

the gospel of

JOHN

witness to the light

JOHN: BORN AGAIN TO SEE AND BELIEVE

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Scripture Reference: John 3:1-13

John chapter 3 verses 1 to 13:

Now, 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 things that you do unless God is with him. Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, 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, Truly, truly, 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 its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus said to him, How can these things be? Jesus answered him, Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things. No one has ascended into heaven except He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Good morning. How are we doing? Good. All right. My name's Jeff Vanderstelt. I'm one of the elders here and I serve on staff as a lead teaching pastor. So I'm excited to dive into this text with you guys this morning. If you need a Bible, we want to make sure you have one, so feel free to raise your hand. A lot of you have them on your phones using an app, but we want to make sure one's got one, some form or another. So raise your hand. We will have someone bring a Bible to you and this is our gift by the way, if you need it, if you want it, you can take it and it can be your Bible today. So we want to make sure you all have one in your hands. We are going to be in John chapter 3 so if you're using the Bibles that we're out, I think that's page 518, 519 -- John chapter 3.

Last week we looked at Jesus in Jerusalem during the Passover at the temple, driving out the money changers and all the animals cleansing the temple. And speaking of a future date in which he would raise up the temple, referring to his own body. And this is a way of foreshadowing what Jesus would do, that he would give his own body on the cross for our sin, that he would die in our place to cleanse us so that we might be a living temple in which God could dwell in our life. And then he rose again on the third day, victorious over sin and death for you and I so that we might also live a life that's free of fear of death and also cleansed of our sins and able to live a brand new life with the Spirit's power in us.

So that was last week. And what follows, we're going to read in John chapter 2 verse 23 and through 25 before we dive into chapter 3. So it's really important that you understand these few verses are a bridge into chapter 3. Read them with me. There'll be on the screen these first two.

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.

So they believe that's good, right? Right. Okay, good. Wanna make sure you with me. Okay, so they're believing in his name though they saw his signs. But verse 24 --

Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people.

Another way of saying this, he knew what we're all like, okay? He needed no one to bear witness about what we were actually like, for he himself knew what was in us -- what's in humanity. This is another way of saying, Jesus understands your mess. He understands your brokenness. He understands the complexity of your life. He gets that there's so much going inside of us, so much mystery, so much brokenness, so much struggle, and he looks at us and he sees that we need help.

Okay? That's what's going on there, and he knows it's entirely possible to believe in God, to believe true about Jesus, to believe in even the works he performed, to know your Bibles, in fact, to gather together as a church to engage in spiritual practices and still be an unbeliever, okay? That's all possible.

These people knew their Bible. They were practicing their faith. They're at Jerusalem for Passover. They see the signs Jesus is doing, but they're still struggling. They even believe in his name, but we're going to find out they're struggling to really see Jesus and really believe in Jesus. The way I want to say it is they believed, but they were still unbelievers.

Okay, well, one theologian calls them this. They're unbelievable believers. I want to turn that around and say they are believing unbelievers. They are believing unbelievers. And the truth is this is a lot of us in the room. In fact, I would say it's all of us to some degree or another that all of us, even if we say we believe have unbelief in our faith, have areas where we don't live like we believe in fact need to learn how to believe in new ways.

I was actually the appearance of a believer who is really an unbeliever up until I was 21 some of you heard me tell that story. I grew up in a church, Christian fam, parents, family, went to church three times on Sunday -- we had like a morning, a gathering and then a Sunday school class and then we had evening church service and then some of you are nodding your head, you're like, yeah, that was my life too. And then we had Wednesday night gathering or prayer meetings like four times a week. I was gathered with the church. I actually led our youth ministry. I was one of the youth leaders as a high school student. I went door to door knocking on doors, doing evangelism, cold call like, Hey, do you know, do you know where you'd go tonight if you died? Kind of opened the door, started to share the gospel. We ended up going into people's homes, sitting at their tables. I'm praying with them to receive Jesus, to respond in faith. As a college student, I'm a Young Life leader and it wasn't until 21 that I finally became a Christian.

