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## The Winds of Change

### John 3:7-8

**Intro:** So far in our study of **ch3**, Jesus has been pretty straightforward in His message to Nicodemus. From the very start of the conversation, Jesus “cut to the chase” and told Nic that there was only **one thing** required for a man to **see the kingdom of God** - the **new birth**. It just so happened to be the **one thing** that Nicodemus lacked in his life. Jesus went on to describe the **new birth** – its **source** is found only in God; it’s **acquired** by being born of water & the Spirit. The undeniable reality of the new birth is there is no evolution from flesh to Spirit – you **must** be **born again**. In order to move from an old life that’s dominated by the flesh to a new life that’s dominated by the Spirit, it only stands to reason that a second birth must take place! In fact, Jesus says as much to Nicodemus in **vs7**. Jesus is emphatic in stating that man doesn’t need a **reformation** of his flesh but a radical conversion of the Holy Spirit.

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**7 – marvel** – The Lord’s statement here **is** emphatic: there’s no other way to take it than that **new birth** is **required!** Of course, we’ve already established this truth in **vs3** and **vs5**. Maybe Nic was skeptical or maybe he was just a little thick in the head that Jesus felt compelled to repeat this truth. Maybe Nic had a look of surprise or bewilderment on his face. Regardless of the cause, Jesus repeats this seemingly basic truth and slightly chides Nic in the process. It appears friendly enough in **vs7** but in **vs10** it seems a lot more direct! Maybe something else is going on here.

On the one hand, it really seems like Nicodemus is lost in this conversation; Jesus is using terminology that he is apparently not familiar with. On the other hand, it seems like Jesus expects Nic to at least have a grasp of the concept He’s presenting to him. But how is this possible? In the entire Bible, the phrase “born again” only appears twice here in **ch3** and once in Peter’s 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle. What gives? Is Jesus expecting too much from Nic? Not at all! Let’s turn to **Ezekiel 36:24-27**. This passage is addressed to the Jews who were exiled in Babylon. It contains 2 of the 3 national promises that the nation of Israel was expecting Jehovah to fulfill. We’ll look at this in more detail next time but for right now, our focus is on the terminology used in these verses. Let’s look at it & see if anything stands out.

When we compare this passage to the Lord’s description of the **means** of the **new birth** in **vs5**, we can see right there in plain view are echoes of OT terminology that Jesus intentionally used to ring a bell in Nic’s mind. Now, you

might say this is **a bit of a stretch** – **it would take an OT expert to see this**. Well, I'd have to agree. I'd also like to state that I am **not** an OT expert. I'd even venture to guess there aren't many OT experts present with us here today. That doesn't matter because the thing is, Jesus was talking to an OT expert; at least he presented himself as such. The religious Jews of Jesus' day didn't study the OT just for scholarly discipline. No, they studied it backwards and forwards, hanging on every word, searching out and looking with expectation for any and every promise from God that applied to Israel. There was no one in Jerusalem who should have had a better grasp on this topic than Nic.

We'll look at this in more detail later but understand: Jesus is a little short with this OT expert because He's lobbing under-hand, softball pitches and Nicodemus is standing there with his mouth wide open watching them sail by. This is not the only reference to OT truth the Jesus will make to Nic. He'll make another one in the very next verse.

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**8 – wind** – We've now come to a 3<sup>rd</sup> reference to the Holy Spirit in the last 4 verses. The 1<sup>st</sup> reference was in **vs5** which teaches that spiritual life occurs whenever the Spirit implants the seed of God's Word within the human heart. The 2<sup>nd</sup> reference was in **vs6**. We spent most of that study discussing the flesh and how Christians can overcome it. This verse deals exclusively with the Spirit so we must consider Who He is, His activity & what it should mean to us.

What is **the Spirit**? Of course, this is a reference to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity. The Spirit is God. On a human level, the spirit is that part of man that is conscious of God. Beyond this, the word **spirit** has some interesting overtones. It comes from the Latin word "**spiritus**" meaning **breath**. We can see this truth in the different English words derived from it: **aspire**, **conspire**, **inspire**, **perspire** and **expire**. They all refer to different ways of using one's breath. When men **aspire**, they **take a deep breath and try harder**. When men **conspire**, they **put their heads together and breathe in and out with one another**. A man is **inspired** when another man (or **God**) **blows some of his breath into him**. We **perspire** by **breathing out through our skin**. When we **expire**, we **breathe out for the last time**; we die.

In Greek, the language of the NT, the corresponding word is **pneuma: breath**. We also have a few English words based on it like "**pneumatic**" – an air operated tool (**pneumatic drill**) and "**pneumonia**" - a disease of the lungs. In both Greek and Latin, the words for "spirit" also refer to breath, wind or air and it's the same in Hebrew as well. In Hebrew, the word is **ruach**. In fact, you can't even say it properly without exhaling. **Ruach** is the sound of a breath!

When Jesus wanted to reveal Nicodemus' spiritual bankruptcy and the spiritual solution to it (an intangible concept) He began His explanation with a concept which was familiar to Nic – physical birth. Now, Jesus wants to teach Nic about the Holy Spirit (epitome of intangible) and He does so by referring to the wind because the wind is clearly an excellent symbol of God's breath (Spirit). Jesus uses this particular reference for 2 reasons: **1) to teach Nic (us) that God allows His breath to go where He wishes and produce the effects He chooses.** **2) To ring another bell in Nic's mind that will point him back to the OT** and remind him that this is a truth he should already be aware of.

