world, born of the flesh, we are like the bones in Ezekiel's valley. Spiritually speaking, we are dead and dry and unresponsive towards God. When you're born from your mother, you cannot understand spiritual things. You are not born into the kingdom of God. You are not only dead, but you are full of sin, like we see in Ezekiel 36. You are unclean before God. You have idolatry running rampant in your life. And you must have God come and cleanse you from it. You and I are born sinners. We're born dead in our sin.

We are born into lives that are characterized by uncleanness and idolatry.

Something that strikes me as I consider this encounter with Nicodemus is this: This is an evangelistic conversation. He is speaking to Nicodemus, who is not in the kingdom. He's not a Christian. He doesn't trust in Jesus yet. And he leads with this: "Nicodemus, you must have an experience occur to you. You must have something happen in your life that you cannot control. The wind blows where it wishes." This spiritual life that needs to be breathed into you, this awakening that needs to occur to you, you cannot affect it. You cannot change yourself. You are dead. Dead people don't raise themselves from the dead. Why would Jesus lead with this? How is this going to help Nicodemus get into the kingdom?

I believe that the answer to this is that this talk of the new birth shows Nicodemus that inquiry is not enough. Respect for Jesus is not enough. Being well-researched in the Bible is not enough. Being devoted to rigorously keeping God's law is not enough. Being born into a nation that has known God in the past is not enough. Being born into a family of Christians is not enough. Going to church is not enough. Being a great teacher is not enough. None of these things will give Nicodemus entry into the kingdom, and none of these things will give you entry into the kingdom of God.

Dead, dry bones need miraculous rebuilding. Unclean sinners need divine cleansing. Those born in the flesh need to be reborn by the Spirit of God Himself. Not only were Nicodemus' qualifications irrelevant for entering the kingdom, but the other point that Jesus is making is that entry into the kingdom is a huge shift. There is a massive difference between dry, dead bones and a lively, breathing body. There is a stark distinction between someone who's only been born of the flesh and someone who has been born of the Spirit. There is a radical change that must occur for someone to go from being unmoved by the wind of God to being moved by the wind of God.

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Nicodemus desperately needed to know about this. He needed to know that his ancestry, his learning, his position, his respect for Jesus, his seeking of Jesus—none of it could give him entry into the kingdom. He needed to be born again. Are you born again? In every gathering of people of this size, it's probably safe to assume that there are some of us who are not. And if you get a pair of glasses and put them on and see spiritual realities, some of us would be sitting here with spiritual life, lively, breathing,

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Now, whatever your answer is to that question, I think we end up in a similar situation to Nicodemus. What are you going to do about it? Nicodemus keeps coming back with this same question: "How can this be? How can this be? How can this be?" "How am I meant to be born again?" is essentially what he's asking. "Am I meant to go back into my mother's womb? What do you want me to do about this, Jesus?"

Now, Jesus answers this question in a surprising manner. We might expect Jesus to say something like, given you can't enter the kingdom of God except by a radical new birth that you cannot affect by yourself, but you need the Spirit of God to work in you, you should just sit back and wait and see if the wind blows. It might feel like that when Jesus is teaching us about the necessity of the new birth in our life, that Jesus is just setting us up for failure and inactivity. If we can't do this to ourselves, if we can't make ourselves be born, then what are we meant to do? How can I get in the kingdom?

But Jesus' explanation of this and where he goes with this in verse 13 through to verse 21 is far from fatalistic and passive. The essence of his explanation is this: you must be born again—and by the way, when he says that, he's not saying this is a command; he's saying this is a reality. It's necessary that you're born again. You must be born again, you must have radical change in your life in order to enter the kingdom, and he's saying, "I have made a way." I have made a way through my atoning work on the cross. That's Jesus' answer, and he gives us four statements showing us just how much he has done so that we might have access into the kingdom, that we might have this radical change in our lives.

