

Written Copy For: Spirit Working Like the Wind-John 3:5-8

2nd Sunday in Lent
Sunday March 8th, 2020

Text: John 3:5-8

⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ 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."

Exegetical Statement

Directly following the statement that Jesus, knowing the hearts of men never allowed Himself to be taken in by their gracious words and commitments to follow since they are prone to wander away and change allegiance to suit their own needs and desires at any particular time. Thus, when Nicodemus comes and night to see Jesus, He is not immediately won over by the confession Nicodemus makes on behalf the Sanhedrin concerning who Jesus is. Nicodemus states that they believe He must be a teacher of Scripture sent by God and that God is with Him as shown by the miraculous signs He has done. But as John hints Nicodemus has come at night: in the temporal darkness that is illustrative of the spiritual darkness of his soul. The Sanhedrin, although charged with teaching and protecting pure doctrine cannot see the truth of the Kingdom of God because they have eyes that see only the flesh and its desires for the Messiah. Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born from above: he must receive the new soul/spirit/mind that the Holy Spirit imparts in order to see and understand Jesus for who He truly is. This work of new birth that happens in Baptism is the mysterious work of the Spirit whose work is like that of the wind: we can't see Him come and go or understand exactly how He converts hearts of flesh into hearts of Spirit no more than we can understand where the wind comes from or control it's blowing. Yet we can see the fruits of His work in our own lives and in the lives of others. The Holy Spirit creates hearts/souls that use the gift of faith He brings to see the temporal work of Christ lifted up on the cross as being the saving sacrifice that forgives our sin. To see Jesus God's gift of His only Son to the world in order that none should suffer the consequence of eternal death buy receive what Jesus' death and resurrection earn for all men: eternal life. The Spirit by creating and sustaining faith in these new hearts makes Christ work for all His work for me.

Focus Statement:

The Holy Spirit comes to us when we have not asked or sought Him out. He births in us a new heart and mind so that we can have and hold Christ as our Savior; so that we can see His death and resurrection as saving us from eternal death and giving us the free gift of eternal life that His death and resurrection paid for

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Without the new spiritual eyes that the Holy Spirit creates in us we cannot and will not understand the Gospel or what Jesus has to teach us. If we lose this gift by casting it aside we remain as blind as Nicodemus was to the kingdom of Christ

What the hearer should do as a result:

Instead of delving too deeply in the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit we call conversion trust His promise that He is always at work in the Gospel and like the wind accomplishes His work in ways we may not understand yet see the fruits of in our lives and the lives of others.

Subject Sentence: The Spirit's mysterious in hearts to reveal Jesus

While I was on Vicarage a member of the congregation where I was serving came to the Pastor with what he called a crisis of faith. He said he no longer believed in baptism as a Sacrament. His son, who he had baptized as a child, sent to Lutheran School, made sure he was confirmed, had walked away from his faith as an adult. The man had tried repeatedly to find out why his son had walked away, and to call him back to the faith. He told me that "Baptism for my son was a lousy seal. The place he's in now is no better than if I had done nothing at all." He had concluded that our false view of Baptism actually encouraged his son's loss of faith since it moved Christians to put faith in a empty rite instead in Jesus Christ and the Gospel itself.

I have heard other people question the work of the Holy Spirit to create and sustain faith in the lives of others. Many struggle with our confession that we don't choose Christ, He chooses us. And if that's the case why are my loved ones not believers? Did Jesus not choose them? And why are some able to walk away from the faith, yet be called back later in life while others seemingly never return? We witness to our friends and loved ones from the heart and describe to them what Jesus has meant to us in our lives and it seems to fall on deaf ears. We wonder why they can't see and understand Jesus the way we see and understand and believe in Him.

