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## LIFE IN HIS NAME

### THE NEW BIRTH

John 3:1-15

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

This morning’s teaching is a teaching of great importance; one so important that bible teacher Sinclair Ferguson calls it the most critical doctrine of all. He goes on to say, “To have clear views here is to pave the way for all other doctrines of the Christian life. To mistake the way here, conversely, will mean that the whole focus of our understanding is seriously at fault.” The doctrine he speaks about is the doctrine of regeneration: God giving life by his Spirit.

Jesus here speaks of it when he talks about being born again, when he tells Nicodemus, “Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.” It’s an important foundational truth. If we

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understand it properly and in balance, it will help us in understanding all other spiritual truth. If we are off on this one critical doctrine, we will be off on everything else.

If you have been here for any length of time, you know that William Wilberforce is one of my historical heroes. He came to faith in Jesus Christ. He was born again when he was in his early twenties. He was a member of British Parliament at the young age of 21, and he was really just living for himself. He was a member of five prestigious social clubs in London. They went around drinking and playing cards and singing. It was part of what he would do at these various social gatherings. According to his own words, he was interested in nothing but his own renown, enjoying the pleasures of this life and making a name for himself.

He underwent at that time in his life something that he called “the great change.” Because of that great change, everything that he did that followed was dramatically transformed. He stayed in Parliament, and for the rest of his life he gave himself to the abolition of the slave trade in Britain. It was a quest that took in total 46 years. His entire adult life was given to ending slavery in Britain. He said that he had two great causes in life: abolition of slavery, and the reformation of the morals in his nation. He believed that his country was off track.

His success came in two parts. The first took 20 years. He submitted a bill to end the slave trade 11 times, not to end slavery itself yet, but to prevent slaves from being traded. In 1807, on the 12<sup>th</sup> time, after 20 years, it passed. He would then labor for 26 more years to see slavery itself end in Britain. Three days before his death, the bill passed. It took two or three days for the papers to be prepared. The bill was signed on the day of his death.

He attributed that life course to “the great change” that Jesus Christ brought about in his life, and that change took place through a remarkable series of events. During a break from Parliament, he went on what we would call an extended vacation. He went on a tour of Europe. He went to the continent. His mother and sister and some others were traveling and he wanted a companion to travel with him. In what was really happenstance, he invited a man named Isaac Milner, who was nine years his senior. Isaac Milner had tutored him when he was younger. He had no idea that Milner was sympathetic to the truths of the gospel, to spiritual, scriptural truth. And so, they went.

Part of this was comical, because Eric Metaxas, in his biography of Wilberforce, describes Milner as an extremely large man. In fact, without exception, everyone who ever met Milner said he was the largest man they had ever seen. He was a giant. And Wilberforce was barely five feet tall. Metaxas

said they got in his carriage, his horse and buggy, and it probably rode listing to one side. Off they went, for weeks, months, touring Europe. Milner was not only large physically, he was large intellectually. He was a genius, really a genius, matched by virtually no one. He is described as always being the smartest person in the room.

Wilberforce found his conversation witty and engaging. In many ways, Milner was in his own right struggling with the practice of what he believed, but he took a serious approach to spiritual truth. They went on this tour, but Wilberforce was called back to Parliament. So he came back to Parliament, then the two of them went out for a second trip. During the course of these two trips, they were in Nice, France, staying with some relatives of Wilberforce, where Wilberforce saw this book by Philip Doddridge called *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. He said to Milner, "Are you familiar with this book?" Milner said something to the effect of, "It's the best book I have ever read." So they took it. They didn't steal it, but they took the book.

So you have this picture of them, day after day, riding through Europe reading Doddridge together, about the topic of how true religion rises and progresses in our souls. Eighteen months later, Wilberforce emerges from this experience as a Christian, as a Christian in a day where the change was so dramatic in his life, he was sure that he would have to quit Parliament. His intention was to quit Parliament. The main reason he didn't was that he went to pay John Newton a visit.