How does "**the wind**" point back to OT truth? I'm glad you asked. Turn back to **Ezek 37:1-10**. Ezekiel saw a valley full of dead bones but when he prophesied to "the winds" (9) the Spirit came and gave those bones new life! Again, it was a combination of the Spirit of God and the Word of God that gave life. The nation of Israel was dead & hopeless.

In spite of the deep morality and strong religious fervor of the people, they still needed the life of **the Spirit!**

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Besides reminding Nic of the truth he should know, what is Jesus trying to teach him about the Holy Spirit here? The operation of the wind is a wonderful parable of the work of the Holy Spirit. In our day, we have the benefits of modern meteorological science, we can track a low pressure wave as it comes off the West coast of Africa until it makes landfall or dies in the North Atlantic. But the ancient world didn't have these benefits. They knew the wind had an origin but they didn't know where it came from. They knew the wind had a destination but they didn't know where it was going. They couldn't see the wind but they could experience it – they could **hear** the wind and **see** and **feel** the **effects** of the wind. It's the same with the Holy Spirit. Like the wind, the Spirit is invisible but yet, still very powerful.

And, just as we can't explain or predict the movements of the wind, neither can we explain or predict the movements of the Spirit. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit can be **grieved, quenched, lied to and blasphemed** but He cannot be **conjured up** or **coerced**. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the God-head. He moves and works as **He** wills not as we will. **But, we want to see the Holy Spirit work; we want to see Him move on the hearts of the lost and the saved.** How can we do this? In short, we can't. This is not something we as God's people can instigate. Having said that, it is possible for God's people to create a spiritual environment in which the Holy Spirit would be willing to work. **How can this be?**

If we want to **see** the **effects** of the Spirit in the lives of the lost; if we desire to **feel** the **effects** of the Spirit in our own lives, we must 1<sup>st</sup> be willing to **hear** the

Spirit, **listen** to His voice and respond to His **will**, His **call**, His **demands**. The Holy Spirit doesn't just bring **new life**; if we'll hear His voice and submit to His will, He will guide us into all truth. He will direct our steps and order our lives. He'll not only **reveal** His will to us, He will **equip** us and **empower** us to perform His will and will glorify the Father and magnify the name of Jesus Christ in the process. The Holy Spirit's job is to draw lost humanity into an intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ and transform believers into the image of Christ. In fact, our obedience to the Holy Spirit is the mark, the indication, the **evidence** of our **sonship** (**Rom 8:14**). This truth is also implied in our text. This verse doesn't just speak of the work of the Holy Spirit; it also speaks very clearly of the **effects** of the Holy Spirit on the lives of believers.

**So is everyone** – everything that was said of the Holy Spirit applies, in a sense, to the **new birth**. We cannot see the **new birth** occur in the heart of an individual; it's a super-natural regeneration, a spiritual transaction. This is the reality any and every time a "lead" someone to Christ. "Are they being sincere?" There's no way to tell – not on that day. But, just like the wind and the Spirit, you might not see the new birth take place but you will eventually see the effects of the new birth, if it in fact did occur. This is exactly what Jesus is implying at the end of **vs8**.

This truth begs the important question: Can others see the **new birth** in you? This question is not meant to prompt **condemnation** but rather: **self-analysis**. Here's why. **If the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to produce something in us that changes our eternal destiny (new birth) then He is plenty powerful enough to change the way we live.** Our message to the lost world, the Gospel, is a message of regeneration and deliverance. The only evidence we have that this message is true is the fact that Jesus Christ has changed our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, for believers, we need to take inventory. If I'm going around telling people of the wonder and glory of salvation – am I living it? How, exactly, does my life demonstrate the power of the Gospel – the ongoing, continuing power of the Gospel? The presence of the Holy Spirit doesn't just bring new life – it brings a changed life. Maybe you were saved at a young age and didn't mess up your life with sin. That's not a bad thing but neither does it get you off the hook. Is your current lifestyle better now than it was this time last year? Is your walk with the Lord improving or are you letting the flesh dominate you at times? Where is the evidence of the new birth in your life? Can others see it?

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Finally, 1 last parallel: just as the coming and going of the wind can't be controlled by human power or wisdom, so the **new birth** of the Spirit is

independent of the human will. Salvation doesn't come by the will of the flesh nor of the will of man (1:13) but by the will and power of God alone. A person can only be born again as the result of God's breathing new life into him and this never happens by man's determination but solely by the good pleasure of God.

Abram left Ur and sojourned in Canaan not because he got a wild hair and wanted to move. It was a movement of God's Spirit calling him out – it was purely a move of God's grace. After Jesus ascended into heaven, no one expected the church to be overrun with Gentile converts but it eventually was because God moved on their hearts in grace. In the late 60's and early 70's, no one expected tens of thousands of street people (hippies) to come to a saving knowledge on Christ but they did, thru the obedience of many a straight-laced believer.

What was it that caused Abram to leave home, cross a desert and go to a country he'd never seen before? What captivated the attention of pagan Gentiles and brought new life to them and their communities? What is it that reaches, stirs, convicts, regenerates and changes people today? It is the breath of the living God, the Holy Spirit, who speaks thru the Scriptures to create new life in spiritually dead people. It's what has saved you, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ. The Spirit ***moves wherever*** [He] ***pleases***, and God alone must have credit for it all. 😊