

A Text For Nicodemus

Ezekiel 36:25-28

by Phil Johnson

This morning we will be looking at a passage from Ezekiel 36, but I want to begin with a different passage, one which is very familiar to you—the account of Nicodemus in John 3.

Most of you know this account well, how Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a member of that legalistic sect that had so openly set themselves against Jesus, nonetheless took an interest in Jesus and wanted to meet with Him personally. So he came to Jesus under cover of night. It appears this was because he didn't want his fellow Pharisees to discover his sympathy for Jesus. John 19:39 mentions Nicodemus in connection with Jesus' burial, alongside Joseph of Arimathea, whom John 19:38 says **"was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews."** Nicodemus was apparently fearful of what his fellow Pharisees would think if they knew he had an interest in Jesus, so he came by night.

And he begins with a profession of faith, of sorts. Verse 2: **"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."**

3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"

There's a tone of rebuke and astonishment in Jesus' words.

"You're one of the great Rabbis in this nation, and you don't even know about these things I'm telling you?"

Now to some degree we can understand and sympathize with Nicodemus's ignorance. Why should he understand what Jesus was talking about? There's no explicit reference to being "born again" anywhere in the Old Testament. The new birth is nowhere called the new birth anywhere in any of the Scriptures Nicodemus had studied.

But clearly Jesus held him responsible for being ignorant of the concept. *"How can you be a teacher of Israel and not know these things?"* How could he be an expert in the Old Testament and know nothing about the doctrine of regeneration? This doctrine has Old Testament roots, and Nicodemus should have been familiar with the fundamental concepts.

What passage of Old Testament teaching had Nicodemus neglected? What should he have thought about instantly when Jesus began to talk to him about being born again? Did you ever think about that? Did you ever ask *why* Jesus would rebuke Nicodemus for his ignorance about the doctrine of regeneration? What passage of Scripture should have instantly come to his mind when Jesus began saying these things?

There's a potent clue in verse 5: **"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."**

I'm always amazed at the various ways people have tried to explain the meaning of this expression **"water and the Spirit."** Some claim water is a reference to the amniotic fluid that is present at physical birth. When a woman is about to deliver, one of the first things that occurs is the amniotic sac that protects the baby during pregnancy ruptures. Even in our modern vernacular, we refer to this by saying "her water broke."

So occasionally you'll hear someone say that is what Jesus was referring to when He speaks about being "born of water." So that the *water* He has in mind represents the physical birth, the first birth. And when He speaks about being "**born of the Spirit**," there He has the second birth, a spiritual rebirth, in mind.

The problem with that is that if that is what Jesus meant, would have utterly escaped Nicodemus. Nicodemus wouldn't have thought of physical birth as birth by water. And in fact, in verse 6, when he wants to signify physical birth, Jesus speaks of "**That which is born of the flesh**"—not that which is born of *water*.

Others say the water is a reference to baptism. This is the Roman Catholic view, and it is shared by many Anglicans and others who believe the New Birth is initiated by the ritual of baptism. I don't think I need to spend a great deal of time refuting the doctrine of baptismal regeneration here, except to say that water baptism doesn't regenerate anyone. No external ritual or human work can ever cause the new birth. John 1:13 says the New Birth is "**not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God**." It is a *spiritual* reality that cannot be initiated by or conveyed through a physical ritual, as the context of John 3 makes clear. Look at verse 8: "**The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit**." This is a *spiritual* event, invisible to the human eye. So we are not born again by the act of baptism.

Think for a moment about this concept of a whole New Birth. It is significant that Jesus uses the imagery of rebirth to get the point across to Nicodemus. This is something more, even, than a resurrection from the dead. *Birth* is what is needed, not just an awakening. It speaks of more than merely the imparting of new life. It's a whole new beginning, a rebirth—newness in every respect. A fresh start, a new person—a new creature.

