

How Can These Things Be?

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: John 3:9

Henry T. Mahan Tape Library
Zebulon Baptist Church
6088 Zebulon Highway
Pikeville, KY 41501

Website: <http://www.sovereign-grace.com/13thstbap.htm>

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I want you to listen very carefully while I read from a most familiar passage of Scripture. I am going to read about seven or eight verses from John chapter three, John the third chapter. If you would like to follow in your Bibles get your Bible and open it to John chapter three.

Verse one says, “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Jesus answered, that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 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. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? How can these things be?”

Now, Nicodemus was a very devout and deeply religious man. And I believe Nicodemus was a very sincere man. I believe he came to Christ in all sincerity wanting some information, some understanding. I’ll tell you why I believe that. A little later in John chapter seven verse 50 Nicodemus, a Pharisee, was meeting with this group of Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, the high Jewish court and they were sitting in condemnation and judgment of Jesus of Nazareth. And Nicodemus stood up and defended the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, “Our law does not condemn a man until it first hears him and finds out what he is doing.” He stood before his fellow Pharisees and defended the Lord Jesus.

I will tell you another reason why I believe Nicodemus was a sincere man. In John 19 when our Savior died on the cross Nicodemus came with Joseph of Arimathaea. You remember who Joseph of Arimathaea is. He is the one who gave the tomb in which no man had ever lain, the tomb in the garden where they buried the Lord Jesus Christ. And Nicodemus came with Joseph of Arimathaea who was a secret disciple of Christ for fear

of the Jews and they buried the body of Jesus Christ. So he was a devout man, a very religious man, a very moral man and I believe a sincere man.

But Nicodemus did not understand that eternal life and salvation is not by obedience to the law of ceremonies and tradition and rituals and religious works. He did not understand that eternal life and salvation is not by our doing and our duties, but it is by the grace of God through the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let me give you four things which Nicodemus did not know which we ought to know. Here are four things. You listen carefully. All spiritual blessings which almighty God has for sons of Adam is in Jesus Christ through the person and redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In him dwelleth the fulness of the godhead bodily. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and the knowledge of God. It is in Christ. It is like Paul wrote in Ephesians one. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ." That is where all that God has for sinners is vested, in the person of his Son. Now that is so.

Second thing that Nicodemus didn't know, we need to know and ought to know. That these spiritual blessings become ours by a union with Christ. It is like the branch in the vine. And the vine draws all its nourishment, the branch draws all its nourishment from the vine. Its fruit is the fruit of the vine. We are in Christ as the branch is in the vine, as the head is a part of the body. Christ is the head. We are the body. So these blessings are ours because we are in him. We are in living union with Christ Jesus. We have what he has. What God has given through the Son is ours.

Thirdly, and Christ is saying this to Nicodemus, that this union is accomplished by a new birth. We are heirs of God because we are sons of God. That's...we are heirs of God because we are sons of God and we are sons of God because we are born of God. I am my father's heir because I am his son and I was begotten by a living human father and that makes me his heir.

And he that is born of God is an heir of God. If we are sons of God we are heirs of God. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. And everyone that loveth is born of God.

Now here is the fourth thing. And this is what Christ is saying to Nicodemus. All spiritual blessings are in Christ and they are ours by union with Christ and that union with Christ is by a new birth. We are born sons of God. And here is the fourth thing he is saying is this new birth is by the will of God. It is by the will of God.

He said to Nicodemus, "The wind blows where it pleases. You hear the sound, but you can't tell from whence it cometh or whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. They are born mysteriously, supernaturally by the will of God. And they are born by the Spirit of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. But that which is born of the Spirit of God is Spirit. And also they are born by the Word of God." Christ said, "You

must be born from above, of the Spirit and the water.” That’s the Word. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.

And Peter wrote, “We are born again not with corruptible seed, but with in corruptible seed by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever.”

And Nicodemus said, “How can these things be? These mysteries. How can they be? How can these things be? How can these mysterious blessings come to pass? I don’t understand.”

Job asked that question. He said, “How can a man be just with God?” He said, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” He said, “What is man that he should be clean, he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous before God? Will God indeed dwell with man?”

These are mysteries and Nicodemus didn’t understand them. And he said, “How can they be? How can these things be?”

And then our Lord answered him and he said, “Nicodemus, are you a master?”

What is a master? It is a teacher. Often our...the disciples called our Lord master, master. And that is teacher. And Christ said, “Nicodemus, are you a teacher, a master in Israel and you don’t know these things?”

And he said in the next verse, “If I have told you earthly things and you don’t understand and don’t believe, how could you believe if I told you heavenly things, these mysterious, these mysterious things of God? How could you understand if I told you those if you don’t understand the earthly things that I have told you?”

What are the earthly things that he told him? Do you remember the Scripture as I was reading it? What are the earthly things that Christ told Nicodemus? Well, one of them is this. Natural men do not have spiritual life.

You say, “Where did he tell him that?”