How is that possible? I knew how to play the part. I knew the Bible. I knew how -- I memorized passages. I, there was lots of stuff that I had up here, but I had not been changed in here. I was no different on the inside than anybody else, and I needed a transformation in my heart, which took place when I was 21 as many of you know.

And I, I set it up this way because I think all of us have to pause and consider our own faith. Paul says it this way to the church in Corinth. In 2nd Corinthians, his letter to the church there, verse chapter 13, verse five --

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize this about yourselves that Christ Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you fail to meet the test. So for me, 21 years he wasn't in me, but I talked about him; almost thought I knew him until 21 he broke into my life and changed me forever. And I've never been the same. In order for us to examine our hearts today, whether you are an a believing unbeliever, meaning you are a believer who struggles with unbelief, or you've never ever experienced what John's going to call the new birth, Jesus is going to call a new birth. If you've never experienced that, I want you to all examine your own faith today. I want you to ask yourself, what's going on inside of me in regards to God?

Now, in order to do that, we have to acknowledge that we all have the same problem, okay? We're going to get to that in a minute, that we all need rebirth. Second, that we have to experience the Spirit's power come in and actually make us new. And then third, the only way that happens is if we look at the Son, we see the Spirit lifting up the Son in our own hearts, Jesus Christ, and recognize our desperate need for him.

First of all, our problem, the need for rebirth. Verse one -- remember keep in mind this group of people who have seen the signs believing in his name, but Jesus knows what's still broken inside of them. Verse one --

Now there's a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi --

Which just means teacher. So he's respecting him,

We --

And he's now, you know, he's representing more than just himself.

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.

Pretty good start: Teacher; God seems to be with you; We're believing something's going on because we see the signs...

And I want you to hear this. Nicodemus is a Pharisee, so that's like the most serious, earnest, Bible-believing branch of faith in Jesus day -- first. So these are the Bible people, right? Some of you, you know, you went to a church and it was called a Bible church and you pride yourself, go like we are all about the Bible, right? And we are too. So we're going to preach the Bible.

But Nicodemus is a Pharisee in a Bible church, okay? He is also a leader in the Jewish council. He's a ruler in a spiritual way. And he is the teacher of Israel. So you couldn't come up with a better representation of the people to go to Jesus; like this guy you would think is as good as it gets. In some ways we ought to pause and say he's a good example for all of us too. Cause maybe a lot of you are religious and by nature and you, you think by coming to church or reading your Bible or doing good deeds, that that's the thing that brought you into God's good grace. And Nicodemus is going to help us see, Jesus is gonna help us see through Nicodemus, that it don't matter who you are, what you've done or where you've come from, you all need the exact same thing. You need to be born again.

Okay. Now notice when he comes to Jesus, he comes home at night. Now, some will say it's because Nicodemus was a little embarrassed; he didn't want to be found out that he's kind of asking Jesus these questions. That may be.

Others will say, well, that's when rabbis would have these conversations, so as one teacher to another, they're having their evening talks. Possibly...
However, John likes to use day and night, light and darkness to infuse a situation with spiritual mystery and meaning. So I'm convinced that he's highlighting this because we're going to discover that Nicodemus is in the dark. He's in the dark. He thinks he knows, but he doesn't

know and Jesus is going to help them see that he's just spiritually blind. He sees Jesus, but he doesn't really see him.

Maybe that's some of you today you see him, but you haven't really seen him. He sees the signs, but he doesn't see the person. He believes Jesus is a teacher sent from God, but he doesn't yet believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world sent to save us from our sin.

Okay, so hopefully you can connect with Nicodemus a little bit and say like, okay, what have I been trusting and what have I been putting confidence in that somehow makes me right with God? Or that might save me or rescue me or change me? Nicodemus has got plenty to look to, but he still is spiritually blind and we'll find out spiritually dead, okay?

