

The New Birth

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Well, what a joy it is to be here again at your wonderful church. I have fallen in love with your church in many ways and I first want to thank you, those of you who have served in the conference, what a joy it was to be a part of this conference and the way that you have thrown your arms open to us as we come in and minister the word and so I want to thank you for your service and I want to thank you for the way that you support your pastor and the encouragement that you give to him and he is one of the most gifted young men that we have in America who preaches the word of God. You have a treasure from heaven entrusted to you and I just got an amen from him. Was it from you, Josh on, on that? No, it was over here. Okay. I thought you were amening that and lacking a bit of humility. No, I got the amen from over here. All right. That's funny. You do have a wonderfully gifted pastor and how I thank the Lord for him and his friendship and he has an amazing ability to invite people and people respond to that invitation and come and so I am here as a result of that.

It's difficult to know what to preach when I have just one opportunity to speak. Our conference was on the Trinity and I preached twice on the Trinity but I want to bring to you a message that I think is so foundational and so fundamental to the Christian faith that it would be strategically important for us to look at this text once again. I feel like it needs to be preached once a year in every church. It needs to be continually before us and so I want to invite you to take your Bible, if you would, and turn with me to the Gospel of John, to John 3, and today I want to speak to you on the new birth.

John 3, and beginning in verse 1. The word of God reads, "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 have come from God as a teacher, for no one is able to do these signs that you do unless God is with him.' Jesus answered and said to him." By the way, let me point this out: Nicodemus never asked a question. Jesus read him like an open book. Jesus read the letter without ever opening the envelope. Before the question could even be asked, Jesus answered him, just like Jesus sees into your heart and into my heart and he knows exactly what your thoughts are.

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you,'" and whenever Jesus says truly, truly, I say to you, that signals our attention that what follows now is of supreme importance. Everything that Jesus said was inspired, inerrant and infallible, but some

things that Jesus said rose to a much higher level of importance and Jesus would signal the intention of his listeners by accenting the importance of it by introducing it with this signature phrase, "Truly, truly, I say to you." Amen, amen, 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? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' 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 flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit. Do not wonder that I say to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'"

The greatest miracle that God ever performs is the miracle of the new birth. Greater than when God created all of nature is when he creates the new nature inside of a sinner. Greater than when God creates physical life in the womb is when God creates spiritual life in the heart. Greater than when God births someone into an earthly family is when God births one into his spiritual family above. Greater than when Jesus turned water into wine is when he transforms sinners into saints. The greatest miracle that God ever performs is the miracle of the new birth and I want to tell you, you need to be a miracle of God's grace. This is the focus of this private encounter between a man named Nicodemus and the Lord Jesus Christ and the subject is the miracle of the new birth which Nicodemus so desperately needs.

By way of introduction, I want to tell you three things about Nicodemus before we begin to dig into this text and number 1, you need to know that he is a Pharisee. We see it in verse 1, Nicodemus was a man of the Pharisees. There were about 2,000 Pharisees within the nation of Israel and they were the most arch-conservatives in the entire nation. They were to the right of right. You couldn't be any further to the right than the Pharisees. They believed the Bible; they believed the whole Bible. They believed in the sovereignty of God. They believed in the coming kingdom of God. They believed in miracles. They believed in angels. They believed in chapter and verse before there was even chapter and verse. They believed it all. They knew the Bible inside out. They grew up with the Bible flooding their minds. He was a Pharisee and the word "Pharisee" means "a separatist or one who is set apart from the foul pollution of the culture." They saw their nation going down the drain; they saw the moral corruption that was going on all around them; they withdrew from the foul society in which they lived; they wanted to be so set apart from all of the filth that was around them. That was Nicodemus.

And then, second, we see that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. In verse 1 it says he was a ruler of the Jews. This means he sat on the ruling body of the Sanhedrin. This was like the Supreme Court and the Senate combined together. There were 70 who had risen to the top, who had climbed the ladder of respectability and influence and power within the nation and Nicodemus was at the very apex of his day. People looked up to Nicodemus. He was a power broker and he presided over the affairs of the nation and sought to do everything that he could to maintain the tradition of his fathers and the glory days of the nation from long ago.