Now, John Newton was famous. He wrote "Amazing Grace." Newton himself was a slave trader -- he was the captain of a slave ship for a number of years. God wonderfully, over a period of time, saved him, and he became a pastor. In his late thirties he became an evangelical pastor. Interestingly enough, Wilberforce had known Newton as a child, shown some interest in spiritual things, and then completely departed from his interest in spiritual things.

Now, after many years, he wants to come back and see Newton, but he understands that true Christians, what we would call evangelical Christians, are seen as just fanatics in his day. He doesn't want anyone to know that he is going to go see Newton, so he takes a letter to Newton, gives it at the door, and says, "Can I meet you in 30 minutes? If not, please tell me when you can meet me. Promise me you will not tell a single person that I am coming to see you." Then just to emphasize it, he puts in a p.s.: "I am well known. I am a Member of Parliament. People recognize my face. Promise me that no one will know." He goes to see Newton, and in that exchange Newton tells him, "Don't step down. God is going to use you in this service."

“The great change” -- dramatic change where at first Wilberforce begins to comprehend intellectually the basic truths of the gospel. But he would have said himself as he looked back that there was a moment where he understood intellectually, he understood mentally, but the heart change had not yet taken place. Then the great change came and he gave his life then for entirely different purposes.

This critical doctrine is taught to us here in John Chapter 3 by the Lord Jesus himself. We will look at it in three parts:

1. The Necessity of the New Birth.
  2. The Nature of the New Birth.
  3. The News of the New Birth.
1. The Necessity of the New Birth, verses 1 through 3. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. He was a powerful and successful man. He was a ruling leader in Israel. He would have been prominent, well known, prosperous, and on top of that, you would have probably liked Nicodemus. We can tell this much just by the way he approached Jesus. He came respectfully. He called him, “Rabbi.” No doubt, Jesus would have been a younger man physically, naturally than Nicodemus. There is a respect that he shows to Jesus, but not only that, unlike most of the religious leaders in Nicodemus’ day, Nicodemus understood that there was something authentic of God in Jesus. He said, “Listen, we have looked at your life and we see the miracles that you are doing. We know that no man can do what you are doing unless God is with him.” There is a certain humility that characterized his life. And yet, he came at night. He came in secret. He came, really, not wanting to be discovered. He came a lot like Wilberforce went to Newton.

It’s interesting if you contrast John Chapter 3 with John Chapter 4 -- Jesus’ approach to dealing with two individuals is vastly different. In John Chapter 4 Jesus encounters a woman who is caught in a pattern of bad relationships. She has been married five times and she is now living with a man who is not her husband. She is caught in a cycle of immorality and broken relationship, and Jesus’ approach with her is much more subtle, we would say “gentle” in many respects.

But with Nicodemus, who probably wants a more subtle approach, wanting to come without being exposed, Jesus takes a completely different approach. He confronts him from the very first word. He tells Nicodemus in verse 3: “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” There is no affirmation, though we would say there are probably a number of things that are commendable about the way that Nicodemus approaches Jesus, that he sees him as authentic, he comes in humility. Jesus in essence says to him, “I don’t care who you are, where you were born, what you have accomplished, what your tradition is -- You cannot see the kingdom of God unless you are born again.” He adds weight to this by prefacing it with this solemn formula: “Truly, truly, I say to you,” communicating that this is non-negotiable, communicating with great emphasis as the old King James said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Nicodemus, you must be born again.”

Think of Galatians 6:15. The Apostle Paul wrote, “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.” Religious tradition, religious ceremony, you are Jewish, you are Gentile, you may take pride in the fact that you are circumcised, you may take pride in the fact that you are uncircumcised, pointing obviously to what that represents in terms of religion and ceremony, the Apostle Paul rightly tells us, “That’s not even the question. It’s not the right question.” If you argue and say, “Hey, hey, hey, no, no, no - you don’t have to be circumcised -- you don’t have to become Jewish -- you don’t have to go through all this religious ceremony,” Paul is saying, “You are not even asking the right question. The question is: “Have you been born again?” Point #1: The Necessity of the New Birth.