And Nicodemus realizes immediately that Jesus is not talking about something he can do for himself. There is no way to birth

yourself. It wasn't by your own choice or activity that you were born the first time. You weren't the cause of your first birth, and there's no way by sheer force of will or any amount of labor that you can make yourself be reborn. You can not cause or accomplish a rebirth for yourself. Nicodemus recognized this instantly, and that is why he said in verse 4, "**How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?**"

Now, Nicodemus wasn't an idiot. He didn't *really* think Jesus was talking about a literal, physical return trip through the birth canal. But he *did* realize that Jesus was talking about something he could not do for himself. It wasn't something he could accomplish through a ritual. We're not born again by water baptism.

According to 1 Peter 1:23 we are born again by the incorruptible seed of the word of God. Again, this emphasizes that the New Birth is a wholly spiritual reality and a sovereign work of God, not the product of a religious ritual we perform. In the words of James 1:18, "**Of his own will [God] brought us forth by the word of truth.**" And water baptism is a merely *symbol* of our union with Christ. It pictures our death, burial, and resurrection with Him. It is not the cause of the new birth.

By the way, baptism had not even been instituted by the Lord as an ordinance for the church in the time of Nicodemus. It's true that John the Baptist was baptizing, but there's nothing in this immediate context that connects the water with the baptism of John. *Nicodemus* certainly would not have understood this as a reference to baptism.

So what did Jesus mean, and what would Nicodemus's mind have gone to when Jesus used this expression "**born of water and the Spirit**"? I believe the answer to that question is very clear. There is a famous passage in the Old Testament Scriptures where water and the Spirit are linked together. Nicodemus would have been very familiar with this passage. I think it would have been the

first passage to come to his mind when he heard Jesus speak of water and the Spirit, because it's in a context that speaks of the same kind of radical new start Jesus spoke of when He spoke of the New Birth. It's the passage we're going to be looking at this morning, Ezekiel 36:25-27. But to give you a little more of the context, I want to read Ezekiel 36:24-28.

This passage is a prophetic word from the Lord to the nation of Israel at the end of the Babylonian captivity. Let me read it to you:

24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land.

25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Now keep in mind Jesus' reference to water and Spirit in John 3. Why have I suggested that Jesus was referring to *this* passage?

First of all, this passage describes the very same kind of radical, wholesale new start Jesus was speaking of as a new birth. *This* is the rebirth He had in mind—specifically, the taking away of the stony heart, the implantation of a new heart, and the indwelling, soul-transforming influence of the Spirit of God. This is the very thing Jesus' words to Nicodemus pictured. This is the Old Testament description of what happens at the New Birth.

Again, let me stress that the water spoken of here is not literal water, and here the context makes that perfectly clear. This is clearly figurative language, and it speaks of a *spiritual* cleansing. And the very same thing is true in John 3:5. Jesus was not talking about literal water. The water Jesus spoke of was not literal, fluid H₂O. Christ was simply using a familiar figurative expression,

based on Ezekiel 36:25, to speak about Nicodemus's need for a supernatural, spiritual cleansing.

Incidentally, water was *often* mentioned in connection with the Spirit in the Old Testament, especially to speak of spiritual cleansing. (In the MacArthur Study Bible footnote at John 3:5 There's a list of Old Testament references where water and spirit are linked to signify renewal and spiritual cleansing.) So this was a familiar expression, and its meaning should have been instantly clear to Nicodemus.

So I hope you can see that both here in Ezekiel 36 and there in John 3, the "water" is a figurative reference to the need for spiritual washing and the purification of the soul. Titus 3:5 speaks of the same kind of spiritual washing: **"He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."**

That's the perfect expression: **"the washing of regeneration."** The whole theme here in Ezekiel 36 is **"the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."** Water and spirit combine to make the imagery complete. It is a washing, but a *spiritual* washing of the most complete and thorough kind. It is not merely an external bath or a dip in the baptistry, but a *spiritual renewal* that revamps and regenerates the very core of our soul. And I think you'll see that as we work our way through this Ezekiel passage.

