

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit **The Spirit Gives New Life. John 3:1 – 16**

The birth of a new life is usually greeted with a combination of joy and wonder. Jesus obviously had the miracle of birth in mind when he informed Nicodemus, one of Israel's highest ranking religious teachers, that a person must be born again (from above¹) in order to enter God's Kingdom. Today the term 'born again' is often associated with a particularly zealous type of Christian. But the fact that Nicodemus understood that Jesus was using this term, not as a religious label but in a literal sense, is reflected in his response, *'How can a man be born when he is old?'* Taking into account the high level of education that must have been required of one of Israel's highest ranking teachers, we shouldn't think that Nicodemus was naive enough to believe that a person would actually need to re-enter his mother's womb and be born a second time in order to enter God's kingdom. But what Nicodemus did seem to grasp is just how literally Jesus was speaking when he talked about our need to be born again. Therefore it makes sense that Nicodemus would wonder aloud, *'How can this be?'* Let's go on this journey of understanding with Nicodemus to see what God's Son has to say about what it means to be born again by the Holy Spirit:

1. Read John 3:1 – 2 and 3:10 – 13. Why were Jesus' credentials as a miracle-worker and his title of 'the Son of Man' (or 'The Man God sent from above') significant to this conversation with Nicodemus, a high-ranking teacher?
2. Read John 3:3 – 4. Given that Nicodemus knew that Jesus was a great miracle-worker, why did the miracle of rebirth seem so utterly impossible to him?
3. Read John 3:5 – 6; 1:19 - 34 and Ezekiel 36: 24 – 28. What did Jesus mean that no one can enter God's kingdom unless he is born of water and the Spirit?²
4. Read John 3:7 – 8. In the original Biblical languages the word for 'wind' and 'spirit' are the same. Therefore, what is Jesus trying to say here about the way the Holy Spirit works within his people?
5. Read the remaining verses of this passage (John 3:9 – 16). According to Jesus, what does it mean to receive new life, and how does this happen?
6. What does new (eternal) life through the Holy Spirit mean to you?

¹ The original word in this verse here can mean both 'again' and 'from above'

² In John the Baptist's day, many Israelites underwent ceremonial cleansings and baptisms to prepare themselves for Christ's coming. Some of these people later put their faith in Jesus and then received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (i.e. after their water baptism). But today we practice baptism as a sign and testimony of faith in Christ and the baptism by the Holy Spirit. Therefore (in our church) water baptism comes after a person has already been born again, not as a pre-condition for salvation.