

Last week we left Nicodemus with Jesus who was rebuking this Pharisee for not understanding the basics of how God works in the life of a person to bring him into a right relationship with his creator and God.

JOH 3:5 "Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."

Two things should be pointed out here:

- 1) It is the Spirit of God who enlightens the heart, mind and soul of a person so that that person is enabled, spiritually, to see his need and reach out to Christ for salvation.
- 2) No one can enter the Kingdom of God without the Spirit accomplishing this in the life of an individual.

And when the apostle John uses the phrase, "no one can enter into the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit", he is saying that human beings are incapable on their own to give themselves spiritual birth, just as an infant is incapable of choosing to be born to any set of parents.

In the case of spiritual birth it is God who gives this life and therefore, it is God alone who ultimately causes our birth into the Kingdom of God whereby we now have eyes to see and ears to hear as we reach out to Christ by faith alone for this salvation.

As we come to our text this morning we see how Jesus makes this distinction between the two births, which Nicodemus wrestled with since he only addresses the physical type of birth. Jesus had the spiritual type of birth in mind.

JOH 3:6 "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

What does Jesus mean by this in light of the context? Well, He begins by addressing the birth Nicodemus had in mind. "Flesh gives birth to flesh." By this Jesus means, not only does a human being give birth to another human being, He also means that the fruit of the flesh can only produce the same kind of fruit, namely that which is of the flesh, sin.

The only thing the flesh, or sinful man, can produce and reproduce is flesh or the sin nature of man which only leads to death. All

human beings are born with a sin nature. Though an infant or small child might be innocent of acting on that sin nature with evil deeds, the truth is that it is only a matter of time before that sinful nature begins producing fruit in keeping with that nature.

Psalm 51:5 ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

When Paul wrote to the Romans he points out where this sinful nature came from.

ROM 5:12,19 "Therefore, ... sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned - 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners..."

Of course, this one man was Adam.

1CO 15:22 "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

Adam was chosen by God to be the representative of the entire human race. What he did determined what would be the status of all men toward God. Since he chose to rebel against God through his disobedience, you and I are born rebels who will disobey God and are therefore, guilty before God.

You and I are not sinners simply because we at some time after our birth decided to sin. You and I are sinners because that's who we are by birth. We are only doing what comes naturally, according to the natural sinful man.

Jesus Christ came to change all of that. And that promise was first given to Adam and Eve shortly after they sinned.

GEN 3:15 "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

They understood God to mean that one who would be a descendant of theirs, born in the future, would fulfill the promise to crush the head of Satan, which is another way of saying to reverse the curse on mankind which separated men from God, because of their rebellion.

And essentially this is what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Since Adam chose to give up his spiritual inheritance through his sin God mercifully chose to come along and promise to give back that spiritual inheritance through a Savior born into this world who would take Adam's penalty for sin, along with the penalty of all men who would embrace the Savior by faith.

According to Old Testament teaching, starting way back in the beginning of Genesis, this was God's plan of salvation. And yet, Nicodemus, who is purported to be a great teacher of the law among the Jews, doesn't understand this most simple proposition.

JOH 3:7-8 "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."

Jesus says, "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'" The NAS version puts it this way. "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

The Greek word for *amazed* could also be translated, marvel. It's as though this is an entirely new concept for Nicodemus that he simply cannot wrap his head around and yet Jesus essentially accuses him of being negligent as to this concept since he is a teacher in Israel.

Where was this truth taught before that Nicodemus should have known it?

Well, Jesus gives him a clue in verse 8 where He equates the work of God with the activity of the wind.

John 3:8 ⁸ "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Our Lord gives Nicodemus a picture of an aspect of nature that we're all familiar with, the wind. All of us have experienced this. We've witnessed the calming experience of a light breeze on the beach as the palm trees gently wave in the wind.

And we've also experienced the awesome force of the wind in tropical storms or hurricanes. But in both instances we can all agree that the wind is powerful and yet we don't see the wind. Oh, we can certainly see the effects of the wind as it kicks up sand and leaves and fills our surroundings with movement, but you cannot

see the wind any more than you can see the air, which is simply the agent of wind.