Now let me take a moment and deal with the main interpretive difficulty of this passage. This is a promise to Israel. Specifically, it was addressed to the Israelites in captivity, when God was foretelling their release from their Babylonian oppressors. The literal fulfillment of this complete set of promises is yet future, because since the time of the Babylonian captivity, Israel never has been fully restored to the promised land. The full range of promises in this prophecy have never yet been literally fulfilled. And if you go on to read through the end of the chapter, you'll see that the whole passage has millennial overtones. I believe there's a glorious literal fulfillment of these promises that is yet to come,

and which will be fully realized only when Christ returns to establish His earthly kingdom.

In other words, there is an *eschatological* dimension to Ezekiel's prophecy that is still future.

But that is not the aspect I want to focus on this morning. What I want to focus on is this promise of regeneration.

Now there are some Bible teachers who look at this passage and claim the whole thing pertains to a yet-future dispensation. There is an extreme variety of dispensationalism that results in the kind of antinomianism we refer to as "no-lordship theology." This view would suggest the radical heart-change that is described in this passage pertains *only* to Israel in the Millennium, and not to Christians in the church age. The advocates of this position have devised a theology that incorporates the notion that there is a whole class of "carnal Christians"—supposedly redeemed people who have no heart for spiritual matters, *no love for the Lord*, no desire for the Word of God, and *no willingness to obey Christ or surrender to His lordship*.

You can instantly see how the truth of this passage absolutely demolishes the notion that a person can be regenerate yet remain unchanged in heart and spirit. The whole promise of the passage is summed up in verse 27: **"I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."**

And it is absolutely vital to see that the cleansing and heart-change that are described in this passage are necessary aspects of the Lord's redeeming work in every sinner who is ever saved. You'll see that clearly as we look at the passage, I think.

In other words, this is the Old Testament description of what happens at regeneration. It is not merely describing something that will be unique to Israel in the Millennium, but this is the heart-change that takes place in every soul who is converted. It outlines for us the principles by which God works in every soul who is drawn to Christ and given new life.

It is set in this eschatological context, because the Lord is promising salvation to all of national Israel, and this passage carefully delineates all that is involved in that salvation. But the *principles* of this passage and the *means* by which God transforms His chosen ones are identical for all who are redeemed. In order to enter the kingdom at all it is *necessary* to experience this kind of rebirth. That was Jesus' whole point with Nicodemus.

So the transformation described in this passage takes place in the heart and life of every individual who is ever saved. **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come"** (2 Corinthians 5:17). Ephesians 2:10: **"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."** All of these verses speak of the same thing; they describe a radical transformation that is the hallmark of every redeemed person. So you cannot by any legitimate principles of biblical interpretation make this passage irrelevant for redeemed people in the church age.

Now let's look at the passage itself and see what Nicodemus should have known. There's a threefold promise of regeneration here, and each of us, if we are truly redeemed, have partaken of each aspect of this promise. Look at them: He promises clean water (v. 25); a new heart (v. 26); and a fresh Spirit (v. 27).

And I want to examine each of these individually, with the hope that each of us will examine our own hearts to see if we really are partakers in these promises.

First (v. 25)—

1. HE WASHES US WITH CLEAN WATER

Verse 25: **"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you."**

Here's the spiritual and figurative washing of water that is so often referred to in Scripture. Ephesians 5 speaks of Christ's loving headship and sacrifice for the church in these terms: **"that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word."**

Again it is quite clear that literal water is not what is in view here. Water is used in a figurative sense because the cleansing property of water perfectly pictures the spiritual reality these verses speak of. And the water pictures the Word of God as a spiritual cleansing agent. He washes us with the water of the Word. That's why Jesus told the disciples that night in the Upper Room, **"Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you"** (John 15:3). He had girded Himself and washed their feet with a bowl of literal water. But the cleansing of their souls required water of a different type—the spiritual water of God's cleansing Word.

Notice the emphasis in Ezekiel 36:25 on **"clean water."** In order to have its cleansing effect, water itself must be pure and clean. It cannot be defiled or corrupted.