When we deal with these kinds of issues: issues concerning conversion, the work of the Holy Spirit to create and sustain faith in Jesus in a person's heart, we are dealing with a mystery. Almost as mysterious as the 3rd person of the Trinity Himself. In some respects, the Holy Spirit is like the silent partner of the Trinity. He works without drawing attention to Himself. He works through means such as spoken and written words, water, and bread and wine. He works not to draw attention to Himself but instead to point us to the 2nd person of the Trinity: God the Son who is Jesus Christ our Lord. And as Jesus tells Nicodemus in our Gospel Lesson, He works like the wind. And unless He is working in you, you cannot understand in truth anything in regard to God, salvation, and eternal life

Jesus is trying to teach Nicodemus this in our Gospel Lesson. Nicodemus was a Pharisee who was also a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council in Jerusalem that was responsible for teaching the truth of Scriptures to the people and making sure no false worship cropped up. Jesus refers to him in V10 as "The Teacher of Israel", not meaning he was the only one, but one whom the people looked up to and listened to for answers. He comes to Jesus at night and seems to compliment Him. Speaking it seems on behalf of the Ruling Council He says **(John 3:2) "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."** Perhaps what is going on here is admission by this ruling council that Jesus is doing things that mark Him as a prophet sent by God who is operating with the presence and assistance of God Himself. As those who have been chosen to guard the kingdom confession of God as the only God of the Jews, they are seeking to form an alliance with Him. In other words, Nicodemus was sent to get Jesus to join their party and start teaching the party line. Nicodemus has come to fill Jesus in with the inside information on how the Kingdom of God works as they understand it.

Nicodemus has come in the dark, at night. But nightfall is not the only thing that has darkened Nicodemus mind and understanding about things of God has been darkened too. **John 3:3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."** As much as Nicodemus and the other members of the ruling council think they know, 'they don't know nothing'. They cannot judge what is a kingdom truth from a lie, they cannot judge who Jesus really is or see the truth of what He teaches unless they have been "born again". That verse can also be translated as "born from above". Nicodemus, as well as you and I, and the rest of humanity, were born with hearts and minds that are darkened by sin. Because of this no one on their own can understand God and His will for us, let alone do it. We need a new heart, and new mind, a new will that is capable and willing to put God and His plan first place.

So, how do we go about getting one of these new hearts and minds? Nicodemus wants to know what he can do to get one. But as far as he can see this is impossible. **(John 3:4) 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?"** Nicodemus is saying, "Hey Jesus! C'mon now! What do you expect me to do? Crawl back into my mother's womb? You're asking me to do the impossible. And that is correct. No one can be born again or from above according to anything he might do for himself.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. How do we receive this new heart? As a gift from Christ that comes in our baptism where the Holy Spirit does His mysterious work. How is He in the water and the word? I do not know. How long does it take Him to create in you this new heart? I don't know. For some it's instantaneous. For others it's the work of years, sometimes of a lifetime. He does promise that when you were baptized He enters into your life and your heart and begins the work of killing your old sinful heart you received from Adam and replacing it with a heart that is worthy of a Kingdom of God citizen. **John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** Our old sinful heart can only see the darkness of the world. It cannot understand what God's kingdom is and has no desire to be a part of it. It already has a king, and that's me, that's you. It works hard to convince me that I'm OK as is; not perfect, but good enough. Only a heart that has been re- made by the Spirit and filled with Jesus love can bear to see ourselves for who we really are.

So just how does the Holy Spirit do this work? Nicodemus is wondering, you may be too. Jesus says to us **(John 3:7-8) ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.**" Since this work of creating a new heart is happening within us we desire to have some kind of control over it. And if not for our sakes some kind of control over how and when it happens in the lives of those, we share the Gospel with. But this work is strictly the work of God alone. We have no control over it in our own lives or in the lives of those around us. We can be a means the Spirit uses to do His work but we can't control the when and how no more than we can control the wind. No man can control where and when the wind blows. We can't see the wind; it is an invisible force. We can see it at work in things

around us, but we can't see or tell where it is coming from or where it is going without seeing how it affects the leaves in the trees, the flag on the flagpole, or feel it blow across our brow. And Jesus is using a play on words in this verse describing this work of the Holy Spirit. In both the Greek and Hebrew language the word translated "Spirit" can also be translated as "wind", or "breath". So Jesus as Jesus says in verse 8 **"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from or where it goes"** at the same time He is also saying **"The Spirit blows (works) as He desires, you hear the sound of His voice, but you have no ideas from where He comes or to where He goes."** His work coming and His work is invisible. You can hear His voice as it speaks through the Scriptures, but never think you can control Him or sum up how He works in some concise formula that can be applied to every heart and life. He works according to His own agenda and timetable.