2. The Nature of the New Birth, verses 4 through 8. Nicodemus’ response to Jesus is a very frank and literal question. “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Now, Nicodemus is not slow. He understands. He asks the question this way because he knows that that’s impossible. It’s his way of pushing the conversation forward and saying to Jesus, “What in the world are you talking about? How can someone be born a second time?”

In these verses, Jesus launches in to a brief explanation regarding the nature of what it means to be born again. The first thing that we observe is that it means to be born of the

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Spirit, to be born of the Holy Spirit. This is not a natural birth. It is not a birth of the flesh. It is not human, so to speak. It is a birth of the Spirit of God. “That which is born of the flesh (verse 6) is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

The second birth is a spiritual birth. This means it is the work of God. It is not something that we do, listen very carefully, but it is done to us. So the emphasis in verses 7 and 8: “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

The word in Greek for spirit and wind are the same word. There is an analogy here that Jesus is using. He is saying that those who are born of the Spirit – it’s very much like what we observe with the wind. You can see its effects. You can observe the effects of the Spirit, but you can’t manipulate it. You can’t control God. You can’t manipulate or control what is taking place. There is a mysterious element to it that Jesus is emphasizing. He is saying to us that this new birth is sovereignly given.

Following the analogy of wind, we take this to its natural conclusion and the point that Jesus is making. It’s a mystery to us. This is something that God does. One of our pastors referenced when they were making their announcement that there was a time when they wanted to have kids and they didn’t initially have kids. My wife and I had a similar time. Like many of you, we planned out our family. We were going to be married this long and after this long we will have everything figured out. That worked, didn’t it? Then we were going to have kids, and then we came to that time when we were going to have kids and we didn’t have kids. There was a delay, and God taught us as many other people experience, that God gives life. God opens the womb.

I have come a number of times to people who are on what we believe to be their deathbed. The doctor comes in and says, “They have less than 24 hours.” Then a week later they are still with us. Weeks later they are still with us, sometimes reviving altogether. Life and death are held in the hands of God. Spiritual life is given by God.

Just to reinforce this, do you remember when we started in John Chapter 1, verses 12 and 13? This is a main emphasis that John will come to over and over. Look at this verse. John 1, verse 12: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to

become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Emphasis: God gives spiritual life.

There is more. Jesus gives us more. He tells us that we must be born of the Spirit and born of water. “Jesus answered (verse 5), ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’” So we ask ourselves, “What does it mean to be born of water?” Some people believe that it refers to physical birth - the breaking of water, the amniotic fluid. Some would say that Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, “You must be physically born and spiritually born.” We would say, well that’s obvious in one sense, but it’s a legitimate possibility. I don’t think it’s correct, and most interpreters don’t, but it’s possible.

The second possibility is that it refers to water baptism. I don’t think that’s exactly correct either. I think it refers to what baptism points to -- it refers to cleansing, the cleansing work of the Spirit of God. It is represented by baptism, but this is not a direct reference to baptism. Nicodemus was an expert in the Old Testament and he would have been familiar with the way water is used throughout the Old Testament to speak of cleansing.

Here is one example: Ezekiel 36, verses 25 and following. Notice in these verses the joining of water and the work of the Spirit of God to bring a new heart, new life.

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

There is a promise here that God will come in by his Spirit and cleanse our hearts, giving us his Spirit and taking out a heart of stone, giving us a soft, responsive heart -- a heart of flesh. Don’t confuse that now with the images in John 3 where we are told that this new birth is not of the flesh, it’s of the Spirit. The point here in Ezekiel is that our hearts now will want the things of God, because we have been given a new heart by the Spirit of God. There is a change. There is a “great change” that happens. We have spiritual life. It helps to see this parallel track -- that as the Spirit of God comes in, he cleanses us. The old life goes as the new life comes.