Because here's the deal, apart from Jesus and a miraculous work of his Spirit, bringing new birth to your inner person, we're all spiritually dead. What I mean by that is we're incapable of living the life God created us to live in such a way that pleases God and the way he designed us. But the good news is that Nicodemus is headed in the right direction. He's coming to the one who is the light of the world, Jesus. So even though he's a believing unbeliever, he's headed in the right direction. So Jesus says to him in verse three, bringing a little light to the darkness.

Jesus answers him, Truly, truly.

And what does that mean? Family? What are the words truly, truly mean here? Amen. Amen. Right? So if you're new to church, when we say amen, we're saying that's right. That's good, that's true. Jesus doesn't say that after he says something, he says it before so that you'll pay attention. Okay? So what I'm about to say is really good, really true, really needed. Listen up.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

There's your problem. Unless you're born again, you can't see the kingdom. Now the kingdom of God biblically is the true nature of God, his rule and reign and the experience of that in your own life. That's what the idea of kingdom of God is. So it's the best place to be. Because when you see God for who he is, you live under submission to his rule and reign, which you were always created to do. And then you get to experience that reign in your life. You get to experience what we're going to hear later is called eternal life -- life that is deep, abundant, full, the greatest life possible.

So all of us want that. In fact, the Bible is really clear, God wrote it on your heart to desire it, but we all go to different places to find it. And what John is going to make clear as he unpacks the story is Jesus saying, you're going to have to come to me to get it.

Now, I don't know if any of you notice this. Did anybody notice that Nicodemus never asked Jesus a question, but Jesus gives him an answer. I love that. Some of us, we approach God thinking, we know what we're looking for or thinking. We know what we believe. And then God kinda like does a little like goes around the angle of the side goes, Hey, you didn't have a clue

that you need even need this, so I'm going to tell you what you need even though you don't even know it and you didn't even ask about it.

Some of you are here this morning. I'm like, I don't know why I'm here. I'm going to ask God to hopefully speak into your lives and go, he knows why you're here and he knows what you need, and I trust that he could speak to your hearts today.

And that's what Jesus does to Nicodemus because he basically responds, you know, you remember this is what Nicodemus said,

Rabbi, we know you're a teacher come from God. No one can do these signs you do unless God's with them.

And then what did Jesus say?

I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Are they having two different conversations? What's going on here? Well, the reality is Jesus knows Nicodemus' heart. He knows he's longing for the kingdom. He knows he wants life abundant.

He knows what you want, by the way -- He knows exactly what you want. God sees you, he knows you, he loves you, and he intends to meet the deepest desires of your heart with himself. That's what he intends to do.

So Jesus' response is not an answer to his question, but it is a statement about Nicodemus' spiritual condition and what he really needs.

And to be clear, this statement is about all of us. Not only is Nicodemus a representative of these people that saw the signs and believe, but as he's a representative of all of us and what we all need.

Every one of us is absolutely helpless and hopeless to save ourselves. Every one of us cannot wake ourselves up spiritually to believe in God. God has to do it.

In fact, John Calvin said this by the term "born again", He means not the amendment of a part, but the renewal of the whole nature. Hence, it follows that there's nothing in us that is not defective.

Theologians call this total depravity. It's the idea that every single aspect of my life has somehow been broken and affected by sin to the point at which I need a whole new life. Not just I need a nice little repair. God needs to make me new from the inside out.

In fact, Paul says it this way to the church in Ephesus.

You were dead

Speaking of all us,

You were dead in your sins and your trespasses. But God, who is rich in mercy makes us alive in Christ.

And so church, you know this, and if you're a guest this year, our emphasis is learning this year, how to really be with Jesus because we know as we spend time with him, we'll become more like him and then we'll be able to do the things he did. And the mistake we could make -- and I just want, this is a bit of a warning, family -- you and I could never become like Jesus without Jesus doing it.