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John Chapter 3, and we'll be reading—actually, I'm going to read from verse 23 of Chapter 2 through to verse 21 of Chapter 3. Now when He, that's Jesus, was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew all men and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what we know and testify what we have seen, and you do not receive our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

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This line from Nicodemus seems to me to be the introduction to something. He hasn't really asked anything at this point. He's just sort of leading in and setting the scene. And yet, Jesus jumps straight in. He interjects. And he says this, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus would have understood exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said the kingdom of God. Israel had been waiting for centuries for God to restore a kingdom. Under David and Solomon, they had seen great peace and prosperity and security and the presence of God among them in the temple. And the prophets of old had foretold of a time when God would send a new king from the line of David to restore this kingdom, to rule over Israel once more with peace and prosperity and security and the presence of God among them.

In fact, Psalm 2 points us to the fact that this coming kingdom was expected to be not just a local kingdom in Israel but a global kingdom where the nations would come and bow down to the king of Israel. Imagine that. A global empire of perfect rule and reign with God with His people, with the nations submitting to Him, with provision, security, safety, and God living with His people. This is what every Jew was waiting for. The kingdom of God to come once again, to come in its fullness. And so Nicodemus was

waiting for this as well. And he would have desperately wanted to be a part of it. Is that something you want to be a part of? The kingdom of God, the creator of the world, placing a king in charge, and everyone submitting to His rule, His benevolent, His good rule, peace, security, order, prosperity. Sounds like exactly the sort of thing I'd want to be a part of.

And Jesus says, "You cannot access that kingdom, you cannot enter that kingdom, you cannot see that kingdom, you cannot be a part of that kingdom unless you are born again." And Nicodemus is utterly confused. "What are you talking about?" he says. "How can a man be born again when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?" Jesus, completely unfazed by the fact that he seems to have confused his student, doubles down. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who's born of the Spirit."

What on earth is Jesus talking about? It's very odd language. Being born again, the wind blowing where it wishes, and being born of the Spirit. Why would being a part of God's kingdom require this kind of thing? What even is this kind of thing? What is this new birth that Jesus is speaking of? Jesus is not being cryptic here. He's not trying to say super weird things to confuse Nicodemus or to confuse us. So much so that he tells Nicodemus that as a teacher in Israel, Jesus expects Nicodemus to understand these things already. Without him having to explain it, without Jesus even having to say it, Nicodemus should have known that this is a requirement.

And the reason Nicodemus should have known is because he should have been studied in the Old Testament. Specifically, given the language that Jesus uses here, he should have known Ezekiel 36 and Ezekiel 37. In these chapters of Ezekiel, the prophet is speaking about how God's going to come and renew the people of Israel. In chapter 36, which we didn't read, he speaks about how God's going to wash Israel with water to cleanse them from their uncleanness and their idolatry. He speaks about how God's going to come and put a new heart in his people, to take out a heart of stone and to put in them a heart of flesh, so that they will serve God and be a part of His kingdom, submitting to the reign of His king. Does that imagery sound familiar? Water and the Spirit and a new life, a new heart.

And as we keep reading into Ezekiel 37, we find even more connected imagery. We see a valley full of dry bones, which Ezekiel is told to prophesy over. And he speaks to the bones, "Behold, I will cause my spirit"—which in the Hebrew could either be "my spirit" or "my breath" or "my wind"—"to

enter you, and you shall live." Do you see the connection? Jesus speaks of being born of the Spirit and how this experience is like a wind blowing where it will bringing new life to dead people. He's using language that Nicodemus should have understood to say that all those who enter the kingdom of God must have a supernatural experience where the Spirit of God breathes life into their dead soul. They must have their guilt washed away by the cleansing water and Spirit of God. They must be born again, not like a fleshly birth like they were the first time, but a spiritual birth.

Now, this implies that Nicodemus was not born again at this point. He still needed to experience this. That's what Jesus is telling him: "Mate, if you want to see the kingdom, you must be born again." It's necessary. And this is an implication for us as well. Given the fact that you are here before me this morning, I know that you've been born of the flesh. That's what it means to be born by the flesh, to be alive. But in order to see the kingdom of God, you must be born a second time. It means that when you were born of the flesh, you were not born of the Spirit.