And the third thing that you need to know about Nicodemus is in verse 10, he was the teacher of Israel. Not a teacher, the teacher. Nicodemus was a walking Bible. Nicodemus knew the Bible inside out and outside in. Nicodemus had such a head full of knowledge. He was the Bible answer man of his day. If you had a question to ask about the Bible, there's only one man you would go to, that's Nicodemus because he teaches all the other teachers of Israel. He's sitting at the top of the pyramid. He's the teacher of the word of God in Israel. And Nicodemus had everything going for him: arch-conservative, morally pure, set apart from the corruption, man of influence, respect, revered, knows the Bible, serves God, teaches the Bible. He had everything except the one thing, he had never been born again and I may be speaking to some people today that fit right into the category of Nicodemus. That's your profile. That's your resume. You may be the arch-conservative of all arch-conservatives. You may think Fox News is liberal. You're to the right of right. You may have grown up in the church. You may have started attending church nine months before you were born. You've been here for a long time. You may be a Sunday school teacher. You may be a deacon. You may work with a youth ministry. You may sing in the choir. You may have been involved in Awana, won the Timothy Award. You may know the Bible inside out, but you've never been born again from above. Hell is going to be filled with arch-conservatives who believe the Bible. Hell is going to be filled with people of influence and respectability who are just strutting their way to hell.

I want us to look at the miracle of the new birth and I want us to look at it for two reasons. 1. For those of us who have been born again. I want us to have a sharp understanding of what it is that God did in my life 50 years ago. What was that all about? And having a more clear understanding of the new birth, it will cause me to give honor and glory to God all the more because I want to tell you, this is the biggest thing that has ever happened in your life. This is bigger than you being married. This is bigger than you graduating from high school. This is bigger than you going to college. This is bigger than you getting a promotion at work. This is the single biggest thing to ever happen in your life. Everything else is subordinate and we need to understand what actually happened when I was born again. Then second, for those here today who have not been born again. I pray that God by his mercy will find you out today. You may be the most respected person in this church, you may be the most long-standing member of this church, you may be the one who serves in the kitchen more than anyone else, you may be a charter member of every committee here just like Nicodemus, but if you've never been born again, today's message, I pray, will be a trumpet blast in your ear of the necessity for you to be birthed from above.

Now, I want to walk through this passage. I want to begin in verse 3 and I want to walk through this passage with you and I want to set before you several truths about the new birth and as we do, I'm just remembering I need to tell you what the new birth is because that's a term that gets thrown around a lot and people use the term, I mean, we have born again refrigerators; you know, we have born again whatever. I mean, what does it mean to be born again? Let me give it to you in the simplest term: it is the life of God in the soul of a man. It is God implanting new life, eternal life, spiritual life, into the empty spiritually dead soul where there has never been life before. It is a spiritual conception that creates a new person in Christ.

Now, understand this: over the last 20 years there has been a glorious resurrection of many Bible doctrines. We are living in a very wonderful time and justification by faith alone has been put to the forefront and rightly so, Romans 3, Romans 4, Galatians, but let me tell you, there is something that precedes justification by faith in the *ordos salutis*, in the order of salvation, and it is what we're talking about today and until this happens, there is no justification by faith. This is where faith comes from and justification by faith. And justification by faith is, in a sense, a legal transaction that takes place in heaven in which God imputes, credits, reckons the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ to the account of the condemned sinner who believes upon Christ. That is a legal transaction that takes place in the courtrooms of heaven but what we're looking at today is something that takes place on earth. It's something that takes place inside of you. It's something that dramatically and radically changes and transforms your life. It is a spiritual resurrection that raises to life the one who has been lying in the grave of sin. It is like when Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth," and the one who was dead in the grave was raised and he came walking out. That is what the new birth is. So my question: has this happened to you? Have you been born again? And if you have, do you more fully understand what all took place when God imparted divine life to your empty, dead soul?