Just want you to understand, that we don't strive to become like him. We don't work really hard to be really good religious people. So somehow we look like him. Like this last week in 301, I had a guy come to me, he goes,

Jeff I don't even believe that we can become like Jesus, I mean I'm a, I feel like I'm just a dirty, rotten, filthy rag.

And I said, stop there. First of all, that's a lie you're made in the image of God. I want you, I want you to hear that, that's not true. But second, yeah, your attempts to be like Jesus without the Spirit of God are going to be like dirty, rotten, filthy rags. Cause they don't, they don't look like him unless it's Him. He's the only way that you can become like Jesus is by Him doing it in you and doing it through you.

Now it's interesting this word "born again", that word "again" in the Greek is "anōthen". And I know you might be going, why are you going to Greek? Well it's really helpful, because if you don't read it in light of what it means, you won't understand what it means. So "anōthen" can mean either "again" or "from above". We find as we read this text, it means both -- "born again from above". That God intends that we would get a new life given to us by him, through his Spirit to make us new people.

And Nicodemus is kind of perplexed. He's like how, how is this supposed to happen? Now he is not hearing from above. He just hearing "again" -- "born again". So he says, and listen, notice the verse, the word he uses --

How can a man be born again when he's old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born?

And the question is -- how can he? He can't. Can he enter? No way.

So Jesus wants to first of all, help Nicodemus understand you've been thinking about yourself way too much in this equation. How do I do this? How do I pull it off? What can I do? And notice that Jesus doesn't say, Hey Nicodemus, just take one more spiritual step or start a new

spiritual practice or do one more good work or get your theological facts in order. Even pray this prayer.

He doesn't say anything cause he doesn't want it to be about Nicodemus. He knows Nicodemus can't save himself.

So, he just kind of lets it hang there a little bit. How can, how can he -- here's what Nicodemus did, and I don't want you, I don't want you to miss this -- Nicodemus kind of started right. Rabbi, you're a teacher from God.

So he's boasting in God and God's work. Who else can do these signs unless God's with him?

And then he goes --

How can I be born again? How can I enter my mother's womb?

You see what he's doing? He starts with God and then he goes to himself. By the way, this is every single person in the room. We boast maybe in God, maybe we even have a gathering together like this. When you leave, you're like, God is so amazing. God is so powerful. God loves me. God's for me. God can do the miraculous. And then you go to work and you're like, what do I got to do? What do I got to do? What do I got to do? It's all about you again.

And then you come back Sunday you're like, man, I got to get back up to here. And then the whole week, it's back to me. And this is the journey of all of us - is we're trying to save ourselves. We're trying to get a better sense of identity by our works, by going to work to get significance, going to school to get a grade, having friendships to get acceptance, whatever it may be. We're all saying, yeah, God could, but I have to.

And this is the problem we all face all week long, is that we start with him and then we end with us. And we all end up desperately wanting what only he can give. And that's what's going on here.

And see, here's the problem. The problem is you. You're the problem. And no one wants to come to a gathering and be told they're the problem, but I'm just going to tell you, you're the problem, okay?

The point is, you and I are broken because of our rebellion against God. So if our own rebellion against God led to our brokenness in our relationships, in our own person, in our psyche, and how we relate to the world, how in the world are we going to fix us?

We need somebody else to come in and fix us from outside -- inside. It's the only way it works. And what I love about the good news is that God is saying, I'm not waiting for you to fix yourself. I'm not asking you to fix yourself. I don't ever expect you to fix yourself. See all of empty religion in the world says, fix yourself and God will love you and the good news of the

gospel says, God loves you so he will fix you. He will work in you. You don't have to work for him. He has more confidence in himself than you to save you. And so he wants you to look to him as the only one who can change you from the inside out.

By the way, I want to pause here. Have you ever have you ever wan-- have you ever wanted to believe something? Anybody here make themselves believe something? Don't raise your hand cause you didn't. Right? Belief in itself is a gift. When you get faith to believe something, it's a gift from God, right? Though, some of you have friends who don't yet believe in Jesus. I want to encourage you. You can't make them. God has to grant the faith for them to respond. It's a gift. It's all a gift. There's no, the Bible's really clear -- we are not saved by our own works, not even our ability to believe that's a gift from God.

