

**John 3: 9-13; “If I tell you Earthly Things”, Sermon # 14 in the series –
“That All May Honor the Son”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on March 17th, 2012, in the Morning Worship Service.**

In this particular case that we are studying, we find that Nicodemus did not really want so much to know the reason why he must be born again; he wanted to know the how, of the New Birth. He said, “How can these things be?” He was thinking to himself, “How could I have gotten so far in the religion of the nation of Israel without this?” “How could I have missed out on something like this, which Jesus says is absolutely necessary to my knowing God and my being able to instruct others? Jesus is going to give Nicodemus the answers that needs. He is going to do this by showing him the relationship between the New Birth and his coming to have true and saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He will explain this all-important relationship in these 3 ways. 1st – He tells Nicodemus that everyone who truly knows about the New Birth speaks what they know, as a witness. (verse 11) 2nd – He tells him that without faith in the knowledge of these earthly things, that he cannot progress to the knowledge of heavenly things. (verse 12) And 3rd – Jesus tells Nicodemus that He Himself is the only One who can reveal to him, and give to him, these heavenly things. (verse 13)

1st of all – Jesus tells Nicodemus that everyone who truly knows about the New Birth speaks what they know, as a witness. (verse 11)

“Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive our witness.” It is interesting to think that this wonderfully religious man Nicodemus did not understand the New Birth when Jesus tells him about the necessity of it. He had never had this experience of his heart being made new. He did not understand “how” it could be. He did not understand the working of God in the regeneration and renewing of his own heart. A better question from him to Jesus would have been “why”. Why are these things necessary? The New Birth, as I have told you, is necessary because each of us, except Jesus, is born into the world a sinner. Being a religious person doesn’t mean that you know God. Going to church or synagogue doesn’t mean that you have ever been born again. Even if you are an actively religious person in many ways in your church, and you have even become a teacher in Israel, as Nicodemus was; it does not mean that you necessarily have ever been born again by the Spirit of God. This was what Jesus was saying to him. And Jesus was speaking to him with His own real and spiritual authority, which was the authority of God; He being the Son of God. You should understand that this is why it was absolutely necessary that Jesus Christ come into the world; to teach us about ourselves; that we are sinners, and to show us our need of Him. We must have Christ, we must have the work of His Spirit in regenerating our hearts. Because of Adam’s sin in the beginning, and because we confirm our being sinners in our thoughts and words and deeds every day, without Christ’s grace we will perish. Because of Adam’s sin we are born into this world dead in our trespasses and sins, and because we are born spiritually blind by nature, we are opposed to the idea that we need to have this fundamental change and transformation take place in our nature before we can begin to live to God’s glory.

But Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus about that which He knew was true, about sinful, fallen man, and yet Nicodemus cannot yet believe that it is so. When Jesus says, “We speak what we know, and testify what We have seen”, I believe that He was speaking about what He Himself knew, and what some of the prophets who had been saved in Old Testament times also knew. These prophets of old had come to know God through the New Birth, and those who wrote down the Scriptures, many of them bore witness to the reality of this vital truth as much as they had received revelation concerning it. This is why Jesus uses the words, “We speak what we know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. Jesus could have

used the words, "I speak what I know and I testify what I have seen, and you do not receive My witness." But He deliberately used the word, "We". This truth of the absolute necessity of being born again thus receives a Divine witness and a human witness. There is the witness from God Himself in the Person of Christ, and there is a witness also from certain of the prophets, in the Scriptures that they wrote, that it is so. Let me ask if you, too, have received their witness?

I want to show you the witness of one of the prophets of the Old Testament; a witness which Nicodemus should have read in his day. He is the prophet Ezekiel. Turn with me over to Ezekiel Chapter 18, verse 20. Sometimes people do not believe that the Lord's ways are fair and right. How can it be right, they think, that a wicked man should be saved from his sins? Well these verses answer that question. Verse 20 says - "The soul that sins shall die." "The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son." "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." "But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die." "None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live." "Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord God, and not that he should turn from his ways and live?" "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live?" "All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die." "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.'" "Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?" "When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies." "Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive." "Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die." "Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.'" "O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?" "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord God." "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin." "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit." "For why should you die, O house of Israel?" "For I have no pleasure in the death of the one who dies," says the Lord God." "Therefore turn and live!"