But where does the wind come from ultimately? It comes from its Maker.

^{NAU} **Psalm 135:7** He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain, Who brings forth the wind from His treasuries.

God is the source of all things in His creation and the wind is no exception. Nicodemus certainly knew this but he had forgotten an important aspect of the promises of God and that is, God accomplishes things, like the wind, that cannot always be grasped, as it moves in the direction God desires without any input from us.

And when it comes to the salvation of God's people God continues to be the only source for this life as He sees fit as His Spirit moves in the hearts of men. And Nicodemus certainly had access to this information if he had only read Solomon's account of the will of God and how unsearchable are all His ways.

^{NAU} **Ecclesiastes 11:5** Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones *are formed* in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.

God is most certainly active even if we don't understand all that He is doing. And when it revolves around His plan to redeem a people for Himself, Nicodemus, even if he didn't fully understand all of the nuances of soteriology, should at least have had enough respect for God when the Lord said that a man must be born from above, to acknowledge that it is true that salvation must come directly from the hand of God.

But when your system of religion lays more emphasis on how man is at the center of how God chooses a people for Himself, than being born from above or being born again, it would certainly be a concept that escapes you because that type of power can only come from the Throne of God, who through His Spirit moves where He will.

This too is something Nicodemus could have seen more clearly if he had simply read the prophet Ezekiel who had used a couple of different examples of how God chooses to give life to the dead, and by implication it is the spiritually dead.

Ezekiel 37:1-3 ^{NAU} The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. ² He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, *there were* very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, *they were* very dry. ³ He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know."

Ezekiel was simply humbling himself when he answered the Lord's question, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And (he) answered, "O Lord GOD, You know."

Ezekiel knew; dead dry bones don't bring themselves back to life unless they are given life or born from above by the hand of God. And the Lord makes this clear.

Ezekiel 37:5 ⁵ "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, *I will cause* breath to enter you that you may come to life.'

The word breath in this verse in the Hebrew is *ruach*. It's the exact word that is used throughout the Old Testament for spirit, including the Holy Spirit. If God is the one causing the bones to come to life as He gives them breath (*ruach*), guess where this life comes from. From above.

In fact, it is in the immediate context of this verse that Ezekiel makes it even more clear as to the One who moves where He will to accomplish this *ruach, this breath*, in the lives of those dry bones that are dead.

^{NAU} **Ezekiel 37:9** Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'"

Notice that these bones have been slain and God brings them to life by His breath, by His Spirit.

Who are the slain? All men who have been murdered by the one who placed them in that situation.

Remember Jesus's word to the Jews?

John 8:44 ⁴⁴ "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. *He was a murderer from the beginning*, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him.

In what sense is Satan a murderer? Because of his premeditated plan to destroy man through the temptation in the Garden of Eden. And he succeeded at that time. And all men since that time have succumb to that first murder since we all die in Adam.

These dry, lifeless bones were not capable of bringing themselves back to life and this is what the Lord was showing Israel through the prophet Ezekiel as He showed how only He can give life where there is none, as this life comes from above, from the throne of God.

But if that wasn't enough for Nicodemus he could have continued to read in the next section of this same vision that God gave Ezekiel as the Lord drives home His point as to where life comes from to those He chooses to touch; from above.

Ezekiel 37:12-13 ¹² "Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, *I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves*, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people.

Though this may certainly have ramifications to the resurrection on the last day, the context is talking about bringing spiritually dead people to life and the life that they need is a life that comes from above by the hand of God, what John implies in the book of Revelation as the first resurrection, but that's for another study.

And then Ezekiel wraps up this section by explaining where this breath of life comes from, this life from above, this being born from above as he finally identifies this breath.

Ezekiel 37:14 ¹⁴ "I will put My Spirit (*Ruach*) within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD."

When Jesus says in our text, "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," He is equating the work of the Spirit with the wind which moves according to the will of God.

