

John 2:23–3:16 // “Finding the Assurance of Salvation” //

START #1

SERVERDU

It is impossible for me to overestimate the importance of ServeRDU to our church... it's now become a permanent part of what we do, year round...

It began with a dream of making the gospel real to our community by meeting her needs wherever we could, and it has led to **countless gospel opportunities** over the years.

My fear is that **we'll take it for granted** and one day it will become something just a few people do in the background. It's part of the identity of our church: we love and serve our city, and I want you to be involved.

Series Intro

We are starting a new series today called *START* in which we are going to look at the **six most essential things** you need to master to thrive in the Christian life.

This is going to be a **great series to bring someone to**—as we are going to talk about the basics of what Christians believe—why we believe them, and why they are so important.

And let me tell you something I'm really excited about: Our discipleship team has produced a six-week study called *START* that goes along with this. **This study is going to do two things:** (1) Each study is going to take you deeper into these things, showing you how to make them a permanent part of your life. But even more than that,

(2) this study is going to serve as an introductory tool that you can take someone through whom you're trying to introduce to Jesus. (*No just during this series, but for years to come.*)

These six things are basically the first questions you think about when becoming a Christian. Things like: *What's **salvation all about** and how can you know for sure you have it? How should you approach the Bible? How do you start to pray?*

In fact, **one of the things you are going to be challenged to do** through this series is find someone outside of the church whom who can take through these things... Each disciple of Jesus is supposed to reproduce—to make other disciples of Jesus—and this study, we believe, is going to be a tool that helps you do that. Think of it like a **starter kit** for a new Christian.

Now, some of you say: *“I've been a Christian for a long time. Am I going to be bored during this?”*

- *Let me ask you this:* Do you know these things well enough to teach them easily to someone else? *That's how I want you to listen to this: **Can I teach someone the basics of the Christian faith effectively?***

Plus, I'll tell you one more thing: Two of the **greatest coaches** in sports history, Vince Lombardi and Dean Smith, were famous for constantly taking their teams back to the basics. **Vince Lombardi famously** held out a football at the beginning of practice each year and said, *“Gentlemen, this is a football.”* These were **already accomplished athletes**, but the deeper they took them into the basics, the greater they became.

The same is true for Christianity. Martin Luther said (and I love this), *“To progress (in the Christian life) is always to begin again.”* **To go deeper in the basics.** I've heard Christianity described like a well. The best stuff is not found by digging wider—but by going deeper—into the well.

Week 1: The Assurance of Salvation

Our first week we're going to talk about the ASSURANCE OF SALVATION: ***What do Christians mean by salvation and how can you know for sure you that have it?***

I figured out that a lot of Christians, when they are honest, admit to struggling to know for sure... If you've been around here for a while you know that for many years **I struggled with that (BOOK)**

- Guinness book of World Records: 5000 times
- **Every youth camp.** Got embarrassing. I've been saved in youth camps all over the nation. Didn't want to be wrong.
- **Baptized four times.** Staple in our baptismal services. Locker.
- It all began in the **7th grade...** Matthew 7: "Lord, Lord." He explained that these were not people who never went to church... active, church going people: Many mighty works. "Cast out demons in your name." When we select you to serve on the demon exorcising squad... Some of you boys are gonna be in that group "That's me." **I'd prayed the prayer**, but for me it was simply a get-out-of-hell-free card. I had no real relationship to him.

So that's the question: What is salvation, and how can you know for sure you have it?

The good news is, you can know definitively, and by the end of today, I think I will have shown you how.

John 3... the story of a religious man, Nicodemus, coming to talk about these things with Jesus:

JOHN 2:23–3:16

We're going to start Nicodemus' story at the end of chapter 2:

[23] Now... many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. [24] But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people. [25] He didn't need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what as in each person.

- In other words, he knew that **though they said** they believed in him, he knew their faith was superficial...
 - **You might say, "they** believed Jesus, but Jesus didn't believe them."
 - **He knew their love** and commitment to him did not go very deep.
- This is the same **group he is talking about in Matthew 7...** who say, "Lord, Lord."
- **Did you know: 67% of Americans say they have a relationship with Jesus, and 50% of them say they have prayed a prayer asking Jesus into their heart**, even though **1/2** of them have no regular presence in any kind of church and **2/3** have lifestyles and worldviews that really do not differ significantly from those outside of the Christian faith?
- *This is the group Jesus is talking about.* They believe, and are religious...

