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CD711

Sermon #1 “Why we do what we do.”

John 3:1-21

Phase 1 - Me: Good evening, my name is Dawn Bailey and (as I still don’t do well with made-up scenarios...) I’m here speaking to you today as my fellow classmates. I hope to encourage you in the midst of our “seminary sufferings” with a little look back into the scriptures to see why we are doing this to ourselves. 😊 [pray: Jesus, I ask that you would be with each of us here tonight. That you would give peace and calm nerves for those who have yet to speak. I ask that you would give clarity of thought and speech to me as I present what you have laid on my heart tonight. In your name Amen.]

Phase 2 - You:

We here are all students. We are believers in Jesus Christ. (I don’t think anyone here is in need of saving but if you are, please see me after class.) We are studying God’s word, training to be leaders either in the church or some other parachurch ministry. We have a deep desire to “know” and to “know” correctly. But some days when things are going rough, do you sometimes feel like you’re missing something? Do you sometimes wonder if you are going to be able to do all you’ve been called to do? Are you going to be able to reach the lost? Why are we putting ourselves through this? I know that these are questions I ask myself. Anyone else past the halfway point yet? It’s rough! There are dark days. Let’s see if we can clarify our vision and find the motivation to press on! Why are we doing this? What is the one purpose that we all share?

transition: I'm going to be looking at John 3:1-21 today. In it we will see a professional student/teacher of the Holy Scriptures who was lacking in his understanding. He met with Jesus one evening and Jesus explained to him "the big picture." Mankind needs saving. They need a new spiritual life found only by believing in him.

Phase 3 - God:

Introduction: Imagine with me...Jerusalem around AD 30...shortly after the Passover...it is evening in the springtime, rainy season is over, warm days, and clear skies. Jesus has gathered his disciples. He has turned water into wine at a wedding. He has also cleared all the people with their microenterprises out the temple courts. People are taking notice, seeing the signs he is performing, and believing in his name. Let's look at our passage, I will be reading from the New International version:

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

I'd like to take a look at Nicodemus for a moment. He can only be found in the Gospel of John, and he only gets three mentions. Here in chapter 3. Next briefly in 7:50 reminding his peers that a man (Jesus in this case) can't be judged without hearing him first. Finally in 19:39 we see him at the cross as he helps Joseph of Arimathea prepare Jesus's body for burial.

Interesting side note: Nicodemus brought 75-100 lbs of myrrh and aloes to anoint Jesus's body (think 2 big Costco sized bags of dogfood). The standard burial amount was only 5 lbs. By

comparison when Mary anointed his feet with perfume she brought one pound of Nard valued at one year's wages. So, it can also be assumed that he is very wealthy. We know that he is a Pharisee, so he is a scholar of the law and very strict in his observations of his faith. We also know that he is a member of the Jewish ruling council. He has had education and has influence.

He thought he knew all that there was to know about his faith...yet its an interesting symbolic note that John records him as coming at night, in the dark. We are to discover how little he really knew and how in the dark spiritually he was.

He begins by acknowledging Jesus as a great teacher from God who accomplishes great things because of God's presence with him. Let's step back into our story and hear some more of this conversation that necessitated the cover of darkness.

3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." 4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked.

"Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still, you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things,

and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

Lots to unpack in this section. There are word plays in action. There are references from the prophets that Nicodemus should have understood but missed. Is Jesus speaking in mysteries intentionally? What is going on here?

Let's take a look at the word plays first. The first one is in verses 3 & 7, the Greek word for “again” can also be understood to mean “from above”. Nicodemus assumes “again” but Jesus is clearly using “from above”. This is the big idea: We need to have a new life that is spiritual in nature, originating from above in the kingdom of God. Without this new life there is no entrance to the kingdom of God.

The second word play is with the words “wind” and “spirit” in verse 8. They are the same Greek word, yet the analogy of the Spirit being like the wind seems to be lost to Nicodemus. Once one is born from above by the Spirit, the spirit is not seen, but his effects are. There is an inner change that must happen in the one who is born of the spirit. (?more)

The next thing we notice are the many Old Testament references that Jesus alluded to that Nicodemus missed. Jeremiah 31:33-34 says, *“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the*

least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Ezekiel 11:19-20 tells us, *“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.”*

Ezekiel 36:26-28 continues this theme by declaring, *“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. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.”*

Even Ezekiel 37:1-14 and the valley of dry bones that were brought back to life tells us of God’s intent and the Spirit’s power and moving.

Verses 14 & 15 are referring back to Numbers 21:4-9. The story of Moses, the lost, wandering and grumbling Children of God (the Israelites), and a bronze snake on a pole. Let’s look at this passage as well: *“They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around 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 wilderness? 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, they lived.”

A lot in that story sounds too familiar, doesn't it? Nicodemus should have known all these stories and words of the prophets. God has told the Israelites these things throughout their scriptures, preparing them for this moment.

Jesus was using verses 14 & 15 and the bronze snake passage as an analogy: just like the snake was lifted to give them physical life, Jesus was already announcing his death on the cross as the means to our spiritual life. Just like if the Israelites believed that if they looked to the snake they would be healed, we are saved by looking to and believing in Jesus.

Now this next section is interesting as sometimes you'll notice that some of your bibles have the “red letter” words of Christ. Others leave it in the standard black print. There is good reason to believe that at this point it is the narrator speaking, rehashing and giving clarity to what has just been spoken. This is a method that is used quite frequently in the book of John.

