

## *Speaking from Experience about the New Birth.*

Read John 3:1-13

Concentrate on these verses: 9Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11Verily, verily, I say unto thee, *We speak that we do know*, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? 13And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

Notice the words of Christ in verse 11, *We speak that we do know*.

Christ speaks in the plural number, *we*, including himself and those who have personal experience of grace and are therefore qualified as witnesses with Christ in preaching the gospel.

Christ is saying to Nicodemus that, “We, who are engaged in spreading the doctrines about which you have come to inquire, speak what we know. We do not deliver doctrines which we do not practically understand.”

Christ knew the truth of the doctrine he proclaimed, and those who came into his kingdom knew it also.

In contrast, the Pharisees taught doctrines which they did not practically understand. They taught much truth (Mt 23:2), but they were deplorably ignorant of the plainest matters in their practical application. They were hearers but not doers of God's Word.

Christ calls out the Pharisees again in Matthew 23:1-

7. We read, "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi."

Christ is teaching here in Matthew 23 that the interpretation the Pharisees gave to the law was for the most part correct, but their lives did not correspond with their teaching.

A Christian author observes, "It is not the duty of men to imitate their teachers unless their lives are pure; but they are rather to obey the law of God than to frame their lives by the example of evil men."

Every minister of the gospel ought to be able to appeal to his own experience, and to say that he knows the truth which he is communicating to others. They should be able to declare, "I have experienced what is meant by the new birth, and the love of God, and the truth which I am teaching."

John and Charles Wesley, brothers and leaders of the evangelical revival in the Church of England in the eighteenth century, were ordained ministers *before* they were converted.

Historians tells us they both attended Oxford University, and there they gathered a few friends with whom they undertook a strict adherence to the worship and discipline of the Book of Common Prayer, from which strict observance they received the nickname, "Methodists."

Having been ordained, they went to the American colony of Georgia in 1735, John as a missionary and Charles as secretary to Governor Oglethorpe. They found the experience disheartening, and returned home in a few years. There, three days apart, they underwent a *conversion experience*.

John, present with a group of Moravians who were reading Martin Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, received a strong emotional awareness of the love of Christ displayed in freely forgiving his sins and granting him eternal life.

John Wesley after experiencing the New Birth himself writes, "From hence it manifestly appears, what is the nature of the new birth. It is that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life; when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is 'created anew in Christ Jesus;' when it is 'renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness;' when the love of the world is changed into the love of God; pride into humility; passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind. In a word, it is that change whereby the earthly, sensual, devilish mind is turned into the 'mind which was in Christ Jesus.' This is the nature of the new birth: 'So is every one that is born of the Spirit.'"

In my own personal testimony, I remember how the Lord used an unconverted Roman Catholic priest to show me my need of the New Birth. This priest was a popular conference speaker who traveled the country year-round providing parishes with unique and dynamic retreats. He read the words from John 3, *you must be born again*, and that resonated in my heart. I believe it was at that time the Lord used His Word to draw me to Christ.

Every born-again believer can identify with the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ in John 3:11, “*We speak that we do know.*” Believers know Christ with their minds. Believers know Christ in their hearts.

The title of my message is, **“*Speaking from experience about the New Birth.*”**

Let us consider first.

## **1. Speaking from experience about the New Birth many times baffles the so called “experts.”**

We read in verse 9 the words of a very confused Pharisee named Nicodemus regarding the nature of the New Birth, “How can these things be?”

Nicodemus was still unwilling to admit the doctrine of the New Birth unless he understood it. We have here an instance of a man of rank stumbling at one of the plainest doctrines of the Bible, and unwilling to admit a truth because he could not understand how it could be, when he daily admitted the truth of facts in other things which he could as little comprehend.

Nicodemus had objected to the doctrine of the New Birth because he did not understand how it could be. Jesus graciously shows him that he ought not to reject the New Birth on that account. It might appear incomprehensible, but it is to be judged by its effects.

Christ illustrates the mystery of the New Birth in verse 8, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

As in this case of the wind, the effects were seen, the sound was heard, important changes were produced by it, trees and clouds were moved, yet the wind is not seen, nor do we know whence it comes, nor by what laws it is governed. So it is with the operations of the Spirit.

We see the changes produced. Men sinful become holy; the thoughtless become serious; the perverted become pure; the vicious, moral; the moral, regenerate; the prayerless, prayerful; the rebellious and obstinate, meek, and mild, and gentle.

When we see such changes, we ought no more to doubt that they are produced by some cause--by some mighty agent, than when we see the trees moved, or the waters of the ocean piled on heaps, or feel the cooling effects of a summer's breeze.

In those cases we attribute it to the wind, though we see it not, and though we do not understand its operations.

A Bible commentator adds, "If the wind cools and refreshes me in summer--if it prostrates the oak or lashes the sea into foam--if it destroys my house or my grain, it matters little how it does this; and so of the Spirit. If it renews my heart, humbles my pride, subdues my sin, and comforts my soul, it is a matter of little importance how it does all this. Sufficient for me is it to know that it is done, and to taste the blessings which flow from the renewing and sanctifying grace of God."

Perhaps you know people who will often admit facts on other subjects, and be greatly perplexed by similar facts in the Bible. Unbelief causes people so often to reject the truths of the gospel.

