

The Necessity and Radical Nature of the New Birth (John 2:23–3:8)

Awakening: The Revival Only God Can Give

Zionsville Fellowship | August 23, 2026 | Drew Hunter

John 2:2–3:8

2:23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, 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 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by 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.” 3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, 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.’ 8 The wind 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.”

What is the greatest need in our world today? What is the greatest need of every person?

What you think is the greatest need follows from what you think is the greatest problem. So, what is the greatest problem, and what is the greatest solution? The answer I’m going to give today may not sound right at first. In our world filled with financial difficulties. Inequality. Anger and strife. Cancer.

But here it is: the greatest need for everyone is the new birth—being born again, or regeneration. And the greatest need for every culture is for this to happen in a wide-scale—which we call revival, or awakening. This solves the problem under every other moral, social, and cultural problem.

There are many reasons why this may not sound right to modern people.

First of all, these terms are misused and misunderstood. People think of being a “born again Christian” as a certain *type* of Christian—maybe a certain personality type, or a particularly conservative type. Or they think of revival as a scheduled event.

But what is the new birth, or regeneration about? What is awakening or revival about?

Let me answer that by telling you a story. I want to tell you what happened in the mid 1700s in England, Scotland, Wales, and the American Colonies. It's called the transatlantic Great Awakenings. It was a sovereign act of God to bring widespread spiritual renewal—and it dramatically transformed people's lives and cultures.

- It started in the mid 1730s. Jonathan Edwards was a pastor in Northampton, Massachusetts. All of a sudden, people started to respond to his preaching in powerful ways. Many people had heard the gospel and been in church their whole lives—but now, all of a sudden, they were powerfully changed.
- At about the same time, God transformed two men in Wales—Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland. They started preaching and had widespread, astonishing results. They didn't even know each other, though. They were doing their own thing, and then they later found out about each other's ministry. And then they heard about Edwards in New England and said, "it's the same thing that's happening to us!"
- At the same time as these revivals, George Whitefield—who didn't know about them—was converted in England and began an even more astonishing ministry.

He went to Oxford and joined a group called the Holy Club. This was led by John and Charles Wesley. It was a religious group focused on holiness—but none of them were converted yet.

Then Whitefield read a book and became convinced of the new birth—that we must be born again. We have to have a deep, God-produced transformation within us. And the Lord gave him this new birth. He was filled with joy, peace, and assurance of God's love.

He started writing to his family that there is such a thing as the new birth. And he shared the gospel with friends, and they became converted.

And then he started preaching about the new birth. He was invited to preach and teach and he grew more popular. He was preaching most days of the week. The churches couldn't contain the people. Thousands were turned away because there was no room.

Over the next few years, he went back and forth between America and England. He preached all through the week—all over the colonies, and all over England. He spoke to crowds of five—, ten—, and twenty—thousand, sometimes forty thousand. He preached in the open air in Philadelphia, and Boston, and New York, and Georgia. He often said that there was hardly a dry face. People were melted and softened. They were weeping from conviction of sin, or from joy of salvation.

He said on one occasion, "[great numbers were quite melted, and dissolved into tears](#)" (Journals, 234). On another, when preaching to four or five thousand, "[some wept, and all seemed much affected, and were very silent](#)" (236).

And another time, he said, “I expounded... with such power and demonstration of the Spirit as I never saw before. Surely the hearers’ hearts were quite melted down by the preaching of the free grace of God in Jesus Christ to poor sinners. Floods of loving tears flowed from their eyes” (259).

What was going on?

God was waking people up to reality. He poured out his Spirit and drenched these nations with his grace. That’s what revival is. It is the outpouring of God’s Spirit through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many become Christians, and many Christians become renewed. And the culture is transformed in its wake—because people are transformed from selfishness to love—love for God and love for others.

I’ll remember hearing the New Testament scholar Don Carson talk about this. He said that when we learn about past revivals, we cannot help but look to God and say, “Do it again.”

So, we’re beginning a three-week series on Awakening—which is the revival only God can give.