Alright, now let's walk through this passage. I want to give you several headings. Some of you are note-takers. This will be very easy to track with me. I'm an outline guy. What I like about an outline is it's like a roadmap: I know where I'm going and you know where I'm going. 1. The new birth is a necessary birth. If we get anything out of this text, it is that the new birth is a necessary birth. Notice verse 3, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot, he cannot, he cannot, he cannot, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'" Do you know the difference between "may" and "can"? My parents taught me that early at the dinner table. "May" is a word of permission, "can" is a word of ability. I would be at the dinner table, "Can I go to the little boys' room?" "Well, I hope you can but what you need is, 'may I.'" Jesus does not say, "Unless you're born again you may not see the kingdom of heaven," he says it is absolutely impossible for you to see the kingdom of God unless you're born again; that you and I are so plagued with a moral inability that we cannot even sniff the kingdom of God unless we're born again. Jesus puts it in the negative in order to have an edge about his words. He is intentionally provocative with Nicodemus and let me tell you, no one has ever talked to Nicodemus like this, this is how Nicodemus would talk to others. And Jesus puts this in the negative to have a shock value, just like, I pray, it will have a shock value with some here today.

He says, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." In verse 5, he says, "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." In verse 7, he says, "You must be born again." George Whitefield was a great evangelist who traveled up and down the eastern seacoast preaching in the 1740s into the 1750s and 60s and he had a sermon that he trumpeted all over this nation in the Great Awakening in the early colonies, it was on the nature and the necessity of the new birth, and Whitefield preached the new birth and basically our country was born out of the flames of the Great Awakening. Whitefield has been called the true founding father of America. More people saw Whitefield than ever

saw George Washington. One woman came up to him and said, "Mr. Whitefield, why do you keep saying to us you must be born again?" To which Mr. Whitefield said, "Because, dear woman, you must be born again." And I say the same to you, you must be born again.

What is the kingdom of God? Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the sphere of salvation over which the King of kings rules and reigns by his grace. It is the government of his grace. It is the realm of redemption. That is what the kingdom of God is and if Jesus said this to the most religious man who ever walked the earth, how much more so does he say this to you and me today?

That's 1: the necessity of the new birth. You can't see it, much less enter it, unless you're born again. Second, it is a second birth. Notice verse 3 again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born," what's the next word? "Again." Unless one is born again. That means a second birth and that's exactly how Nicodemus understood this because look at the next verse, "Nicodemus said, 'How can a man be born when he's old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?'" Jesus talks about two births. In verse 6 he says, "that which is born of flesh is flesh." That's your first birth. Everyone here today has had a first birth. And then Jesus said, "and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." There must be this second birth in order to enter into the kingdom of God.

Now, this implies two things. You need to jot this down if you're taking notes. 1. This is clearly an indictment on your first birth. Your first birth was so plagued and polluted by sin that you cannot enter the kingdom of God with simply your first birth. You were born in sin. You were born under sin. The venomous poison of sin was in you at the moment of your conception. The Psalmist says, "In sin did my mother conceive me." The Psalmist says, "I went forth from my mother's womb speaking lies." That is why you must have a second birth because your first birth has ruined you spiritually before God, and if all you ever have is a first birth, you will wish you had never been born at all.

The second implication is that when you were born the first time, you were born outside the kingdom of God. That's why you have to enter into the kingdom of God. That means you're on the outside. You were a stranger. You were a foreigner. You were an alien. You were a rebel against this King who ruled over a kingdom of grace and you need to come into the kingdom but by virtue of your first birth, you are outside the kingdom and it mattered not if you grew up in a church, if you were sprinkled as a baby, if you were in vacation Bible school, if you were a nice kid, if your mother thought you were wonderful, all of that is fine except you were outside the kingdom of God and there must come a time, there must come a place when you enter into the kingdom of God and that only happens with a second birth. Have you had the second birth?

