

“Earthbound”
John 3:7-12
(Preached at Trinity, September 6, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 3** opens with the introduction of Nicodemus.
John 3:1 NAU - "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;"
2. He was a man of position, of influence. He was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. But he recognized that there was something uniquely different about Jesus. So, he came secretly by night for fear of the other Pharisees.
3. Nicodemus was religious, but he was not yet born again. Lacking in spiritual understanding the words of Jesus were strange and confusing to him. How could it be possible to be born a second time?
John 3:3-4 NAU - "Jesus answered and said to 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? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"
4. Then Jesus compared the secret work of the Holy Spirit with the blowing of the wind. This further confused Nicodemus.
John 3:9 NAU - "How can these things be?"
5. This led to a rebuke by Jesus:
John 3:10-12 NAU - "Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? ¹¹ "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. ¹² "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"
6. There are several important truths we need to glean from this passage.

- I. First of all, this reminds us that all men have a responsibility to hear and understand the Gospel. Jesus is basically telling Nicodemus, “I’m telling you the truth and you refuse to accept it.” Nicodemus had no excuse for his unbelief. He was responsible for hearing and believing.
- A. The fall has left all men with Moral inability
1. All are dead in sin. All are unable to comprehend spiritual truth and embrace the things of God.
 2. Augustine recognized this moral inability in his prayer: “Grant what Thou commandest and command what Thou dost desire.” This provoked the great Pelagian controversy. Pelagius denied that grace was necessary for obedience. Augustine taught moral inability; that the ability of man to embrace the things of God was corrupted by the fall.
- B. Moral inability doesn’t deny man’s responsibility
1. The Gospel message is clear and all men are commanded to repent of their sin and receive Christ. Moral inability does not diminish human responsibility. God’s sovereign election does not diminish human responsibility.
 2. Spurgeon – “Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, *that is true*; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, *that is true*; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other.”
 3. Men have always tried to argue that election denies human responsibility and Divine fairness because if God has determined all things who can resist Him? How can God hold us accountable for what He has ordained?
- C. Nicodemus had but one option – repent and receive the Gospel
1. This is the duty of all men
 2. Faith is commanded and obedience is demanded
Romans 16:25-27 NAU - "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, ²⁶ but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, *leading to obedience of faith*; ²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen"
 - Obedience that faith produces
 - Faith that IS obedience – obedience to the command to believe.
 3. Lloyd-Jones – “Why should I believe the gospel? The first reason that we all should have for believing the gospel is not that it is going to do this, that or the other for me; I should never preach it in that form. I preach this because it is the record that God gave concerning His Son, and I tell you that if you do not believe it you are making God a liar; you are rejecting the Word of the holy, eternal God, and that is the most terrible sin. We are to preach this gospel and then tell men that, if they do not believe it, they are refusing God, and nothing remains for them but perdition and punishment.”

- II. Second, we find in this passage the weight burden upon teachers to know the truth
"Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"
- A. Those charged with teaching God's people are charged with a weighty responsibility.
1. Nicodemus was a teacher & ruler of Israel and yet he lacked even the basic understanding of Christ and His Kingdom. His continual response to Christ was, "How can these things be?"
 2. As a teacher of Israel Nicodemus had a duty to know the truth about Jesus. He should have been teaching the people about Jesus. All of the OT Scriptures pointed to Jesus. There were over 300 prophecies pointing to Christ.
John 5:39-40 NAU - "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; ⁴⁰ and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."
 3. The problem for most of Israel's teachers was they were blind guides. When the teachers are blind, then all the people stumble in darkness.
Matthew 15:14 NAU - "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."
 4. Jesus is rebuking Nicodemus as a teacher:
"Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"
- B. The same is still true of the teachers of God's people
1. James gave a warning
James 3:1 NAU - "Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."
 2. No one has the right to declare himself to be a pastor or a teacher. Matthew Henry – "But this is indeed a question, which all that act either as magistrates or ministers, ought to be furnished with a good answer to, and often put to themselves, *By what authority do I these things? For how can men preach except they be sent?*"
 3. With this authority comes great responsibility
 Teachers have a duty to study long and hard to know the truth. Paul told Timothy
1 Timothy 4:6 NAU - "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, *constantly* nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."
 - a. Biblical knowledge demands constant study
 - b. The excellent Pastor and teacher continually feeds upon the Word of God. The word "nourished up" comes from a compound Greek word that literally means: to feed on – A Pastor must continually feed on the Word of God. Having fed he then feeds.
 - c. Preachers of God's Word must approach the pulpit with great fear
 There is no profession with a greater liability

- III. Third, we find the great danger of being earthly minded
 "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"
- A. The implication is Nicodemus could only comprehend things on a carnal, earthly level.
1. In **Verse 1** Nicodemus tells Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God"
 - a. His knowledge was based upon human reasoning – reasoning rooted squarely upon a worldly mindset. Nicodemus was earthbound. This is the mindset of this world.
 - b. Notice how Jesus contrasts His spiritual mindset in **Verse 11** "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know"
 - c. Nicodemus shared the carnal reasoning of man. Jesus shared the wisdom of the Father.
John 5:20 NAU - "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing"
John 14:10 NAU - "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works."
 - d. Matthew Henry – "What he spoke of God, of the invisible world, of heaven and hell, of the divine will concerning us, and the counsels of peace, was what he *knew*, and *had seen*, for he was *by him as one brought up with him.*"¹
 2. Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus on the most elementary level using examples of the most basic kind – He spoke of human birth and the need for a new birth. He spoke of the blowing of the wind. Nicodemus couldn't make the connection. They were beyond his grasp.
1 Corinthians 2:14 NAU - "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."
 3. Carnal reasoning is most dangerous for a teacher of God's Word.
 4. A teacher's duty is to study God's Word with discernment so that they he rightly apply Biblical truths to the heart of God's people.
- B. Earthly minded people will only be able to relate to earthly minded teaching
1. Paul taught of such that they are enemies of the cross
Philippians 3:18-19 NAU - "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1929.

2. They have ears itching for carnal teaching
2 Timothy 4:3-4 NAU - "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."

Conclusion:

1. The problem with Nicodemus and all mankind is we are spiritually dead. We are earthbound, unable to see beyond this age—The things that Jesus taught were beyond the ability of Nicodemus to understand, and yet, like all men, he was held without excuse.
2. Once again, we must understand how helpless we are without God's grace. The wonders of the Gospel are beyond the grasp of human reason. Unless we are born from above by the Sovereign Spirit who moves when and how He pleases, we will continue in our corruption to our eternal condemnation.
3. If Nicodemus was helplessly blind how can we not say his unbelief wasn't his fault? If the new birth is an act of God's sovereign will, can't we say that Nicodemus' confusion was not his fault.
This isn't what is being taught here. Jesus is rebuking him for his unbelief. God's Word must be believed and received. If you lack understanding cry out for God to open your understanding.