

That You May Believe & Be Reborn

John 3

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, June 24, 2018

Well, good morning everyone. Before we dive into our passage, just a few housecleaning things. The men who were on the fishing trip last week are having a meeting in the gym. So, if you were on that trip, just meet with some of the other brothers in the gym that were there as well. You guys have a special presentation. So it should be fun, right after the service.

Also, before we get started this morning, I want to introduce you to something new that we're doing as a church. If you've noticed, we've had quite a few visitors here lately. The Lord has been blessing us with that. And in an effort to minister to them better, we've created some new welcome packets as a church that look like this right here. It has a nice design on the cover and inside it has several things like our history page, and the points of our Vision Statement. It also has a welcome letter from me to the visitors that I want to read to you, because I think it'll be encouraging to you.

But when you open up the packet on the inside cover there, it says,

Hello everyone and welcome to Grace Fellowship Chilliwack. We're thrilled that you are here and are interested in learning more about our congregation. We're a Bible teaching church located in Chilliwack, British Columbia who make it our passion to proclaim Christ and make disciples of the nations. Since moving to Chilliwack in 2017, I have found the people of this church to be warm, caring and friendly. They love to study the Bible and learn from God's Word. They love to worship the Lord and evangelize the lost. They have a strong desire to see Christ glorified in His church, and to see His name lifted up in all the earth. And if there's anything we can do to serve you, please let us know. We pray that your time with us is a joy and a blessing. Sincerely, Jeremy Cagle, Teaching Pastor.

I just wanted to read that to you guys because I think that sums you guys up in a nutshell. The packet also contains a visitor card that asks for the person's contact information, and whether they would like a visit and some prayer. There's actually a line in there for prayer requests. And the way this works is that starting next week, our visitors if they're interested, will fill out one of those and drop it in the offering basket, and we'll follow up with them. I'll personally write a card to each visitor, thanking them for coming to be with us and we'll also visit and pray with anyone who requests that. If you would like extra copies of those, they're in the foyer right outside.

Also, you'll notice that we have some Grace Fellowship Chilliwack pens. Can everybody just say, "Ooo," "Ah." Okay, good. Listen, these things are special. You haven't arrived until you have your own pen. It has our church name and our website on it, and it has a little clippy thing for your shirt. And I can tell you guys aren't impressed because you don't know how hard this clippy thing was to make. But it has a clippie thing on it. There's extra copies of this in the foyer as well. In fact, I would encourage you to take some of these. Pass them out to friends and neighbours.

You know, when I first came to Grace Fellowship, someone asked me, “What's our goal as a church? What are we trying to do?” And I said, “We're trying to get the Gospel out to the community of Chilliwack.” Amen? I mean that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to make as many disciples of Christ as we can. So, when you get things like this, welcome packet, pens (we're going to be putting some pamphlets out in the future), that's what they're there for, they're there to pass out. So, don't be shy about that. If we run out, we'll get more. But take those and please send them along to others that you know.

That brings us to our sermon for today. Because this morning, we're going to make disciples this way through the Gospel of John. So, if you haven't turned there already, if you would, turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of John. And as you're doing that, if you're new to us, we're in a series today that we started a few weeks ago called the “That You May Believe” series, the “That You May Believe” series. It's kind of an unusual title, but it's taken from the end of the Gospel of John. You don't have to turn there, but I just want to read this to you.

John 20:31 says that, “These things have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.” That's why John wrote this gospel. That's what this is all about, so that you may believe and know and understand that Jesus is your Saviour. John says, “I believe that. I want you to believe that.” John says, “I know that, I understand that, and I want you to understand it and be saved.”

In the Berlin art gallery in Germany, there's a piece of artwork called *The Unfinished Painting* because the artist died while making it. He didn't finish it. He passed away before he completed the work. But in it, you see a group of soldiers gathered around a blank spot where the king is supposed to be. He got everything done but the king. They're ready, they're standing at attention, all their features are there; their clothes, their face, their weapons. And they're standing in front of nothing.

I think a lot of people are doing that today with their Christian lives. They're doing that with Jesus. They're standing in front of nothing. They're ready, all their features are there, they've got their Bible, the church, things like that, but there's kind of a blank space or an uncertainty when it comes to Jesus Christ. John says, “I don't want you to have that.” He says, “I want you to be very clear about who Christ is. I want you to believe the truth.”

