

Jesus and the Wind of the Spirit

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John 3:1-16

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named **Nicodemus**, a ruler of the Jews. ² He came to **Jesus** by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you have **come from God as a teacher**, for no one is able do these **signs** that you are doing unless **God is with him.**”

³ Jesus responded, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born from above** (again) they cannot **see the kingdom of God.**”

⁴ Nicodemus asked, “How can a person be **born** when they’re **old**? Can they enter a second time into their mother’s womb and be born?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born from water and Spirit** (*pneuma*), he cannot **enter the kingdom of God.** ⁶ That which is born from the **flesh** is flesh, and that which is born from the **Spirit** is **spirit** (*pneuma*). ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘**All of you must be born from above.**’ ⁸ The **Spirit/wind** (*pneuma*) **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/wind.**”

⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things happen?”

¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not know these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we’re speaking what **we know**, and bearing witness to **what we’ve seen**, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you **earthly things** and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you **heavenly things**?

¹³ No one has **ascended into heaven** except he who descended from heaven, **the Son of Man.** 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.**

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.**”

John 1:11-13

¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, he gave authority to become children of God, to those who believe on his name, ¹³ who were born, not from blood, nor from the flesh’s will, nor from a man’s will, but from God.

John 1:51

⁵¹ Jesus said to Nathaniel, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

John 6:61-63

⁶¹ [Jesus said,] “Do you take offense at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

John 7:37-39

³⁷ Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 12:32

³² [Jesus said,] “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Genesis 1:2

² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit/wind of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Numbers 21:8

⁸ And the LORD (*Yahweh*) said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it as a sign, and if a serpent bites anyone, everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.”

Daniel 7:13-14

¹³ “I saw ... visions: with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given authority and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should revere him; ... an everlasting authority....

Romans 5:5-6

⁵ Hope does not put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Messiah died for us ungodly.

The Searcher Struggling to Understand

John gives us a glimpse of a likely long, but amazing conversation. Jesus has just confronted the temple authorities and now one of them, impressed, comes to Jesus: a Pharisee, a teacher, member of Sanhedrin, open to Jesus’ teaching, affirming God’s presence.

Jesus takes him seriously. He has seen signs, but they point to revealing a new reality in Jesus. He unveils the new level of God engaging humans, doing what the temple had symbolized. Birth “from above” (*anothen*) can also mean “again.” It’s misunderstood by Nicodemus.

Birth from Above and the Breath of God

Jesus is intentionally mysterious/poetic to help N. to think in new ways. The very idea of birth means starting over, profound change of things as they are, new learning, new growth.

But also a new basis of life from God. As the Spirit / God’s breath was in the first creation, so “born from water and Spirit” is new creation. For even a well-respected teacher? Yes! N. is a good man, but he needs the very life/presence of God, the Spirit, sensed in Jesus.

Temple, Law, Sanhedrin – the heart of control, God within bounds. Jesus speaks of Wind, the uncontrollable power of God’s Spirit; birth from the blowing Wind/Breath of creation. The character of the Spirit changes the character of the child born from above. Jesus was in a process of giving that Spirit, by his teaching, his action, his promise, his own presence.

God’s Transforming Passion and Gift

Jesus meet N.’s lack of understanding with further challenge: There’s so much more. This is like the sign of the dangerous serpent that could heal as in Moses’ days (Num 21). It’s the “Son of Man” who unites heaven and earth, brings God’s kingdom to earth, as in Daniel.

The Son of Man will be lifted up/exalted – on a cross. His power/authority begins from that cross, because it embodies the passion of a loving God. God deeply loves the people of his creation in spite of their brokenness and rebellion and inability to help/heal themselves. We love the idea of self-sufficiency, independence. We can improve ourselves marginally, but we can’t stop our perishing. God wants to give more. He gives himself in Jesus, the Son.

He calls us to believe, to trust his love, trust his gift, receive God’s life in his surprising Spirit, to receive new life that in no way negates our physical life, but lifts it to new union with God’s life. This love, gift, new life breaks through the barrier of perishing into eternal life now.