

## Pt 15 Ye Receive Not Our Witness – John 3:11-15

A sermon series in the Gospel of John, by Pastor Byron Chesney at Porchlight Baptist Church [www.pbcknox.com](http://www.pbcknox.com)

### John 3:11-15

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12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

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.

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

A few weeks ago, we started Chapter 3 of the Gospel of John. We saw where a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus, came to Jesus in the night because he had questions. The Lord knows his heart and why he is there and tells him **John 3:3b**... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Of course Nicodemus, being a lost man, is only able to think with his fleshly mind because he doesn't have a Spiritual one. So, he does not understand what Jesus is talking about.

The Apostle Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 2:14** But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Then Jesus went on to explain, that those born of flesh are flesh and those born of Spirit are spirit and the only way to do that is to be **"born again."**

Nicodemus still doesn't get it and Jesus gives him a mild rebuke in **John 3:10b**... Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

That's where we pick up in our opening text this morning.

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.

Nicodemus was a smart man. He probably had much book learning and education. No doubt he sat under seasoned Jewish teachers such as Paul did under the great Jewish Rabbi, Gamaliel. But despite Nicodemus' education and knowledge, he did not understand the simplest things concerning salvation.

Here in verse 11, Jesus tells him that he has told him the truth, he speaks the truth and testifies of it yet Nicodemus and those of his kind did not receive his witness. In other words, they did not believe in him as Savior, despite the fact that the first words out of Nicodemus' mouth when he first came to Jesus was this: **John 3:2** 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.

Nicodemus seems to be speaking on behalf of his fellow Pharisees when he says, **"we know that thou art a teacher come from God."** Isn't it interesting that they believe he is of God yet, cannot believe in Him as their Messiah? That is what Jesus is calling him out on. The very people Jesus came to earth for, to save them from their sins, would not receive him.

Remember what we studied in the very first message from John chapter 1:

### John 1:1-11

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

Nicodemus and the Pharisees are of those the Bible says are "his own." His own people. His own nation. His own hometown. His own Synagogue. Even his own family would not receive him.

12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

Jesus then goes on to address his unbelief by pointing out the fact that he used an earthly illustration of a baby being born and he didn't believe, what makes him think he would believe if he talked to him of heavenly things? If he can't understand basic earthly matters, then there's no way he's going to understand Spiritual matters.

Take notice of the word **"believe"** here in this verse. It is mentioned twice in this one verse and 5 more times in the next 7 verses. It is the key to this passage of Scripture. Belief is the means to the New Birth. Not going back into your mother's womb and being born, but by simply believing in Jesus as Savior.

You could substitute the word **"believe"** with the word **"faith."** It takes faith to believe in something you cannot see. **Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

And, we know what it says in **Romans 10:17** So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Nicodemus cannot believe yet because he has not placed his faith in Jesus as his Savior, and he has not placed his faith in him because he has not believed or received his word.

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.

This may perhaps be one of the toughest verses in the Bible to reconcile with. Out of this entire message I spent more time studying, praying, and meditating on this verse to try and grasp the entire meaning. Let me explain:

1. In the first part of the verse, Jesus says "no man hath ascended up to heaven. This is really where we get troubled and where some even claim that the Bible contradicts itself. Because we read the following in **Genesis 5:24** And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him. And we read in the New Testament; **Hebrews 11:5** By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

So, we are told that God “took” Enoch and “**God translated him.**” The word “**translated**” means “**to be transported, transferred, or moved from one place to another.**”

We are not told God took Enoch to Heaven, but I think that is what is implied. I mean, where else would God have taken him?

Also, we read the following in **2 Kings 2:11** *And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.* Here the Bible plainly says **Elijah went into heaven.**

So, we have these two men; neither saw death yet both seems to have been taken up to Heaven.

How do we reconcile this with John 3:13 where Jesus says: **And no man hath ascended up to heaven?**

Well, I believe what we need to do is take the whole passage into context. Nicodemus was not receiving the Word of the Lord even though the Lord was telling him of Spiritual things, Heavenly things, that only someone who had actually been in Heaven could teach. When we continue with the second part of John 3:13b we read: **but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.** Neither Enoch nor Elijah had come back down from heaven to teach of spiritual or heavenly things. Only One man had ever done that – “**the Son of man.**” The Son of man is the title that Jesus used for himself more than any other title. It was his way of connecting himself with mankind.