Just to give an example of this so you can see what I'm talking about; one of the most popular Christian books in recent years was called *The Jesus Calling*. And it's all about an imaginary conversation between the author and Jesus. It's made up, it's not found in Scripture. There's some Scripture in there and then there's a lot of things that are not of that. But the book sold more than ten million copies. It's been translated into 26 different languages.

In 2013, it was I think the seventh most popular book in the world; secular and religious combined. And the author explains the reasons for writing the book this way. She said,

I've been writing in prayer journals for years but that was a one-way communication. I did all the talking. I knew that God communicated with me through the Bible, but I yearned for more than the Bible. Increasingly, I wanted to hear what God had to say to me personally. I decided to listen to Him with pen in hand writing down whatever I

believed He was saying.

I mention that because I would say that's an unfinished view of Jesus or an uncertain view of Him. It's like standing at attention in front of nothing or in front of a void. John says, "I don't want you to do that, the King is already spelled out. The King has already lived and risen. The King is in this book, you don't need to yearn for more."

We could mention other books, but it's not just the books that are doing this, you see this in universities as well. Just several months ago, a professor at a Catholic university in the States made the headlines by calling Jesus a drag queen. He said the Lord was a cross dresser, and he made several lewd references to that. And it so infuriated the students at the university, that they called for his resignation, and people in the community passed out petitions. I think they had 10,000 names signed to fire this guy. And the school defended him. They said they were okay with what he said, because they have an unfinished view of Jesus. They don't know what to think of Him. "Maybe He was those things," they said.

I think it goes without saying that this is in the schools, it's in the books and it's in the churches. This idea of uncertainty or confusion has made its way into the church of Jesus Christ. In fact, if you keep your eyes on the news, the Christian news, you see that every couple of weeks another church abandons the Biblical view of marriage and the right to life. Every couple of weeks another denomination folds on homosexuality and abortion, and it shocks us. But it shouldn't shock us because if you look at history, almost every case, those denominations abandoned the Biblical view of Jesus, maybe a century ago.

They deny His deity and resurrection, they deny the virgin birth and the Atonement. They deny all these things about the Biblical view of Christ, and now they're rejecting everything. One scholar called it the "slippery slope" or the "downgrade controversy". He said,

Once you give up certain doctrines like the deity of Christ, it's just a slippery slope from there. You keep going faster and faster and faster downhill, to the point that you don't even know when life begins anymore. You don't even know what a marriage is anymore. The church stands or falls with our view of Jesus Christ.

Now, I haven't said too much about this before, but our survival is entirely dependent on how we view the Saviour. That's why we're going through this series. In fact, the Bible calls Jesus our Foundation, it actually uses that word. Paul says in First Corinthians 3:11, "For no one can lay a foundation for the church other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." "Jesus is the one we stand upon," Paul says. He holds it all together. You take Him away and you fall. You move Him an inch, and the whole thing comes crashing down.

Listen, you can have pretty windows and pretty doors in your building but if the foundation is off, it's going to crumble. Same way in the church. We can have pretty music and pretty people and pretty pens, but if you forget Christ, the thing crashes. The Bible also calls Jesus the Cornerstone of the church. Ephesians 2:20-21 says, "He is the cornerstone of the church in which the whole building being fitted together is growing into a holy temple."

When I was pastoring before in Illinois, I pastored a church full of builders who knew what a cornerstone was. I was kind of ignorant about this. So, they taught me that the cornerstone was

the stone that sets the direction for everything in the building; it sets all the angles. So, the way it works is when you build a house, you lay a foundation, you pour the concrete in, and then you put a stone in the corner to line it all up. And if that stone is off, everything's off in the building. And if that stone is straight, everything's straight in the building.

Paul says, "Jesus is the cornerstone of the church. You get Him straight, everything is straight. You get Him crooked, the whole thing is crooked." He calls Jesus the Head of the Church because He stands on top of it. Colossians 1:18, "He is also the head of the body, the church." So, Jesus is beneath the church and He's on top of it. He is the foundation and He is the head. Other passages actually call Him the Builder of the church.