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by

the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

In this section we see God's great love for the world, for his created ones, is what motivated him. He did not want to see anyone perish. He wanted to restore the relationship that had been broken way back at the beginning of humanity. How else are we to become part of the kingdom of God if we are not born from above, in a spiritual birth that comes only through believing in Jesus Christ.

Why do we need Jesus? Because man is already condemned. Not because of any of his particular actions, sins, crimes, or even good behavior. He is condemned because he has chosen not to believe in the name of Jesus Christ. I have a young man in my church who routinely asks me, "Mrs. Bailey, why don't people believe in Jesus...it's so simple...he loves us. Why isn't the church full?" And I have to remind him of this passage. People who don't believe in Jesus are living in the dark. Their deeds are evil. They don't want to come into the light of Jesus and be exposed. This is why we do what we do. We are here to help people and to expose them to Jesus. ** fill this up more...this is why we are doing this!*

The contrast between dark and light is wrapped up here at the end of this section. We started off with Nicodemus arriving at night, in the dark. He was in the dark about the need for a new spiritual life that he could only have by believing in Jesus. The Light in verses 19-21 refers to Jesus. It's the continuation of a theme the author began in the beginning of the book. 1:4,5 & 9..."*In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.*"

transition: You might be thinking now, this is great, but we already know all this. We do! So what?

Phase 4 - You:

This is a hard time in our lives. Seminary and life can be overwhelming. If you feel like you're missing something? It's ok, you've got this. God's word has told us what we already need to know. People are condemned. God loves them. Jesus died so they wouldn't perish. We are his witnesses now, to this generation, to these people.

Sometimes we have a "Nicodemus" problem and think we know all the answers. Stay humble and receive Jesus's correction. That's where I've been struggling lately. When I started back to school in the Fall of 2020, I hadn't been in the classroom in over 30 years. I had been in fulltime ministry as a pastor's wife and homeschooling mom. I figured I knew stuff. I was also very black and white about what I knew. Let's just say I was deeply unnerved by what I realized I did not know and how wrong I was on some key issues. I was embarrassed by my arrogance. I am amazed by the fact that the more I studied, the less I knew. I have learned and come to accept that *I* don't always know what God is doing, in the lives of others or in situations. God does. His Spirit moves wherever it pleases, accomplishing his will. I have to remember that he is working in the lives of all his children. I just need to do what he wants me to do and pray for and be gracious to others.

God loves us. He wants to take our heart of stone and give us a new heart. Have you gotten a little hardened in the busyness? Let him soften your heart again.

Can you do all you've been called to do? Yes! We are already part of the kingdom of God. We have already been given his spirit. He wants to fill us with his Holy Spirit so we can do his work.

What about reaching the lost? Yes, we can and we must. They are in the dark. They are condemned already. We are in the light. We are no longer condemned. As we continue to step into the light all that we do can be seen, not only by God but by others. We are now part of the living witnesses to the world of God's great love for them. Because I live on the church campus I've joked that I live in a Teflon bubble that I can't escape. I noticed that after years of serving the church, raising kids, and homeschooling those kids...I wasn't getting out and mixing and mingling with unbelievers. When I realized this I asked the Lord to help me with this. I still couldn't easily get off campus but God brought people in to me. I now have 4 people living upstairs from me who don't know the Lord. I am now able to try and develop a relationship with them and show them the love of God. When I do get out, my first stop is usually our local Hobby Lobby. Over the year, my daughter and I developed a friendship with a lady who works in the fabric department. She recently shared a story about a scary situation that happened to her, concluding it with "I don't know why God kept me safe." I was able to share and suggest that perhaps its because he just might love her. (I know not the gospel, but it's a first step. Pray with me for Debbie).

Why are we doing this to ourselves? The crazy hours, the lack of sleep, reading and writing, it seems like without end...We are doing it for them, the condemned ones. The ones in the world that God loves so much. The ones he loved so much that he sent his son for them, so they wouldn't have to perish, if they would only believe in his name.

transition: For the believer this passage is a reminder of who we are: citizens of the kingdom of God. It is also a call to action: as citizens of the kingdom of God we are to join Christ in his plan to get those who do not believe off their path to condemnation, out of the darkness, and into the light.

Phase 5 - We:

Let us go out of here tonight encouraged. We are students now, but we will be leaders and teachers. While some of us may be in the front lines bringing people off the condemnation path, some of us will be discipling and training still others to go out and continue the rescue process. In closing, I am reminded of Fanny Crosby's hymn "Rescue the Perishing" written back in 1869. The words are as appropriate today as they were when she penned them. Listen as I read them to you:

1 Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.

Refrain:

*Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying;
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.*

2 Though they are slighting Him, Still He is waiting,
Waiting the penitent child to receive;
Plead with them earnestly, plead with them gently;
He will forgive if they only believe. [Refrain]

3 Down in the human heart, Crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;

Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
Chords that were broken will vibrate once more. [Refrain]
4 Rescue the perishing, Duty demands it;
Strength for thy labor the Lord will provide;
Back to the narrow way patiently win them;
Tell the poor wanderer a Savior has died. [Refrain]

Go in his peace and be encouraged, be motivated to finish strong. We have people to
help rescue!