Nicodemus' story is Jesus' answer to that group of people (unfortunate place for a chapter break—because this is a direct response). **[3:1] Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. [2] This man (Nicodemus) came to Jesus by night (that's why we call this story Nic at Night) and said to him, "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." He was one of the guys in chapter 2. He saw the signs and believed.**

[3] Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Now, **Nicodemus is confused...** thinks Jesus is telling him he needs to crawl back up into his **mommy's tummy...** and so he says, vs. 4, **"How can that be? I'm too big...** that's kind of **awkward**; plus, I think **it's illegal in every state** except for Tennessee..."

[5] Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, (BTW, Jesus doesn't normally say untrue things, so saying "truly, truly" doesn't mean, "OK, now, this time I'm telling the truth!" Rather, it's kind of like my mom using **my**

full name—Jacquin Diangelo Greear—“Truly, truly” means, “Pay attention”! Unless you are born again, you can’t enter God’s kingdom). He goes on. *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.”*

3 questions: *“Why you must be born again (and what does that mean); “How you can be born again?” And then “Are you born again?”*

- (BTW, this concept, maybe more than any other regarding salvation, shows you that you are either in or out. It’s like pregnancy: My wife has been pregnant 4 times. Not once has she ever brought out the little stick to me and said, “Hey look, I’m sort of pregnant.” You either you are or you aren’t. The same with the new birth: you either are born again or you are not. *(This is a CIRCLE you are either in or you are not, and you had better make sure you are in!)*

1. Why you must be born again

- To need new birth implies there is something wrong with our first birth.
- According to the Bible, we are born into a state of spiritual death because of the sin of the human race.
- God had declared in Genesis, “the one who sins will surely die.” And when we sinned, that’s exactly what happened.
 - Adam and Eve were driven out of God’s presence, and their **relationship** with God was severed.
 - At that point **our bodies**, which God had intended to sustain eternally for us, began to die.
 - And our **spiritual hearts** went bad.
- It’s like our **hearts got sick**. We **quit loving** what we were supposed to love and started to love what we shouldn’t love...
 - We were made, you see, so that our hearts were turned outward—loving God and loving others; but, after sin, we turned inward, seeking first to love and please ourselves.

- Luther: *incurvatus in se*
- Scripture is not sparing in its description of the state of our hearts
 - Jeremiah 17:9: The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked—your heart
- Paul says in Romans that we are **disordered in our emotions**
 - What we love is all out of whack:
 - We love God’s gifts more than we love him
 - We seek to serve ourselves before serving him
 - We use God to get to his gifts: you can see that when you obey and you yell at God, “Why didn’t you repay me?”
- **Defiled in our bodies**
 - **Our lips are dirty because out of them come things that hurt and slander others.** Jesus said that when we destroy someone with our words, or write them off... “I’m so done with him...” we are guilty of murder.
 - **Our lips are dirty because we lie.** When I want to get depressed, I think about how naturally I lie—stretch the truth. Telling the truth is a discipline I have to force myself into.
 - **Sexually, our bodies are defiled** because we use our bodies to gratify our lusts rather than give ourselves to one person in the sexual relationship God designed.
- **Genesis 6 says that our thoughts are laced with evil continually.**
 - We never have a good thought without the presence of evil somewhere close by. Owen: Even our tears of repentance... Usually my repentance contains a mixture of pride, “Man, I’m pretty awesome for repenting this way.” Or unbelief, “I’m not sure if God loves me.”
- Paul says in Romans 2 that **we’re hypocrites**.
 - Francis Schaeffer: illustration of tape recorder that only activates when you use the word “ought”
- Louie Giglio says, “It is impossible to **overestimate** the corruption sin caused in our hearts. Sin didn’t knock us down to God’s JV

team or put us on probation or put us on a slower track to get our mansion in heaven. Sin wiped us out.”¹

- We’re **stained through and through**. We are, **by nature**, children of wrath (Eph 2:3).
- We **cannot possibly hope to stand before God** stained so thoroughly with sin:
 - Imagine you had a new baby, and someone sick with the **Ebola virus** came in and asked to hold your baby... horror because your baby is precious and its health is important.
 - God is **more pure than you are healthy**, and **God’s creation is more precious to him** than your baby is to you, so **your revulsion to Ebola is nothing** compared to his revulsion to sin.
- And we **can’t possibly do anything to “fix ourselves,”** because the problem is in my heart and **when I decide to “fix myself,”** I have to draw on the corrupted resources of my heart!
 - In college, as a joke, a friend of mine and I put a hard-boiled egg in the heating unit of our friend’s dorm room so that every time he turned on the heater he smelled rotten egg. Of course he didn’t know where it was coming from, so he tried everything to make the smell go away; keeping the door open; air fresheners; changing his sheets; keeping the bathroom door shut... but the problem was deep in the unit. That’s like my heart.
 - It can’t be changed through willpower or covering it up with religion.
 - [6] **“That which is born of flesh is flesh...”** We can’t save our corrupted flesh through the efforts of our corrupted flesh.

