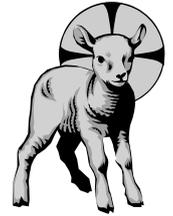




Enjoying God: Life in All its Fullness

(passages from John's Gospel)



Summer 2017

John 3:1-21 Life

(sermons: May 21)

Introduction

It is unclear who is speaking in verses 16-21 because the Greek manuscripts don't have speech marks, so you can't always tell when someone stops speaking. Jesus may say all of verses 10-21, or verses 16-21 may be John's explanation. Even if Jesus did not say verses 16 to 21, John would be summarizing what Jesus taught, on other occasions, about himself and his mission to save the world.

Nicodemus was 'a member of the ruling Jewish council' (or Sanhedrin), most of whose members were Sadducees - but Nicodemus was a Pharisee, who would have emphasized keeping God's Law to prepare for the coming of the Messiah & the Kingdom of God (in the age to come, for obedient Jews only). Later, he stood up for Jesus and became a (secret?) disciple who helped to bury him (John 7:50-52; 19:38-40).

John 3:1-8 Nicodemus and Being Born Again (or Born from Above)

- v.2 *who has come from God – i.e. doing God's work, not necessarily a prophet, let alone God Incarnate*
- v.3 *in reply – Jesus anticipates Nicodemus asking for proof of who he is and cuts to Nicodemus' real need*
- vv.3,7 *born again – or 'born from above' (NIV margin); the Greek word can mean either (or both?).*
- v.v 3,5 *see/enter the kingdom of God – understand or experience God's rule. The phrase links to being given 'the right to become children of God' in John 1:12-13.*
- v.5 *born of water and the Spirit (or spirit) – water symbolizes washing away sin (as it does in baptism). Both water and spirit are mentioned in Ezekiel 36:24-27 (see end of these notes).*
- v.6 *flesh – human nature, with all its limitations; we aren't born in a spiritual relationship with God*
- v.7 *You must be born again – 'you' is here plural i.e. everyone, including Nicodemus and his friends*

1. Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus 'at night'? It is interesting that Jesus did not make him come out into the open. How can we make it easier for people to find out about Jesus without putting them on the spot, or expecting a commitment before they are ready?
2. When Nicodemus tried to question/interrogate Jesus, Jesus turned the tables by telling him that even he needed to be born again (or born from above). Nicodemus' response is at first dismissive (v.4). Can we recognize a time(s) in our own experience when we moved from demanding answers from God to a more humble trust in him? What helped us to change our attitude?
3. What did Jesus mean by being 'born again' or 'born from above'? How did Nicodemus react to the idea that he needed a fresh start that only God could give him? Do we ever meet people who think that being born again is just an experience that some people have, but isn't essential? If it is the phrase 'born again', rather than the concept, that puts people off, what other words could we use?
4. When Jesus compared the Spirit's activity in people's lives to the wind (v.8) what point(s) was he making to Nicodemus? Do we ever risk giving the impression that we understand all about God and can predict what he will do? How can we develop a 'bigger picture' of God?

John 3:9-15 Nicodemus Needs More Explanation

- v.10 *Israel's teacher – so Nicodemus should have recalled passages such as Ezekiel 36:24-27*
- v.12 *earthly things – e.g. the Spirit's activity in our lives here and now, as opposed to 'heavenly things' such as truths about the coming Messianic age and judgement*

- v.13 *the Son of Man* – Jesus' ambiguous title for himself; could mean just 'the man' but also links to the messianic figure in Daniel 7:13-14.
- v.14 *as Moses...* – the story is in Numbers 21:4-9 (see the end of these notes)
- v.14 *lifted up* – (for Jesus) both literally lifted up on the Cross, and lifted up / exalted / revealed in his true glory, which is his character of self-giving love
5. What authority does Jesus claim for his teaching? What does that imply about who he is?
6. How does the story of Moses and the bronze snake illustrate what it means to believe in Jesus? What illustrations of faith/trust/commitment could we give today?

John 3:16-21 Jesus (or John) Explains why God Sent His Son

- v.16 *the world* – the world that does not recognize the light (John 1:10) and loves darkness (3:19)
- v.16 *eternal life* – 'life of the age (to come)', starting now and experienced fully in the future
- v.18 *believes in him* – same form of words as 'put their faith in him' (John 2:11) so this means trust and commitment, not just mentally accepting something
- v.19 *verdict* – Greek 'krisis' meaning judgement i.e. 'This is the crunch (question).'
- v.21 *has been done through God* – or 'done in God' i.e. only as God helps us to do good
7. 'God so loved the world'. Does our presentation of Christianity start here? What is the evidence for God's love? Does our attitude to other people show this love? Is this our main motivation for outreach? What helps us to appreciate God's love more deeply and to act as channels of that love?
8. In what ways is the world in 'darkness'? Is ignorance and lack of understanding the main reason why people don't respond to Jesus, or are moral issues and unwillingness to be changed more important?
9. Is there any middle ground between *believes/eternal life* and *does not believe/stands condemned*? Do we accept that these are stark alternatives? What does this show about our need to respond to Jesus' teaching? Does this affect our attitude and approach to outreach?
10. What sort of 'life' does Jesus offer to people for now, and for the future? How can we help people to see that they need this 'life'?

Ezekiel 36:24-27 (God's message to the Israelites in exile)

I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Numbers 21:4-9 (The Israelites have escaped from Egypt after the Passover)

They travelled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go round Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.