

John 3: 12 and 13; “If I Tell You Heavenly Things”, Sermon # 15 in the series – “That all May Honor the Son”, A Communion Sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 7th, 2012, in the Morning Worship Service.

Jesus has just finished telling Nicodemus that he must be born again to enter the kingdom of God. Nicodemus answers Jesus by saying, “How can these things be?” “How can a man again enter his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus tells him that it is not a work of the flesh performed by men, but it is a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit of God, whereby He regenerates a sinful man’s heart and infuses a gracious principle of life and holiness into the soul of the person receiving this gift, so that they become a New Creature in Christ. “I will give you a New Heart, and put My Spirit within you,” says God in Ezekiel 36: 26. That Elect person is given life from above; but the Spirit’s working is mysterious like the wind. A person hears the sound of it, but they cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. It does not matter if that sinful man is the most religious man in the world; he still needs to be born again to see and enter the kingdom of God. Nicodemus had thought that he was a spiritual man before he came to Jesus, but now he knew that he had missed something. Jesus had told him earthly things; He had told him about this New Birth, but he had not understood it. Now Jesus was going to give him a sample of what He meant by “heavenly things”. He says, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man who is in heaven.” It is this statement of heavenly things that we want to think about this morning before we partake of the Lord’s Supper. This statement has much in it of Christ’s blessed person and His mission in coming to save sinners from their sin, and so it will be fitting to prepare us for our time of communion with Christ, around His table, in just a few minutes. Let us meditate upon the 3 statements which Christ gives to us here: 1st – No one has ascended to heaven, but Jesus. 2nd – No one has come down from heaven except Jesus. And 3rd – And no one can be in heaven and on earth at the same time, but Jesus. May we receive this teaching as food to our souls this day.

1st – No one has ascended to heaven, but Jesus.

How can Jesus make this statement that He does here, when we know from studying the Bible, that at least two other man have ascended to heaven in the history of mankind? They are Enoch and Elijah. “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him,” it says in Genesis 5: 24. God took him to be with Himself in heaven; He translated him. And Elijah, it says in 2 Kings 2: 11, “went up by a whirlwind into heaven”. These two men “ascended to heaven”. But let us understand that these two men never ascended to heaven in order to gather the mysteries of the wisdom and the knowledge of God, and then return with that knowledge to reveal it to us; to bring heavenly things down to fallen, sinful

mankind, as our Lord Jesus did when He became Incarnate. No, we must seek to understand this first statement in a different sense. I think that we can begin to conceive of what Jesus is saying here by turning over to Proverbs Chapter 30, and verse 1. Here we have, as it says in verse 1, “The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, his utterance.” “The man declared to Ithiel – to Ithiel and Ucal: Surely I am more stupid than any man, and do not have the understanding of a man.” “I neither learned wisdom nor have the knowledge of the Holy One.” “Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?” “Who has gathered the wind in His fists?” “Who has bound the waters in a garment?” “Who has established all the ends of the earth?” “What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, if you know?”

We see here from these verses that there are many things about God the Father and God the Son that we need to have revealed to us. Agur says, “Surely I am more stupid than any man, and I do not have the understanding of a man.” He means that he did not understand spiritual things as a man ought to understand them if he would glorify God. It was not as though Agur did not have religious privileges; he certainly had those. It was simply that he had not “learned wisdom”, or correctly understood “the knowledge of the Holy One”. He had not by means of his own searching, or knowledge that he had gathered, been able to come to understand God’s ways in terms of what was the best way to live his life. He had not come to understand and make due improvement of the all truth of the Scriptures that He had learned. Let me ask you if you have come to that place where you see yourself rightly? Have you come to the place where you see that there have been many things that you have known about God’s truth, and God’s expectation for you, as far as what He would have you to do. And yet you see that you have not lived up to all that truth and light that you have been given? You need to understand that this realization is a part of your sanctification; for God to bring you to this place. Because without His bringing you to this place, you will not be able to comprehend, that sanctification, which is your becoming more holy, is not first of all your own determination to change and become holy; it is first of all God’s determination that you will by Christ’s grace change, and He will make you holy through Christ. God the Father, in saving you from yourself and from your sins, will make you over into the image of His Son. This is something you cannot possibly do on your own.