So you -- some of you might go like, wow, I feel helpless. Or you could say, I have tons of hope because I already know I can't do it. But if it's up to him, maybe I can have hope. It is a gift.

Parents, by the way, I know some of you are like even up here, we prayed for families. You go, man, I want my kids to believe so bad. You can't do anything to make them believe. You can have a great home and you can lead them to Jesus and you can pray for them and all of these things. The end of the day, God has to change their heart from inside out. And the same is true for our friends. In fact, if you're praying for your friends, pray that God would change their heart. Give them the faith to believe.

And let's hear this because it's not us. It has to be him, and Jesus makes it really clear. It's the Spirit who does it. The Spirit is the means of rebirth. Jesus says in verse five,

Truly, truly,

What does that mean again, family? Okay, we're getting better. I might ask you one more time, so be ready.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Now what does that mean? Born again, of water and Spirit. Now remember, Nicodemus said, how can I be born again? And Jesus goes, Oh, no, no, you missed it. I was talking about being born of water and Spirit. I'm not talking about going back to mom, okay? And he says, how am I going to enter my mother's womb? He's like, no, no, no. How are you going to enter the kingdom of God? That's the question.

So Jesus says, unless you're born of water and Spirit, you can't enter the kingdom of God. And Nicodemus in his mind is only thinking down here. What can I do? And Jesus going, no, you got to start thinking up here.

So verse six, That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

Yeah, I get that. But Jesus, speaking of the supernatural, that's what born of the Spirit is Spirit. Don't Marvel. He says, you must be born again from above, Nicodemus.

Now, here's what he's doing. He's, he's using a great, beautiful analogy, which is a spiritual reality, and that is -- how many of you chose to be born? Any of you raise your hand, we're going to take you somewhere. Talk later, okay?

None of you said, man, I would just love to be born someday! Right? You look back and you said, I was born on this date. It was somebody else's decision that gave me life, okay? Jesus said, that's how it is spiritually. You don't choose to be born again. I choose to make you born again, God says. It's the spirit that gives this about.

So then you go like, well, wait a minute. If it's up to God, then what do I do? Nothing. Well, you'll do something, but it will be in response to being born again. A baby doesn't cry until it's born. It doesn't get hungry until it's coming out of the wo-- I mean, it's hungry in the womb, but it doesn't scream. How many love screaming babies? How many love a weaned baby? Right? How many have taught a baby how to scream? You don't. Some of you have, maybe there's a few. It's unusual if they, if they've never gotten food for a while, then they'd learn how to stop, right? But a healthy baby comes out and right away you're going, is this baby going to cry out? Okay?

Did that baby get taught or did that baby do it because it's alive and it's hungry and it wants milk? Because it's alive and it's hungry and it wants milk.

And that's what happens to spiritually when you're born again -- you want the milk of God's word. You want the Spirit to give life. You hunger for the things of God and you don't come here and have me tell you you should hunger for them. You hunger for them and that's why you come and say, let's keep getting more. Right? That's how that works.

Now, what does Jesus mean by being born of water and Spirit? Now, those two need to be taken together. Some people think water means your first birth; Spirit means your second. That's not what he's trying to communicate here. He's trying to communicate something that the prophets foretold would happen. Okay, Joel was one of them.

If you're new to Christianity, prophets were people several hundred years before Jesus showed up, who spoke of a time in the future that when when Jesus would do something and he would fulfill God's word. Okay, so one of them was Joel. And Joel told them a time when God's Spirit would be poured out on men and women. This happened at Pentecost after Jesus ascended to the, to the right of God, the Father and the Spirit of God was poured out on these men and women, and they began to speak just like Jesus did with the same power and the authority. They healed people, miracles were done -- it was a pouring out of the Spirit. Okay?

