

**John 3: 8-11; “The Wind Blows Where it Wishes”, Sermon # 13 in
the series – “That All May Honor the Son”, Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on March 10th, 2013,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

The common denominator in all that I have tried to show you, in my two previous sermons on regeneration, is that the Spirit's working in regeneration is always according to the sovereignty of God. Regeneration is not a co-operative effort between man and God, and verse 8 which we are studying proves this to be so. "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes." "So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." The work of the Spirit, both leading up to regeneration and in the act of regeneration itself, are here compared to the blowing of the wind. This morning we want to more closely examine the Spirit's work; His work being compared to the wind, in these following ways which are revealed to us in the words of our Lord. 1st of all – Jesus' statement that the wind blows where it wishes. 2nd – Jesus' statement that you hear the sound of it. And thirdly – Jesus' statement that you cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. I hope to bring greater clarity of thought upon this important subject so that each of us may pray for a greater influence and working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and also to the hearts of many others.

1st of all – Let's think more upon Jesus' statement that the wind blows where it wishes.

In this amazing illustration of truth, Jesus is showing us that the Holy Spirit sovereignly determines where He will work, and what kind of work that He will do. The Spirit does not move and act in the same way in regard to every single person. He is very particular in His holy work. Many persons are often unaware of His work going on in their hearts. At other times and even with large numbers of people, He may come upon them like a mighty rushing wind, as He did on the Day of Pentecost. With some persons, He strives with them, blowing upon them with His spiritual wind, and yet the work of regeneration is not done. They are awakened, but they are not regenerated. With others He blows with His wind and the work is mighty and irresistible and they are regenerated. Why is there this difference? The difference is that the Spirit does all of His glorious work of striving with men, of awakening them to the truth, and regenerating them, in connection with the eternal purpose of the Father and the Son. It is not the man himself who determines these things; it is God who initiates this all-important giving of a New Heart. In regeneration a person is perfectly passive. At every other point in his experience he is active, both before and after conversion. The sinner is actively resisting God and His Spirit in many ways before conversion, but He comes to actively submit to God and His Spirit's working following conversion.

He is acted upon by the Spirit and not acting himself to savingly repent and believe until the wind of the Spirit blows. It is the Spirit alone who gives him life; his fleshly wisdom and strength, his education or religious privileges and activities profit him nothing at this point.

Even a religious man, like Nicodemus, will only act to repent and believe in the gospel when he receives power to act in regeneration. Then he will want to believe in the gospel, and then he will want to receive Christ as He is offered. Regeneration changes the want to; the inclination and desires of the heart. The new spirit given has new desires. The everlasting love of the Father and the Son leads to their showing saving mercy to specific sinful people of their choosing, through the work of the Spirit, at a specific point in their life. At that precise point, in the life of the chosen one, The Spirit causes His wind to blow effectually. He illuminates their mind to the gospel and He opens their heart to receive it. He circumcises the heart and takes away its stoniness. He infuses the principles of a love for the truth and the desire to be holy into the spirit of that person, making them a new creature in Christ. All of this is God's sovereign work. W.G.T. Shedd says this in his systematic theology – “Man is passive (when His spirit is being regenerated) only for a moment, during the twinkling of an eye.” “God's regenerating act is like the sounding of the last trumpet.” “The resurrection of dead bodies is instantaneous, and the regeneration of the dead souls is so likewise.” “The doctrine that the sinner is passive in regeneration does not imply that the passivity extends over a great length, or even any length of time in his existence.” “On the contrary, it is only a punctum temporis (a moment in time) in his history.” “Between the carnal mind and the spiritual mind, there is nothing but the instant of regeneration.” (Vol. 2 Dogmatic Theology, P. 502)

When you think about the wind, how would you describe it? It is a force in nature that you cannot see, and you cannot control. The wind seems to have a mind of its own; that is what people will naturally think, apart from the truth of the Bible. The wind is something that just happens. People speak of “mother nature” as though the physical forces of nature are an entity which has a separate existence from God's immediate control. They believe that all weather is something that just happens, independently of the control of God. And when people assume this, they are leaning to their own understanding; they are blind spiritually. They are refusing to admit the truth, which the Bible so clearly states, that what God created in the beginning of the world is something that He also sustains, and governs by the word of His power; moment by moment, and day by day. He spoke and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast in the creation. But the Spirit still broods over the waters of men's troubled hearts. And He is well able to bring about a New Creation in the hearts of sinful men. Listen to Job Chapter 12, verse 12 – “Surely God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice.” “Who gave Him charge over the earth?” “Or who appointed Him over the whole world?” “If He should set His heart on it, if He should gather to

Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to the dust.” You can see here the amazing and prominent role that the Holy Spirit has, in relation to the will of the Father, and also to the finished work of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ our Lord, in His creating, upholding, and sustaining everything created and everything living. But we need to look from His work in the 1st creation to behold His work in the New Creation; the New Birth, people being born of the Spirit to eternal life. The word for “the wind” in verse 8 is *πνευμα* in the Greek; “a current of air, that is, breath, either a blast or a breeze, and it is used here by analogy or figuratively for the Holy Spirit.” (Strong’s Def.)

As we delve into this more, I am going to be giving you a number of verses of Scripture. And as I do so, I want you to ask yourself this question: Am I being governed by my own thinking and logic of how I understand God’s sovereignty in salvation? Or, am I letting the Scriptures define for me the truth of God’s absolute sovereignty over the wind, and over the salvation of men? I want you to turn with me over to Genesis 8, verse 1. “Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with him in the ark.” “And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided.” You see here, how God used His great power in bringing the wind sovereignly to bear upon the waters of judgment. He did this in relation to His remembering Noah and all those with him. He was intending to bring them, who had been in this ark a year, to safely rest on the mountains of Ararat. The way that He would do this would be to make a wind to pass over the earth, and this would cause the waters to subside so that they could have a perfect landing. You see that in God’s careful and controlled use of the wind He accomplished His objective. His objective was to bring 8 people alive through the flood waters of judgment, and safely set them down into a New World. Noah could not have done anything to bring this about. He was entirely at the mercy of God. But he had found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and since he found regenerating grace, God would bring him to the place of safety, both temporally and eternally.

Even so, it is true in regard to God’s sovereignty in relation to your salvation. It is entirely a matter of God’s mercy. His intention for the rest of mankind was to judge, both temporally by bringing the flood, and eternally in hell because they would not listen to the voice of His preaching through Noah. He would bring this great and overwhelming judgment because they had refused to heed Noah’s preaching in the building of the ark. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. Noah would preach Christ in the building of the ark. Judgment was coming, but men could escape it if they would heed the word. He said to Noah in Genesis 6: 3 “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” This was God’s patience with them. That was His common grace to them. They were fully responsible for hearing Noah’s preaching, for by improving upon the common grace of hearing the word, they could then expect to find saving grace in salvation; God’s giving them a

regenerated heart. It took Noah 120 years to build the ark, and God patiently waited for all of that generation of mankind to turn to Him for grace and mercy in relation to their great sins. And none did, except Noah, and a few in his household. In Genesis 6: 5 it says, "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." "And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth." "So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'" "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." This "finding grace" was the Lord's awakening Noah to the deadly nature of his own sin, and then regenerating his heart. He was then able to do what God wanted him to do, which was to build the ark. In Hebrews 11, verse 7 it says, "By faith, Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." God was sovereign in Noah's salvation. The wind blew fair to him to bring him to heaven. He warned Noah of the judgment which was coming. This created in him, by God's grace, a "godly fear". He then obeyed the gospel, which for Him was to build the ark; the very picture of Christ to him. In this way he would be saved; he and his household. In this way he would preach to that sinful generation. In this way Noah would prove that he was a true Old World, antediluvian saint.

In all this, God was sovereign; the wind would blow where it wished. He would save Noah, and He would judge the sinful men who would not listen to Noah and who would not repent. He was ruling and governing all men in this situation. Each of them was free to do as they wanted. The rest of the men of the world saw their freedom as being free to sin. But with Noah things would be different because he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This was not something that was inherently in Noah. It was God's sheer mercy to him. He would be given precise instructions on how to build the ark, and he would follow them because he had a regenerate heart. He and his family would enter the ark at God's time and according to his command, and God would shut the door, and bring his judgment on all mankind. None would be saved but Noah and his family, because they obeyed God and entered the ark. "Do not marvel that you must be born again. You must be given a New Life, a regenerated heart, a renewed mind, by the power and work of the Holy Spirit of God to enter the ark of Christ, and escape the coming judgment. The wind blows where it wishes. So the Spirit works as He wishes, and yet it is in perfect accord with the Father and the Son in the salvation of men.