When Wilberforce became a Christian, a lot of reports began to circulate. He couldn't hide it forever, it was so obvious. His biographer, Kevin Belmonte, writes these words and then quotes Wilberforce:

Strange reports now began to circulate. Wilberforce was said to be out of his mind and melancholy mad. These reports were conveyed to his mother and relations in Yorkshire, and for some time made them very uneasy. But he went to visit them and took particular pains to be cheerful, pleasant, and kind. "My natural disposition was irritable," he recalled, (can any of you relate to that statement?) "and it had often cost them much pain. They were exceedingly struck by the altered deportment. They found me so much more kind and patient, so much more forbearing and considerate than formally, that one of them remarked, 'if such were the effects of becoming melancholy mad, it would be well if many of our acquaintance would take the same infection.'"

Metaxas, also a biographer, tells of Mrs. Sikes. Mrs. Sikes was a friend of Wilberforce's mother. She made this statement to his mom: "If this is madness, I hope he bites us all." You see, a change had happened in his life. When you read that quote, you could say, "Well yeah, Brian, but if you look carefully, what happened is that he went with the intention of being pleasant and kind."

Yes. That's the change. It's not like with a snap of the fingers God strikes you. You were cranky before, and now you are always pleasant, you are patient. No. That's the fruit of the Spirit that is cultivated and developed over a long period of time -- the character of Christ. That doesn't happen immediately or instantly. But the evidence of the change is that now he actually cares. He is grieved over the fact that his previous attitude brought pain to others. Now he goes with the intention of being a blessing. That transformation describes the cleansing and the new spiritual life that God brings. We go from entering into experiences and into rooms and into life saying, "Oh gee, I don't even want to be here," to "How can I be a blessing to others as I honor God?" It's a wonderful transition, the kind of thing that makes us say "If this is madness, I hope he bites us all."

So, Jesus introduced again in this section (did you notice it?) this teaching with the same solemn formula: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he

cannot enter the kingdom of God.” He has stressed emphatically the necessity, now he stresses the nature. Cleansing and new life – let’s put it altogether here – the nature. Jesus is speaking of his divine life, the life of God, a principle of life entering into us so as to transform, to make new. It is correct in one sense to speak of being made alive spiritually, but more than that, it’s a new you. It’s a transformation. It’s a new you, but it’s also an experience. It’s a lot. You are alive. When God did give us children, I had the privilege of being there in labor and delivery. The moment that baby is born in some cases just takes over the room. They’re alive!

In Wilberforce’s day, there were terms they called true Christians, evangelical Christians, as we would describe them. They called them Enthusiasts, or Methodists. Now, when they said Methodists, they didn’t mean the denomination. It didn’t exist as we know it. You think of the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, who we look to as the founders of the denomination. They were not the only ones that were called Methodists. In fact, Whitefield, who was of a very different theological makeup, was also called a Methodist. And Wilberforce was called a Methodist as he became a Christian.

Here is what they meant -- these people are so serious about God and so serious about spiritual things, they are methodical! It affects everything they do! They are enthusiasts! That’s actually a great word, but it was used with very negative connotations. It’s like they are saying, “They just take things way too far! They are just far too serious about this religious stuff!” We might say, “Well, they are just extremely emotional.” That’s not to condone emotionalism. It’s just to point to the fact that when Jesus Christ comes in, you come alive. It’s the difference now between an idea and a tradition, to being a container of the divine life. They were alive and now their lives were given over to God.

Consider 1 Peter 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again (notice the emphasis on the activity of God. To what?) to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” “Listen, I was going along in my darkness, in my sin. God came in – gave me life – I believe in Christ – and now the evidence of all my brokenness and dysfunction is replaced by this glorious hope that the resurrection is coming for me! I have the hope of eternal life and that eternal life now resides in me!”

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How can you look and sound dead when God lives in you? It is the very nature of what we are talking about. Get this right and other doctrines fall into place. Misunderstand this and nothing quite finds its right position or proportion. A man must be born again in order to see or enter the kingdom of God. We must be born of water, born of the Spirit.

