

St. John's Gospel

Session 4 – May 28, 2017

St. Bede's

This morning we pick up our study of John's Gospel with chapter 2:13-22 - Please read these verses. It is the story of the cleansing of the temple.

I have always had some sympathy for the money changers because they served an important function at the Temple in Jerusalem. It was Passover and pilgrims from the surrounding countryside would travel to Jerusalem for the high holy festival. It was a great inconvenience to have to bring along animals to sacrifice. So the money changers provided a service whereby you could purchase the animals for your sacrifice and they would provide the animal in exchange for money. Now it is likely that Jesus was upset with them because there may have been some shady exchange taking place and profiteering by virtue of

the supply and demand reality. In the sacrificial system, the poor people would sacrifice pigeons, while the more well to do would sacrifice a lamb or an oxen.

In verse 15 Jesus makes a whip out of cords, which was probably straw from the animals stalls and sleeping quarters. He drives them out of the Temple, and tips over their tables, telling them not to turn his Father's house into a house of trade. Jesus is obviously upset.

The Jews then ask him – what **sign** have you to show us for doing this? In other words: what is your authority to wreak such havoc in the Temple?

Jesus uses this opportunity to bear witness to his impending death and resurrection. Jesus responds - "Destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up – a clear reference to the cross. It is the cross and Jesus death on it that will be God's ultimate sign of who he is. He will be the Passover Lamb, whose blood will atone for our sins. And his resurrection

will forever be the sign that death itself will be defeated.

Vs. 20 – The Jews misunderstand, which is a constant theme of John’s Gospel. They claim that it had taken them 46 years to build the Temple, and you can destroy it and raise it up in 3 days?

Vs 21 - John tells us that Jesus is speaking of the temple of his body.

Vs 22- Jesus notes that after the resurrection his disciples remembered this conversation at the Temple, and came **to believe, the scriptures and the Word.**

In the last few verses of chapter 2, that “many people came to believe because of the **signs** that he did”. In vs. 24 Jesus is quite negative about belief based on miraculous signs. He is not the Messiah because he could heal people, or change water into wine. There is only one sign that shows who he is. It is the cross and his dying and being raised to new life that is the basis for belief. There were many

other faith healers in Jesus day, but none of them rose from the dead.

The story of the cleansing of the Temple is interesting for another reason. John moves the story away from the historical setting of Holy Week. In the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, this story takes place after Palm Sunday's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. As we have said, John does not care at all about being historically accurate. He cares about being theologically accurate. He thinks nothing about moving this story to the beginning of his Gospel and joins it with another important story dealing with Judaism, the story of Nicodemus which begins chapter 3

Chapter 3 - Read 3:1-21 John includes the story of the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus in his Gospel. Chapter 3 is a good example of the way John chooses to write. Throughout the Gospel,

John tells us a story. But then he follows the story with a discourse to explain the meaning and **significance** of the story.

Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a learned Jew. He comes to Jesus at night, in order to not be seen by his fellow Jews and religious leaders. So he is curious about Jesus, but also trying to protect himself.

Vs. 2 – Nicodemus calls Jesus “Rabbi”, which means teacher. He also acknowledges that Jesus “comes from God”, because “no one can do these signs that Jesus does unless God is with him”.

Vs. 3 – Jesus takes the opportunity to take the conversation to a new level. This is known as a “Johannine spiral” . Jesus wants to use the opportunity to reveal who he really is. So he spirals the conversation to teach. Jesus says to Nicodemus: “Unless you are born anew, you cannot enter the Kingdom of God”.

Vs. 4 – Nicodemus cannot understand. This is how the Jews are portrayed throughout John’s Gospel,

as not quite getting it. To this days, John is the least liked Gospel within Judaism, for obvious reasons. In John's Gospel, the Jews just can't quite grasp what is happening. They cannot grasp that the eschatological inbreaking of God's plan of salvation is happening now with Jesus. A whole new community will be formed. So in some ways Nicodemus is a sort of representative person of Judaism.

Nicodemus states: "How can a person enter back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Vs. 5 - Jesus speaks of being born of water and the spirit, as a prerequisite to entering the Kingdom of God. Jesus is almost certainly referring to being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit. This indicates that Jesus is talking about the inbreaking of a new order, a new community of believers, the Church.

Vs. 9 – Nicodemus asks: "How can this be?". He cannot understand.

Vs. 11 - Nicodemus now disappears from the story.

Vs. 13-15 - Then Jesus speaks about no man having ever ascended into heaven, but he who descended from heaven (meaning himself!), the Son of Man.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness , so must the Son of Man be lifted up (referencing the cross of course). This is a reference back to the wilderness wandering time when Moses was leading the people. In the wilderness many people were bitten by poisonous snakes. (Numbers 21:9), So Moses was commanded to make a bronze snake and attach it to a pole and whenever one of the Hebrews was bitten, they could just look at the bronze snake attached to the pole and live. Jesus claims that when he is lifted up on the cross, whoever believes in Him will have eternal life and vanquish death.

Vs 16F - John 3:16 is probably the most well known verse in all of the Bible: “For God so loved the

world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life”

What follows in verses 17-21 – are perhaps the clearest statement in all of Holy Scripture of what this new eschatological order that Jesus ushers in, is all about. John 3: 16-21 are about the clearest statement of the Gospel that we have. It states that God sent his son not to condemn the world, but to save it. He who believes has eternal life. He is not condemned. He who does not believe is condemned already, because he does not believe in the only Son of God. The judgment is that the light has been sent and shines on human history. But men choose and love the darkness (Light and darkness are very much a part of John’s Gospel) Everything is black and white to John. There is no gray area. You are either a believer and live, or a non believer and die for all eternity. Those who do

evil hate the light of Jesus. Those who love Jesus come to understand and work for the light of God.

John gives us an insight into why Judaism did not work. In Judaism righteousness was based on being to living a perfect life in obedience and in accordance with all the laws. So we Jews were doomed and condemned as guilty because nobody can lead a perfect life (other than Jesus). So you could never feel secure about your eternal fate. The Pharisees were always in trouble with Jesus because they felt superior because they tried to live in accordance with all the laws. But this led the Pharisees to pride, self righteousness, arrogance and looking down on others. The Gospel is the exact opposite of Judaism. Christians are saved by the grace of God alone, not by our own works, lest anyone boast. We try to live holy lives not to earn God's favor, but as a response of wanting to live as God would have us live.

When we began this study, I said that John's purpose in writing his Gospel is not to tell us what happened, like Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is to tell us the meaning of what happened. Nowhere is that more evident than chapter 3 of his Gospel. And this is what makes John's Gospel unique. Nowhere in Matthew, Mark and Luke will you find an event, like Jesus encounter with Nicodemus, that is followed by a prolonged discourse to make it abundantly clear, that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, God incarnate to save us rather than condemn us. Nothing could be clearer than John 3:16-21. Lets close by standing and reading those sacred verses again.

Amen!