So that is why Agur speaks the way that he does, here. He has come to realize something of God’s ways, and something of God’s grace, and he realizes that in the past he has been stupid. As a believer, he really has much more yet to learn before he dies and meets God face to face. That’s why he says what he does here. “Surely I am more stupid than any man” is a saying which each Christian must learn, whether they want to or not, if they would be Christ’s disciple. Remember what Jesus said in Luke 14: 26 – “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple?” Let me ask you now whether you have come to this place,

yet, in your experience? Have you come to the place, either as an unbeliever or as a Christian, where you hate your own life? Jesus means here, that you have must come to that place where you see the folly of using your own earthly wisdom to guide you in how you live your life. God will bring you to that place because He has better things to show you. He would show you great and mighty things which you do not know. He would teach you His way of doing things. When you come to see the truth of this principle of God's ways versus your own, and you have the grace to own up to the fact that you have not learned His ways in the way that you should have in the past; you now hate yourself for having thought that going about to live your life in your own way, apart from the wisdom of God in the Scriptures, was wise at all. You come to see yourself as stupid because you know that you were stubborn about holding on to all the selfish and sinful attitudes and ways of earthly wisdom which prevented you from seeing how great and glorious and good God's way is.

The point here, is that no one has ascended to heaven on their own; no son of Adam has ever succeeded in being able to find this wisdom on his own apart from God and Christ's showing them that they needed to learn God's good way of doing things, by seeking Christ for this wisdom that they do not have in themselves. All of us, by nature, want to believe that we can figure these heavenly things out on our own and that we have the power within ourselves to be able to do what pleases God. But we do not. That is what this whole conversation with Nicodemus is all about. "I have neither learned wisdom, nor the knowledge of the Holy One," could have been Nicodemus' confession as well at this point. But look at what follows. For there is great hope in this text. "Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?" (You and I have not) "Who has gathered the wind in His fists?" "Who has bound the waters in a garment?" "Who has established all the ends of the earth?" (None of us can do these great and mighty things.) "What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know?" (Only God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, can cause a person to be born again and work the grace of sanctification into their souls) "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do, for His good pleasure." (Philippians 2: 13)

Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 10, verse 1. Speaking of his religious fellow-countrymen, the Jews, Paul says: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved." "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God." "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." "For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law." "The man who does those things shall live by them." "But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' "(that is, to bring Christ down from above)" or "Who will bring Christ up from the dead), but what does it say?" "The word is

near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach), that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” That is the true wisdom that Agur was confessing that he needed. He could not ascend up to heaven to bring Christ down, but he could believe in God’s Son, even in Old Testament times. “What is His name, or His Son’s name?” “Surely you know”. For him, Christ’s name was prophetic; He was the Holy One who was promised in the Scriptures, and surely every word of God was pure. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who we have come to remember this morning. We could not ascend to heaven to attain to the wisdom and saving knowledge that we needed to change. But we believe that God has revealed it to us, and thus we found grace to save us, and grace to help us live to God’s glory; and now we pray to find grace to change, to become more holy and righteous in His sight. In believing in Jesus we find a righteousness better than our own and a wisdom which is from above; that which is first pure, peaceable, and then gentle; it is full of good fruits. This is what we confess that we have found, and this is what will confess at the Lord’s table that we still need, every day of our lives; His precious and powerful and comforting grace.

2ndly - No one has come down from heaven except Jesus.

“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man...” We have now established that none of us could ascend to heaven on our own; none of us is able to understand the earthly spiritual things of being born again or the heavenly spiritual things of God’s way of sanctification and holiness unless we come to Jesus Christ our Lord for salvation from our sins, and the removal of their spiritual blindness. We haven’t the power to comprehend spiritual things; by nature we haven’t the ability to do and keep God’s commandments from right motives, no matter who we are; no matter how religious we have been. But nevertheless, we confess that we have great hope and great joy this morning, those of us who are Christians, because Jesus Christ our Lord “came down from heaven” for us. Turn with me over to John Chapter 6, verse 32. “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.” “For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” “Then they said to Him, ‘Lord, give us this bread always.’” “And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life.’” “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” “But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.” “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” (Watch this now) “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.”