The bottom line is that as much as you and I might want to explain the wind it is still invisible and outside of our control. You can't see the wind, you can only experience its effects in one way or

another. You can't see how the wind travels in a southerly path one minute and how it shifts to an easterly path the next. You might feel the difference, but you can't see the actual wind.

And Jesus uses this analogy to teach a spiritual truth about the work of God as it relates to our salvation.

JOH 3:8 "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."

As much as you and I might want to explain the work of the Spirit as it relates to our salvation He is just as mysterious and Sovereign as the wind in that He works in ways we cannot see, and does so without consulting us.

As hard as you and I might try, we can't change the direction in which the wind blows. It will do as it pleases. And it is the same with the Spirit of God, is Jesus' point.

The Spirit of God consults with no man as to how He decides to work in opening the eyes of spiritually blind people. Those people, by the way, who were given to Jesus by the Father. Remember Jesus' words on that aspect of salvation?

John 6:38-39 ³⁸ "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

If it were up to man making the decision for the Spirit of God the apostle Paul would not be an apostle of Jesus Christ, he would have continued to be lost in his sin as a Pharisee.

Those on the receiving end of Paul's wrath would probably have voted for God to wipe him out. But the Spirit blows where He will, and He showed compassion and mercy to Paul as the Spirit of God breathed on him, in a spiritual sense, and his eyes were opened even in his blindness, and he was given life as Jesus took his dry bones, if you will, and breathed the breath of life in it to his dead spirit.

This is why you and I can't dictate to God what He must do in the life of any individual. We are encouraged by the Lord to pray on behalf of all individuals, and we certainly come to God with expectations of God opening their eyes and hearts to receive Christ, but ultimately it's up to God.

Only He can give spiritual birth as they are born from above. This should not discourage us, but should actually encourage all of us because we have the hope that someone can change their hearts.

What are we told about the heart of man?

JER 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

It was this deceitful heart of man which God saw that prompted Him to destroy the earth by a flood.

GEN 6:5 "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."

Paul is emphatic about how the natural man and his sinful heart is not interested in the things of God.

ROM 3:10-12 "As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

But praise God our great Savior and Creator is not only capable of changing our hearts to want to seek after Him, He is more than willing to accomplish that as He died in our place to redeem us and reunite us back to the Father. His Spirit is in the business of doing this work in our hearts as He gives us a new nature which desires the things of God.

We can't see how the Spirit does this, but we can see the effects of the Spirit, like the wind, as we see people desiring God, as we see believers whose lives no longer hunger after the world and the things of the world, but now seek after those things above.

We see the effects of the Spirit in the lives of people who now have this new nature and have the ability for the first time in their lives to actually please God by faith in the power of the Spirit.

We see the effect of the Spirit as His fruit begins to take precedence in our lives.

GAL 5:22-25 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions

and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

These things are the effects of the Spirit and the new life He has given us in Christ, but it is still up to the Spirit to do what He desires to bring glory to God.

And yet, even after Jesus points this out to Nicodemus he still can't seem to grasp this simple truth of the Sovereignty and purpose of God as it relates to being born again.

JOH 3:9-10 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. 10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"

Now keep in mind that Jesus is the one instructing Nicodemus. Surely, we say, if anyone can make an intellectual argument for how we receive salvation, it must be Jesus Christ. If anyone can convince someone to see spiritual things it must be Jesus.

How could anyone listen to Jesus and not be able to understand the things the Lord is teaching?

This is the point Jesus is making with Nicodemus. The heart is deceitful, who can understand it? Well, Jesus certainly can, but unless the Spirit of God causes Nicodemus' spiritual birth not even the words of Jesus will make any difference to Nicodemus.

The irony Jesus is pointing out is how Nicodemus can purport to be spiritual and yet he doesn't even understand the most basic aspects of salvation.

It's a good thing Jesus shows up on earth as a man, because he loves His people too much to let them continue to be blinded by the deceitfulness of their sin. It is His intention to make sure we have a way out of our spiritual death as He, along with the Spirit and the Father in heaven, is going to rescue all of His people from themselves, as He gives them life and a new nature.