He said, “You must be born again. Except a man is born again he cannot understand or enter the kingdom of God because he is flesh.”

And natural men do not have spiritual life. They cannot see. They cannot hear. They cannot enter the kingdom of God. They have got to be born again. That is an earthly truth. We are dead in sin. We have no life.

Here is the second truth he told him. Natural men cannot give themselves birth and light. They can’t born themselves. “Except a man is born,” he said, “Of the Spirit of God he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

And the third earthly thing he told him is that natural men do not have the power to command the birth to come to them or to command God to do anything. He said, “You hear the wind. You see the effects. You cannot command the wind. You cannot demand anything of the wind. You cannot make it do what you want it to do.”

So natural men have no spiritual life. They must be born again. Natural men cannot give themselves spiritual life. It has to be by the Spirit of God. And natural men cannot command God to give them...they can ask him. They can seek it. They can pray for it, but they can't command it.

Do you remember when Ezekiel was taken by God to the valley of dry bones and he looked at...there had been great battle fought there years before and all these bones were everywhere, dry, parched and bleached in the sun? And God spoke to his servant. He said, “Can these bones live?”

And Ezekiel said, “Lord, you know. You know.”

He said, “Well preach to them. Preach to them. Command them to live. Command them to hear. Command them to hear.”

So Ezekiel said, “I preached to them.” And they came together, bone to its bone, flesh up on the bones, but there was no life in them, no life. And God said, “Command the wind and say to the wind, ‘Oh breath of God breathe on these bones that they may live.’”

“So I prophesied to the wind and I cried, ‘Oh breath of God...’ And they stood up a mighty army and lived.”

But then our Lord said, “Listen. Nicodemus, no man hath ascended to heaven, no man can ascend to heaven. No man can penetrate the courts of God. No man can understand the mysterious counsels of God. Can you by searching find out God? Can you find out the almighty to perfection? You can't find these things out. They have to be revealed.”

And he says, “There is someone who can reveal it.”

No man can ascend to heaven. No man can penetrate the counsels and courts of heaven. But there is someone who can.

Listen to verse 13. “He that came down from heaven even the Son of God, even the Son of man which is in heaven.” He is...Christ is talking about himself. He is saying, “You can't discover these mysteries and you can't find the answer to how these things can be, but I can tell you. I can tell you. He that came down from heaven, even the Son of God, the Son of man,” and watch, “which is in heaven.”

Christ is God. And though he walked on this earth in human flesh he never left the presence of the Father. The Son of man which is in heaven. He is able to reveal. He is able to

manifest. He is able to tell you, to teach you, to reveal to you how these things can be because of who he is. That's right.

Paul wrote in Hebrews, "God who at sundry times and at different manners spake to our fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son." And then he describes him. "He is the heir of all things by whom God made the worlds, who is the brightness of his glory, who is the exact image of his person, who holds all things together, who by himself purged our sins, who is seated at the right hand of God."

Listen and he will tell you how these things can be. Will you listen? How can he be just and justifier? How can he be clean and born of a woman? How can a man be born again? How can God be just and justifier? Here is the remedy. Here is the answer.

Verse 14. You have read it many times. Read it again, verse 14. Christ said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

What is this? What happened in the wilderness? Israel murmured against God, complained and rebelled against God. And God sent fiery serpents into their midst. And these fiery serpents had bitten the people and they were dying. And Moses cried to God for mercy, for healing.

And God said, "Moses, make a serpent of brass in the likeness of the serpent that had bitten the people. Put it on a pole. Lift it up between heaven and earth and it will come to pass. Everyone that looks will live."

Now we are bitten by serpents of sin. We are bitten by sin and we are fallen creatures. We have rebelled against our God. And our God sent his Son into this world, made in the likeness...now Moses made a serpent in the likeness of that serpent that had bitten the people. Christ was made in the likeness of our problem, sin, of the serpent that had bitten us, sin. And our Lord came to this earth and was lifted up on a cross.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man was lifted up and he was made sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. And all who look live. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him and by his stripes we are healed. It is look to Christ and live.

His perfect life is our righteousness and his death is our justification. And there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus our Lord. That is the remedy. That is how these things can be. Christ our justifier, Christ our sanctifier, Christ our righteousness, Christ our substitute. As Moses lifted up the serpent, even so must the Son of Man, the Son of God, the substitute for sinners be lifted up that whosoever believeth on him...

All right. That's...here is the results. Here is the results in verse 15. "That whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

When Moses lifted up that serpent in the wilderness he said, God said to him, “It will come to pass that whosoever looks lives.” And that is what exactly what our Lord Jesus Christ said that whosoever believeth on him may have eternal life.

He does not fail. He cannot fail. He said, “My sheep hear my voice and they follow me and I give them eternal life and they will never perish.” He cannot fail. No man ever came to Christ seeking mercy who failed to find it.

Now you look through the Word. Every one who came to Christ with a need, with a burden, with a sinful soul and sought mercy found it, every one. He delights to show mercy.