But we can predict when wind will be present. When the barometric pressure changes it creates wind as air flows from areas with higher pressure to those with lower pressure. In the same way we can know that the Spirit is present with all His divine power to change hearts and minds. Whenever Christians gather around the Baptismal font, He is there to give that baby a new birth from above. He is present and at work whenever the message of John 3:16-17 is preached, read, or sung **(John 3:16-17) ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.** He works to create in us a new heart and new life, so that we might believe that Jesus was God's gift of love for "me". So that I might be saved through Him and have the gift of eternal life. The Spirit comes create in me a heart that has the gift of faith that only He can give. The power that not only believes Jesus died and rose again, but that He did so for me.

He makes us identify with the Israelites who, while wandering in the desert, refused to obey God. God sent poisonous snakes into the camp which bit the complaining people. This moved them to cry out to God for help. God had Moses lift up a bronze likeness of a snake on a pole. When the people looked to it in faith as God's remedy for the death the snakes brought, they were healed. **John 3:14-15 ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.** Just as the cause of the people's punishment for sin was lifted up on the cross and became the focal point of God's promised healing, Jesus was lifted up on the pole that was the cross. In taking on our sin He became that which would cause us to die eternally. But when we see in Him the death of our sin by faith, we are restored to life now and are given eternal life to come. But the only way we or anyone else can see Him as this is by the work the Holy Spirit does in your heart and mind

This work is truly miraculous and can be worked in anyone regardless of what they think about Jesus and how much they disbelieve. When the Spirit comes to work on a heart through the Gospel the sinful broken heart immediately says "No! I will not believe! I don't need Jesus, especially as my Lord!" And our sinful heart continues to respond with that mantra until, by the supernatural working of the Spirit, the person's not is turned into a yes. And once the Spirit creates a new heart that confesses faith in and love for Jesus no

other person can turn you away. **Romans 8:38-39** ³⁸ **For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,** ³⁹ **nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

Nothing can stop Jesus from loving us. But we choose to stop loving Him. We can choose to revive our sinful selfish heart that is programmed to love ourselves over and above Jesus. It is always ready to dismiss Jesus to 2nd or 3rd place or lower. And if nothing happens to curb that work of our sinful heart the love of Christ and faith in Him can disappear forever. But remember nothing can stop Jesus love for you, not even your sinful choices. He gave everything He had for you on the cross. He will not let you go without a fight. He sends the Holy Spirit into your life with the express mission of calling you back. He uses the sinful consequences of our disobedient heart to create the pain and sorrow we need to be awakened to our sin awakened to our faith, and then restore the love of Christ once again. He continues to be at work in your life and mine working to keep that faith in Christ alive and active by continually restoring the love of Christ to our heart and life.

The answer my Vicarage Pastor gave the gentleman despairing over his son who strayed from the faith was this. As long as he is breathing air, there is hope. This Spirit is at work in that young man's life bringing to bear on his heart the law when he hears it as well as the "Law not preached": the consequences that Goad allows in his life as the result of his sinful obedience. Father sent His only Son as His gift of love for that young man, as well as for your children, and for you and me. Such a great sacrifice means He does not take the loss of one of those He died for lightly. He loves them even more than we do. He loves you and I more than any other person in this world does. We entrust their faith and eternity into the hands of the Spirit just as we entrust our lives. He is the unseen God who works miracles in the heart of men. He did so in your heart and mine. He can do so in theirs. He is at work through the Gospel Message proclaimed in John 3:16-17 to renew our hearts, to suppress the old and restore the new. To keep us in faith toward Christ now and until we see Him face to face in eternal life. Amen