In Ezekiel, we see this idea of the water and the Spirit coming together in chapter 36 -- this is going to be on the screen, 25 is where we're going to start.

I will sprinkle clean water on you -- God says through Ezekiel -- And you shall be clean from all your uncleanness. From all your idols, I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, a new spirit I will put within you and I'll remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I'll put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

This is what Jesus is talking about. He's saying, Nicodemus, you know, you know that there has to be a day when through my Spirit I cleanse you of your sin and I wake you up from the dead and I take the heart of stone that doesn't even want to obey God -- and I take it out, and I give you a new heart that wants to do everything God wants. And when you get that heart, you will walk in my ways.

And what I love about that is he doesn't say, Nicodemus, through the prophet, you know what? Clean yourself up. Get your act together. Work harder to obey, and then God will love you.

No he says, remember, water and Spirit is what must help you to receive new birth. I've got to clean you up. I've got to give you a new heart. I got to give you my spirit. And when you get it, you'll want to do everything I want you to do. I love that. Isn't that beautiful? That's how God works. He doesn't say, clean yourself up. I'll accept you. He says, I accept you so I'll clean you up. He doesn't say change yourself. He says, no, I love you and we'll clean you and we'll change you and we'll give you all the need, all the motivation you need in your heart. That's the good news of the gospel.

How does this happen?

It's like the wind (chuckles). It's like the wind, Jesus says.

Now I can imagine Nicodemus is going, Jesus, you're not very helpful right now. Tell me what I'm supposed to do. Well, it's like the wind, Nicodemus. It blows wherever it wishes, you hear its sound, you don't know where it's come from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. You can't see the wind. You can't control the wind. You just understand the effects of the wind and when it blows, everybody knows, right? When it blows, everyone knows.

Now the word for "wind" and "spirit" in both the Hebrew, which is the language in the Old Testament and the Greek, that's the new Testament, is the same word. Wind and spirit in Hebrew is "ruach", in Greek is "pneuma".

And what's going on here? Jesus has gone, Which one is it? Is it the wind or the Spirit? Okay. When the wind blows, when the Spirit blows, you don't know where it's coming from. You don't know where it's going. That's how it is with God's Spirit in your life.

And in many, and I believe this too, believe this is an allusion to the next chapter in Ezekiel, the prophet I already read from, in chapter 37, where God's ruach, His pneuma, His wind, His spirit blows on the valley of dry bones. Anyone remember that story? All this graveyard of dry bones and God says, look at what I'm going to do. And he blows, wind goes over the bones and they get up and they start getting all the sinews back and the muscle back and these things -- these bodies started coming to life. Which was a picture of what's going to happen to you and me when the spirit of God comes into our dead, broken bodies of sin and he brings new life to our being.

That's what he's talking about -- and Jesus saying, the wind is gonna blow. You're not going to know where it came from. You're not going to know where it's going, but you will know when it blows. Because you will be changed. You'll see the effects of the wind in your own life. That's what I experienced. God regenerated me. God gave me new life. God didn't just forgive me --he woke me up, enabled me to see and believe and I was changed forever. And I did nothing except respond to the wind -- to the Spirit.

Now this should give you great hope cause it's up to him to do it, not you. Also should warn you because we don't control the Spirit of God. And unfortunately, there's a whole lot of stuff that goes around and says, if you say it this way, if you pray it that way, if you just perform this way, then God's Spirit will be poured out.

No, that's not -- we don't control the wind any more than we -- we certainly don't control the Spirit. The Spirit does what the Spirit does when the Spirit wants to do it.

And I'm praying the Spirit's doing a work in your heart right now, that as I'm preaching, you're going, I think this is true. Maybe I can see.

Maybe you're still where Nicodemus is at in verse nine he says, how can this be? In other words, how can it happen? And Jesus answers him, are you the teacher of Israel? And you don't understand these things?