Third, it is an unmerited birth. Let me ask you this question: what did you do before you were born physically to deserve to be born? I'm waiting. There's nothing. There's nothing you did. There's nothing you could have done before you were born physically in order to be born physically. God simply chose to cause you to be born physically and by extension of the metaphor, the same is true spiritually, and when Jesus says that we must

be born again, we are to understand that there is absolutely nothing that we can do to deserve to be born again: not by good works, not by church membership, not by water baptism, not by personal integrity, not by spiritual service, not by giving money, not by attending church, not by your own personal character. It is all of grace. Titus 3:5 says, "He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness but according to his mercy," listen to this, "by the washing of regeneration." The word "regeneration" is a theological word, it's a biblical word and it's a theological word that means "a new birth." There is nothing that you and I can do to be born again. What did you do to be born the first time? Nothing. What can you do to be born spiritually? It's all of God and it is all of grace.

Fourth, it is a heavenly birth. Look at verse 3 again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again." This word "again" can be translated "from above." In fact, I looked it up this morning in a Greek dictionary and the primary meaning of this word that is translated "again" into our English Bible, the primary meaning is "from above" and that is exactly how it is used in verse 31 of this same chapter, "He who comes from above is above all." What Jesus is saying here, and it also means "again," which is the secondary meaning of the word. What Jesus is saying, this second birth is a birth from above. It's an out-of-this-world experience. It is the life of God coming down into our empty soul. It is this: heaven must come to you long before you go to heaven. If heaven hasn't come to you in this life, you will not go to heaven in the next life. It is the supernatural eternal life of God that comes down from above. It doesn't arise from within us and it doesn't arise from what is around us, it is not the result of any church, any ministry, any denomination, any preacher, any evangelist. It comes exclusively from the throne of grace above.

It is a heavenly birth that brings eternal life, and the word "eternal" literally means "the life of the ages to come." That supernatural quality of life comes to reside within us unlike anything this world has to offer. It is unlike any experience you will ever have in this world. It is unlike any occurrence that could ever be brought to bear upon your life. It is unlike going to school, unlike being married, unlike sports, unlike business, unlike recreation. It is from another realm that comes down into our soul. Has heaven come down into your soul? Has God himself come down to reside within your soul?

Fifth, it is an illuminating birth. Illuminating birth. Look at verse 3 again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." In verse 5, he will say, "you cannot enter," but in verse 3, he says, "you cannot see," and you cannot enter what you cannot see. There is an intentional order here with theological precision. This word for "see" that Jesus used means "to see with understanding." It's not referring to physical eyes, having a physical sight, it's talking about spiritual eyes, having spiritual perception with spiritual understanding, with spiritual insight. Until you are born again, you are spiritually blind and you cannot see and you come to church and you hear a preacher or you turn on the radio and you hear a Bible teacher, you might as well be with your Bible closed, upside down, you're in a dark room and it is midnight. You have eyes but you cannot see and unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God because in the new birth God gives you new eyes with which to see.

There have been times and I've been preaching for many years, and there has been more than a few times I will be out in the lobby after church and an old businessman who is used to having his way at work bossing people around, doesn't like to hear a preacher telling him what to do, will come up to me in the lobby and will say, "Preacher, I just don't see it." And I'll think, "You know, that's really true. You really don't see it because you are blind. You're blind as a bat." I won't say that and I'll want him to see but until God gives him eyes, it doesn't matter the quality of my teaching. Blind is blind. You can't dress up blind. But in the new birth, we are enabled to see the kingdom of God and suddenly in a moment I see who God is. I see me. I see who I am. I see my need for grace. I see the cross. I see Christ. I see grace. I see the transactions that must now occur between God and me and in a moment, the veil is pulled back and I see it. I am so weary of hearing people sometimes in their testimony say this, "Oh, I've always been a Christian." That tells me you need to be born again because you haven't always been a Christian. John Newton said, "I once was blind but now I see." It's an illuminating birth. It is an eye-opening birth when you suddenly see with 20/20 vision. You just woke up in a new world.