We’ll do this from the Gospel of John, in chapters 3 & 4. And we’ll consider three topics: The New Birth this morning, Justification by faith alone next week, and revival in the last week.

Why these topics? Because the *New Birth* and *Justification by Faith Alone* are the doctrines that God used to spread revival. They are essential to true revival and renewal.

When Whitefield started preaching, he said, “the doctrine of the New Birth and Justification by Faith in Christ... made its way like lightening into the hearer’s consciences.”ⁱ It was his sermon on the New Birth that sparked the revivals.ⁱⁱ These doctrines were widely neglected and misunderstood in Whitefield’s era, and they are neglected and misunderstood today.

This morning we’re considering the new birth; or being born again; or what we call regeneration.

This is the radical transformation at the core of our being when we become a Christian. We so often reduce becoming a Christian to “making a decision to trust and follow Jesus.” Okay. But the only reason that happens is because God transforms our heart so deeply, so thoroughly, that it can only be considered a new birth.

And we learn this from Jesus in John 3. **Jesus teaches us that everyone must be born again by the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God.** The new birth is the radical transformation of the core of our being, and it is necessary to be saved.

Jesus answers three questions about the new birth, or regeneration: *Why do we need it? What is it? How does it happen?* So: why we need it, what it is, and how it happens.

1. Why Do We Need the New Birth? (2:23–3:3)

First, why do we need it? Why is the new birth absolutely necessary?

Notice how emphatic Jesus is about this. He says this three times. Verse 3, “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Verse 5, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Verse 7, simply: “You must be born again.”

And he says all of this emphatically—before he says this, he repeats, “truly, truly, I say to you...” He is saying, “listen to me. This is absolutely necessary to hear. You must be born again.” There is no Christian without it. No salvation without it.

And who needs this? Everyone, without exception. Rich and poor, young and old, religious and irreligious, moral and immoral. No one is saved without it.

The story makes this point by drawing attention to two kinds of people.

The first group is those who believe in Jesus in some sense, but it’s a superficial belief.

This is at the end of chapter 2. The chapter breaks in the Bible make us miss the connection between these people and the story of Nicodemus. But the stories are tied together in a number of ways.

Verse 23 says many people are in Jerusalem and seeing the signs Jesus did. And notice how they respond: “many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.” They believe in some sense. They have a kind of faith in Jesus. They know something about him, they trust him. That’s positive.

But there’s something incomplete or defective about their faith at this point. They really don’t understand who Jesus is yet. They are just impressed by signs. So, notice verses 24–25, “But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.” These people are trusting Jesus, but Jesus doesn’t trust them—he doesn’t believe their belief. These people are maybe on their way—but they are not yet fully embracing Jesus. And Jesus knows this because he knows what is in man—he knows the human heart.

What is so striking is that here we have people who are believers, who are not true believers. They have faith, but not saving faith. John will later talk about disciples of Jesus, who then turn away and prove to not be true disciples. James will later talk about two kinds of faith—a dead, non-saving faith, and a living, saving faith.

So, that’s the first group: people who believe in Jesus, but it’s superficial. Jesus knows, because he knows what is in man. They need something deeper. They need a deeper change inside of them.

And now we see the second kind of person who needs this inner change—and it's Nicodemus.ⁱⁱⁱ

John just said, "Jesus knows what is in man..." And now, in verse 1 we read, "now there was a *man* of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This *man*..." This is an awkward way to introduce someone—but John is drawing attention to that word "man." Here is another person—and Jesus knows what is in the heart.

Who is Nicodemus?

- He's a serious religious person.
- He's a Pharisee, which was the Jewish group most serious about keeping laws.
- He is a leader—he's called a ruler of the Jews.
- And he's probably very well known. One scholar named Richard Bauckham said we have records of only four people named Nicodemus in Israel in this 500 year window—and they all belong to the same family. A well-known, socially elite, wealthy family.