Sin killed us, and nothing we can do can change that. We need something more. So (he continues), [5] **“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”**

- Think of the imagery here:

¹ From Louie Giglio sermon on John 3, “Choose Life.”

- **Water washes...** We need something that cleans away the guilt and defilement of our sin.
- **The Spirit makes alive...**

(Some people try to teach here that Jesus is saying **you have to be baptized** (born of water) and born of the Spirit to be saved. But (and here’s your **nerd moment**), in Greek there is only one article, “born of *the* water and spirit” not “born of *the* water,” and “born of *the* spirit.” Which means: One thing he talks about.²)

He is alluding to a passage from Ezekiel. 600 before Jesus, God prophesied through Ezekiel: **“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean... And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone and give you a heart of tender flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to (want to) walk in my statutes and to desire to obey my rules.”** (Ezekiel 36:25–27)

- **God then gave Ezekiel** one of the coolest visions of the OT: **He took Ezekiel out to this** valley: filled with the skeletons of dead men,³ and said to them, “Ezekiel, can these people live again?” And Ezekiel says, “God, I don’t know how... they’ve obviously been dead for a long time.”
- Well, then Ezekiel hears the sound of the Spirit blowing through them, and the bones begin to come together forming sinews and tendons... and then human flesh grows over them... and then they stand up and form an army.
 - This is what God is doing in the church, and **this is what YOU NEED:** You don’t need more religion or more rules, more resolutions, putting the bones together.
 - You need the wind of the Spirit to make you alive; to give you a new heart.

² Like Ezekiel explains, they are two images of salvation: removing our defilement and reviving us in the Spirit. Paul called it in Titus 3:5, “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”

³ Ezekiel 37:4–10

- God doesn't want you just to change your behavior; he wants to change your desires.
 - You see, **it's not pleasing to God** if you obey him because you are forced to. Men, if your wife acted loving toward you—spoke politely to you, honored you—but you knew she was in love with someone else, would that satisfy you?
 - **Jonathan Edwards said that if you had a little wooden puppet** and you arranged it to bow in your presence... would that be relationally satisfying to you?⁴ MECHANICAL.
- GOD didn't create us because he needed robots to obey him, or servants. .
 - *The essence of God is love; love that existed eternally between the members of the Trinity. God created us to share in that love.*
 - **He doesn't want people in heaven who wish they were somewhere else, who simply use him as a means to avoiding hell or getting heaven. He wants people who share in his love. Who serve him because they love him.**
 - **A new kind of obedience...**
 - **The dilemma of the human condition:** *not that we don't behave right, but that we don't love right...*

2. How you can be born again

Down a little farther, Jesus says: **[14] And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up [15] that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**

- He refers to another OT story.⁵

As the people of Israel were headed into the Promised Land, they **got impatient, started to doubt** the *goodness and even existence* of God, and their hearts started to **wander after other gods**.

⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, Works: 21:172. See also *Delighting in the Trinity*, Michael Reeves, 99.

⁵ Numbers 21:4–8

So **God sent these fiery serpents** into the camp. 1000's of them... Bit them. The people began to wail in pain and cried out to God.

So God told Moses to make a **bronze image** of one of the serpents, and put it high up on a hill on the top of a pole. And **God told the people that if they would look** at that in faith, believing that God would heal them, they would be healed.

[14] And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up [15] that whoever believes in (looks to) him may have eternal life.

- **Jesus would be lifted up**, on a pole, like that serpent.
- The serpent, you see, was **the result of their sin**; death was the result of ours.
- And God made him, who knew no sin, who was as pure as heaven's glory, the perfect, spotless Son, to become sin for us...
- And if we look at him, dying there in our place, **we will be healed like they were**.
- **Born again**, out of the curse of death into the promise of new 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.

And there it is, the **clearest explanation** of the gospel: God looked down from heaven... (God is a **Father**; he's always been a father, and he **saw us, his children, suffering** in our sin and he **couldn't stand** to leave us to perish... so he **came to earth**, in search of us, and we killed him, but we didn't realize he was **paying our penalty**, so that if we **believe...** just look to him, we'd be saved.