Number 6: it's a cleansing birth. Look at verse 5, "Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'" What does this "water and the Spirit"? I understand the Spirit, what is "water and the Spirit"? Let me tell you what it's not saying first of all. You know what I'm going to say. It's not talking about water baptism. My friend, the thief on the cross, they didn't tear down, baptize him and nail him back up again. No amount of water can wash away the foul pollution of your soul. Water here is a metaphor for the ministry of the Holy Spirit and there are two metaphors in this passage. One is found in verse 8, the wind. The Holy Spirit is like the wind who blows so powerfully. The second metaphor is here in verse 5, it's like water. He cleanses and purges and purifies when he comes flooding through our soul. These are the two metaphors. Jesus is the Master Evangelist and he is the Master Teacher and he is painting a picture on the canvas of Nicodemus' mind. Not only is he telling him, he is showing him what must take place in his life. Unless one is born of water, comma, even the Spirit, comma, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, is how I believe this should be more properly translated and that's exactly, those are the light bulbs that would have come on in Nicodemus' mind, because remember, he is the teacher of Israel. He has the Old Testament down cold.

One of the mountain peak passages of the entire Old Testament is Ezekiel 36:25 when God, as the speaker, speaks through his mouthpiece Ezekiel and God describes the new birth. And by the way, the new birth was not something new in the New Testament. There's only one way of salvation, both Old and New Testaments, by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. There are not two tracks to heaven, there is only one way to heaven and everyone in the Old Testament was saved the way people were saved in the New Testament and they had to be birthed into the kingdom as well. That was a spiritual circumcision is what it was in the Old Testament by way of metaphor. But in Ezekiel 36:25, God says, "I," God, "I will sprinkled clean water on you." God's not saying he's going to come down out of heaven and dip you in the river Jordan and sprinkle water on you. That's not the intent. No, God says, "I will sprinkled clean water

on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness." It's obviously he's referring to a spiritual washing of the spiritual filthiness of your life. And then he adds, "and this water will cleanse you from all your idols." But Jesus is saying, "Nicodemus, you need to be born again and you need to have that filthy, stinking, foul, rotten heart and soul of yours purged."

You see, in the new birth, and he'll go on to say this in the Ezekiel 36 text, God removes your heart of stone which is lifeless, hardened, unresponsive to the things of God; God removes that heart of stone and he puts in a heart of flesh. It is alive. It has a spiritual pulse. It is alive to God. It is responsive to God. But before God puts in the clean new heart, God must first clean house and he washes out the filth from the inside of your soul and then places the new heart into the scrubbed soul. This is what must happen to each and every one of us and that's why in Titus 3:5 which I read earlier it says, "By the washing of regeneration." God said through Isaiah, "Come, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool." That's what the new birth does, it wipes the slate clean; it purges the soul as God puts the new life on the inside.

Seventh, it is an instantaneous birth. Verse 3, verse 5, verse 6, verse 7, he keeps saying you must be born again, you must be born of the Spirit, and implied in this metaphor drawn from the human reality of a physical birth is the fact that a birth is not a progressive act. It doesn't take place over an extended period of time. If your life is a timeline, the new birth does not take place in an extended parentheses of time. There is a pinpoint on that line in which you went from being unborn to being born. If I were to take my driver's license and hold it up and you could read it, you would see that I was born in 1951. My mother would be very glad to know her labor was not a year long. That would be quite an experience to go through. It says not only 1951, but that I was born in April of 1951, but my birth did not take a month. It says April 13, 1951. In fact, it was at 10:13 at night. There was a moment, there was a time when I went from being unborn to being born in the sense of being in my mother's womb to now being out of my mother's womb.