This is truly an amazing passage. And it helps us very much to understand what Nicodemus should have known being a teacher in Israel. He should have understood that receiving imparted grace from God which enables one to repent and do good works, establishes for that person a true righteousness which God can approve of. Whereas striving to establish your own righteousness through the ceremonial and moral law by the power of your own wisdom and strength will never merit favor from God. A wicked man can turn away from his sins and do what is right and good when he has received grace. And, a man who is only righteous with his own righteousness can turn from his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, and die in that iniquity, and perish everlastingly in his sins. If a man truly has grace, however, he will never turn away and apostatize from the faith. That is what God is saying here. That person who gets for himself a new heart and a new spirit has found grace. He has been born again. He has been regenerated. He has repented and has cast away from himself all of the transgressions which he committed. He has gotten himself a new heart and a new spirit. Now the way that this is worded here in Ezekiel 18: 31 might lead one to believe that Arminianism is true; that a person's own choice, strength, and power, being in exercise, brings these good things of grace to himself. But that is not what is being said here. It would contradict what God says through the prophet

in Ezekiel 36: 26 – “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” “I will cause you to walk in My statutes and you will keep my judgments to do them.” God is the One who chooses in predestination. God is the One who sovereignly and effectually calls. God is the One who opens to heart and gives the grace to be saved.

What is being said here is that when a person is coming to consider how he is to obtain a New Heart and a New Spirit, that He is to get it from God Himself. And he is to consciously act to obtain it through believing prayer; for “whoever will call upon the Lord shall be saved.” Whoever, then, will call upon the Lord to sincerely ask for a New Heart has already received a regenerated heart, but they will not know it in their experience until they exercise the faith that they have been given. Just as when Jesus was going to heal the man who had the withered hand, He told him to “stretch out your hand”. He was given the power to perform the act. He did not have it in himself before. Even so, it was in the act of his stretching out his hand, by faith, that his withered hand was made whole. Therefore, each of us should know, that when a person does what God commands people to “get themselves a new heart, something like this which is impossible, they find that grace has already been at work, if they are one of God’s Elect. If any person is serious about getting a New Heart and a new spirit, and asks for that gift, he will find by his praying for it and his receiving it, that he will receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit”, which to the believer is his seal, and the witness, and the manifest presence of the Person of the Godhead who has already, before he believed, performed the work of regeneration upon his soul. These things can only be understood by finite beings in this way which is related to their responsibility; to obey the command of God in the gospel; not to wait for feelings, but to pray for blessings. Have you been born again? You can only know when you obey the gospel, and in obeying the gospel, you receive the witness of the Spirit. He has sealed you with Himself as a down payment of all that God will give to you in grace for both this life, and in the final transformation; grace to sanctify you in the remainder of your life, and then, grace to make your spirit sinlessly perfect at your death. And then grace to transform your lowly body to bring it into conformity with Christ’s glorious body on the Day of the Resurrection. This leads us on to the 2nd thing that Jesus told Nicodemus:

2nd – He tells him that without faith in the knowledge of these earthly things, that he cannot progress to the knowledge of heavenly things. (verse 12)

Verse 12 says, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” The things which Jesus was telling Nicodemus about, when He spoke to him about the New Birth, these were the “earthly things”. Let us understand this morning that the Lord Jesus Christ is able to answer all of the questions that we bring to him, when it is God’s will that He do so. We do not have to have Him physically present with us now, because He has given to every Christian His Word and His Spirit. You may be a Christian, or you may not be a Christian, but you have been given access to the Bible which is the very Word of God. Let us study it to know what it says about ourselves, and to find God through Jesus Christ our Lord. These are the earthly things that Jesus would tell Nicodemus about; the things related to the New Birth and the gospel. The Bible tells us of these most important earthly things; the spiritual experience of truth and grace in relation to Jesus Christ Himself. But many people, when they first hear about this truth of the New Birth are just like Nicodemus. They are incredulous. They say, “How can these things be? They simply do not understand that there are these glorious and wonderful spiritual truths to learn; to come to know, and to live out and experience in living the Christian life. And they do not seem to grasp that these things are all received by faith in Jesus Christ.

Turn with me over to 1st Corinthians 2, verse 6. “However we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to

nothing.” “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’” “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.” “For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?” “Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” “But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.” “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him” “But we have the mind of Christ.”

Now, some people have wrongly concluded that when it says, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the mind of man comprehended the things that God has prepared for those that love Him,” that this is referring to what God has prepared for believers in heaven. And truly, we cannot comprehend that until we are there and we can see it. But the context here is rather earthly spiritual things; the spiritual truths and realities of experience that take place in the true believer’s life, as they come to believe in Christ and are increasingly led into the truth of the Bible. In the Bible spiritual words to guide you and teach you were written down there by the Apostles. They had the mind of Christ in the first and primary sense, and by divine inspiration from God they wrote down the words of Scripture so that we would know of the spiritual realities of the Christian life. Paul says that he, when he came to Corinth spoke wisdom among the mature. The word in the Greek is *τελειοι* “perfect ones”. John Gill, in his commentary on this verse, says this: “The apostle’s sense is, that to such that were perfect, and even to everyone that had the least degree of spiritual knowledge, the Gospel was wisdom. Some refer this clause not to persons, but things; and so the Arabic version reads it, “we speak wisdom concerning things that are perfect”; as the things of the Gospel are, such as a plenteous redemption, perfect righteousness, full pardon, plenary satisfaction, and complete salvation and happiness.”