Now I don't think he's trying to shame him, but I think he is trying to wake him up to something. Cause it's almost like he's saying Nicodemus -- okay, wait a minute. You're the teacher. You know the God who breathed over dry bones and they came to life, right? You know the God -- you've hopefully have told the story of how he parted the red sea and they pass through without being killed.

You know the God who was able to show a ladder heaven before Jacob. So we could understand that you are still here with us --

I'm sure he's going, Nicodemus have you never preached any of these texts? Are you not aware that the God who regenerates and renews could do this to you? Could do to this these people? Where have you been in all of your learning and teaching?

In some ways I think God wants, Jesus wants to wake him up to the fact that his problem is not intellectual at all. It's faith.

I was at a conference several years ago speaking, and oftentimes I'm asked to speak on how, how we can apply the gospel to everyday life. And so I had a couple sessions, large sessions in a large room. And the first one I said, I'm just going to preach the gospel because I'm never going to assume anybody in the room is yet born again.

And this is all pastors and teachers, just to be clear, these are people who this, they did do what I do. And I said, I'm never gonna assume that. So I wanna preach the gospel. That may be possible. Some of you are going to finally have your eyes open to see Jesus and be born again today.

And I get done, and this older woman in her sixties comes up and she said, Jeff, that was me. I've been in the church my entire life. I've been in spiritual leadership teaching in the church for 20 years. And today my eyes were open and I saw Jesus for the first time and I realized my need for him and I am forever changed. And you know what, I used to try and push myself to do everything I do. Now I can't wait to obey Jesus and do everything he wants me to do. It's amazing.

Now I say that because I assume every time I preach here that there are some of you have been in the church your whole life and yet you've been, you've not been born again yet. You have not experienced the Spirit pour over you, give you a new heart, change your desires, give you a new power and a new ability to live a new life. And so I will, I will just ask you to consider your faith today.

Are you just religious? You just intellectually know it up here, but you've never been transformed here? Because you know, when you know. You do. You know the effects of the wind, it changes you.

And so Jesus continues. Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we've seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

Now some people think he's sardonically speaking in using the word we, which is what, what Nicodemus used earlier. Like we know that you're a teacher from God, Jesus who could do these things apart from God with them. And so now Jesus kind of turned around going like, Oh yeah, we speak of what we know and we bear witness to what we've seen, but you don't receive my testimony. So you haven't seen very clearly yet. That's kind of what he's saying.

So Jesus continues -- If I told you earthly things -- referring to new birth, to be clear, he's not talking about like dirt and sand and trees and all that -- If I told you earthly things, which means what happens in this moment when you get new birth on this earth. So he's going to, if you, if I tell you those and you don't believe, how can I tell you of heavenly things and what's going to

happen as you get brought into this life with God, I can't even talk to you about that yet because none of it will make sense to you until you get the Spirit wake you up.

And I know for some of you every week you're here and I love that you're here. And some of the stuff that I say, you're like, I don't know what he's talking about, and that might be just because I'm confusing. And might also be because you haven't experienced the new birth of the Spirit to give you the ability to see these heavenly things that we're talking about every week -- and it has to start there. You must be born again.

Now he continues. No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. How is the new birth going to come about? The Holy Spirit is going to give you eyes to see Jesus. I mean really -- not, not me hear me talk about him. Not just, you know go, I know what he's going to say next -- he's going to talk about his life and his death and his spirit and his resurrection. Not that no, no. For you to see Jesus. I mean really see -- the eyes of your heart opened up -- you go, Oh, that's who you're talking about. I really, really see.

And I'm telling you, once you've seen, you can never look back. Because when you really see him for all that he is, you can't get enough of who Jesus is.

And so this new birth comes about by the power of the Spirit, but the Spirit lifts up Jesus. So you can see. The Son's provision is our source of rebirth.

And Jesus is being very clear. There's only One who's ascended and descended, and that's the Son of Man. There's only one who can tell you what God's really like and be absolutely truthful in everything he says, and that's Jesus Christ.