But the point is that it's all about Him. The church belongs to Jesus Christ. There cannot be an empty space where He is supposed to be. You have to have Him settled in your minds as a church. He's got to be fixed in here.

It's so sad that churches today are missing this. In fact, some of them (and you just see this throughout history) it's like they've decapitated themselves. They don't have a head anymore. They go whatever the trend is, off they go. There's some churches here in Chilliwack (it's my understanding) that are closing their doors because of this; the head is gone, the life is gone. We don't want to do that here at Grace. We want to have a clear view of Jesus Christ this morning.

Martin Lloyd Jones said, "The superficial views of the work of Christ produce superficial Christian lives." Or we could even say "Superficial views of the work of Christ produce superficial churches, shallow churches, empty churches." And we don't want that either. Let me say it this way, you can pass out pens from now until eternity, but if you get Jesus wrong, it's all for nothing, amen? I mean you can pass out welcome packets until your hands fall off. We want to have a clear view of the Saviour today.

That brings us to our passage this morning, because this morning we're going to study why Jesus is so essential to the church, why He's so important. And that is because He gives us a new birth. That's how He grows the church, that's how He builds it. He builds it with the new birth. So, if you want to see this, turn with me to the passage we just read, to John chapter 3. As you know, we're taking the Gospel of John chapter by chapter to get a big picture view of the Saviour. To see Him from way up.

If you remember last week in John 2, Jesus did His first miracle by turning water into wine. We talked about that last time. It's online in case you missed it. But today, He's going to talk about a second miracle. This is not actually the second miracle in the Gospel of John, that's later in chapter 4. But this is the second one that He talks about.

Just to give you some background for this, at the end of chapter 2, Jesus cleanses the temple. We didn't have time to talk about that too much. That's a very interesting event. People were buying and selling animals in there, they were making money (illegally, some of them) because they were fidgeting on the money changing. There were hundreds of them in there and the Lord Jesus chases them all out with a whip. One man, one whip, hundreds gone. It's a pretty staggering event. And you can imagine the backlash of this. And as a result, chapter 3 says the man comes to see Him about that. You can imagine how many nasty emails you would get if you did that.

This man, an interesting man, a very powerful man comes to talk to Jesus about what He just did. If you look in verse 1 of chapter 3, it says, “Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and he said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’” Let me let me walk you through these two verses for just a moment, because it's important to our story.

Verse 1 says, “Now there was a man of the Pharisees.” We've talked about these guys before on Sunday mornings. But the Pharisees were one of the most powerful parties in Israel at this time. Josephus says there were 4,000 of them. In a country of just a few million people, that's a lot of men. They were very popular. They controlled the synagogues which means they controlled the places of learning. They taught in the schools, many of them were rabbis and they had a great interest in what happened in the temple. You could say, it was one of the things they liked to be part of.

So, this man came to talk to Jesus about that. The name Pharisee means “separate one”. They believed they were getting into heaven by separating themselves from everybody else. So, that's part of his background.

Verse one also says this Pharisee was named Nicodemus. Which is important because starting in chapter 3, John goes on to give us four interviews with Jesus and a total stranger, and this is the only one where he gives their name. So, in chapter 4, Jesus is going to meet with the woman at the well. You'll see that next time. He'll also heal a nobleman's son. Chapter 5, He's going to heal the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda. But this is the only time he gives someone's name. And that could be because of what Nicodemus does. At the end of the Gospel, he's one of the ones who helps take Jesus off the cross.

But I think it's also because of what his name represented. The name Nicodemus in Greek means “victor of the people” or “champion of the people”. That could have been a nickname that he got, but it was probably the name his parents gave him. They expected him to be a great man; a champion or a victor. I've had some of our German brothers and sisters in the church tell me that my last name Cagle means “bowling pin” in German. Because that's what my parents wanted me to be. They wanted me to be bowled over in life (just kidding). I thought it meant “son of kings” and they took me down a notch. It means “bowling pin”.

This guy was different. I mean his name meant something special; champion, victor, the one who is going to succeed. Imagine growing up with that name, right? The verse also says that he was a ruler of the Jews. It says, “Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.” That was probably a reference to the Sanhedrin, which was the group of 70 people who governed things in Israel. That was the group that if you remember put Jesus on the cross. Verse 10 calls him Israel's teacher or instructor. He was their Rabbi.