And when Nicodemus says, "we know you're a teacher..." the "we" signals that he's representing people. A lot of people have assumed that Nicodemus is coming to Jesus in private and curious and open to him. But some scholars make the case—and I find this plausible—that he is actually not alone. Evening would have been the time when rabbis teach their students and have public dialogues. And so Nicodemus may be there with his own disciples, and he may have been sent by the Jewish leaders to confront Jesus here. This dialogue has the marks of a public challenge. So here it looks like we have the representative Jew, challenging the representative of God.^{iv}

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night—which, in the gospel of John, is associated with spiritual darkness. And he praises Jesus as a teacher from God.

Jesus responds in a striking, even jarring manner. Rather than saying, "thank you for the complement," he says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

What does Jesus mean? Nicodemus would have expected the kingdom of God to come at the end of the age. The Messiah would come, God's people would be raised from the dead, and the earth would be renewed. And he would have expected all decent Jews to be there and enter that kingdom.

Jesus's startling point is that you must be born again in order to see it and enter it. Jesus is implying that Nicodemus is not yet fit to enter the kingdom.

But this is Nicodemus—the representative Jew. He's a serious, moral, Bible-teacher. Surely if anyone can enter the kingdom, it's him, right?

No. He lacks the one necessary prerequisite. And what is so radical about what Jesus is saying is that he needs to start over again. It's not that Nicodemus has advanced to mile 9 of a 10-mile run, and he needs just a little bit more to go. No, he's on the wrong track.

So—what is the point, then, of what we've seen so far?

Everyone, without exception, must be born again. Even those who profess to know Jesus—they need to know that they must be born again. Even serious, moral, Bible-reading, religious leaders—they need to know they must be born again.

And so here's what this assumes: it assumes that our nature so corrupt that we don't just need to try harder; we need a new birth. We are not sick and need healing; we are dead and need life.

This assumes the doctrine of original sin. This is the radical corruption of our nature ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. The Bible says we are dead in our sins (Eph. 2:1–3). It says our natural mindset is hostile to God (Rom. 8:7). It says our eyes are blinded to the beauty of Jesus and his grace (2 Cor. 4:1–6). It says no one seeks God (Rom. 3).

And this means that nothing short of a new birth will do.

No amount of moral effort will get you into God's kingdom.
Being born into a Christian family will not get you into the kingdom.
Knowing the Bible and sharing it with others will not get you into the kingdom.
Professing to trust Jesus will not—by itself, as a profession—get you into his kingdom.
Attending church and liking sermons will not get you into the kingdom.
Going to Bible college and serving in ministry will not get you into the kingdom.

You can do all these things—and many people do—and not be born again, and therefore you will not enter the kingdom.

We need nothing short of a new birth.

Do you have this? Have you been born again? There is nothing more important.

2. What Is the New Birth? (3:4–6)

So, we need to ask the second question, then: What is the new birth?

The New Birth is a radical cleansing and transformation at the core of our personality. It is also called regeneration because it is a complete transformation and renewal. It is a spiritual resurrection—from spiritual death to life.

When Jesus says he must be born again, Nicodemus takes it in a crassly literal sense. He asks how a man can re-enter the womb and be born again. So Jesus clarifies what he means—and this shows us what the new birth is. Notice what Jesus says in verse 5: to be born again is to be “born of water and the Spirit.” What does that mean?

Jesus is drawing on one of the greatest promises of the Old Testament.

It is the promise of the New Covenant. He is specifically drawing on Ezekiel 36:25–27. We’ll read it in a moment, but here’s the context. Israel had a long history of disobedience and rejecting God. From the very beginning, they rejected him. They couldn’t keep his law. They didn’t love him. They continually committed idolatry and were unjust to one another.

So, God eventually sends them out of the land into exile.

But he gave them this great promise—he promised to make a new covenant with them. A whole new arrangement. And in this new covenant, basically God would take over, invade our hearts, and transform them.

The whole story of Israel proves that human nature—because of original sin—cannot trust and love and obey God. It won’t work. We’re morally incapable. So God himself would guarantee that his people—all in this new covenant—would actually know and obey him.