There's only One who can give you direct access to the God of the universe, and that's Jesus. John 14:6 later, Jesus says, I am the way, I am the truth and I am the life. No one comes to the Father -- God -- except through me.

And how does he grant this access? Verse 14:

As Moses was lifted up, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

This is a reference to Numbers 21 -- this is the time when God's people are very rebellious and complaining against God, to Moses, and so God said, all right, if they want to rebel, I'll give them the results of their rebellion. He turns us over oftentimes to the results of our sin. In this case, he gives a very physical experience by sending these fiery serpents into the camp and they bite the people and many of them die as a result.

And they go back to Moses and they say, please, we know what we've done. We know it's been evil. We know we'd rebelled against God. Tell God to save us. Pray, ask for help, and God says

to Moses, what I want you to do is take this bronze serpent, put it up on a stick so that every time they get bit, they just come and look at it and they'll be healed.

That's what Jesus is referring to here. He's saying, I'm the Son of Man who must be lifted up on a stick and that stick is the cross. And so that everyone who's bit by the evil of sin and has experienced its destructive effects in their life, and they know how desperately they need to be saved from the rebellion and they confess that, just invite the Spirit to lift your eyes up and see the Son of Man Jesus Christ, hanging on a tree for you and me dying for our sin so that we might be healed, cleansed, forgiven, and made new.

That's what Jesus is referring to. And he says, if we do that, if we believe in him, we will have eternal life. I said this earlier, that's not just about the length of life. That's the depth of life. That's the life you and I all want to never end. And the Spirit grants you that.

This text is about God giving you the gift of new life by His Spirit -- the gift of sight, so you can finally see your need for Jesus. And the gift of lifting your head up from yourself and showing you that the One died for you on the cross so you could be forgiven, you can be changed, and you can be made new. And you could have the very thing that the prophet Ezekiel said would happen, that God would not only cleanse you, but he would give you a new heart and he would make you new from the inside out forever.

So I want to ask you again, have you been born again?

Have you experienced what I'm talking about? You know you have because the effects of the wind are very obvious.

Paul said in Romans 5, he'll pour God's love in your heart. And in Romans 8, you'll actually be able to hear this love of God so you can start calling God your daddy. He tells you that you're going to have the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, meekness, self-control, starting to come out of your life.

He tells you that your life will start to look more and more like Jesus increasingly day after day as God's transforming you for one degree of glory to another.

Is that what you've experienced? Can you see the effects of the wind in your life?

You'll know because you'll know that it shows up in the way you treat each other. It shows up in your relationships, it shows up in your missional community and the groups that you're involved in. It shows up at work.

And some of you might go like, Hey Jeff, stop like just you're making me feel bad, and that's not my intent. Maybe there's areas of your life where you're like, Oh, Holy Spirit, wind blow -- change me. I don't like that. I don't want that to be true of me anymore. I want to love in a

different way. I want to be more patient and more kind and more gentle. I need the Spirit's wind to blow into this life and transform me from the inside out.

And maybe you are a believer, but you're an unbelieving believer or a believer who is still struggling with unbelief.

And I'm sure the answers for all of you is yes, that's me.

So I want to give you a moment just to be quiet with God and invite the Spirit to show you -- One, are you even born again? And maybe for some of you, this is the time where you go, I think I see. I think I see my need for a savior. I know that I've sinned. I know I've rebelled against God. I know that there's no way I could save myself, but the Spirit's giving you sight to see you need Jesus today.

And you can, you can just say, I see. You can confess that to him right now. I see that I need you. I see that I have sinned, I see that there's no other way other than Jesus Christ.

And we can believe and you can have eternal life. Start today. In this moment. There's others of you who you need the spirit to show you where the wind needs to blow right now. And so I just encourage you to take a moment. Invite him to show you where the wind needs to come and bring new life to you.

Holy Spirit, blow through this place. Give new life. Save. Renew. Change forever our hearts. We pray in your name. Amen.