- (Alex: insert my name).
- Rejoicing in the presence of the angels

When Jesus says, "believe", he's not just talking about...

- **Believing facts...** *Demons believe and tremble!* The demons believe Jesus is God; rose from the dead.

- You believe? Good. On par with demons. *The difference in demonic faith and saving faith is that I have looked to him in desperation and leaned the weight of my soul on him.*
- **Like a chair.** Saving belief accompanied by surrender.
- **WRITE: Belief without full surrender is demonic faith.**
- **Faith like demon;** fate like demon
- **It's not just praying a prayer** that equals believing. People in every religion pray for God to let them into heaven. We are talking about a cry from your heart, realizing that his finished work is **your only hope.**

Charles Spurgeon: *"I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now, had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning while I was going to a certain place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel there may have been a dozen or fifteen people. I had heard of the Primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache; but that did not matter to me. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they could tell me that, I did not care how much they made my head ache.*

The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed in, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or a tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed; but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text for the simple reason that he had little else to say.

The text was, "LOOK UNTO ME, AND BE YE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH."

He did not even pronounce the words correctly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus—

"My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, 'Look.' Now lookin' don't take a deal of pains. It ain't liftin' you foot or your finger; it is just, 'Look.' Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, 'Look unto Me.' Ay!" said he in broad Essex accent (think of that like a deep Pittsboro accent), "Many of you are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves... The text says, 'Look unto Me.'

Then the good man followed up his text in this way:

"Look unto Me (says Jesus); I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!"

When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so, the poor soul was at the end of his tether. (He could think of nothing else to say.)

Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he (must have known) I was a visitor, and fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said,

"Young man, you look very miserable."

Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance...

However, it was a good blow—it struck right home. He continued,

"And you always will be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death—if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved."

Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do,

"Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look—and live."

And I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said, I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!"... what a charming word it seemed to me!

Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to him. Oh, that somebody had just told me this before, "Trust Christ, and you shall be saved."

Yet it was, no doubt, all in God's good time, and now I can say—'Ever since by faith I saw the stream thy flowing wounds supply, Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die.'"⁶

3. Are YOU Born Again?

Nicodemus was **presented with a choice**. A choice he had to make. He wasn't just born into it. My parents are Christians, so I'm a Christian. He had to choose personally to be born again.

It wasn't enough to just be religious. He was already religious! Ask people if they are a Christian, get a list of what they do: "Yeah, I go to church..."

- **Going to church is not enough. You have to be born again.**
- Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to **McDonald's** makes you a hamburger... or going to Dunkin' Donuts makes you a cop.

Have you fully surrendered to Christ as Lord; have you fully leaned on Christ as Savior? Have you been born again?

I remember my own story: My first year of college I was devouring the Bible trying to figure out how you could know for sure you were going to heaven... and I came to Romans 10:9–10... if you will confess your mouth... and I saw it had been done... My chains fell off...

Are you born again? You can know.

CARD:

SALVATION (For believers: Are you ready to teach this? What if Nicodemus shows up at your house at night—Are you ready?)

BAPTISM:

When you trust Christ, you are supposed to show it through baptism. Public declaration. Symbolizes the washing and rebirth by the Spirit.

- Many of you have never done that. **a.** Maybe **just trusting Christ** today, or, **b.** *maybe you trusted Christ as Lord and Savior a while ago, years ago; but you've never declared it through adult public baptism.*

Excuses:

- **"Is it really that important?"** Yes, it's a command of Jesus. It doesn't save you; it is the public declaration of what happened. A **visual picture** of what happens... baptized, raised.

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography, Vol. 1: The Early Years*, 88.

- ***“Well, I don’t think it is that important.”*** Who are you to decide which of his commands we’re going to obey and which we are not?
- **Pastor J.D.: *“I was baptized as a child.”*** Their decision or yours? Symbol of *your faith*. Every time in the Bible...We see 27 baptisms in the book of Acts; all 27 times they believed first. ***“I don’t want to shame my parents.”*** You’re not! You’re fulfilling their hopes!
- ***“I need to think about it...”*** About what? ***Whether he said it?*** Acts 2:38. ***Whether he meant it?*** I assure you that he was serious. ***Whether he is Lord?*** I hope if you are a Christian that question is answered.
- ***If you are a follower of Jesus, you should be baptized. If you need to, indicate there; we’re going to do it next week and we’ll get your ready.***

Bullpen:

- Jesus said that many church people will say on that day, “Lord! We were really involved!”
- Many people, if you ask them if they are Christians, will say, “Well, yeah...” as in, I’m not Jewish, or a Muslim, or an atheist...”
- But just like Nicodemus you have to choose: “*Will you be born again?*”
- **That heart sickness is revealed**, among other places, **in how we relate to God’s commandments**. The 10 commandments were not supposed to be commands we had to force ourselves to obey; they were supposed to be more like vital signs of the healthy spiritual heart.
 - Vital signs... if I go to the doctor and he says, “Your blood pressure is too high.” Not an assignment (lower your blood pressure), it’s a symptom. I need to change something else to bring it down—get more exercise; quit dumping so much salt on my French fries.
- *How naturally we obey the 10 commandments is like vital signs of the spiritually heart. Have you ever considered what how you feel about the 10 commandments says about your heart?*
 - **Commandment 1:** Love God with all your heart soul and mind. *Is God constantly first in your thoughts, affections, and actions? Has he always been the most important thing in your life?*
 - **Commandment 5: Honor your father and mother...** Your mom and dad are the first authorities that represented God in your life... and how you submitted to them was an indication of the posture of your heart to the authority of God... Have you always submitted joyfully to the God-ordained authorities in your life? FAIL.
 - **Commandment 10:** You shall not **covet**: Are you content with what you have, or do you desire what others have, wishing you had it and they didn’t?

- **Commandment 9:** You shall not **bear false witness**. Do you always tell the truth? Ever massage the facts to make them go your direction? Ever try to present yourself as something you are not? Cover, or minimize your mistakes! Are you ever one way to people’s face and a different behind their back? Anyone here really willing to say, “Oh yeah. Nailed that one. Never lied”?
- **Commandment 6: Don’t murder**. We always think, “Good on this one.” Jesus said that if you look at someone with hate, or a desire to harm them, in your heart, the spirit of murder is at work in your heart and you are guilty of it.
- **Commandment 7:** You shall not commit **adultery**. Jesus said same thing here... Ever fantasize about sex with someone you are not married to?
- **Paul said that the more he looked at the 10 comm** he realized he had not really kept any of them, on the heart level. As a religious teacher, **he taught them**, but he didn’t really keep them.
- That’s how I am. I’m **0-10**. When you get a 0 on the final exam, you have no hope of passing the course.

Believe, as in: look in desperation. Scholars say the Greek word *pisteuo* can mean, “to lean your weight on.” Like sitting down in a chair. You’re in 1 of 2 positions.

We say, “The gospel is not the diving board... it is the pool.” I say this a lot, but God is not just looking for obedience—he could have created robots for that—he is looking for a new kind of obedience, an obedience that springs from desire.

(you—a friend of mine had his whole life wrecked by substituting his name for the word “you;” he’d grown up in a home without a good father, and had no concept that God loved him, and his pastor told

him to substitute the word “you” in that verse. For God so loved “Alex.” The father, the heavenly father, loved Alex like Alex had always craved to be loved and when Alex was lost the Father left heaven to come and save him)

- Why did God do it that way? Why not drop penicillin from heaven, or turn all the snakes into puppies?
- Jesus, like this image of the serpent, would be lifted up on a cross for our sins, so that all who looked to him would be saved.
- **It used to confuse me WHY** God chose a serpent to depict his son. Why not a lamb? But then I realized that the serpent was the result of their sin.
 - The serpents had bit them because of their sin. On the cross, Jesus took the viper’s bite. **2 Cor 5:21** says that he became sin for us and like the serpent was put up on that cross in our place...
 - JESUS IN MY PLACE.

Earlier I referred to Ezekiel’s prophecy... God takes the prophet Ezekiel and puts him a valley full of dry bones and says, “Can these bones live again?” And Ezekiel says, “God, I don’t know how... they’ve obviously been dead for a long time.”

[4] Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. [5] Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. [6] And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

[7] So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. [8] And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. [9] Then he said to me, “Prophesy

to the breath (*ruach*: Spirit); prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath (Spirit), and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” [10] So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. (Ezekiel 37:4-10 ESV)

Someone preaches to us the finished work of Christ, and we believe, and as we believe, God washes our heart and his Spirit blows into us and we are made alive.

[3] For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to our sinful passions, passing our days in anger and envy, hated by others and hating one another. [4] But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared (and we believed it), [5] he saved us, not because of good works that we have done, but according to his own mercy, *by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit*, [6] whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, (Titus 3:3-6)

You must be born again! And it will happen as you believe. As you look.