2ndly - Let's consider Jesus' statement that "you hear the sound of the wind".

"And you hear the sound of the wind, but you cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes." "So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Some highly intelligent people called Deists, believe that God created this world that we live in.

They believe that He made it like a watch. He made all of its intricate parts and its springs and movements. He then wound it up, and let it run. And thus, they say, the world having been created by God, it keeps going by its own innate power, independent of God's immediate superintendence and control. The reason that they believe this, is because they do not want to believe the truth of the Bible in all of its specifics. The preaching of the Bible, accompanied by the power of the Spirit, is "the sound of the wind". Have you ever asked yourself why the text does not say, "You feel the power of it"? But no, it is, "You hear the sound of it." You hear the sound of the Spirit's voice speaking to you through the preaching of the Word of God. Sometimes you cannot tell what God is trying to teach you when you hear the sound of this wind. Men, by nature, do not like the thought of a God who is this sovereign; a God who is this much in control of things that go on in this physical universe around us. Although, to our natural mind and experience of the wind, it does not appear that God is immediately bringing the wind or controlling it, He is. Even so, it is, in the preaching of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit of God is here, speaking to you now through His word and my words to you concerning its truth. It is only our limited perception of things that prevents us from seeing more clearly that the wind, coming to save, comes only from God's sovereign working. Unfortunately, there are also many Christians today who might not want to believe that God is that is that sovereign either. Whether it is in regard to the physical wind, or whether it is in regard to the salvation of people's souls by the regeneration of their hearts, they think that God is simply waiting for man to respond in faith. They think that their faith in Christ is what regenerates their hearts. Christ has performed the work of redemption, and now it is up to them to choose. It is up to them to "accept" Christ. Once they accept Christ's finished work, then they are given the New Heart, the New Birth, and regeneration. They believe that a person already has the power to believe and obey the Word God; they with their free will simply do not choose to obey. But this contradicts the truth of our text concerning the wind.

Turn with me, if you will, over to Exodus Chapter 10, verse 12. Here we find the Lord telling Moses about the eighth of His plagues that He would bring upon the Egyptians and Pharaoh in order to make Pharaoh let them go. "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land—all that the hail has left.' "So Moses stretched out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind on the land all that day and all that night." "When it was morning the east wind brought the locusts." "And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt and rested on all the territory of Egypt." "They were very severe; previously there had been no such locusts as they, nor shall there be such after them." "For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkness; and they ate every herb of the land, all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left." "So there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of

the field throughout all the land of Egypt.” “Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, ‘I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you.’” “Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the Lord your God, that He may take away from me this death only.” “So he went out from Pharaoh and entreated the Lord.” “And the Lord turned a very strong west wind, which took the locusts away and blew them into the Red Sea.” “But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.” Now, you can see here, can’t you, that God’s sovereign purpose of bringing this judgment was accomplished by His use of the wind. It was the strong east wind which brought the locusts, and it was a very strong west wind that blew them into the sea and they all died. All of this was not done in relation to Pharaoh’s salvation, or his heart being regenerated, but rather it was done in relation to the strength of his rebellious sinful heart being weakened, only for a time, so that he would plead for forgiveness of his sin and that Moses would pray and ask the Lord to remove the plague. His heart was only weakened from his own purpose temporarily. It was not regenerated to love God or His people. This shows us that God used His physical wind in different ways to accomplish His sovereign purpose in relation to both Israel, and Pharaoh. With Israel, it was to show them His sovereign power to deliver them from their bondage in the land of Egypt. And with Pharaoh it was to harden his heart.

And then 3rd – Let think about Jesus’ statement that “you cannot tell where it comes from and where the wind comes from and where it goes”.