What happened on the day of Pentecost? Thousands gathered there that day and Peter stood up and said, "This Jesus whom you crucified, God has raised from the dead therefore let all of the house of Israel know for certain that this Jesus God has made to be both Lord and Christ." They were cut to the heart, it was pierced to the heart. What must we do? Peter said, "Repent." And verse 41 says, "And as many as received his word were added to their number." In fact, down in verse 47, it says as the church began to spread and percolate throughout Jerusalem, that the Lord was adding to their number, listen to this, "day by day those who were being saved." Not week by week or month by month or year by year but some were being birthed on Tuesday and others were being birthed on Wednesday and others were being birthed on Thursday. It happens in a moment. It happens in a day.

What happened on the road to Damascus? Saul of Tarsus had letters in hand going to Damascus to apprehend the believers. He wasn't looking for Christ, he was looking for Christians to put them to death just like Stephen had been put to death. And on that

Damascus Road, there was a light that shone out of heaven and the text says suddenly and he was knocked off his horse and in that moment, he looked up and said, "Who are you, Lord?" He answered his own question. That's how suddenly, birthed into the kingdom.

The Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8, goes up to Jerusalem to learn the way of salvation; buys a copy of Isaiah 53; remains in darkness coming down that Gaza Strip; Philip is sent out into the middle of nowhere to bring the message to him; he explains Isaiah 53 and in a moment he is birthed into the kingdom of God and wants to be baptized immediately.

Paul goes to Philippi, he sees some women by the Riverside, they are God-fearing women but they are not converted. They are still unborn and Paul begins to preach the Gospel to them and God opens their heart and they are birthed into the kingdom right then on the spot.

They will apprehend Paul, throw him into prison and at midnight there is an earthquake the comes, throws open the doors of the prison cell; the Philippian jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." That very night, not only was he saved, his whole household was saved, all who could believe upon the Lord.

Let me tell you, the new birth is an instantaneous birth. Now, you may not be able to pinpoint that exact time but I believe it's the result of such poor Gospel preaching that only by the sovereignty of God are the elect brought home and they have such a weak, watered down, nebulous presentation of the Gospel, they may have gotten saved off a hymn rather than the sermon. It was so bad. But nevertheless, I want you to know it is an instantaneous birth. When was your instantaneous birth?

Eighth, it is a comprehensive birth. Again, it's implied in the metaphor in verse 3, verse 5, verse 6, verse 7. When you were born, did you receive one eye, and one ear, and one leg, and one ankle, and when you went to kindergarten, they gave you your second eyeball? Just kind of screwed it in? Got to fourth grade, "Here, you're going to need another ear." Scotch tape that on. Go to junior high school, "Where's your other arm? Oh, you need another arm." FedEx brings you another arm. Is that how that works? Of course not. You got it all when you were born physically from the beginning. It was simply a matter of growth and development. Now, here's why I belabor this point: the new birth must be as comprehensive as total depravity and total depravity does not mean you are as totally depraved as you could possibly be. Total depravity means depravity as extended to the totality of your being; that your mind is darkened; that your heart is defiled; your will is deadened; from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet, the foul pollution of sin has contaminated you and corrupted you and in the new birth there must be the reverse of the curse. There must be the total reversal of total depravity such that in the new birth, in that instant, in that moment, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. The old things passed away, behold, new things have come. In that instant, God gave you the mind of Christ. God gave you ears to hear the truth. God gave you a new heart with new desires and new affections and new appetites. God gave you new eyes to see the truth. God gave

you new hands with which to lay hold of that which is pleasing to God. He gave you new feet to pursue holiness and to run after God. From the top of your head to the bottom of your feet, every inch, every ounce of you, you became a new creature in Christ and there was not some little closet left in your life that was unregenerated, that just kind of transfers into the Christian life, but the washing of regeneration never touched that back room. No, that doesn't work that way because the new birth is a comprehensive birth. Your mind is enlightened. Your heart is inflamed. Your will is engaged. This is what the new birth is.