Before we leave this second point, I would like to just give a brief word of caution. Now that we have looked a little bit at the nature of the new birth, let us take note of the fact that this speaks of something so profound – a deep, mysterious, spiritual experience in truth. It is not a title or a phrase to be thrown around lightly or flippantly.

I remember years ago watching a movie. A well-known actor was playing the role of an athlete, and he was sitting on the hood of his car. I wouldn't recommend this movie. I am not even going to give you the title to it, now that that's all you are wondering about. He is sitting there talking to this actress and a guy walks across the parking lot, another athlete. He says, "Hey, have you been born again?" It's a cringe moment if you are a Christian because it's just so superficial. There is no context for it. It's a fly-by.

I am not sure that it's the best entry point for evangelism unless you can go to this passage or sit down and have a conversation where you wrestle with, "What does it mean?" Because that's certainly what happened to Nicodemus. Nicodemus is like, "What?" And there is this exploration that Jesus leads him through. I'm not saying we can't ever use it. Certainly, the topic needs to be brought out, but we need to be careful, I think, even in the way that we invite people to come to Christ. We give this quick 30 second invitation -- pray this prayer - - boom, boom, boom. Wilberforce was 18 months wrestling with the conviction of sin and the cross of Jesus Christ to pay for his sin.

Some of you have been here for a long time. You are seeking. You are open. You believe. You think you believe. You are not sure you believe. There is a process. It's a mystery. The wind blows where it wills. We see its effects, we hear its sound, but we don't manipulate God. We don't control God. And we can't just – boom! – check the box -- it's done.

James 1:18 points us in a helpful direction here. "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth" (here you see again this emphasis of God giving birth) "by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." I share this point because it sets us up for the very last point. If you are listening and paying attention and thinking about this,

you are saying, “Okay Brian, you have stressed that Jesus stressed that this was something that God did. This is a work of his Spirit. We can’t control it. We can’t give new life. So what do we do? That brings us to the final point – the News of the New Birth, verses 9 through 15.

3. The News of the New Birth. Nicodemus’ response is classic: “But how? Is this something God does? How? How does this happen? How do I experience this? How can I be born again? How can I receive the Holy Spirit? How can I receive eternal life? How can these things be?” (verse 9). The answer is that God brings the new birth to you through a message, through news. We call it the gospel. We call it good news. This word comes to us, and as God’s word goes forth, it raises the dead.

Here is what happens in the last paragraph. The pace quickens. Jesus responds in verse 10 to Nicodemus with what appears to be a rebuke: “You are a teacher and you don’t understand these things? You are a teacher of Israel? You don’t understand these things?” Then for the third time in the passage, Jesus gives this solemn formula: “Truly, truly...” Now this one is a little bit harder to get our minds around, but it’s important because there is a crescendo. There is a building here to a climax that brings everything together for us. Verse 11: “Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.”

This is really fascinating. It’s very subtle. When Nicodemus approaches Jesus at the beginning of the chapter, he uses the plural, the third person. He says, “We know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs unless God is with him.” That’s how the conversation started. It’s like Nicodemus is coming very respectfully, very humbly, hiding at night – he doesn’t want anyone to see him, but he talks like he’s representing some group, some faction of honest seekers, right?

Jesus flips that and uses the plural here in this verse. He says, “Truly, truly (there is that solemn formula), I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.” Here is what Jesus is saying: “You come representing a certain group, maybe a group of leaders. You are respectful, you are appreciative, you are humble. There is so much here to be commended. But let me be clear. My authority is sure. I am emphatically saying to you that none of that will do you

any good unless you believe. We know and we are sure and those who follow me believe and trust in me.”

It goes throughout the passage, but as I said, it crescendos here in these verses so that Jesus is mercifully saying to this man, “Leave all your baggage at the door. You must believe in me. It will not help you that you are a leader, a ruler, a Pharisee, a Jew amongst Jews, that you are coming humbly, respectfully. Do you believe?”