A couple of years ago I went to India with Doug McMasters and Jay Flowers. And we were there during monsoon season. And in the midst of one of those monsoon rain storms, Jay Flowers and I were walking one day through a squalid slum in the midst of a crowded city, and he pointed out to me that in most places, everything feels fresh and clean after a rain shower. But there in that place, the rain just seemed to make everything seem even more filthy, muddy, steamy, and foul-smelling. All the filth ran into puddles of sludgy mud, and it was almost impossible to walk anywhere or even stand still without getting splashed with some kind of liquid defilement.

The only cure—and *I looked forward to it eagerly at the end of every day while I was in India during monsoon season*—the only cure for that muddy defilement was *pure* water—a cleansing shower. In a humid climate when you are covered with ground-in dirt, it doesn't even matter that the water coming out of the shower is cold. It's a refreshing, cleansing ablution, and you want it to last as long as possible and be as thorough as possible.

That is the very imagery Ezekiel has in mind here. He's speaking in a spiritual sense, of a cleansing that purges us "**from all filthiness**" (v. 25, KJV). It's a refreshing, revitalizing cleansing, as thorough as possible, because it is the work of God Himself to cleanse us.

Now let me say that I think in *this* passage, the forgiveness and cleansing that are spoken of mean something more than the legal forgiveness that comes with our justification—where our guilt has been imputed to Christ and atoned for, washed away. There *is* that kind of complete forgiveness at the very moment of conversion, where the guilt of our sins is removed, and the ledger of divine indictments against us is blotted out, and we are washed whiter than snow.

But the cleansing spoken of here in Ezekiel 36 seems to be something more than just an erasing of the charges against us and a declaration that we are judged righteous. It's something more than the forgiveness of justification, which is a purely forensic reality—like a courtroom verdict.

This cleansing effects a change in our very soul and character. It seems to describe a process by which God actually purges wickedness from us and begins conforming us to the image of Christ. It's a practical cleansing that involves the renovation of the sinner's very soul.

And I am convinced that Scripture teaches both realities. I thank God for the truth of *justification*, because it teaches that I am instantly forgiven and granted a perfect righteousness that enables me to stand before God with the full merit of Christ's

perfect righteousness. But I'm also grateful for the doctrine of *sanctification*, which teaches me that I am being molded and shaped in the likeness of Him who is glorious in His righteousness, so that one day, when I see Him, I will be like Him—in practice, as well as by divine reckoning.

And both truths are taught side by side in Scripture. First John 1:9: **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** He is just to forgive because Christ paid the price to satisfy God's justice to the fullest measure. But He is also faithful to keep cleansing me from unrighteousness, so that I am progressing in holiness and not constantly and hopelessly mired and in bondage to sin.

Notice verse 25 again: **"from all your idols I will cleanse you."** That clearly speaks of a *practical* cleansing which results in a change of behavior for the one who is cleansed. This cleansing is so thorough and so effectual that the redeemed one cannot hang onto what is vile and idolatrous. And why would he ever want to? Because look at the second aspect of God's regenerating work. Not only does God wash us with clean water, but—

2. HE GIVES US A NEW HEART

Verse 26: **"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."** We're talking about a total heart transplant here.

Now—a word about what Scripture means when it speaks of the heart. Children tend to think of the heart as an organ in your chest that is shaped like a valentine. That's not what this refers to. It's not speaking of the literal heart, the blood-pumping organ.

Some people think of the heart as the seat of the emotions. Popular songs and expressions often refer to the heart that way: "She broke his heart." "I left my heart in San Francisco." "Achy Breaky Heart." "Your Cheatin' Heart." Or my all-time favorite country title: "You Done Tore Out My Heart and Stomped That Sucker Flat."

When we use the word *heart* like that, it usually refers to the emotional part of our beings. But that is not quite what this means either.