This is absolutely vital for us to understand. When we come into this world, born of the flesh, we are like the bones in Ezekiel's valley. Spiritually speaking, we are dead and dry and unresponsive towards God. When you're born from your mother, you cannot understand spiritual things. You are not born into the kingdom of God. You are not only dead, but you are full of sin, like we see in Ezekiel 36. You are unclean before God. You have idolatry running rampant in your life. And you must have God come and cleanse you from it. You and I are born sinners. We're born dead in our sin. We are born into lives that are characterized by uncleanness and idolatry.

Something that strikes me as I consider this encounter with Nicodemus is this: This is an evangelistic conversation. He is speaking to Nicodemus, who is not in the kingdom. He's not a Christian. He doesn't trust in Jesus yet. And he leads with this: "Nicodemus, you must have an experience occur to you. You must have something happen in your life that you cannot control. The wind blows where it wishes." This spiritual life that needs to be breathed into you, this awakening that needs to occur to you, you cannot affect it. You cannot change yourself. You are dead. Dead people don't raise themselves from the dead. Why would Jesus lead with this? How is this going to help Nicodemus get into the kingdom?

I believe that the answer to this is that this talk of the new birth shows Nicodemus that inquiry is not enough. Respect for Jesus is not enough. Being well-researched in the Bible is not enough. Being devoted to rigorously keeping God's law is not enough. Being born into a nation that has known God in the past is not enough. Being born into a family of Christians is not enough. Going to church is not enough. Being a great teacher is not

enough. None of these things will give Nicodemus entry into the kingdom, and none of these things will give you entry into the kingdom of God.

Dead, dry bones need miraculous rebuilding. Unclean sinners need divine cleansing. Those born in the flesh need to be reborn by the Spirit of God Himself. Not only were Nicodemus' qualifications irrelevant for entering the kingdom, but the other point that Jesus is making is that entry into the kingdom is a huge shift. There is a massive difference between dry, dead bones and a lively, breathing body. There is a stark distinction between someone who's only been born of the flesh and someone who has been born of the Spirit. There is a radical change that must occur for someone to go from being unmoved by the wind of God to being moved by the wind of God.

And I believe that Jesus is making this point to Nicodemus: There's no incremental way to Jesus. There's no inquiry that you just sort of slowly chip away at and then you get there. There is a radical change that must occur. And that message is true for us today as well. You might be here this morning because you're interested in Jesus. You want to know more about Him. You've heard about Him. You think He's a great teacher, perhaps. He said some pretty wise things, something about loving your neighbor as yourself, or do to others as you would have them do to you. He sounds pretty interesting. Perhaps you think you're almost a Christian, as you're edging your way into the kingdom. You're moving slowly towards Christ. You're gradually improving your life, and then one day you'll sort of be enough.

But Jesus is saying it does not work like that. Entry into God's kingdom is a radical change produced by God. A work of the Spirit where your stony heart that hates God and is unresponsive to His rule and reign is transformed into a lively heart of flesh that loves God and wants to submit to His rule. Entry into God's kingdom is as dramatic as being born. One minute you're inside a womb, not breathing, in the darkness, unaware of the outside world, and the next minute, by no act of your own, you're thrown out into a world of light. Your lungs are filled with air. You start making noises you never made before. You're alive. That is the sort of change that takes place in the life of everyone who enters God's kingdom, in the life of every single Christian who is genuinely a believer in Jesus.