So in verse 12 we read: “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” Notice, he started with a rebuke. He gives this emphatic word. “Listen, our testimony is absolutely sure. You must believe. You must agree with those who follow me.” Then he tells him this: “I have told you of earthly things and you don’t believe. How will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

There is this objection that rises up, isn’t there? Don’t you think, “Wait a minute. You have told us that this is a birth of the Spirit. You have told us that this is the work of God. Haven’t you been telling us about spiritual things? Are you telling us now that you are telling us about earthly things?” Yes. Why? How?

This is what I think Jesus is saying. He is saying, “This is fundamental. This is elementary school. This is ABC’s. My Spirit comes here on earth and you come to life. This is earthly. This is fundamental, basic. How can I tell you, if you don’t understand this, about heavenly things? How can I tell you about a new heaven and a new earth? A new Jerusalem where there is no temple because I am the temple? A new reality where there is no sun because I give light?! How can I tell you about an immortal body that will never perish? A physical, real body that never gets old? How can I tell you about all that’s to come and all that’s before you for all of eternity if you don’t understand that you desperately need to believe in me so that a work of the Spirit of God can take place in your life?!

If you don’t understand this doctrine, nothing else falls into place. When you understand it, everything else begins to find a proper balance and position. No one has ascended into heaven except he who has descended from heaven, the Son of Man. You say, to know these things I would have to go to heaven, but no one has done that. No one can do that. Yes, but one has come from heaven to declare this truth to you and me.

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So now, in verses 14 and 15 we come to the conclusion and the message is made clear. It may not be clear to you or me, but it was certainly clear to Nicodemus. In the verses that follow we see John 3:16, the most famous verse of all. We will look at that next week as a commentary on these verses, but let's look at verse 14. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." Immediately, Nicodemus would have known that which Jesus spoke about.

In Numbers Chapter 21, there was this incident -- it is five or six verses. Moses is leading the children of Israel. They have come out of Egypt. They have been delivered from slavery, and they are grumbling. Their grumbling has reached a point where they are just coming out against God and Moses. "Why have you brought us here? We hate the food. We hate this experience. We are better off back in Egypt. Why are you doing this?" Finally, it reaches a point where God brings his judgment on them and fiery serpents enter the camp and start to afflict the people. Immediately the people get it. "We have gone too far." And they come to Moses, "Moses, please help us. Help us! We are sorry. What can we do?"

Moses goes to God and this is what God leads them to do. It's contrary to everything you would expect in the bible. He tells them to fashion a bronze serpent, put it on a pole, and hold it up in front of them. He tells them to look to this serpent. If you get bitten, you will be healed. That's contrary to everything we think because it looks like idolatry. It looks like superstition. It looks like things we are forbidden to do, but it's actually this glorious gospel picture.

Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Unless I am lifted up and you believe, you won't have eternal life." You see, what happened is, the curse of sin was the serpent. God put it on a pole and raised it up and said, "Look at it and you will be healed." The curse of sin was placed upon Jesus. The judgment for your sin was placed upon the perfect Lord Jesus, and he was lifted up. He was lifted up on the cross and when he is lifted up on the cross he is exalted.

This is what we do when people ask, "Okay, how are people born again? How does salvation come?" We lift up the cross. We lift up the Lord Jesus Christ, and new life comes and people are saved. People are born of the Spirit of God. They fall under a conviction of sin. We don't understand it. It's mysterious. It's like the blowing of the wind. It's the work

## Life In His Name - The New Birth

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of God, but new life comes and a great change, a great transformation happens. We are born of the Spirit of God.

1 Peter 1:23: "...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, (look!) through the living and abiding word of God..." There is news. There is a message to be proclaimed. God does the work. God does the saving. But we proclaim this message of life: You must be born again. "You must," Jesus tells Nicodemus, "have my life within you." You need the cleansing work of my Spirit. You hear this message that there is new life -- cleansing, eternal life by faith in me -- you must respond to this message with faith. Do you believe?

Nicodemus will reappear two more times in the gospel of John, and based on those passages, we know that he did believe, that he did come to faith in Christ. And that leaves you and me with the question: Do you believe?

Let's pray.