So, this is quite a guy in John chapter 3. He's an impressive man. Later in chapter 4, Jesus is going to talk with the woman at the well; a Samaritan woman, a Samaritan adulteress. Which is basically the lowest person in society at the time. Here, He's talking with the highest person in society. It's one of reasons we're taking John chapter by chapter, because I want you to see this. This is the cream of the crop in chapter 3. Next week, you're going to see the bottom of the

barrel. And you're going to see how Jesus evangelizes both people.

Here's what He tells Nicodemus. If you think about it, you have a guy like this come to you, what would you tell him? I mean he already knows everything, right? He's already studied it all. So, what would you say? Jesus talks to this man about the new birth. He says, "You must be born again." He says, "With all your credentials and achievements, with all your great name and success - you're the ruler, you're the teacher, you're the champion, you're a Pharisee. With all that stuff, it doesn't matter, you need to be born again."

J.C. Ryle says, "You know Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus is one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. Because a man may be ignorant of many things in religion and yet be saved, but to be ignorant of this is to be headed down the way to destruction." That's what Jesus says here. He says, "Nicodemus, you can't be ignorant to this. You have to have this thing settled in your mind." I mean this guy was the equivalent of like a congressman and a professor all in one. He says, "You can have all that and go straight to hell," Jesus said.

My friends, I want to say the same thing to you this morning. You could have all your theology studied, you can have the Bible memorized backwards and forwards, you can have been at church from the time you were nine months in the womb, but it doesn't matter, at the end of the day you must be born again. The first birth isn't enough, the first one can't save you, you need another one.

You know, George Whitfield was a famous preacher in the 1700s who used to talk about this a lot. And a woman came to him and she said, "Pastor Whitfield, why do you keep saying that we must be born again? You say that over and over and over again. Why do you keep saying that?" To which he said, "Because dear woman, you must be born again." You can't get into heaven without this. You can't be saved without this. And no one can. I mean if this guy can't be saved without this, then you and I know don't have a chance.

Jesus goes on to explain this in three lessons I want us to talk about this morning. So, in John chapter 3, if you're taking notes, I want to look at three lessons on the new birth that Jesus gives to Nicodemus. Three lessons on the new birth.

Again, if you think about this whole scenario, it's very interesting because Jesus teaches the teacher here. This guy comes to him at night, he says, "Look, you're doing some crazy stuff." Kind of saying in a polite way, "What's going on?" And Jesus goes on to take the professor to school, and He does it with three lessons.

So, the first one is this, He says, "You cannot see the kingdom of God unless you're born again." That's the first lesson He gives this amazing man. "You cannot see the kingdom of God unless you are born again."

Nicodemus was a man who wanted to see the kingdom of God; everybody did at that time in Israel. In fact, it said that there's something like ten false messiahs that came in Israel within about an a hundred-year period of Jesus' life, because all of them wanted to bring in the kingdom. They were sick of Rome, they were sick of...if you look at Israel's history, they were like a ping pong ball politically being passed back and forth from country to country. They wanted that to stop.

So, Jesus goes right to the heart and He talks about what Nicodemus would have wanted to know. And if you look in verse one, it says this, it says,

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 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 can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” 3 And Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Now, just a few thoughts on this, if you noticed, Nicodemus doesn't ask a question here. He doesn't bring up the kingdom, but Jesus knowing his thoughts, goes right to the heart of it and says, “Unless you're born again, you can't see it.” And Jesus says, “I know what you're thinking. I know why you're here, so let's just get straight to the point. You must be born again.”

The word “again” in Greek is interesting, it's helpful. It means “again”, a second time. But it also means “from above”. It has both meanings. So, Jesus says, “You can't see heaven unless you are born again from heaven. You can't see the kingdom unless you're born into it.” Many of you have come to Canada like I have from another country, and you've got to go through the whole passport process. But if you're born here, you're a Canadian, right? Jesus says the same way here: If you're born into heaven, you go to heaven. The kingdom of God essentially is another term for heaven.