This afternoon, we're looking at some testimonies of people amongst us who profess to have come to know Jesus Christ. This is the change we are saying has taken place in them. But Christians, I think, who believe in the necessity of the new birth, sometimes obsess over the precise details of when that happened. I think this text is actually helpful for us in that regard. Our testimonies become, "Let me just nail down for you precisely the moment I was born." But Jesus says, "Hang on, the wind blows where

it wishes. You hear the sound of it, but you can't tell where it comes from or where it's going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

My house had a whole lot of wind the other night, and I know that it did because I could hear it outside, and I went out in the morning and stuff was blown all over the yard. I could hear and see the effects of the wind. I could see that stuff had moved. I didn't know when it moved. I just knew that it had been moved by the wind. It's what it's like with the new birth. You don't have to know the precise moment the wind started. You don't need to remember your spiritual new birthday. But we should be able to see the effects of the wind. Where once you hated the Scriptures and the Bible, you now love God's Word. Where once you disliked the idea of coming to church, now you can't get enough of fellowship with God's people. Where once you had no inclination whatsoever to pray, now you want to pray more. Where once you loved your sin, now you hate it. Where once you walked happily in your sin and you ran after it, now you are grieved every time you sin. Where once you're bored by God, now you get so excited hearing about how God works in this world.

Nicodemus desperately needed to know about this. He needed to know that his ancestry, his learning, his position, his respect for Jesus, his seeking of Jesus—none of it could give him entry into the kingdom. He needed to be born again. Are you born again? In every gathering of people of this size, it's probably safe to assume that there are some of us who are not. And if you get a pair of glasses and put them on and see spiritual realities, some of us would be sitting here with spiritual life, lively, breathing, hearts beating, responsive, aware of the realities of this world, hearts that are longing after God. And in some seats, if you stood up here and put these glasses on, you'd see a pile of bones. Have you experienced a new birth? What does God see when He looks at your soul?

Now, whatever your answer is to that question, I think we end up in a similar situation to Nicodemus. What are you going to do about it? Nicodemus keeps coming back with this same question: "How can this be? How can this be? How can this be?" "How am I meant to be born again?" is essentially what he's asking. "Am I meant to go back into my mother's womb? What do you want me to do about this, Jesus?" Now, Jesus answers this question in a surprising manner. We might expect Jesus to say something like, given you can't enter the kingdom of God except by a radical new birth that you cannot affect by yourself, but you need the Spirit of God to work in you, you should just sit back and wait and see if the wind blows. It might feel like that when Jesus is teaching us about the necessity of the new birth in our life, that Jesus is just setting us up for failure and inactivity. If we can't do this to ourselves, if we can't make ourselves be born, then what are we meant to do? How can I get in the kingdom?

But Jesus' explanation of this and where he goes with this in verses 13 through to 21 is far from fatalistic and passive. The essence of his explanation is this: You must be born again—and by the way, when he says that, he's not saying this is a command; he's saying this is a reality. It's necessary that you're born again. You must be born again; you must have radical change in your life in order to enter the kingdom, and he's saying, "I have made a way." I have made a way through my atoning work on the cross. That's Jesus' answer, and he gives us four statements showing us just how much he has done so that we might have access into the kingdom, that we might have this radical change in our lives.

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Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. This is the main point of the first part of Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus. Picture the scene: An older man, a ruler of Israel, one of the 70 leaders in the Sanhedrin, a teacher of God's law, a Pharisee, Nicodemus, comes to Jesus at night. He's a Pharisee. He's committed himself to radical obedience to God's law. He's a teacher. He knows the Scriptures. And he's coming to find Jesus. At this point, Jesus is probably around 30 years old. He's a carpenter who's turned into a public teacher very recently. He's just started gathering followers. And the last thing he did in John's gospel is cause a riot in the temple, throwing out the money changers and the sacrifice sellers. And yet, Nicodemus comes to him at night.

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And it's in this context that Nicodemus comes and calls Jesus rabbi and acknowledges that He's a teacher come from God. Nicodemus seems to believe that God is with Jesus. And there's no reason, I think, in this text for us to think that Nicodemus is being anything but sincere. This line from Nicodemus seems to me to be the introduction to something. He hasn't really asked anything at this point. He's just sort of leading in and setting the scene. And yet, Jesus jumps straight in. He interjects. And He says this, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

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And so Nicodemus was waiting for this as well. And he would have desperately wanted to be a part of it. Is that something you want to be a part of? The kingdom of God, the creator of the world, placing a king in charge, and everyone submitting to His rule, His benevolent, His good rule, peace, security, order, prosperity. Sounds like exactly the sort of thing I'd want to be a part of. And Jesus says, "You cannot access that kingdom, you cannot enter that kingdom, you cannot see that kingdom, you cannot be a part of that kingdom unless you are born again." And Nicodemus is utterly confused. "What are you talking about?" he says. "How can a man be born again when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?"