And Ezekiel uses the imagery of *water* and the *Spirit* to refer to this cleansing and renewal. Let’s read this—and I’ve underlined the key promises Jesus is drawing on. Here is [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. 26 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. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

1. First, the promise of *water* for cleansing. We will be cleansed from our sins and idolatry.
2. Second, the promise of *a new heart*.

This is why the idea of “new birth” is a fitting summary of this text. It’s a complete transformation of the core of our personality. That’s what the heart refers to in the Bible—it’s our spiritual and moral and psychological control center. It is the source of our deepest thoughts, desires, and motives. God swaps our old heart out with a new one—he gives us new desires, new motives, which lead to new behaviors.

3. And third, the promise of *the Holy Spirit*. He puts his own Spirit within us.

Why? So that he will *cause us* to be careful to obey his rules. He doesn’t force us to obey him against our will. He transforms our will so we *want* to obey him.

This is why the new birth transforms our lives.

This is why if you say you believe in Jesus, but nothing changes in your life, you don't.

There is new life, and the sign of life is that it grows.

It exerts a force on your thinking, your desires, and your behavior.

You now know and love and obey God—not perfectly, but truly and increasingly.

So, what is Ezekiel promising?

A completely new beginning, marked by cleansing and renewal. It is not a physical rebirth, but a spiritual one—given by the Holy Spirit.

This answers *the problem* of Israel in the Old Testament. This answers *the problem* of the human condition. God will not just say, “here is my law; love and obey me.” He says, “I will give you a new heart and cause you to love and obey me.” I will cause you to be born again.

It's right there in the Old Testament. That's why Jesus will say to Nicodemus soon, “are you the teacher of Israel and you don't know these things?” He should have known.

Now, Israel should have been waiting for this new covenant. They should have been waiting for the messiah to bring this reality. And here Jesus is. It's time. He came to bring this new covenant. You must be born again—and you can be born again.

The New Testament is saturated with this promise.

- Titus 3:5, “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”
- Ephesians 2:4–5: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.”
- 1 Peter 1:3, “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope”
- And John—in his first letter—shows how this transforms our lives. This is how you know you've been born again. You begin to grow. 1John 2:29 “If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”
- 1John 3:9, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”

What is the new birth, or regeneration?

It's not about turning a new page; it's about becoming a new person.

It's not trying harder to obey; it's God giving us a new heart and causing us to obey.

So, the question we're asking again is this: Has this happened to you? Have you been born again? There's nothing more important.

How Does the New Birth Happen? (3:7–8)

So, this leads us to ask the third question: How does the new birth happen? How does this come about? How can this happen to us?

At one level, it's clear that this is not something we can do. Jesus does not say "cause yourself to be born again." He says, "you must *be* born again." Nobody gives birth to themselves. Nobody chooses to be born. Nobody plans to be born. It happens to them.

So, Jesus explains this with another illustration in verse 8: "The wind 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."

It's a perfect illustration. Because the Spirit is the one who causes us to be born again. And the Greek word for wind and spirit are the same word. And they work in similar ways. Just like the wind blows where it wishes; so does the Spirit. You don't see it coming; you just experience it. You can't see it, but you can see its effects.

Jesus is probably also drawing on Ezekiel here—in the next chapter in Ezekiel, chapter 37. Ezekiel gets a vision of a valley filled with dry bones; filled with skeletons; dead people. And then the wind starts blowing and the bones come alive. It's a picture of resurrection. And it portrays a spiritual resurrection—it illustrates the new covenant, the new birth. We are spiritually dead, and the Spirit must come to us, like wind, to cause us to be born again.

What does this teach us about the new birth? It's *supernatural*, *mysterious*, and *powerful*.

1. First, it's *supernatural*. It's from God. It's a gift from above. You cannot cause this to happen to yourself. You can't control the wind. You don't choose and plan to be born again. It's a total gift, absolutely free. You do nothing to prepare for it. The picture from Ezekiel is that you're dead, and God breathes life into you. The wind blows where it wants—God breathes life into whom he wants, when he wants, where he wants.
2. Second, it's *mysterious*. Jesus says you can hear the wind, but you can't see where it's coming from or where it's going. You cannot see the wind; you can only see its effects. That's the new birth. You cannot see it happen inside of you; but you can see its effects.
3. Third, it's *powerful*. It creates a change.