When Scripture talks about the heart, it is referring to the center of your thoughts as well as your emotions. The closest word we have for the concept in English is the word *mind*—but it is not merely the intellect. It embraces all our thoughts and emotions. The heart is the center of all our vital thoughts and feelings. It includes everything that goes through your mind—everything that makes you capable of self-reflection. Incidentally, nowhere in Scripture is any animal said to have a heart, unless it is speaking of the bodily organ. The heart is unique to man of all creatures. Scripture speaks of the heart of God, and it speaks of the heart of man. But it never ascribes a heart to any other creature. So the heart may simply embrace all that reflects the image of God in us.

Now, the heart of every fallen man is corrupt and sinful. Abundant Scriptures testify to this. Jeremiah 17:9: "**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?**" And listen to Romans 8:7-8: "**For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. [So, then] Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**"

That is the state of every person apart from Christ—with a deceitful heart, utterly at enmity against God, and unable to love, obey, or please God.

This passage in Ezekiel compares the fallen heart to stone. The imagery is perfect.

Why a *stony* heart?

First of all, like a stone, it is *cold*. That is the nature of stone. We prefer carpet rather than stone on the floors in our living spaces, because stone is too cold. A couple of years ago, Darlene and I went to Rome. And the place there I was most interested in seeing was the Mamertine prison, because that is where the apostle Paul was held in chains. It's a cramped little dungeon

carved completely out of stone, with a small hole in the ceiling through which food and water could be let down. The smallness and the darkness of that dungeon made it depressing, but it was the coldness of the stone that made it seem most inhospitable.

That's how it is with the fallen heart. It is cold and hostile to the things of God. And just like with cold granite, you may sometimes warm it artificially by placing it near a fire, but coldness is one of its natural properties, so remove it from the fire and the heat soon dies away. Then it returns to its natural coldness.

Like a stone, the fallen heart is *hard*. Some kinds of stone actually harden the more they are exposed to heat and light. The sinful heart is like that.

And like a stone, the fallen heart cannot be softened. You can lay a stone in water as long as you like, and it will not dissolve. You can't make any lasting impression on it. Take one of those seals that is designed to be used with wax to seal letters. Press it on hot wax, and it leaves a decorative imprint. Press it on stone and you can hold it as long as you like, with as much pressure as you like, and it will leave no impression whatsoever. The sinful heart is the same way. It is incapable of receiving any lasting impression. Some of you with strong-willed children know exactly what I mean. You can exert all kinds of external pressure with as much force and consistency as you like, and you cannot make an impression on that hard heart.

Like a stone, the fallen, unregenerate heart is *dead*. It feels nothing. It responds to no spiritual stimulus. It is devoid of spiritual life. It is incapable of any true love for God, incapable of any genuine or lasting sorrow over sin, and incapable of any sincere appetite for righteousness. It is dead, cold, hard, and unmovable as a stone.

That's why what we need to free us from our sins is not merely reform. Nothing short of a wholesale regeneration—a rebirth,

with a whole new heart—can solve the heart problem that is associated with our sinful fallenness.

But notice that God himself promises to change us. He doesn't suggest that by self-reform or self-effort we can transform ourselves; he Himself promises to take out the stony heart and replace it with a heart of flesh.

Don't miss this point, because it is vital: only God can grant the new heart. Charles Finney, whose theology was seriously defective in a number of significant ways, used to teach that regeneration was nothing more than a matter of self-reform and that any sinner could do it for himself. And he cited Ezekiel 18:31, which says, **"Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?"** And Finney had a famous sermon titled "Make for Yourselves New Hearts," in which he argued from Ezekiel 18:31 that it is the responsibility of sinners to reform their own hearts.

Let me just say that anyone who would place such an interpretation on that verse hasn't really come to grips with what it means to have a heart of stone. A stony heart *cannot* reform itself. It's cold, immovable, dead, hardened against the things of God—incapable of loving Him, incapable of obeying Him, and incapable of pleasing him. *You* could *never* form a heart of flesh out of a heart of stone. And if you are thinking you can be saved by reforming yourself, you need to repent of an arrogant self-righteousness. If it were up to you to regenerate yourself, you would be in an utterly hopeless situation. That plea, in Ezekiel 18:31, deliberately underscores the hopelessness of self-reform. The sensible sinner will hear that command, recognize his utter inability to make a new heart for himself, and plead to God for mercy.