David said that in Psalm 130. He said, “Lord, out of the depths have I cried unto thee. Lord, hear my prayer. If thou shouldst mark iniquity who would stand? But there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared and worshipped.”

All right. How can these things be? Here is the remedy. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up that whosoever believeth on him...here is the results...should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Now, here is the reason. There is a reason for this. Verse 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. The reason for the gift of life is found not in us, it is found in God. The reason for salvation is not found in us, it is found in God. It is the mercy of God. It is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. It is the gift of God. That is what eternal life...

Herein is love, not that we loved God. He loved us and gave his Son to be a propitiation for our sins. This is the record that God hath given us eternal life and this life is in his Son. The death of Christ for our sins, listen to me. The death of Christ for our sins is not the cause of God’s love. It is the effect. Christ Jesus didn’t die on the cross to get God to love us. He died on the cross because God did love us.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Notice four things about the love of God. Arthur Pink pointed this out in one of his books, four things about the love of God.

Number one, the tense of his love. It is always God so loved. God is love.

Somebody said, “Well, God is a God of love.”

No, that’s not the way to say it. God is love. The love of God, how rich, how pure, how measureless, how strong. It forever more endures even the saint’s or angel’s songs. That’s the tense of his love his always. He has said, “I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore with loving kindness I am drawing you.”

What is the magnitude of his love? God so loved he gave. He gave his only begotten Son. God gave. That is the magnitude of his love.

Thirdly, the design of his love. And everyone who believes should never perish, never perish. That is the design of his love. That is the design of his death. That is the design of his atonement that those for whom he died will never perish, never perish. And no man will pluck them out of his hand he said. "My Father gave them to me and no man can pluck them out of Father's hand." They will never perish.

And what is the benefits of his love? Everlasting life. Here is the remedy. How can these things be? How can a man be born again? How can a man be clean, born of a woman? How can a man be just with God? How can God almighty be just and justifier? Well, here is the remedy. Here is the remedy.

As Moses lifted up that serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. Here is the results, that whosoever believeth on him might have everlasting life. And here is the reason. God so loved. And oh the magnitude of his love. He gave his only begotten Son. And oh the reason and design of it. And whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Now, the conclusion in verse 17. He tells Nicodemus this. "God didn't send his Son into the world to condemn the world." The world was already condemned. This is the condemnation. Light is come into this world and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Christ Jesus didn't come to condemn. He said, "I am come to seek and to save that which is lost."

"The Son of man is come into the world to save sinners," Paul said, "of whom I am chief."

"Call his name Jesus," the angel said to Joseph, "he shall save his people from their sins." He didn't come to condemn. He came to save.

God sent his Son to save his people. In Luke chapter 19 he said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost."

And now here is verse...look at verse 18. "And he that believeth on Christ is not condemned." There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus the Lord.

If you read that eighth chapter of Romans, there are five questions that the apostle Paul asked that are the very grounds of our assurance. Here they are... He said, "Number one, if God be for us who can be against us. He that spared not his own Son, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?"

The second...third question, "Who is he that condemneth? Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died. It is Christ that is risen. It is Christ that is ascended. It is Christ that is seated at the right hand of God."

The fourth question, “Who can lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God who justifies? Who can condemn? Who can charge us?”

Are we not chargeable? Well, of course we are. We will admit it immediately. We will admit it any time. We are always chargeable. We are not perfect. Paul said in Timothy, he said, “I haven’t arrived. I am not perfect. I haven’t laid hold upon that for which God laid hold of me in Christ Jesus. I am chargeable, but no one can charge me because it is God that justifies.”

Now here is the fifth question. “Who can separate us from the love of God? I am persuaded neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. He that believeth is not condemned.” And now listen. “But he that believeth not is condemned already because he has not believed on the name of the Son of God.”

He is condemned because he hath not believed on Christ. He has no Mediator. He has...if a man does not believe on Christ he has no substitute. He has no sin offering. He has no great high priest. He has no atonement. He has no one to plead for him before God. He does not have a Mediator.

1 John chapter two verse one says, “If any man sin,” and that is a foregone conclusion. “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we say we have not sinned we make God a liar. But when any man sins if he is a believer we have an Advocate. We have a Mediator who is Jesus Christ the righteous and he is at the right and of God and he ever intercedes for us. He is our Intercessor. He is our Mediator. There is one God and one Mediator between God and man and that is Christ.

Now he that believeth on the Son, he has a Mediator. He has an Intercessor. He has an advocate. But if a man believes not on Christ he is condemned. He has no mediator. He has got to stand before God in his guilt, in his sins, in his wickedness forever condemned because he has no mediator.

He that believeth is not condemned. He that believeth not is condemned already because he has no mediator.

Now if you would like to have this message on tape, it is called, “How Can These Things Be?” I believe that is as plain as I can make this gospel message. If you would like to have it, now the address will be on the screen. If you will send two dollars that’s what it costs us to make them and send them. And we will mail you this tape, “How Can These Things Be?”

Now until next week at this same time may God bless you everyone.