We could say a lot about that because it's a rich subject in the Bible. But the meaning here essentially is salvation. You can't be saved unless God has rebirthed you, unless God has given you a brand-new start. Which by the way, would have shocked a man like Nicodemus. This is a startling thing to say in the first century. Because to a Jew, the way to get into heaven was your first birth not your second. To a Pharisee especially, the way you're saved is by your first beginning, not the second one. You're saved by your race, that's what they thought, that's what they believed.

So, you're born Jewish, you stay Jewish your whole life and you die Jewish. That's how you get into heaven. One rabbi said, “Abraham sits at the gates of heaven and he doesn't let anyone in but a Jew.” Gentiles don't get in, Samaritans (as we'll see next week) don't get in, only the Jews. In fact, the Jews even had a process for taking a Gentile or a Samaritan and making them Jewish. It's called making a proselyte, changing religions. But they had a process for doing this, and they would refer to it as being “born again”. They actually used that term. One Jewish writer said, “The Proselyte or Gentile who is saved is like a newborn child who takes upon himself the yoke of heaven.”

And to do this, they would do several things. They would circumcise the person, they would baptize him. They actually would actually do baptism for someone becoming Jewish at the time. You remember John the Baptist was baptizing in the wilderness. You know, what was shocking about that was not that he was baptizing, what was shocking is that he was baptizing Jews. You don't baptize Jews, you baptize Gentiles, not Jews.

Jesus essentially says, “Jews must be born again too.” If you notice verse 3, it doesn't say, “Truly, truly I say to you unless a Gentile is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Jesus says, “Unless one or anyone or everyone is born again. Even you Nicodemus, even a Pharisee.”

And let me just say that if Jesus could have said this to a man like this, He would have said it to you and me, amen? I'll take your silence as a yes. If Jesus could say it to a guy like this, He could say it to anybody. I mean if you think about it, you weren't born Jewish. I don't think anybody here was. We weren't born into God's chosen race. You're not a Pharisee, I'm not a Pharisee. We're not a ruler of the people, we're not a champion, we're not a victor. Our parents didn't destine us for greatness. And if Jesus would say this to him, He would have said it to us.

Just to get your mind around this, I did a study of the different ways the Bible refers to the new birth, and I think this might help you to kind of get a full picture of what this means. And here's some different terms the Bible uses for being born again.

It uses the term conversion. Jesus says in Matthew 18, He says, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Conversion is another way of saying “change”. Jesus says, “Unless you change and become like little children in your faith, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” We talk a lot about converting things today. We talk about converting feet to inches, miles to kilometers. In electricity, we talk about converting a current which means we change its direction. It was going this way, we convert it, now it goes that way. Jesus says, “You must do that to be saved. You've got to turn around.”

You also see the word “transformation” in the Bible. It's another word the Bible uses for this. Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The idea there is to change as well. You know, I hear that word and when I was a child, we used to play with transformers. Anybody else did that here? But they were these little toys that would go from being a car into a robot or a plane into a tank. It transforms you into something different. “Salvation does that,” Jesus says. It revolutionizes your life.

You see the word “resurrection” in the Bible, and not just the word resurrection of the body but the resurrection of the soul. You see the term “adopt” which means you get a new family. My wife and I were privileged to adopt children, and we brought them into a new family. You see immigration, we become citizens of heaven. Immigration means you get a new country, you get new loyalties. You see the idea of a new heart and a new creation, new life, new beginning, and we could go on and on. But you get the idea, it's new, new, new, new, change, change, change. Jesus Christ changes you, He makes you new.

So, let me ask you, has He done that for you today? Has He changed your life? Have you become different by the power of God? Have you been born again; born from above, born from heaven? Or are you still the same? They say that if nothing changes, nothing happens. If you're still the same, you haven't met Jesus. If you told me this morning you got hit by a truck, I would ask you how you're different, right? And if you said you've been hit by Jesus, I would ask you the same thing. “What did it do to you? How are you different? How are you not the same?”

We could say it this way, you guys have heard of the term “born again Christian”. That term sound familiar? That was a big thing in the States several decades ago. Can I tell you there's no

such thing as a non-born-again Christian? If you're born again, you're Christian. If you're not, you're not.