And what are its effects? I'm convinced the New Birth is what produces faith and repentance in us—which leads to a transformed life. In 1 John 5:1, John says, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him." Those who believe *have been—already—born*

again. The evidence of the new birth is faith and love. It produces what Israel and humanity are unable to do on their own.

I'm convinced that the very first effect is faith. God has to cause us to be born again in order for us to repent and believe. Being born again happens simultaneously with our faith—but it is the cause of it.

John Piper described it like *fire and heat*—when you start a fire, you have heat immediately.^v They happen simultaneously. You don't have a fire without heat, and you don't have heat without fire. But the fire is what caused the heat. The new birth is what causes the faith.

Now, some would disagree with that. But any evangelical Christian has to at least agree that God has to do *something* in our hearts to bring us to faith.^{vi} Original sin has so corrupted us that we will never believe unless God works inside of us. He has to give a special grace to us so we are enabled to repent and believe. Because of the fall, nobody does it on their own.

So, the new birth is supernatural, mysterious, and powerful. God doesn't have to do this to anyone. But he does it to millions out of his heart of mercy.

Implications

Now, I want us to consider several implications here.

Jesus said—seriously, emphatically, urgently: You must be born again. And unless you are born again, you will not enter the kingdom of God.

So, the main question each one of us needs to ask, is this: *Have you been born again?*

There is nothing more important. A day is coming when we will stand before this Jesus, and we will either enter his kingdom, or we will be sent away into eternal punishment. And the difference between the two paths is this: those who are born again will enter the kingdom. *Have you been born again, and are you trusting in Christ alone for your salvation?*

This means that you and I need to make sure we are resting in nothing else. These two stories—the people who trusted Jesus in light of his signs, and Nicodemus—show us that nothing else will do.

You may be like the crowds who profess faith in Jesus, but it's superficial. The Barna surveys find all sorts of people who say they are committed to Jesus and say they are born again—but their lives are no different than anyone else's—which means they are not, in fact born again. They are not truly trusting Christ.

Or you may be like Nicodemus. You've come to church for years. You read the Bible. You read theology books. You talk about Jesus. Maybe you're a leader. You're successful. But you're not born again. You don't need *one more* thing; you need *the only necessary* thing.

How do you know if you are born again?

You know because you see its effects in your life. If the fire is there, you feel the heat. You are trusting in Christ alone for your forgiveness and righteous status. You have turned from your sin and you are trusting him. And you are growing—that's evidence that a baby has been born; it grows.

So, in your life, you see evidence of a new heart—you now love him, you love other Christians, you hate sin, you want to pray, you delight to read the Bible, you want to see others know Christ, you want to become like him, you are looking forward to being with Christ forever. Those are the marks of the new birth. That is evidence that the wind has blown over you. None of them done perfectly now—but there is evidence of life.

If you are not born again—what do you do?

You can't cause yourself to be born again. Only God can do this. That may seem distressing to find out. But we need to understand our condition.

But this is also where hope is found. Because God loves to give the new birth. He can do it, and he loves to do it.

So, what can do you do?

1. First, ask him for it. Plead with him to give you this new heart. Don't rest until he does.
 2. And second—and this is actually the main thing—look to Christ. Trust in him. Repent and believe, and receive his grace and forgiveness. Jesus calls us to trust him. God gives the new birth as we hear the gospel—he brings it home to our heart. So hear the good news again, and receive it—by God's regenerating power. Jesus died for sinners like you—trust him for forgiveness.
- Children and young people, you are never too young for this. Your parents may not be born again, but don't let that keep you from coming to Christ. Seek Christ, trust him, ask him for this.
 - Older men and women, you are never too old for this. You are closer to your death than most here, this is the one thing you must ensure you have.
 - Parents, remember that your kids are not born again just because they are your kids.