This was true in the case of Nicodemus. He was a teacher and master of Israel, who should have been fully acquainted with the biblical doctrine of the New Birth. It was not new, but was clearly taught in the Old Testament Scriptures.

We read in Ps 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

Furthermore Ezekiel 11:19 states, “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh.”

Again in Ezekiel 36:26 we read, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”



Christ rebukes Nicodemus, who, though a master of Israel, did not understand the very rudiments of the doctrine of salvation. He was ignorant of the nature of the new birth.

It may seem surprising that a man whose business it was to teach the people should be a stranger to so plain and important a doctrine; but when worldly-minded men are placed in offices of religion--when they seek those offices for the sake of ease or reputation, it is no wonder that they are strangers to the plain truths of the Bible.

A Bible commentator writes, "How wretched is the lot of that minister, who, while he professes to recommend the salvation of God to others, is all the while dealing in the meager, unfruitful traffic of an unfelt truth! Let such either acquire the knowledge of the grace of God themselves, or cease to proclaim it."

There have been many, and there are still, who are in the ministry itself, to whom the plainest doctrines of the gospel are obscure. No man can understand the Bible unless he is born again.

A child thus may have more real knowledge of the way of salvation than many who are pretended masters and teachers of Israel.

It is reported that, William Tyndale, the great English Reformer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in the course of a dispute with a prominent clergyman said, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost".

Speaking from experience about the New Birth many times baffles the so called "experts."

## **2. Speaking from experience about the New Birth reflects a radical change in the life.**

We read in verse 11, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, *and testify that we have seen;* and ye receive not our witness.

Notice Christ's word, *that we have seen*. Jesus had seen by his omniscient eye all the operations of the Spirit on the hearts of men. His ministers also saw its effects as we see the effects of the wind, and, having seen men changed from sin to holiness, they are qualified to bear witness to the truth and reality of the change.

Every successful minister of the gospel thus becomes a witness of the saving power of the gospel in the life of sinners.

I say quite often from this pulpit, "A life not changed is a life not saved."

Those having the New Birth have become a new person and they have the change to prove it.

What is the change?

"Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Cor. 5:17

Those who are saved become a new person. Outwardly, they still look the same, but inwardly Christ has done a work of grace in their heart.

And Christ points out in verse 11 that the Pharisees rejected the ministry of Christ despite the evidence of changed lives, “ye receive not our witness.”

Christ is saying, “Although we give evidence of the truth of the new birth in the souls of men. Although miracles are performed, and proof is given that this doctrine came from heaven, yet you reject it.”

Men reject revelation although it is attested by the strongest evidence, and although it is constantly producing the most desirable changes in the hearts and lives of men.

Speaking from experience about the New Birth reflects a radical change in the life.

### **3. Speaking from experience about the New Birth rests on the authority of Jesus Christ.**

The answer to Nicodemus’ question in verse 9, “How can these things be?” is found in verse 13. “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.”

*No man hath ascended into heaven.* No man, therefore, is qualified to speak of heavenly things like the New Birth. To speak of those things requires intimate acquaintance with them--demands that we have seen them; and as no one has ascended into heaven and returned, so no one is qualified to speak of them but He who came down from heaven, Jesus Christ.

This does not mean that no one had gone to heaven or had been saved, for Enoch and Elijah are there (Ge 5:24; comp. Heb 11:5; 2Ki 2:11), and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and others are there; but it means that no one had ascended and returned, so as to be qualified to speak of heavenly things.

*But he that came down,* The Lord Jesus. He is represented as coming down, because, being equal with God, he took upon himself our nature, Joh 1:14; Php 2:6,7. He is represented as sent by the Father, Joh 3:17; 21:25; Ga 4:4; 1Jo 4:9; 5:21.

*The Son of man.* Called thus from his being a man; from his interest in man; and as expressive of his regard for man. It is a favourite title which the Lord Jesus gives to himself.

*Which is in heaven.* This is a very remarkable expression. Jesus, the Son of man, was then bodily on earth conversing with Nicodemus; yet he declares that he is at the same time in heaven.

This can be understood only as referring to the fact that he had two natures--that his divine nature was in heaven, and his human nature on earth. Our Saviour is frequently spoken of in this manner. Comp. Joh 6:62; Joh 6:62; 17:5; 2Co 8:9. As Jesus was in heaven--as his proper abode was there--he was fitted to speak of heavenly things, and to declare the will of God to man.

The truth about the deep things of God is not to be learned of men. No one has ascended to heaven and returned to tell us what is there; and no infidel, no mere man, no prophet, is qualified of himself to speak of them.

It is only Jesus Christ and his inspired apostles and evangelists that can speak of those things.

Some things in the Scriptures are mysterious. They are about things which we have not seen, and we must receive them on the testimony of one who has seen them, Jesus Christ.

Speaking from experience about the New Birth is only possible because of the atonement Christ made on the Cross for sinners. Without Christ we would still be lost, and dead in our sins.

Have you experienced for yourself the New Birth?  
Are you born again?

Speaking from experience about the New Birth rests on the authority of Jesus Christ.

In closing, we have studied the words of Christ in John 3:11, “*We speak that we do know.*” All true believers can speak from experience about the New Birth. The New Birth baffles religious and non-religious experts alike. It reflects a radical change in the life. And it rests on the authority of Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit help us to speak what we know so sinners can hear and see Christ in us. Let us pray.