Roland Hill was an evangelist in the 18th century who loved to tell the story of the cat and the pig. And he said, "The cat is a very clean creature. He washes himself with his tongue, he stays away from dirt, all that sort of thing." He said, "But the pig is different. The pig wallows in the mud, plays in filth, never stays clean." And he said, "You can teach a pig to act like a cat if you want to. You can teach him to take a bath and clean himself off if you like, but it won't work. He'll just get dirty again because he's a pig, it's his nature." "Your nature has to change to go to heaven," Jesus says. "Your soul has to change."

Let me say it this way because this is important, and it's going to get right into our or next verse. But you're never too old for this. It's a very clear application here. Nicodemus is an old man. (We're going to talk about that here in just a moment). But Jesus says, "You're never too old to be born again. You're never too feeble, never too weak. You can be saved at any age." The Puritans used to tell the story of a man who was converted at 70 years of age by a sermon he heard as a little boy.

He was out in the field working, he was plowing, going about his business when he heard a sermon he had heard 60 years ago. And he was saved on the spot and born again. Friends, that can happen to you today. You're never too old for this.

That leads right into the next point we're going to talk about. The first one is that you cannot see the kingdom of God unless you're born again. The word "see" means you can't find it, you can't locate it, you can't know where it is, unless you're born again. The second one is this (and I'll explain this long phrase): You cannot see the kingdom of God unless you're born of water and the spirit. That's the next thing He says here. You cannot see the kingdom of God unless you're born of water and the spirit. Spirit refers to Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity. You can't go to heaven without Him.

Verse 4, goes on with the story this way. It says, "Nicodemus said to Him, '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? And Jesus answered and said, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'" As this conversation goes on, Jesus and Nicodemus have a little back and forth here, they have a little Q&A. And even though Nicodemus is shocked by what Jesus said, he's tracking with Him, he gets the idea.

I've heard some people say that Nicodemus thought this was all physical. But I mean this guy was the teacher of Israel, he was tracking. But what he didn't understand was how is this possible. He doesn't understand how can a man be born when he's old. Most members of the Sanhedrin were older. I've heard different numbers on that, but some say you had to be like 50 or 60 years old, which was a pretty advanced age at that time. And so Nicodemus says, "How can a man be born when he's old?" He says, "I can see how a young man can do this, I could see how a young man can start all over again - that makes sense to me," he says. He says, "But how can an old man do it?"

He also asked if you noticed, the second question there, is kind of more of a statement than a

question. But he says, “He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?” It’s kind of a sarcastic statement. But the idea here is he can't earn this, can he? He can't do a work, can he, crawling back into the womb? You know, to a Jew in the first century, you got into heaven by your birth but you had to keep it. You had to earn it.

It's kind of the same idea in the Roman Catholic Church. They teach that you are saved by grace and you maintain it with works. And Nicodemus thought that way. As a matter of fact, he’s a Pharisee, that means he had extra works added to the Old Testament. And he’s thinking in those terms here and he says, “What do I have to do to rebirth myself?” Which if you think about, it's a pretty silly question, right? I mean how many of you earned your first birth? Nobody's hand’s up. You know, when you were born, the doctor didn't shake your little bitty hand and say, “Way to go, that was really hard for you.” They do that to your mom. Which makes Nicodemus’ question very silly, but again, he’s trying to process this.

Jesus goes on to explain it this way in verse 5. He says, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” That's kind of a controversial verse because some say it means you have to be baptized to be saved. But that's the opposite of what Jesus is saying here. Because He’s saying this is not a work. In fact, later on in this passage, He’s going to drop the word “water” and talk exclusively about the Spirit, because this is all about the Spirit’s work in you.

There's different views on what this verse 5 means. One helpful view I think is that “water” refers to your first birth and the “spirit” refers to your second birth. Water plays a part in the birth process. Some think both terms might refer to the Spirit. Just as water washes you on the outside, the Spirit washes you on the inside. There's a couple of different views on that. But if you're uncertain about it, verse 6 goes on to explain in more detail. He says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” In other words, that which is human flesh is human flesh, and that which is born supernaturally is supernatural.

