(John 3:3-8, NIV & ESV)

John 3:3-8 (NIV)
3 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”
4 “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”
5 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.
6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.
7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’
8 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.”

(ESV is very similar in these verses in its wording, especially in 5–6.)

Theological Insights

Here are some theological elements and clarifications that give deeper understanding to what being “born again” means, what “water and Spirit” possibly refer to, and how the imagery of wind (or the Spirit) functions in the Christian life.

1. “Born Again” / “Born from Above”

- The phrase translated “born again” is from the Greek *anōthen*, which can also mean “from above.” This dual meaning (again/from above) helps clarify that Jesus is talking not about a second physical birth, but a spiritual rebirth—something beyond human effort, a renewal from God.
- Nicodemus’s literal misunderstanding—thinking of physical birth (entering a mother’s womb a second time)—reveals how radically spiritual this teaching is.

2. Water and Spirit: What Do They Mean?

- When Jesus says “born of water and the Spirit,” scholars debate what “water” refers to. Several interpretations exist:
  1. Baptismal water — The idea that water baptism is involved in the new birth. Some traditions hold this as essential, others see baptism as a public symbol of an inward change.
  2. Cleansing by the Word or symbol of purification — Water as symbolic of cleansing from sin (cf. Old Testament sprinkling, ceremonial cleansings).
  3. Natural birth imagery — Some theologians suggest “water” refers to the amniotic fluid (natural birth), emphasizing that being born of the flesh is the

first birth, then one must also be born of the Spirit.

- The “Spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit, the divine agent who brings about regeneration, renewal, transformation. Without the Spirit, no true spiritual life or entrance into God’s kingdom is possible.
- Some theologians emphasize that “water and Spirit” are not two separate births, but a united act of rebirth. They belong together—the water being symbolic, the Spirit being active.

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3. Nature of the Flesh & Nature of the Spirit

- Flesh (“that which is born of the flesh is flesh”) refers to human nature—our natural, sinful condition. Spirit refers to the new nature imparted by God’s Spirit. There is a contrast: the old nature vs the new.
- Regeneration (new birth) is seen in Christian theology as instantaneous, sovereign work of God (a person does not regenerate himself). It is the work of God in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

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4. The Figurative Use of Wind / Spirit

- Jesus uses the image of the wind to describe the Spirit’s work: invisible, powerful, moving where it wills—unseen origin, unpredictable path—but its effects are felt, heard. This makes sense in light of the Holy Spirit’s activity: unseen, yet real.
- “You hear its sound…” implies spiritual perception—after regeneration one begins to perceive spiritual truths, desires, convictions; one is “awoken” in spiritual senses. But the Spirit’s full working remains mysterious—where He comes from, how He moves, who exactly He will lead is ultimately known only to God.

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5. Old Testament Background

- There are several Old Testament passages that Jesus' teaching draws from or echoes:
  - Ezekiel 36:25-27: "I will sprinkle clean water on you … I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit … I will put my Spirit in you …" This shows the combined work of cleansing (water) and Spirit.
  - The prophetic promises of Spirit outpouring (e.g. Isaiah, Joel) tie in with what Jesus proclaims—that with the coming of Christ, the age of salvation has broken into history with the Spirit.

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6. The Kingdom of God / Entrance Conditions

- Jesus says you must be born again, born of water and Spirit, to *see* or *enter* the kingdom. This isn't optional; it defines what it means to be a true citizen of God's kingdom.
- "Enter" vs "see" the kingdom: verse 3 says see, verse 5 says enter. Theologically, seeing is understanding / perceiving spiritually; entering is living within its reality. Both require new birth.

Application in Natural Speech (Revised Message + Theological Detail)

Here is an updated version of the message, integrating these theological nuances, as if written by a native speaker of English:

The Wind of the Spirit

Jesus declared in John 3 (NIV/ESV) that a person *must* be born again—born of water and of the Spirit—in order to see and enter the Kingdom of God. Unless one undergoes this spiritual rebirth, the Kingdom remains invisible and inaccessible.

When He says “born of water and the Spirit,” He isn’t speaking of two separate, sequential births, but of one unified work of God:

- The water symbolizes cleansing—Old Testament imagery of purification, God’s Word, or baptism—all pointing toward inner transformation.
- The Spirit is the divine agent, the Holy Spirit, who regenerates the heart, giving new life and enabling one to live a life aligned with God.

We are born once physically (of flesh), but that alone leaves us spiritually dead. We need the new birth—God’s supernatural work. It’s not human effort; we can’t renew ourselves. We must receive God’s Spirit. This is regeneration.

Jesus uses the image of wind to help Nicodemus—and us—grasp how the Spirit’s work is both mysterious and real: you hear it, sense it, but don’t position it or direct it. It comes from God and leads where He wills.

This explains radical changes in a believer’s life. When someone truly meets Christ, their desires, values, behaviors change—not primarily by will-power, but by the Spirit working within: hatred for sin, hunger for God’s Word, new compassion, moral transformation. External demonstrations follow the inner reality.

Ezekiel 36 and other Old Testament passages promised this. Jesus is saying: “That promise is here. The Kingdom is breaking in.”

If you haven’t yet made that decision—turn from sin, receive Christ—you’re not missing a ritual. You’re missing the life-transforming power of the Spirit. The Christian life without the Spirit’s new birth is like hearing wind’s sound, but not knowing where it comes from or where it goes—you sense something, but you lack substance and power.

Be baptized (in accordance with your understanding and conviction), repent sincerely, invite the Holy Spirit—you’ll find that inner transformation. And you’ll recognize that the Spirit’s wind is real, unseen but mighty, pushing you into God’s purpose for your life.

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