Ninth, it is a radical birth. If I could come up with a stronger word, I would. It is a radical birth. To be born again? This is not a slight, subtle alteration of your life. This is a game changer. This is life altering. This is the most dramatic change that could ever take place in your soul this side of glorification. You go from death to life. Do you think that's big or small? You went from darkness to light. You went from grunge to godliness. You went from vulgarity to virtue. You went from profanity to purity because you suddenly became a new person in Christ. Ephesians 4:24 says, "The new self has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Listen, this is the best, the greatest thing that could ever happen to your life. This isn't just a makeover, this is a takeover of your life. New life and a new person, never the same again. Has this happened in your life?

Tenth, it's a sovereign birth. Look at verse 8, "The wind blows where it wishes." The preacher has no power over the wind. The parents have no power over the wind. The weatherman certainly has no power over the wind. No one controls the wind. The wind has a mind of its own. The wind is going to do what the wind is going to do. No one can start the wind. No one can steer the wind. No one can stop the wind. You know how powerful that wind is. You don't see it. You've never seen the wind, but you sure see the effects of it and you feel the power of it. I've been living for the last 21 years in Mobile, Alabama, hurricane alley, and we just sit there in our little den watching the Weather Channel and watching this hurricane just like a running back in the open field just darting, moving. Who knows where it's going to make landfall. Let me tell you, when it hits and makes landfall, it will just pancake the landscape.

Jesus says the ministry of the Holy Spirit is just like the wind. The wind of the Holy Spirit will swoop down in a house and it will pass the first bedroom and pass the second bedroom and pass the third bedroom until it comes all the way down to the end of the hall and it will swoop down into that bedroom and there is a birthing that takes place, and it has passed over a mother, a father, or passed over other siblings but this is the one and this is the appointed time and it's powerful. And then that wind lifts up and it goes down the block and it hits another house after passing over many other houses. Then it lands and there is another birthing and then it lifts up and it goes to another town. It has a mind of its own. That is the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God and there are some people that think that the wind always blows on Sunday at 12 noon on the 28th verse of "Just as I am," and they don't know that they don't know. They're clueless about the things of God. It's a sovereign birth.

In fact, in John 1:13, John writes, "You were born," referring to the new birth, "you were born not of blood," meaning it doesn't matter who your parents were. If they were saved, it doesn't mean you're saved. If they are born again it doesn't mean you're born again. It's not of blood. There are no legacies in the kingdom of heaven. There are no grandchildren in the kingdom of heaven. It's not of blood. I don't care if you're a blue blood, it's not of blood. And then it says, "nor of the will of the flesh," meaning you can't earn it, you can't deserve it, you can't work for it. It's not of the will of the flesh no matter how determined and how rigorous and how resolved and how whatever you want to be to push yourself to try to hit a standard. It's not by the will of the flesh. Now, look at the next one. This is sobering, "nor of the will of man." That includes, you sir, and that includes you ma'am, and that includes this preacher. What can a dead man do? I remember my professor asked that question in seminary one day, what can a dead man do? You could hear the grass growing outside. There was no answer and one student in the back pew yelled out, "Stink." That's all a dead man can do. A dead man doesn't have a will towards the things of God. He is plagued by moral inability.

It's a sovereign birth and if you are born again, it's not because you have a higher IQ, it's not because you're better, it's not because you're smarter, it's not because of anything about you, it's in fact in spite of you, not because of you that God by his mercy has chosen to direct that wind into your life. He says, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." This is the most humbling truth that God has blown the wind of the Spirit into your life. You are very blessed person.

I want to wrap this up, number 11. I'm doing what I tell my students never to do, never have this many points. I'm breaking every homiletical rule in the book. Tell me you're hanging with me. Okay. Number 11: it is an inscrutable birth. Look at verse 8 again, after he says in verse 8, he has already said, "The wind blows where it wishes," that's the sovereignty of it. Now listen to what follows, "and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going." I always chuckle at churches that put on the sign out in front of the church, "Revival, April 17-24." You must be smarter than God because you do not know. Let me repeat that. I have translated this out of the original Greek, here's what it literally means: you do not know where it comes from and where it goes. And I want to tell you, just when you think you've got it figured out who is going to be saved next, who is not going to be saved, what country it's going to hit, what denomination it will come on, you don't know.