So, to answer the question, “How do I receive this? What do I do?”, Jesus says, “You don't do anything, God does it all.” To answer to Nicodemus’ question, “How do I earn it? What works do I have to do to do? Do I have to crawl back into the womb?” Jesus says, “You don't earn it, God earns it, and He gives it to you as a gift through faith.” In fact, the rest of the passage says in verse 7, he says, “Do not be amazed that I said 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 born of the Spirit.”

First, Jesus talks about water, now He talks about wind. Some people think the wind might have been blowing through as He said this. Verse 1 says they were talking at night, and the nights in Israel are very windy, especially if you're out in the country side. If this was a secret conversation, it probably took place in the countryside; wind is blowing. And Jesus says, “The wind blows wherever it wishes; so is everyone born of the Spirit.”

The word “wind” there is actually *pneuma* in Greek from which we get the word “Spirit”. So, it's kind of a play on words. Jesus says, “The Spirit blows wherever He wishes. He saves whom He chooses.” And you guys can attest to this in your life. I mean when you see someone interested in the things of God, what do you say? You say the Spirit is moving, right? We all say that.

When you see someone repenting of their sins and getting right with God, you say, “The Spirit is at work.” You don't say, “Finally, they've got their act together.” You know, “Finally, they're pulling themselves up by their bootstraps.” You say, “The Spirit of God is doing it.” That's the idea here.

Let me tell you what it looks like when the Spirit does this, it looks like a miracle. You may not be able to tell all the evidences of it right away, but it looks supernatural. It doesn't look like something a man can do. That's why Jesus refers to this as a birth and the wind because those things seem miraculous to us, right? You can't see the wind. You can't see what's going on in a birth, until it happens. That's the idea here.

There's a famous pastor who tells a story the time he ran into a drunk who came up to him and said (he was drunk at the time), “Preacher, I'm one of your converts. I'm one of your disciples.” To which the preacher said, “You must be one of mine because if you were one of Christ, you wouldn't act that way.” He said that's not a miracle. See that's not what this is talking about. This is talking about something that man can't do, man can't explain. Something by the power of God.

Another way to say that is you can't predict this in someone's life. You can't plan it out and put it on a calendar. I've talked to some of our moms and they've told me it's hard to put a birth on a calendar, right? A new birth is like that times infinity.

I just mentioned to you some of the plans we have for ministry here at Grace Fellowship Church; plans for reaching visitors, plans for serving our guests. But if you're going to ask me who's going to be born again, I don't know. If you're going to ask me how people are going to respond, I don't know. And there can be a temptation when you do ministry like that to say, “If I do this, God will do that.” Right? Have you guys had of ... it's called a quid pro quo - I do these things, I get these things back. It doesn't always work that way because this is the prerogative of God. Now, God does bless us for our efforts, but how He blesses is up to Him. Like I said, this is His church, it's His body.

I was talking with someone the other day about plans we have for the church and I said, “We're going to do this, and we're going to do that. We're planning on this and we're planning on that, but how big we're going to get? I don't know, it's not up to me. Or how many people are going to join? those things are in God's hands. He causes a new birth, He causes the wind where to blow. But we also know that God is building His church, which gives us confidence to minister. Which is another application of this; God is bringing new life.

That leads to a third lesson we learn about the new birth that balances this out. Let me say it like this, you can't see the kingdom of God unless you're born again and you can't see it unless you're born of water and the Spirit. So, does that mean we don't do anything? It's an important question, right? Does this mean that man just sits by and waits for the wind to blow? Does it mean we fold our hands and wait for a new birth? And Jesus goes on to say it doesn't, because the third lesson He gives us about the new birth is this: You can't see the kingdom unless you believe. You can't see the kingdom of God unless you believe.

It's an interesting thing in Scripture but far as I know, just about every time the Scriptures tell us about the sovereignty of God, election, predestination, those types of things (which is all kind of

tied into this), it also talks about our need to believe. I mean after telling us this is all the work of the Spirit, Jesus says six different times in this passage that you have to believe in order to be saved. And you have to believe in Him to be born again. In a way, that's not explained. In a way, that's mysterious to us. Jesus says, "God does it all, God is sovereign, God is in control, God gets the glory and we have to believe." That's how salvation works.