JOH 3:11-12 "I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

Isn't it amazing how people will accept a lie and reject the truth even when that truth is plainly put before them?

I'm always amazed at how people will choose a political affiliation without any thought as to the basis behind that affiliation. 'Well, it was good enough for my parents, so it's good enough for me.' And simply because of a particular political affiliation it's as though people will be loyal to a political party even when individuals in their party are doing things which are plainly wrong. And yet, they'll defend them.

It's blind allegiance. And in the spiritual realm it's the same thing. People will defend their sin, they will defend their position that they have a god of their own choosing, or that the God of the bible isn't the only way. They'll defend every conceivable lie, but when it comes to expounding the simple truth of who the one true God is, and the plan of salvation He has for mankind, they go off in a tirade.

They're tolerant of everything but the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why it is essential that God does a change in us from the inside. It's a work only He can do.

Now, when Jesus uses the pronoun "we" and "our" in our text He's addressing those who have joined Him in declaring this truth, specifically the prophets of old who have born witness to the truth of who God is.

JOH 3:11 "I tell you the truth, *we* speak of what *we* know, and *we* testify to what *we* have seen, but still you people do not accept *our* testimony."

This is an indictment against Nicodemus who should have understood what the prophets of old were talking about and who they were bearing witness of. Jesus says, that "*we testify to what we have seen.*"

Has Nicodemus ever been privileged to hear from God as did the prophets? No. But the prophets in Israel who did hear from Him were faithful to record His very words. The Lord spoke to these people and gave them His very word to give to Israel. Jesus Himself has been sent from the Father and He knows the truth because He is the truth.

And what He is now saying to Nicodemus is that the O.T. prophets had the privilege of personally hearing from God and they spoke of the Messiah. Jesus is that Messiah. He is saying that both He and the Old Testament prophets bear witness to this same truth.

And yet, Nicodemus, a Jew, and a Pharisee, isn't willing to accept the testimony of the prophets, or Jesus Himself, who has proved Himself, (according to Nicodemus), who says that "no one could do these miracles unless God were with him."

Now when Jesus speaks of His testimony in verse eleven, He is speaking of His teachings. Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, and by extension, all of the leaders of Israel, that though they might be willing to accept His miracles, they are still not going to believe the teachings of Jesus which tells them that He is the Messiah.

And this is what our Lord puts His emphasis on. If they are not willing to accept the truth of God's word, it makes little difference if they believe His miracles. It isn't until a person is born from above by the Spirit of God, and is then able to receive God's truth, and applies that truth to his own situation by faith, that salvation can become a reality.

This is why I'm always concerned with the world's approach that we must give people something other than the truth to bring them into the kingdom of God. We need balloons, we need slick marketing tools, we need a building, and the list goes on. If we're ever going to be successful we must have all of these things which will attract people.

When is the last time you heard of any church involved in the ministry of raising the dead, or multiplying loaves and fish?

Well, whether there are churches today where this is truly going on, or not, they still couldn't boast in suggesting that the miracles alone are sufficient in turning the hearts of people.

When Jesus Himself was performing miracles and signs and wonders people still rejected Him.

In fact, even Jesus admits that miracles alone will not turn the hearts of people. When conveying the story of Lazarus in heaven, and the rich man in hell, where the rich man pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus back to his brothers to warn them we read this.

Luke 16:27-31 ²⁷ "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house-- ²⁸ for I have five brothers-- in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' ³¹ "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and

the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead."

It isn't about creating an environment conducive to hearing, or through some marketing approach, which will ultimately bring people to Christ. It's ultimately about God giving life from above coupled with the testimony of Christ that we bear witness to; the same testimony the prophets, apostles and Jesus Himself bore witness to.