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And the reason Nicodemus should have known is because he should have been studied in the Old Testament. Specifically, given the language that Jesus uses here, he should have known Ezekiel 36 and Ezekiel 37. In these chapters of Ezekiel, the prophet is speaking about how God's going to come and renew the people of Israel. In chapter 36, which we didn't read, he speaks about how God's going to wash Israel with water to cleanse them from their uncleanness and their idolatry. He speaks about how God's going to come and put a new heart in His people, to take out a heart of stone and to put in them a heart of flesh, so that they will serve God and be a part of His kingdom, submitting to the reign of His king. Does that imagery sound familiar? Water and the Spirit and a new life, a new heart?

And as we keep reading into Ezekiel 37, we find even more connected imagery. We see a valley full of dry bones, which Ezekiel is told to prophesy over. And he speaks to the bones, "Behold, I will cause my spirit"—which in the Hebrew could either be "my spirit" or "my breath" or "my wind"—"to enter you, and you shall live." Do you see the connection? Jesus speaks of being born of the Spirit and how this experience is like a wind blowing where it will, bringing new life to dead people. He's using language that Nicodemus should have understood to say that all those who enter the kingdom of God must have a supernatural experience where the Spirit of God breathes life into their dead soul. They must have their guilt washed away by the cleansing water and Spirit of God. They must be born again, not like a fleshly birth like they were the first time, but a spiritual birth.

Now, this implies that Nicodemus was not born again at this point. He still needed to experience this. That's what Jesus is telling him: "Mate, if you want to see the kingdom, you must be born again." It's necessary. And this is an implication for us as well. Given the fact that you are here before me this morning, I know that you've been born of the flesh. That's what it means to be born by the flesh, to be alive. But in order to see the kingdom of God, you must be born a second time. It means that when you were born of the flesh, you were not born of the Spirit.

This is absolutely vital for us to understand. When we come into this world, born of the flesh, we are like the bones in Ezekiel's valley. Spiritu-

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Something that strikes me as I consider this encounter with Nicodemus is this: This is an evangelistic conversation. He is speaking to Nicodemus, who is not in the kingdom. He's not a Christian. He doesn't trust in Jesus yet. And he leads with this: "Nicodemus, you must have an experience occur to you. You must have something happen in your life that you cannot control. The wind blows where it wishes." This spiritual life that needs to be breathed into you, this awakening that needs to occur to you, you cannot affect it. You cannot change yourself. You are dead. Dead people don't raise themselves from the dead. Why would Jesus lead with this? How is this going to help Nicodemus get into the kingdom?

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Dead, dry bones need miraculous rebuilding. Unclean sinners need divine cleansing. Those born in the flesh need to be reborn by the Spirit of God Himself. Not only were Nicodemus' qualifications irrelevant for entering the kingdom, but the other point that Jesus is making is that entry into the kingdom is a huge shift. There is a massive difference between dry, dead bones and a lively, breathing body. There is a stark distinction between someone who's only been born of the flesh and someone who has been born of the Spirit. There is a radical change that must occur for someone to go from being unmoved by the wind of God to being moved by the wind of God.

And I believe that Jesus is making this point to Nicodemus: There's no incremental way to Jesus. There's no inquiry that you just sort of slowly chip away at and then you get there. There is a radical change that must occur. And that message is true for us today as well. You might be here this morning because you're interested in Jesus. You want to know more about Him. You've heard about Him. You think He's a great teacher, perhaps. He said

some pretty wise things, something about loving your neighbor as yourself, or do to others as you would have them do to you. He sounds pretty interesting. Perhaps you think you're almost a Christian, as you're edging your way into the kingdom. You're moving slowly towards Christ. You're gradually improving your life, and then one day you'll sort of be enough.