Most kids of Christians have some kind of belief in Jesus because they trust their parents and they go to church. For some, Jesus has given the new birth, and it's a deep and saving faith. But for others, it is superficial at this point.

So as your kids express faith in Christ, encourage that, be charitable, don't assume it's not true and deep—but also, don't assume that it is without any question.

You are looking for evidence of regeneration, evidence of a new heart.

Do they know God? Do they hunger for him? Do they trust and love Jesus?

Are they hating sin?

Do they want to read the Bible and pray?

Do they want to know and love and obey Jesus?

Are they growing?

Evidence of the new birth is not merely making a decision—or agreeing with questions. It is a deep, revolutionary, lasting transformation. It is receiving Jesus's grace and coming under his authority.

That is evidence of true salvation. This is why we believe there is wisdom in waiting for baptism and membership for kids—we are looking for evidence of regeneration. We don't want to discourage young faith, but we also don't want to give false assurance.

So, parents, pray for God to give your children the new birth. Yes, we want them to be moral. But we don't want Spirit-produced morality that flows from the new birth.

Now, if you are born again, how should you respond today?

Never grow tired of admiring and thanking God for this miracle. He brought the gospel to you, and his Spirit blew over you like wind, and he gave you a new heart. He didn't have to. But he did. Any true Christian growth you have—is ultimately because of his mercy and grace. Thank him all through the day.

And live in light of it. If you have been born again, that's a change that is to impact you every day. It is to change the way you think, what you love, and how you live. Are you living consistently with this new heart that you have? Are you seeking to water that little seed in you so that it grows? Born again Christians are those who long to know Christ more. We identify whatever sins and lusts and greed is in our heart, and we renounce it over and over again. We long to know Christ, so we read his word and study it and talk about it together. We eagerly listen to biblical, Christ-centered sermons. We want to pray through the day, at work, as we leave for the day, when we lay our head down at night.

And if you are born again, you will long for others to be born again. And you will make sure people understand this. You will do this for people who are clearly not yet Christians, and also for those who think they *are* saved already. Remember, many people are like those

people in chapter 2—they believe in Jesus, but Jesus knows their heart; they are not trustworthy yet. They must be born again; it may not be a living, saving faith.

And, now let's return to where we started: to awakening and revival.

We've been talking about the new birth, and how it comes to us individually. But what happens when God decides to have his wind blow over whole towns, regions, and nations? That's what we call revival. God awakens whole towns and nations from their spiritual sleep.

That's what we long for. And only God can do it. Never think we can manipulate revival. You cannot schedule it. If anyone tells you, "here's what you need to do to bring about a revival," don't listen. God alone does it. He uses us as instruments—so we pray, and we share the gospel, and we plead with people. But God alone gives the new birth.

ⁱ George Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals* (Banner of Truth Trust), 81.

ⁱⁱ George Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*, 86.

ⁱⁱⁱ Stories are connected. The connection of the word "man." Jesus needed no one to bear witness about *man*, for he knew what was in *man* (2:25).... Now there was a *man* (3:1)... this *man* (3:2)... The people had spurious faith based on his signs in 2:23; Nicodemus coming to Jesus in response to his signs (3:2).

^{iv} He is probably sent by the Jewish leaders, who are upset about the temple cleansing and the signs and teaching he's doing. So Nicodemus is the perfect person to represent them, and to represent Judaism: "the perfect representative of the Jews, facing Jesus, the perfect representative of God" (Edward Klink III, *John*, ZECNT, 194). Also, Frederic Bruner notes, "It is difficult to imagine a person more qualified to be a good human being or to enjoy a good relation with God" (Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, 166).

^v John Piper, *Finally Alive*.

^{vi} Arminians, for example, refer to the doctrine of prevenient grace—the grace that enables people to make a free choice to trust and follow Jesus. Without this prevenient grace, because of original sin, people cannot believe. See the discussion on prevenient grace and partial regeneration in Roger Olson, *Against Calvinism*, 171; and Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell, *Why I'm Not a Calvinist*, 68–72.