

MAKING VISIBLE THE INVISIBLE REALITY
Ezekiel 36:22-26; John 3:3-8

(Read John 3:3-8)

Intro: Next Sunday is the Day of Pentecost. It is the day the Holy Spirit came upon the Christ Followers who were gathered obediently in Jerusalem. We will celebrate that next week. This week we will be **preparing for Pentecost** and we are going to briefly examine how we, the followers of Jesus, **make visible what is invisible**. Here goes:

Matthew Nowakowski bought a sailboat.

The interesting thing about sailboats is they need wind in their sails to move. The photo on the screen of Matt's vessel shows it moored with its sails furled. This is the wise thing to do since life could get pretty interesting if he tried to tie it up to the dock with the sails fully extended.

But when Matt takes his boat out, he unfolds the sails and they catch the wind and away he goes. He can't see the wind, but he knows it's there because the canvas sail are filled with it and it propels him across Lake Erie. Even if Matt gathers in the sails several miles out into the lake he still knows there is wind because he can see it moving the surface of the lake into waves. **He can't see it, but it's there.**

When wind is not present, Matthew would know that too. There is something out in the ocean along the Equator that sailors call The Doldrums. Officially they are known as **The Intertropical Convergence Zone**. Wikipedia says this. *"The Intertropical Convergence Zone, known by sailors as the doldrums or the calms because of its monotonous windless weather, is the area where the northeast and the southeast trade winds converge. It encircles Earth near the thermal equator, though its specific position varies seasonally."* In the days before steam and fuel driven ships and the

main propulsion was sails, ships would get caught in the Doldrums and they might languish there for days and even weeks as they ran low on food and water and as the sun beat down relentlessly. They couldn't see or feel the wind but the broiling mariners certainly knew it was happening when the wind finally stirred and brought them out of the Doldrums.

We are the sails and the Holy Spirit is the wind propelling us. By the way, the word for “spirit” in Hebrew, Aramaic, AND Greek, which were the main languages of the known world in of time Jesus are also the word for “wind” in those languages – which makes Jesus’s illustration of the wind of the Spirit very helpful. We know that the Spirit is just as invisible, but he is also just as evident.

We just heard Jesus talking to Nicodemus about the Holy Spirit as he said a lot of puzzling things to him. It’s puzzling to me too. In fact, it’s puzzling to everyone so let’s learn together.

Jesus begins by telling Nicodemus . . .

Unless you were born again, you will not see the kingdom of God.

- Nicodemus was a learned man but he still had to learn more. The cool thing about him is that **he knew it**. He came to Jesus because he knew Jesus was no ordinary rabbi or some random itinerate street preacher. Something was different and he knew it, in fact, in the verse prior to where I began he told Jesus, *Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. John 3:2*. Here was a member of the Jewish ruling council admitting that he and his colleagues knew Jesus was from God. The thing that was different though, was that he wasn’t threatened by Jesus – instead he wanted to learn more.
- The first thing he learned was he needed to be born again. He needed to be completely new – the old formulas he knew from the Old Testament law were

driven by human effort. The problem with human effort is that you end up in the doldrums paddling along with cupped hands. Sooner or later you just give up from exhaustion. That's what happens when you try to save yourself. Jesus was offering a completely new plan – but it took being born again.

- Nicodemus's head was shaking at the thought. How can I crawl back into my mother's womb? I mean, if it was even physically possible, which it wasn't, his mother might not even be living anymore. And I can picture Jesus smiling in the darkness and clarifying with, "Just think about it Nicodemus. You're a smart man. You need God to start with you from the ground up like a new born infant. As an adult you think you've got the world by the tail, but you are coming up short. But a new born baby is completely dependent on his parents for safety, sustenance, warmth, EVERYTHING! To be born again means to be that completely reliant on God."
- Nicodemus struggled, but he got it eventually. Later in John ([John 19:39](#)) he assisted Joseph of Arimathea in retrieving Jesus's body from the Cross and he was the one who brought 75 pounds embalming spices to prepare the body of his Savior for burial. I believe Nicodemus saw the Kingdom of God.
- But Jesus said something else – he talked about the Spirit. Specifically he said this, *"Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. John 3:5-6.* That means . . .

To be born again MEANS to be filled with the Spirit

- An expression I've often heard over the years is some variation of "*My mama carried me here to church.*" which means very simply – the one saying it has gone to that particular church since they were born. It's true about a number or you here

at ABC – your mama carried you here. But what that reveals is that as a baby you couldn't get here by yourself. Dale was born on April 16, which means it snowed and so if his mom put him out on the porch out at the farm and told him to get along to church, which in those days was just on the other side of the meadow and the cemetery, poor little Dale would have frozen to death. He was an infant and completely incapable to getting to the church whether it was across the field or across the porch.

- It's that way for us when we are born again or born anew – we need the Spirit to propel us. Matthew's sailboat is wonderful **IF there's wind**. If there's no wind, **it just sits there**. That's fine – but sailboats are designed to be propelled by the wind, so just sitting there is a waste. So it is for us if we are born again and not propelled by the Holy Spirit.
- **The Holy Spirit needs to be moving**. We need to be the sails catching the wind of the Holy Spirit. Try this when you leave the church building today. Try to catch the wind. You can't. I can't catch the wind, and I cannot control the wind. But it can catch me and it can control me. So it is with the Holy Spirit. He is speaking into our lives and propelling us along.
- Now don't get me wrong – and you already know this, but this doesn't make us into robots being driven by unseen hands. We have been born again to allow the Spirit to guide us for his Kingdom purposes.
- If you're puzzled with this, you're not alone. I am too and so was Nicodemus – so you've got company. In Nicodemus's case, he wanted answers, and Jesus's response was, *You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'* *The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. John*

3:7-8. It's like this, you don't understand everything about the wind, but you see its effects. So it is with the Spirit. Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know he didn't have to understand everything about the new birth before he experienced it.

Conclusion: This is as far as I'm going today as we prepare for Pentecost Sunday next week. Just remember as we ponder these things:

Unless we are born again we cannot see the kingdom of God

But when we are born again we have a new heart and a new spirit

Because we are born again, the world can see the kingdom of God – **IN US**, which makes us God's instruments as he is making visible the invisible reality of his kingdom. Amen.

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