We can't get into all of this for the sake of time (we're going to have to skip through some things), but Nicodemus says this in verse 9. Nicodemus says to Him the question we would all be wondering, "How can these things be? How does this work Jesus? What are you talking about?" And Jesus says this in verse 10, He answers and says to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" In other words, "I'm using these earthly analogies so you'll understand heavenly things." He says,

No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

Those last couple of verses are a reference to a story from the Old Testament Nicodemus would have been familiar with. But Numbers 21 tells us that when the Jews were in the wilderness, they sinned against the Lord. They were complaining, they were griping because it was hot. And as a result, the Lord sent snakes to poison them essentially. They were poisonous snakes, fiery serpents. And he had Moses also construct a pole with the figure of a snake on it, so that whoever looks at it would be saved.

I think that pole (maybe some of our doctors could correct me), but I think that pole is used in the medical community to represent the medical profession, right? At least it is in the States anyway. You guys have seen the little pins some people wear? It's the idea there. And Jesus refers to this, and He says, "The Son of God will be lifted up; so that whoever believes in Him will be saved." You see the word "believe" there. Jesus will be put on a cross, so that whoever trusting in Him will be rescued from death.

He says it in another way in verse 16, this is probably the most popular verse in the Bible, He says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." He says it in verse 18...(And we're skipping over some things here for the sake of time), but verse 18, "He who believes in Him is not judged." And then he closes this way in verse 36, the chapter or John the Baptist closes this way, he says, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, for the wrath of God abides on him."

But the point is that this is how you enter the kingdom of God. This is how you are saved; you believe in Jesus Christ. You know, if you're reading this whole chapter here and you're wondering like Nicodemus did, "How can these things be?" Or you're wondering, "How do I know I'm saved? I mean how do I know I'm going into the kingdom of God?" Jesus says the answer is simple, "You believe." That's how you know. You believe in Jesus.

If you read this chapter and you wonder, “How do I know the Spirit is moving in me?” or “How do I know it's blowing my way?” You believe. You believe He's the One who was lifted up, you believe He was the One that God gave, you believe He gives us eternal life, and you're saved.

Friends, there's a mystery to this, but everything is not a mystery. It's unknown, but there are things we do know. And we know that God saves those who believe. So, will you believe in Him today? Will you trust in Him?

You know, I started this sermon with a painting story, let me just close with one. It was said that when Leonardo da Vinci painted the Last Supper, he had just gotten into a fight with a friend of his. And as a result of the fight, he painted His friend's face on the face of Judas. You can imagine how nasty that was, right? And he said, “I thought I really got back at him. I thought that was a good idea until I realized I could not look at that painting and see Jesus' face anymore, I just saw my friend's face. My friend that I had gotten a fight with.” So, he said, “I had to go back and erase my friend's face and put another one on there because nothing can take away from the face of Jesus.”

That's what John is saying in this chapter. We don't want anything to take away from the face of Jesus this morning. We don't want anything to take our attention away from Him. Not only do we want to have a finished view of Christ, but we want to have a focused one, an all-consuming one, because He is our salvation. He is our new birth. Will you trust in Him today?

As one author said,

If you trust in Him, you will receive the forgiveness of sins, a new nature, a new disposition and a new heart that loves righteousness. You will die to the old life and rise again to a new life. If you believe in Christ, you'll be delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son, and you will come to the truth that transcends. The truth you will never find anywhere but in the Bible. And if you believe in Him, all truth, all wisdom, all knowledge, all understanding, all peace, all joy, all value, all fulfillment, all satisfaction, all purpose, all deliverance, all strength, all comfort, and all hope will be yours. But only if you come to Christ. To have Him is to have everything. Not to have Him is to have nothing.

Will you believe in Him today? Let's close in a word of prayer, and then we'll take the Lord's Supper together.

Father, we can't think of any passage that's more fitting to a time of the Lord's Supper than the one we've read this morning. And I grieve in some sense because there's much more that could be said about this. This is so rich, Lord. But we pray You would apply what we've learned into our hearts. That we would trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and believe in Him. And not only that Lord, we would trust in Your sovereignty to save sinners.

Lord, we want to see sinners saved in our church; that's why we're here. But we know that only Your Spirit can do it, and we pray that He would work. As we take Your supper this morning, Lord, would You be glorified and would You be honoured in that, and would Christ be exalted in our time together. We pray in His name, amen.