**The Spirit and the New Birth**

**The Word**

Read together John 3:1-10

**The Big Idea**

Apart from the Spirit of God, human beings are powerless to create spiritual life within themselves, but the Spirit is pleased to blow when and where he wishes to create new life.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. On Sunday we talked about the idea of human beings ever since Adam being born in a state of spiritual death. How would you explain the idea of spiritual death to a person who doesn’t identify as a Christian? Get creative :)

2. How did Sunday’s message add to your perspective on the familiar idea of being born again?

3. Consider the sailboat analogy at the end of Sunday’s message. What do you think about that, and how does that relate to how you’re currently approaching your spiritual life with God?

**Digging Deeper: Sermon Outline**

I. Jesus’ words are simple, and yet they are so radical that even one of Israel’s elders and teachers is left utterly bewildered.

II. The necessity of the new birth

A. You have to be born again/of the Spirit (v. 3, 5, 7)

1. Human beings are spiritually dead apart from the work of the Spirit (See Genesis 2:16-17 and Ephesians 2:1-3)

2. Humans have natural life and can be alive to many things (love, literature, politics, family, sports, even religion)

3. But they are not alive to God as he truly is, and they are not alive to his grace, and to being able to live lives that genuinely please him

B. Flesh gives birth to flesh, the Spirit gives birth to spirit (v. 6)

1. No amount of human effort, ingenuity, or striving can change this situation.

2. Nicodemus had lived a full life trying to follow the law in the power of the flesh

3. Only the Spirit can produce genuine spiritual life in us

C. The wind blows wherever it pleases . . . so it is with the Spirit (v. 8)

1. The wind is utterly free and totally out of our control

2. Likewise, God’s Spirit is totally free to blow where and when he wants

D. All of this amounts to the reality that we are in a completely desperate, helpless, and powerless spiritual situation apart from the Spirit of God

III. The wonder of the new birth

A. You must be born of water and Spirit (v. 5)

B. This is a reference to Ezekiel 36:24-27

1. Water: God would sprinkle his people clean and forgive them of all their sin

2. Spirit: God would remove their hearts of stone and give them hearts of flesh by putting his Spirit within them

C. See also Titus 3:3-7: Water and Spirit

D. The new birth is all about water (God washing us with his forgiveness/grace) and Spirit (God giving us new hearts moved by his Spirit that are receptive to him)

IV. There is no formula to the new birth in terms of how we experience it

A. For some, it is dramatic and takes place at a distinct moment in time

B. For others, it is more subtle and takes place over a season of time

V. How do we respond?

A. Gratitude

1. The Spirit is the one who brought us to God

2. We are often grateful for the person who introduced us to our spouse, favorite book, band, etc.

3. Likewise, we can be grateful to the Spirit for his role in our conversion in bringing us to God

B. Dependence

1. The dynamics present in the new birth are still present in our lives today

a. Flesh still gives birth to flesh, and the Spirit still gives birth to spirit

b. The Spirit still blows wherever he wills

2. How can we live intentionally dependent lives?

a. The sailboat metaphor: A sailor needs to draw the sails and also needs the wind to blow

b. Likewise, we need to keep on drawing the sails (reading Scripture, praying, engaging in deep Christian community, etc.), but we need to do all of that in total dependence on the Spirit.

c. The tendency is either to not draw the sails (not live intentional lives of spiritual practices and postures because of our busyness and distraction) or do to those things and seek to control them and manage them (not wait for the Spirit/wind in the midst of them)

d. So the call is to continue to engage in intentional disciplines, practices, rhythms but every time we do them, to pause and acknowledge the need for the Spirit to blow and be completely open to however he wants to blow.

e. “We are always dependent on a power outside ourselves, we need the wind. Yet at the same time, we are not passive observers. We can’t control the wind, but we can catch it. And in order to catch the wind, you have to draw the sail. And in order to draw the sail, certain God-given, time-honored skills need to be learned and put into practice.”

–Rankin Wilbourne