And here in *our* text, God promises to do for sinners what they *cannot* do for themselves, and therein lies the blessedness of this

promise. This is a loving and totally gracious work from the hand of a sovereign god.

Verse 26: **"And I will give you a new heart . . . I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."** God lovingly and graciously places within us a new, tender, living heart. That is the very essence of regeneration. It is the very thing Jesus meant when he told Nicodemus, **"You must be born again."**

There's one more aspect of this miracle of regeneration:

3. HE PLACES WITHIN US A FRESH SPIRIT

Verse 26: **"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. . . ."** Verse 27: **"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."**

There we have the New Covenant promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is the very essence of what makes the New Covenant unique. You can search through the Old Covenant manifesto—the Mosaic law—and you will find no promise that the Spirit of God will indwell or enable obedience. This is the whole distinction between law and gospel. The law proclaims God's righteous standards and pronounces doom on those who fall short of them. The gospel secures the means of our obedience to the law.

There's nothing wrong with the law. As Paul said in Romans 7:7, **"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!"** The law isn't evil; on the contrary, according to Romans 7:12, **"the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."**

I often hear Christians vilifying the law of God. Some Christians love to quote Romans 6:14: **"you are not under law but under grace"**—as if that somehow gave us permission to ignore the moral standards of God's law. But don't ever stop with Romans 6:14. Verse 15 goes on to say, **"What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!"** If sin is understood as defined in 1 John 3:4 (**"sin is lawlessness,"** or in King James language, **"sin is the transgression of the law"**), then when Paul says

we are not under law, he certainly is not suggesting that the law of God is now abrogated, or irrelevant, or without any authority whatsoever.

Grace doesn't *overturn* the law. If grace meant God could simply nullify the moral principles of the law and overturn them forever by doing away with them, Christ would never have had to die. But He lived His perfect life and died His substitutionary death to fulfill the righteousness of the law on our behalf—and that is the whole basis of grace.

In other words, grace doesn't *nullify* the law; it *fulfills* the law perfectly. And grace even enables and empowers us—or in the words of Ezekiel 36:27—it *causes* us to obey the law. God says, **"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."**

There's *proof* that Ezekiel has in mind the most practical kind of soul-renovation. This is not merely a positional reality, but a real and practical regeneration—a wholesale renewal and restoration of the human soul. It has practical consequences. The Authorized Version says, "[you will] **walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.**"

Don't try to tell me that a person can undergo the new birth with no impact on his life and behavior. The person who claims to be born again but whose life remains unchanged is utterly deceived by his own sin-hardened heart. And he desperately needs to implore God to grant him the spiritual cleansing, together with the new heart and new spirit that are described in this passage.

There are probably some here today in a group this size who have not yet been born again in the spiritual fashion described by Ezekiel. There may be some who have testified to being born again, but who have never really received the new heart described in this passage. Your heart is still hard and cold toward the things of God. You have never known the kind of deep and thorough

cleansing from sin and idolatry that is described in this passage. In your heart of hearts there is nothing but secret wickedness and defilement of all kinds.

If you sense even the slightest hint that the Spirit is speaking to you in this passage about the coldness and wickedness of your heart, you need to implore God to work this miracle in you before it's too late—before your stony heart grows completely cold and so impenetrable.

Don't bother trying to rebirth and reform yourself spiritually. This is something only God can do for you—but he promises that those who come to Him He will in no wise cast out. In Luke 11:10, Jesus said, **"everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."** And in the context of that very promise, Jesus was talking specifically about praying to God for the miracle of His regenerating work in our hearts. Listen to verse 13: **"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"** That is God's own promise to us. May it be a promise that you lay hold of by faith.