A person first must come to learn and receive the earthly things of salvation by faith in Christ before they can begin to be truly wise. When this good beginning of the New Birth and conversion to Christ is experienced and learned, then the Christian is then able to go on to receive the many other spiritual truths, the heavenly things which Christ would teach them. There is an order to your learning as a Christian. First you must learn the gospel; then you learn more about Christ and holiness. In order to learn either, you must be given spiritual discernment. The phrases that we have just read: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the mind of man comprehended, what God has prepared for those who love Him”, are not referring in the first place to your going to the literal heaven itself, the place where Christians go when they die. They are referring to the spiritual realities which Christ’s grace produces in the life of the person believing in Him. This spiritual reality of grace at work in the heart and mind of the Christian leads them on to be able to learn to “judge” all things that they are looking at rightly. As the young Christian begins to read the Bible, he is shown by his pastor and other Christian friends, that he must compare Scripture with Scripture to rightly understand the truth of the mysteries of the Bible. God has not given you a manual of the Christian life in the Bible. He has given you a book which comments upon itself, and speaks to you in applications of what you should do. This is why listening to good preaching is so important. A pastor is a steward of the mysteries of God. The Bible is filled with spiritual words, and spiritual word pictures which convey the truth

about God, about you, and about all the many situations of life which you will encounter. You must learn of Christ by “taking His yoke upon you and learning from Him”. His grace will teach you how to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil age. You must read the Bible for yourself, and interact with God over it, in relation to all the situations of your life. This means job, family, church, country, and world situations. You have a relationship to all of these in one form or another. And good and wise judgments must be made by you on how to live your life. This is what it means in 1 Corinthians 2: 15 when it says, “But he who spiritual judges all things”. Every Christian “judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one”. That is; it is not the judgment of other people around you that you need to fear or ultimately to have your highest regard for; it is the judgment of God. And the only way to know what God’s mind is on any given subject is to look into the Bible and pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten your mind concerning that particular subject. This doesn’t mean that you do not ask questions of your pastor or other godly people. Because they will be able to help if they themselves know the Bible. But no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. And you, when you come to Christ have received the Holy Spirit. He is the One who searches your heart. He is the One who teaches your heart. This is why you must be born again; because the Spirit searches all things, yes even the deep things of God.” Even so, you cannot know the things of God, earthly or heavenly, except through their being revealed to you by the Spirit of God, in relation to God’s Holy Word the Bible. Therefore, when you read the Bible, compare Scripture with Scripture. When you read something that you do not understand in one place, realize that God will usually have it explained or commented upon in another place. The things that are dark or obscure in the Old Testament may often times be explained in the New Testament. But meditate in the word of God and you will have good discernment, and you will make progress in holiness as you pray and think and do righteous deeds, in obedience to God, and for your Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then 3rd – Jesus tells Nicodemus that He Himself is the only One who can reveal to him, and give to him, these heavenly things.

Verse 12 says, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if you I tell you heavenly things?” “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man who is in heaven.” I have told you that the Bible teaches, that Christ teaches, that there is an order and progression in coming to be a Christian and in living the Christian life. The order that takes place is this: First the New Birth. And that is set in the context of the preaching or reading of the Word of God. Then you understand earthly things in the gospel concerning faith in Christ. And then, by the continuing on-going illumination of the Spirit upon the Word of God, you begin increasingly to understand “heavenly things”. Nicodemus was not that far yet, but Jesus was giving him the overview. And he gives Nicodemus a sample of what He means by “heavenly things”. He speaks to him very briefly here about His own exalted and mysterious Personhood. He says: “No has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven.” That is, no one knows the truth about God and what He is like, and what it is like to be in His presence; no one knows His holiness, His wisdom, His majesty, and His power; no one knows all about the greatness of His love and mercy and grace and goodness except “He who came down from heaven”. Here the Lord Jesus is teaching Nicodemus of His having been with God before His incarnation. He explains, in a mystery, that He came down from heaven in His incarnation. And then He explains His purpose in coming down in a further mystery, when He calls Himself “the Son of Man”, the One whom God gave to fallen sinful mankind-sinners. And then He further reveals the mystery of His Theanthropic person (the mystery of His being both God and Man; two natures in His one Blessed Person when He says: “that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven”. Because He is the God-man, Jesus as the Logos of God had constant communication and communion with His Father in heaven while

He walked here upon the earth. But these are heavenly things, and we will save them for a separate sermon; the next time that I speak to you from this text.