But Jesus is saying it does not work like that. Entry into God's kingdom is a radical change produced by God. A work of the Spirit where your stony heart that hates God and is unresponsive to His rule and reign is transformed into a lively heart of flesh that loves God and wants to submit to His rule. Entry into God's kingdom is as dramatic as being born. One minute you're inside a womb, not breathing, in the darkness, unaware of the outside world, and the next minute, by no act of your own, you're thrown out into a world of light. Your lungs are filled with air. You start making noises you never made before. You're alive. That is the sort of change that takes place in the life of everyone who enters God's kingdom, in the life of every single Christian who is genuinely a believer in Jesus.

This afternoon, we're looking at some testimonies of people amongst us who profess to have come to know Jesus Christ. This is the change we are saying has taken place in them. But Christians, I think, who believe in the necessity of the new birth, sometimes obsess over the precise details of when that happened. I think this text is actually helpful for us in that regard. Our testimonies become, "Let me just nail down for you precisely the moment I was born." But Jesus says, "Hang on, the wind blows where it wishes. You hear the sound of it, but you can't tell where it comes from or where it's going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

My house had a whole lot of wind the other night, and I know that it did because I could hear it outside, and I went out in the morning, and stuff was blown all over the yard. I could hear and see the effects of the wind. I could see that stuff had moved. I didn't know when it moved. I just knew that it had been moved by the wind. It's what it's like with the new birth. You don't have to know the precise moment the wind started. You don't need to remember your spiritual new birthday. But we should be able to see the effects of the wind. Where once you hated the Scriptures and the Bible, you now love God's Word. Where once you disliked the idea of coming to church, now you can't get enough of fellowship with God's people. Where once you had no inclination whatsoever to pray, now you want to pray more. Where once you loved your sin, now you hate it. Where once you walked happily in your sin and you ran after it, now you are grieved every time you sin. Where once you're bored by God, now you get so excited hearing about how God works in this world.

Nicodemus desperately needed to know about this. He needed to know

that his ancestry, his learning, his position, his respect for Jesus, his seeking of Jesus—none of it could give him entry into the kingdom. He needed to be born again. Are you born again? In every gathering of people of this size, it's probably safe to assume that there are some of us who are not. And if you get a pair of glasses and put them on and see spiritual realities, some of us would be sitting here with spiritual life, lively, breathing, hearts beating, responsive, aware of the realities of this world, hearts that are longing after God. And in some seats, if you stood up here and put these glasses on, you'd see a pile of bones. Have you experienced a new birth? What does God see when He looks at your soul?

Now, whatever your answer is to that question, I think we end up in a similar situation to Nicodemus. What are you going to do about it? Nicodemus keeps coming back with this same question: "How can this be? How can this be? How can this be?" "How am I meant to be born again?" is essentially what he's asking. "Am I meant to go back into my mother's womb? What do you want me to do about this, Jesus?"

Now, Jesus answers this question in a surprising manner. We might expect Jesus to say something like, given you can't enter the kingdom of God except by a radical new birth that you cannot affect by yourself, but you need the Spirit of God to work in you, you should just sit back and wait and see if the wind blows. It might feel like that when Jesus is teaching us about the necessity of the new birth in our life, that Jesus is just setting us up for failure and inactivity. If we can't do this to ourselves, if we can't make ourselves be born, then what are we meant to do? How can I get in the kingdom?

But Jesus' explanation of this and where He goes with this in verses 13 through to 21 is far from fatalistic and passive. The essence of His explanation is this: You must be born again—and by the way, when He says that, He's not saying this is a command; He's saying this is a reality. It's necessary that you're born again. You must have radical change in your life in order to enter the kingdom, and He's saying, "I have made a way." I have made a way through My atoning work on the cross. That's Jesus' answer, and He gives us four statements showing us just how much He has done so that we might have access into the kingdom, that we might have this radical change in our lives.