We read the following in **Philippians 2:5-11**

**5** Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:  
**6** Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:  
**7** But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:  
**8** And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.  
**9** Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:  
**10** That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth;  
**11** And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

As Pastor Sexton often said during my Seminary days, ***The very God of Heaven robed himself in flesh and became man. He did not cease to be God when He became man. He did not give up His deity to become man. He took on humanity without giving up deity, but He did lay aside His glory.***

I believe what Jesus is telling us is that no man except for himself has ever ascended into Heaven and then descended to earth to speak of Heavenly things. I think that makes the most sense if we read our opening text again:

**John 3:11-15**

**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.  
**12** If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?  
**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.

This makes Jesus the One and Only man to be able to speak of Heavenly things because he is the eternal existing One and has the knowledge and authority to speak of Heavenly things.

Nicodemus may have known what the Old Testament Scriptures said. He may even have memorized Scripture, but his knowledge was only earthly knowledge, physical knowledge – but not Spiritual knowledge.

An atheist can do the same thing. He can memorize the Bible and quote it back to you verbatim, but he is not spiritually discerned and therefore cannot understand spiritual matters which are only born of the Spirit.

So, instead of getting hung up on whether anyone else had ever ascended up to heaven, we need to focus on what Jesus was actually teaching and that was that He was the Only one with the authority and Heavenly connections to be able to teach Spiritual truths concerning how a man must be born again.

**14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: **15** That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

I think it would do us good to read about what Jesus was referring to concerning the “serpent in the wilderness.” Look in **Numbers 21:4-9**

**4** And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.  
**5** And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for *there is* no bread, neither *is there any* water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.  
**6** And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.  
**7** Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.  
**8** And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.  
**9** And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

The fiery serpent was a symbol of punishment by death for the people's disobedience, their sins. But God made a way for them to live if they would be obedient by looking up at the fiery serpent that Moses had lifted up on a pole, then they would live even though they had been bitten by the deadly serpent.

When Jesus mentions this when talking with Nicodemus, he is symbolizing the penalty of death for sins. Instead of God placing a fiery serpent on a pole, he placed the **Son of Man**, his precious Son, Jesus, on a cross which was lifted up above the ground. Jesus tells Nicodemus ...**even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.**

Jesus also made this very clear in **John 12:32** **And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.** And, just so we wouldn't be confused the Bible gives it's own commentary of what Jesus was saying by telling us in the next verse, **33 This he said, signifying what death he should die.**

Many of the Children of Israel no died in the wilderness because they refused to look up at the fiery serpent. They refused to believe that a fiery serpent on top of a pole could save them. I can hear their conversation now, "that's the craziest thing I've ever

heard in my life, how in the world is a serpent on top of a pole going to save us from snake poisoning? We are all going to die. Somebody do something!"

Man is doing the same thing now. They refuse to place their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior because they can only trust in their own strength. My friend, that is why it is called faith! You must have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved.

Nicodemus came to Jesus in the night to try and get answers. Answers that he knew only Jesus could supply. He recognized the fact that Jesus had somehow come from God because he could not have done all of the things he had been doing and could not say all the things he had been saying had he not been of God. But the fact remains that Nicodemus did not recognize Jesus as BEING God.

Nicodemus could not see past his years of book learning. Of his memorizing Scripture. Of his memorization of the Laws of Moses. Of the rules that he had to keep being a Pharisee. All of that stuff made sense to him because it was something that He could do. It was something He could perform. That's why Jesus gave him a mild rebuke in Chapter 10 when he said: **Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?** While Nicodemus was very academic, he knew nothing of the truth about God. and that was how to reconcile himself to God and to know how to redeem his soul.

So we find Nicodemus asking how a man can be born again? How can a man be saved? How can a man go to Heaven? And again Jesus gives him the great truth that **Christ must be lifted up**. And that is where men like Nicodemus and the unbelieving Atheist have a problem. They refuse to see Jesus high and lifted up. Man in his self-centered, self-absorbed, me, myself, and I rebellious nature can only see himself lifted up. They do not have the faith that is necessary to lift up Jesus and look unto him for their salvation. They are like a mindless robot that can only discern between black and white or 1 and 0's. Cannot compute, cannot compute...

Jesus tells him there is NOTHING he can do. No offerings, no works, no ceremonies, no religious exercises, self-righteousness that can get you into the Kingdom of God. It takes a much higher faith than faith in your own works and deeds, and goodness, it takes faith in The Son of Man. **even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.**

We will stop here this morning and pick back up in John 3:16 in 2 weeks, Lord willing.