**John 3:1-16**

Introduction

I. Today we look at the Spirit’s first and most fundamental role in our lives

= giving us new birth (“regeneration”)

II. The word for “Spirit” is the same word for “breath” and “wind” in the Bible

In Gen 2:7 God made Adam out of dust, and then breathed his breath of life

He still does that today in a spiritual sense so that people come alive spiritually

The Passage

I. The dynamic between Jesus and Nicodemus

A. Nicodemus is a great religious and theological leader, and yet even he is confused and shocked by what Jesus considers to be basic and fundamental aspects of faith

 B. What Jesus says is so radical and we need to appreciate that in a fresh way

II. The basic idea of being born again (v. 3-5)

A. Being born again (or born from above) = being born of water and the Spirit

B. Ezekiel 36:25-27 combines the image of water and Spirit

 1. Water = an inner spiritual cleansing that God will bring about in his people

 2. God will take hearts of stone and make them hearts of flesh

 3. God will put his Spirit in his people so that they are faithful to him

4. Ezekiel 37:1-14 is a powerful image of dry bones coming to life through the Spirit/breath of God

C. Jesus is saying that kind of radical miraculous new spiritual birth must take place for a person to come to genuine faith in him and, therefore, receive salvation

III. This is a radical understanding of how desperate/hopeless our condition is without Spirit

A. You can tell how radical a problem is by how radical the solution is that fixes it (e.g. if the dr. prescribes advil you have one problem; if surgery you have another problem). Jesus’ radical solution implies a radical problem

B. Without the Spirit we are spiritually dead

1. Like those dry bones or those stone hearts

 2. Eph 2:1: as for you, you were dead in your sins and transgressions

= unresponsive to the most important realities of all (our need for God and embracing who Christ is)

C. Without the Spirit we can’t fix our dead problem (v. 6)

 Flesh (= fallen human nature) will never on its own give birth to spirit

D. We don’t have control over the Spirit (v. 8)

Just as the wind is utterly free from our control, so also the Spirit can work wherever and however he pleases

E. So Jesus is speaking to a very religious and respected man and confronting him with the reality that a miracle needs to take place in his life that only the Spirit can perform

IV. This is a radical understanding of the Spirit’s miraculous work of regeneration in our lives A. He takes spiritually dead people and makes them alive!

 B. If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation! (2 Cor 5)

C. The actual content and experience of new birth

v. 14-16:

1. Numbers 21: Just as the Israelites needed to recognize their desperate situation and look trustingly to the bronze serpent to heal them, so also we need to recognize our desperate situation and look trustingly to Christ and the cross for salvation

2. So our experience of new birth = a recognition of our sin and need for God, and our recognition of God’s loving solution of sending his son to die for us, and repenting from trusting ourselves and living for ourselves and trusting Christ and living for him

 D. Our experience and the Spirit’s work

1. v. 14-16 portrays our experience and v. 3-8 portrays the underlying spiritual reality

2. We may not have been aware that the Spirit was at work during our conversion, but he was working all along

E. Each of us has a unique experience of new birth

For example: conviction of sin, experience of forgiveness, sense of freedom, sense of God’s love, sense of coming to know the truth, sense of surrender to God, experience of a relationship with God, etc.

Conclusion

I. How can you live within the reality of your new birth this week?

II. How did the Spirit work in your life when you first became a Christian? How can you walk in that again?

**Discussion Questions**

1. John 3 is obviously a famous and very familiar passage. How did Sunday’s sermon give you a new insight or a new appreciation of a familiar passage?

2. Explain in your own words what Jesus means when he says “flesh gives birth to flesh” (v. 6) and explain how specifically his analogy of the wind (v. 8) applies to the Spirit within the context.

3. What was the defining reality of your own conversion experience (for example, was it a conviction of sin, a sense of freedom, forgiveness, joy, surrender, truth, relationship with God, etc.)?

4. Read Revelation 2:2-5. When you consider your first love with Christ and consider “doing the things you did at first” what does that inspire you to do?