In verses 11 to 13, Jesus says that He has come down from heaven to show us this way. Look at verse 13: "No one has ascended to heaven, but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." He's talking to Nicodemus, saying, "I'm teaching you these things because you need to know them, and no one would have known these things unless heaven had come down and taught us." It's a recurring theme throughout

the next few verses that God has come down in order to teach us these things, in order to show us these things.

In verse 17, God sent His Son not to condemn but to save. In verse 19, the light came into the world. The fact that we are by nature dead, spiritually unclean, and full of sin, and that in order to enter God's kingdom we must have a radical, life-transforming event happen to us, means that we are absolutely without hope unless God comes down and acts. And here is Christ saying that that's what He's done. He has come down from heaven. No one else can teach us these heavenly things. No one else can teach us of eternal realities and of the spiritual necessity of being saved. We need God to come down. We need a heavenly teacher. We need the condescension of Christ Himself.

That's a remarkable thing, that God would come down in order to tell a bunch of dry bones that they need life. There's nothing in it for Him in that regard. But Christ's condescension to come down and teach us heaven realities was not enough. We needed to have more. And Christ shows Nicodemus this by referring to an Old Testament event.

In verses 14 and 15, Jesus says, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." He's referring to an event that occurred in Numbers 21. While the Israelites were wandering around the wilderness, they grumbled against God, complaining about their circumstances. And so God sent fiery serpents into the camp. The serpents bit people, and the people died. And as the people called out to God to rescue them, God told Moses to make a serpent and to put it on a pole, so that whoever looked at the serpent would live. And that's what Moses did. And everyone who looked at the bronze serpent hanging on that pole were healed and lived.

And Jesus is saying here that this is a picture that God wrote into history of the work that Jesus would do on the cross. Notice that there's a close connection between the curse that the Israelites were saved from and what was lifted up on the tree. Serpents were killing them, and so they must look at a serpent to be saved. And the same is true with Christ. As Jesus has just implied with His teaching about the new birth, we must be saved from our uncleanness and our idolatry and our sin. We must be saved from our lifelessness, from our spiritual death.

And so Jesus came not only to teach us heavenly truths but to be raised up on a cross, to become death, to take upon Himself our sinfulness and our uncleanness, to lose His life so that all who believe in Him, all who just look at Him as their only hope of salvation, will receive eternal life. He lost

His life so that we would receive eternal life, new life, spiritual cleanness, and the kingdom of God. Jesus' atonement, being lifted up on the cross as a sacrifice, gives life by bearing the curse of death. We look at Him and we see someone laden down with sin, and we are delivered from our sin. The new birth is not a cheap exercise. It's not easy to secure new life for God's people. It costs Jesus the incarnation. It costs Jesus the atoning sacrifice on the cross.

But Jesus is not done yet explaining how God's provided us with access to this kingdom. The next verse, we read one of the most famous statements in the Bible about God's provision. Verse 16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." You see, it wasn't just Jesus who went to great lengths to solve our problem of our deadness. The Father wanted to bring people into His kingdom. And so He sent His Son, He gave up His Son, to suffer and die and rise again so that whoever believes in Him would have this eternal life, would be raised from death to life.

Notice that just after Nicodemus, Jesus has told Nicodemus of the radical nature of entry into the kingdom and the fact that what we need is something that can only be produced by God—you know, the Spirit will blow where it wishes—just after saying this, Jesus then proceeds to give one of the most universal welcomes to eternal life that we find in the Bible. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Can you hear the broad, open call there? There are plenty of debates that go on around what exactly the word "the world" means, but one thing's for sure: it's a broad statement. And there's another word to pay attention to: the word "whoever." In the Greek, that word means "whoever." Whoever believes in Jesus, anyone, all you must do is look to Him and you will be saved.

Which dead bones can live again? Whoever. Whoever believes. There is nothing stopping you from coming to Christ right now. From experiencing that radical transformation that you so desperately need. From moving from death to life. All Jesus says you must do is look to Him. Believe in Him. Look to His atoning sacrifice on the cross. Look to the gift that the Father has sent. Look to Him and be saved. Receive life.