This refers to the fact that no matter how hard we try, we will not be able to figure out why God has mercy on some people and saves them, and why He passes by others and leaves them under their just condemnation. And further, we do not understand why some Christian persons make greater progress in holiness than others. Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 9, verse 14. Sometimes when people hear from the Scriptures that God is this sovereign, they do not receive the truth of it. And the reason that they do not receive the truth of it is because in their own mind they believe that it makes God out to be unfair in His dealings with men. They think that God would be unrighteous if He chose some persons to eternal life; that He would be a respecter of persons. But the Scripture answers this thought right here. Verse 14 – “What shall we say then?” “Is there unrighteousness with God?” “Certainly not!” “For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’” “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” “For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’” “Therefore, He has mercy on whom He will, and whom He wills He hardens.”

These verses clearly show us that the “wind blows where it wishes” in relation to the salvation of men. It is clearly not God’s purpose and intention to save all men. He has a sovereign purpose which is related to His own glory that is just as great, or greater, than His sovereign purpose is to save a people for His own possession. And yet we cannot really understand these things. We cannot tell where God’s reasoning comes from, or where He is going with all this. But we still try to press God with our own logic. The answer of the Apostle Paul, of what we should do with all of our logical questions is given to us here in the following verses. Verse 19 – “You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault?” “For who has resisted His will?” (In other words, He is sovereign. Why does He not simply override all of their resistance and give every man salvation?) “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God.” “Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” “Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” “What if God wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” He is saying that all of this; His demonstrating of His justice in the damnation of sinners like Pharaoh was really needed; just as much as His demonstration of His mercy was needed in the salvation of sinners, whom He would call from among the Jews and the Gentiles shows His goodness, and His kindness and His love.

All of this displays God’s glory. It was then, and it is now, more necessary that God’s glory might be seen in both His mercy and His justice. God is no respecter of persons as He says in Romans Chapter 2, verse 11. And God will always judge men according to their works. But since none of us has a perfect record of obedience, He shows mercy to some. He did not choose to show mercy to Pharaoh. He did not regenerate His heart. But dear believer here today. Can you tell me why He should have chosen you, and set His love upon you? And how was it that your sinful resistance to God, to Christ and the gospel, changed? What was it that turned your own heart to consider the loveliness, and the desirability, and the necessity of receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior? Whether you know this or not, it was because the wind of the Holy Spirit blew in your heart, and Christ, by His Spirit, came into the darkness of your heart and shone His light. It was because He came and took away your heart of stone, which always would have remained hard, unless He had come and changed it, giving you a new heart and a new spirit. O this is the sovereignty and the power of the wind. It blows where it wishes. But we must each acknowledge that we cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.

Let us close by thinking together for a moment about why some Christian persons make more progress in their obedience and are more holy than others. If I

am reading this text rightly, it is because every Christian hears the sound of the wind, and still cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes.” We do not really understand how great God’s purposes are in our lives, and how He leads us individually. Both Abraham and Lot knew the Lord. They were both righteous men. Both had the Spirit of God’s work going on in their hearts. And yet Lot saw the greenness and the lushness of the land around Sodom and chose for himself to live there where all the wicked sinners were. Abraham let Lot choose first, and yet he did not want to live anywhere near where he might compromise his soul with ungodliness. Did that mean that he did not have a love to see people come to know God? No. Did that mean that he thought himself a better person than Lot? No, for Abraham prayed that God would not destroy Sodom, and that He would rescue Lot. But Abraham did not grieve the Spirit by trying to make friends with the sinful people of Sodom who he knew would attempt to convince him to compromise his walk with God. He was not going to compromise his walk with God to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin for a season with them. Our choices of where we live, the friends that we choose, and the people that we associate with, and whether we will pursue heavenly things, or whether we are more inclined to pursue just worldly things; these are all important to God, as well as ourselves in terms of our final reward as a Christian. This is one of the main reasons that some Christians are more holy than others. Both are born again, but some are not pursuing heavenly things as they should. When the wind of the Spirit is blowing, they do not understand why they should forsake worldliness and pursue godliness. “They do not know the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child.” “So they do not know the works of God who makes everything.” The beauty of having been regenerated is that the Spirit is given to you forever, to teach you and to guide you, and to bring you to glory. Therefore, my final exhortation to you now is this; do not grieve the Holy Spirit by whom you were sealed to the day of redemption, for His wind is blowing.