Does this mean we're against balloons or buildings with steeples? I suppose not. Does this mean we're against miracles? Absolutely not. You can create a lot of excitement with these types of things. People were excited about the miraculous ministry of Jesus. But they still crucified Him. It isn't about what we do in our own wisdom to create an environment to bring people to Christ, it's about the truth of God's word and the work of the Holy Spirit.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit", says the Lord.

I know it's easy to become discouraged when you think we're doing the will of God, and yet our growth is still small. I know it's easy to compare ourselves to others who don't even teach the truth and yet they seem to be "happening" churches.

But simply because there are great numbers in some of these churches doesn't mean they are bearing testimony to the truth of God's word. Some of them are simply appealing to the flesh of people as they try and create an environment of excitement. Lots of flash, but no heat.

It might surprise you to know that many Christians in a lot of these churches are biblically illiterate. And by this I mean, of the myriad of "seasoned saints", those who have been in the church for many years, many of those couldn't distinguish between false teaching and true teaching.

Of course all of us begin in this condition as new believers. But we are told to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I'm constantly amazed when I meet people from different churches who have some of the most bizarre ideas on what it means to be a Christian and how one should grow in their faith; people who should know better.

But because their leadership isn't teaching the word of God, but rather are utilizing the wisdom of the world, they too depend more on the world than on God. And I guess this shouldn't surprise us.

But, as Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus He seems to be surprised by Nicodemus' lack of understanding of the things of God.

JOH 3:12 "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

Jesus has spoken in very plain terms to both the masses in Israel, as well as to Nicodemus. And yet, Nicodemus still doesn't understand. This is what Jesus means when He says, "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe..." (JOH 3:12)

This is an expression which deals with the intellect of man as our Lord gives him the truth in simple terms, like the wind. It's like an electrical engineer trying to explain how electricity works to second graders.

He could use terms they would understand about this awesome power. He could use analogies second graders would be used to so they could make the leap from ignorance to some sort of understanding of electricity in their lives.

In a similar way, Jesus is saying to Nicodemus that He has used terms and analogies to try and show Nicodemus the most basic truths, and still he doesn't understand. "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe..."

If Nicodemus, one of the spiritual giants in Israel, can't grasp this then how in the world will he ever understand the more difficult spiritual truths? "How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

And this is why someone must be born from above, born again, so that which is spiritual can be understood by those who are of the flesh. Only God can do this. Only God can take that which is dead and give it life. And not until one is given life can they reach out and embrace the gift that is being offered by God, not unlike how Lazarus was able to respond to Jesus' call to come out of the grave.

Think about it. When was Lazarus able to respond to Jesus's call, before he was given life or after? Was Lazarus able to respond in his death or after Jesus brought life to his dead body enabling him to respond?

This is what Jesus is telling Nicodemus. Jesus is stating, ‘how are you ever going to hear what I say if you don’t have ears to hear in your dead state?’

And the dead state of man will not allow him to hear spiritual things which is precisely what Jesus told other Jews of His day.

John 8:42-47 ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. ⁴³ *"Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.* ⁴⁴ "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. ⁴⁶ "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? ⁴⁷ *"He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God."*

The natural man, that man who is dead in his trespasses and sins, has no ears to hear and no eyes to see precisely because he is dead. It is that man who is not of God. But blessed is the man who has eyes to see and ears to hear because God has given him life as he is born from above so that he may respond to the grace and kindness of God’s call by faith in Christ.

Nicodemus is an example of how people will gravitate to anything and everything to make themselves feel spiritual. Jesus brings him back to earth and simply points him to the truth that he must be born again, and that birth comes through the work of the Spirit of God who brings that person into the presence of Christ and is then enabled by the Spirit to employ the gift of faith in the Messiah.

Nicodemus was looking for spiritual truths as he understood them. Jesus shows him that he is not spiritual at all, only religious. That’s where the world is today. Let’s show them Jesus, and give them the life transforming truth of the gospel. And pray the Spirit opens their eyes and gives them life in Christ as they reach out to the Savior.

Let’s pray for our community that the Holy Spirit would do a great work here as we are faithful to testify that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and the redeemer of mankind.