Jesus is emphasizing—I can't say the word—Jesus is saying that He is not trying to make entry into the kingdom impossible. He's not saying you can't do it. He's not saying don't do anything. He's saying it is radical. It is incredible. It is requiring a miraculous work, and He has paid the price to make it achievable. That's amazing. Yes, our state is desperate. Yes, we're born spiritually dead, under a curse, sinful, unclean, a bag of bones in urgent need of a life we cannot manufacture. But Jesus came to make

a way for those dead bones to live by simply believing. He did not come to condemn the world. He didn't come to preach a message of the requirement of the new birth so that we would all sit here going, "Well, we're stuffed." He does not walk around the valley of dry bones that Ezekiel saw, take a look, and say, "Well, you're pretty dead."

No, He comes down, and He makes a way for that dead carcass of my life to be made alive. To solve a problem that I cannot solve. He came to do that for all who believe. Have you experienced the new birth? If the answer to that question is no, if you're sitting there this morning and you're saying, "You know what, I don't feel it. I'm unresponsive. I can't change myself. I don't even care what you're talking about, Tom," you're dead. You are dead in your sins; you're a bundle of bones on a chair, and Jesus says, "Look to me and live." Believe in Him today.

And then, just in case we haven't got the point yet, Jesus comes at the same truth from another angle. Because when Jesus came into the world, light started shining. And if you choose not to believe in Jesus Christ today, then Jesus says you do so by your own will. You do so because you love darkness. You do so because you want to stay dead. Look at verses 19 to 21: "This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

To come to Jesus requires that you come to the light. You must acknowledge that you are dead in order to receive life. You must confess that you are unclean in order to receive cleansing. You must confess your sinful thoughts, desires, and actions in order to enter the kingdom of God. The light of Jesus, as He came down from heaven, teaches us the way to life, but it also exposes us for what we are. It exposes us in all of our deadness, in all of our sinfulness, in all of our coldness, and in all of our uncleanness. But a sick man should want an MRI. A patient who is bleeding out should want the lights on in the operating theater. If Jesus is right—and He is—that we are dead by nature, sinful, under condemnation, spiritually unresponsive, then we should want all the light we can get, so that Jesus, the great physician, can go to work.

Your sin is not worth hiding. It's shameful. Oh, I've done shameful things. But Jesus has a cure. Come into the light. Confess your sin, admit your desperate need of God, stop covering over your guilt, come into the light, and find life. The choice is before you today. Your and my need is great. We need radical transformation. In fact, Christian, we need this every day. To be alive, you must keep breathing. We need God's breath, God's Spirit, at

work in us every day. Our need is so huge. To move from being dead bones to being alive is a transformation that only God can give. But God's provision is greater than our need. Christ has come into the world and taken the curse of sin and death upon Himself as He suffered under the judgment of God that we deserved. The Father sent His Son, and the Holy Spirit has been shining the light of the gospel across the world ever since. You have no excuse. You can choose. Stay in your condemnation, remain in your guilt, live out the rest of your life as a spiritually unresponsive corpse with no breath in your lungs, or come into the light. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, look to Him, expose your sin, see Him hanging on the cross, and see the one who offers life, new life, rebirth, eternal, spiritual life.

I beg you, if you don't know Him, look to Him today. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, our sins, there are many, but Your mercy is more. We confess to You, Lord, that by nature we are in a destitute state, and we are in desperate need of Your Spirit to give us life. And we thank You, Lord, that despite all that it costs to bring us into Your kingdom, You have paid it all.

Lord God, I pray that we would rejoice, those of us who are in Christ, that we would rejoice at the great salvation that You have brought through Him, and the great transformation that You have brought about in our life. And Father, I pray that even this moment, even this day, You would save those among us who do not know this life that You bring.

Lord God, convict. Lord God, breathe life, we pray, in Jesus' name, amen.