I hope that you believe this morning, as a Christian, that you can never be lost once you have truly been saved. This text plainly says that it is God’s will that

Christ lose nothing. He shall not lose one of God's Elect people; none of those people who were specifically given to Him before time began shall ever be lost. Why? Because Jesus came down from heaven. He came down from heaven to do the Father's will, and He did it thoroughly. He obeyed all of God's holy commandments out of a pure love to the Father and to the souls of all those given to Him by the Father. Your salvation, dear Christian, rests entirely upon this fact; that Jesus did the Father's will perfectly. Your obedience and your perseverance are only established, to whatever extent they are established, by the grace of Christ. And what you fail to do completely He has done completely. And what you omitted to do, He did not omit doing it. He has fulfilled all of God's righteous law on your behalf. You are complete in Him. This is what you persevere in; it is your faith in Christ, as you go about to do good works unto God. You persevere in faith and doing what is right, not because you do it perfectly, but because you are trusting that you are being sanctified by this will of Jesus to do the will of God. His perfectly willing and doing God's will is the basis of your willing and doing God's will to the extent that you are able to obey God, by means of Christ's grace. This also, then, is one of those precious heavenly things that cannot be understood without God's revealing it to you. If you are attempting to persevere in your own strength, you will never be able to do it; but by Christ's obedience being imputed to you and His grace working in your heart, you shall most definitely persevere to the end. Hebrews 10: 10 – "By that will, (that is the will of Christ to do God's will in every particular) we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." That is what we now will come down front to remember together.

3rd – We want to see that one can be in heaven and on earth at the same time, but Jesus.

"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." This is truly an amazing statement, and it does have application to our being here at this hour partaking of the Lord's Supper. As Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus he was not only right there in front of him physically; He was also in heaven spiritually. That is what Jesus was saying. How was this possible? It was possible because Jesus Christ is the God-man. He is the only glorious Person who has two natures which make up His One Blessed Being. He is fully God and fully Man. This means that because He is God, He is in every place; including heaven, at any given time. So, as being fully man, he was conversing with Nicodemus. And as fully God is was also in heaven with His father; not physically, but spiritually. Now some professing Christian people have gotten this all wrong. The Roman Catholics believe that their priests have the ability to say a few words over the bread of the Lord's Supper, and it is actually changed into the body of Christ. But this is not only not possible, it is blasphemous. It is undertaking to do something that God never ordained a man to do; to by his own words change bread into Christ's body. No Christ's body, since

He has ascended into heaven, is there in heaven. He the God-Man cannot be changed in substance or essence into a wafer to be placed into men's mouths. It does great dishonor to God and to Christ, and twists the gospel itself into a message of sacramental and ceremonial works-righteousness. If you just take the Mass, they say, Christ is being sacrificed for you. Do it over and over and you might just be saved. No, no; it will not only never happen, but it is blasphemous because it dishonors God who sent His Son to accomplish redemption on the cross and to say, "It is finished"; once for all.

Then there is the Lutheran view of the Supper. They believe in what is termed Consubstantiation. They believe that Christ's material body and blood are corporally present "with, in, and under the bread and wine". And the reason that they came to this doctrine was partially because of this text that we are studying today. They believe that since Christ could be in heaven and bodily upon the earth ministering to His people, both at the same time, that therefore, since His ascension that He can bodily be with the bread and the wine in real material substantial way, as well. But there are real problems with this. How can a body at once be visible and invisible; felt and un-feelable; present in heaven, and in multitudes of places on earth, and still be all together in heaven? It cannot. And so we must come to a better understanding of these things. Christ cannot be bodily in two places at one time, but He can, since He is God, be with us present here, by His Spirit, as we break the bread and drink the wine. Spiritually, we do feed upon Him and feast with Him, as we partake these emblematic elements. Nothing is changed in them, but much spiritually is communicated to us. "Unless you eat my flesh and drink My blood, you have no life in you," does not mean eating or drinking physically these things at all, but rather being given spiritual life and nourishment which come to our souls in through this special means of grace that He has provided for us. We come not to an altar, but to a table. We come not to sacrifice Christ, but to remember Him, and to commemorate His death and resurrection. Truly He is with us, and among us, in His Supper, ministering to each believing heart, the reality of His strengthening grace. Let us now remember why He suffered and why He died. It was because we were needy sinners, and because we are still needy saints.