- BTW, some teach that Jesus is here saying unless you’re baptized you can’t be saved. Born of water *and* the Spirit. But Jesus **could not have been referring to baptism** because...
 - A. (and here’s your nerd moment), in Greek there is one article, “born of *the* water and spirit” not “born of *the* water,” and “born of *the* spirit” as if they are too separate things.
 - B. He refers to it as something Nicodemus should have understood... but baptism was not an old, Jewish custom.

- **Washing (as if by water) and making alive happen at the same moment**, when you are born again... as Paul says in Titus 3:5, “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”
 - **Baptism is the symbol of those things**, which we’ll get to in a little bit, but let’s let Jesus keep unpacking this.
 -
 - If you ask the average person, “What is sin?” list of bad things... at it’s core, it is a rejection of God’s love and his authority. I don’t believe God is good, so I won’t trust him. I don’t believe God is supreme, so I’ll make my own rules.
 - That choice, to be our own boss, made the curse of death come upon us.
- **Getting religious**
 - Get active going to church... going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going to McDonald’s makes you a hamburger... or going to Starbucks makes you a \$9 coffee or going to Dunkin Donuts makes you a cop.
 - Religion can often be a cover-up for true belief and surrender
 - It’s like the man who tries to placate his wife with flowers while he cheats on her with someone else.
 - Many people serve God in their behavior while your heart is far from him. *Religion can be a way of avoiding being honest about your heart, reckoning with what’s really in there, and surrendering your heart to Jesus.*
- **Partial surrender**
 - You start obeying God in one area but not all.
 - Imagine if I told my wife I was 95% faithful
 - **People at the church I grew up at: God is my co-pilot?** Someone’s in the wrong seat. IT’S HIS CAR! You get in back and say, “Where are we going?”

- ~~THAT’S SIN. Now, this is really a picture of all sin. We doubt God; disbelieve him; grow dissatisfied with his ways; and our hearts wander from him and serve other gods. “God I’m not satisfied with you, I need romance; I need money; I need comfort.” The bite is the curse of sin: the pain, the brokenness of life.~~

Either Wrath or Eternal Life: My friend here is a meteorologist. When I grew up meteorologists just looked at the sky and said, “I think it might rain sometime.” But they’re smart these days. They have these super-doppler things, and they can say, “There’s a storm leaving Little Creek, and if you’re in Boulder Ridge, you’ve got 4 minutes before the hail comes.” What do you do? Do you switch the channel back to Lifetime? No, you grab a mattress and you get in the tub. You take cover in your basement. **We’re all under wrath.** And no mattress, and no basement, can hold you. And it’s coming your way. The gospel says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” (Louie Giglio, John 3)

- Furthermore, I don’t need to be compelled to do things I love. I never need to be commanded to eat a steak, or kiss my wife, or take a nap.
- God doesn’t want people in heaven who want to be somewhere else.
- He wants people who love him.
- One more example. Some people hate it when I use this example, but it makes the point: VOMIT

3:5: Jesus could not have been referring to baptism because:

- He referred to it as something Nicodemus should have understood
- If he was, then the thief would have had to have been baptized
- New birth: one article, “born of water and spirit,” not, “born of water,” and “born of spirit,” **Ezekiel 36:25–27**

(Nicodemus **had to come himself**. Can't be your grandparents or your parents.)

- **Feeling sorry about your sin**

- Look at what the Apostle Paul says in **2 Corinthians 7:10**, "*For godly sorrow produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly sorrow produces death.*" Paul is here talking about a sorrow that is not of God. It cries over its sin, but it's not repentance and does not lead to salvation.
- I've seen this all my life... Sit in my office and cry...
 - The sorrow of being caught.
 - Guilt.
 - Shame.
 - Self-pity.
 - That's not repentance toward God.

Really you could summarize it in two words: **repentance and faith**.

- Repentance means recognizing that God is right and you are wrong; your life belongs to him, always has.
- Faith means believing that he did what he said to save you

Ezekiel 36:25–27: "***I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.***"
(Ezekiel 36:25-27 ESV)

- We need to be washed; we need to be made new. We need a new heart that desires God.

- God doesn't want us to obey him just because we are threatened by hell when we obey. He wants us to want to obey him. **VOMIT.** *God does not want spiritual dogs who obey because they are forced to; he wants people who obey because they desire to.*
- **God's not after the submission of slaves but the love of sons.** He's not just after obedience; he's after a whole new kind of obedience, an obedience that grows from desire.