"So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Who has known the mind of the Lord? That's a rhetorical question. The answer is so obvious, Paul quoting Isaiah does not even answer it. Who has known the mind of the Lord? No one. Or who has been his counselor? No one. It's inscrutable. It's mysterious. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are his ways above our ways and his thoughts above our thoughts. He's not sitting on our committees. He does this all by himself.

Finally, number 12: it's a permanent birth. You've heard once saved, always saved - once born, always born. You're never unborn. Once you are born, you're in. You're in the

family and that's implied in this metaphor. And it's not in my notes but I'm going to throw it out anyway, number 13: it's a clearly evidenced birth. There will be the evidence of a changed and transformed life. You read the book of 1 John 2:29, 1 John 3:9, 1 John 4:7, 1 John 5:1, 1 John 5:4, 1 John 5:18, there you will find every evidence of the new birth. You can read it at home. And if there's no fruit, there's no root. This is the necessary evidence of the new birth and it's not a multiple-choice. "I'll take 1 John 2:29, I'll take 1 John 4:7, but I'll pass on 1 John 3:9 and etc. etc. etc." No, it's all or nothing. The one who is born of God, those are all the marks, in fact, the entire book of 1 John bears all the marks of the new birth. The Gospel of John is written that you might know how to be saved, 1 John is written that you might know if you're saved and I have found in the south when I preach 1 John, a lot of Nicodemuses get saved. A lot of arch-conservatives, Bible believing, morally separated people look at their branches and see there is no fruit of a changed life.

So where are you today? Have you been born again? If you've never been born again, I would urge you to pray to God, "O God, birth me into your kingdom. God, blow the wind of heaven to me. O God, open my heart. God, give me the eyes. God, give me the ears. God, do in me a supernatural work. God, put your life within my empty soul." And I point you to the Lord Jesus Christ who brought this instruction, who came into this world, he was born of a virgin; he was like us but he was unlike us. He got into our skin yet he had no sin and he lived a sinless and perfect life under the law, the law that you and I break day after day after day. He perfectly fulfilled it and it is that perfect obedience to the law of God on our behalf, it is that active obedience and perfect righteousness that is credited to your account as though you have lived in perfect obedience to the law of God. That's why Jesus when he left heaven didn't go straight to the cross. Why the 33 years? It was to fulfill the law of God so that that fulfillment of perfect righteousness could be put into your account, in my account, when we believe upon Christ. He then went to the cross. He had no sin of his own to suffer for and him who knew no sin God made to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him, and all of our sins were laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and he suffered and bled and died bearing our sins upon that cross and there is salvation in no other name for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. They took him down from that cross, they buried him in the tomb, and on the third day he was raised from the dead. He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father, and whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. I urge you to call upon the name of the Lord. I urge you to put your trust in him, to repent of your sins, and to believe upon the only Savior whom God has sent into this world.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you are born again you will not see and you will not enter the kingdom of heaven," but today the gates of paradise are swung wide open and you may never have an opportunity like this again the rest of your life. Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, today is the day of salvation. If you have never committed your life to Christ, I would run to Christ, I would flee to Christ, I would throw myself upon his mercy and, "Him who comes unto me," he said, "I will in no wise cast out." He loves to gather in sinners. He stiff arms the self-righteous and throws them away. He is a physician who has come for the sick, not for the well. Tell him how sick you are. Tell

him how sinful you are. He came for sinners, not for those who are well, and he will receive you, clothe you with his righteousness and you will be a member of his family forever.

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, cause us to treasure this supernatural sovereign birth that you have brought about in our souls. Cause us to meditate, cause us to contemplate, cause us to truly think about this miracle that you have performed in our lives. Make it jaw-dropping, make it knee-bending, make it praise offering. And Lord, for those here today who have never been birthed into your kingdom, I plead with you to do what only you can do, to blow the wind of heaven into this place and descend upon these pews and to bring with it new life from above. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.