

The Heart of the Action

In all things, Jesus is the center through the spirit
John 6.63

Based on Eugene Peterson's material

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Scripture Reader and Reading: Tim Braden – John 3.14–18

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Larry Amberg – Songs on Jesus

Prelude:

I. How does the Lord perceive you?

- A. I want to show you two narratives in the Gospel According to John
- B. that show Jesus welcomes everyone,
 - 1. including you, regardless of
 - 2. who or what you are.

Persuasion:

I. Nicodemus (John 3)

- A. This man was a Jewish Rabbi.
 - 1. He had much at stake when he went to see Jesus.
 - 2. After all he was a Pharisee and
 - a) a ruler of the Jews,
 - b) making him a highly respected man in Israel.
- B. Then he goes to see Jesus.
 - 1. Who was He?
 - 2. He was just a itinerant preacher
 - a) from a place called Nazareth
 - b) that some people thought nothing good could come from there.
 - (1) Yet, something good did come from there.
 - (2) This young man whom no one had heard of before,
 - (a) suddenly had the attention of the entire nation!
 - (b) What would the Pharisees and other rulers of the Jews do?

C. Nicodemus went to talk to this new teacher.

2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “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.”

– John 3.2

D. Why did Nicodemus go at night?

1. Did Nicodemus go to Jesus at night out of *fear*?
 - a) Could a Pharisee befriend such a man as Jesus?
 - (1) An unknown teacher had everything to gain
 - (2) from association with a ruler of the Jews.
 - (a) A ruler of the Jews had everything to lose
 - (b) from association with an unknown teacher.
 - (3) Therefore, going at night, Nicodemus could visit Jesus secretly.
2. Perhaps Nicodemus went to Jesus at night because he was *humble*.
 - a) He truly wanted to know about the Kingdom
 - b) from Someone who knew all about it.
3. Then again he may have had moments of *internal strife*.
 - a) He knew what people thought he was, but
 - b) he knew he did not live up to that image.
 - (1) The better he got as a Pharisee and a ruler,
 - (2) the more he felt unworthy.
 - (a) He knew that he did not live all that he knew.
 - i) His *knowledge* of the truth
 - ii) exceeded his *living* of the truth.
4. As a leader, he may have been *curious*.
 - a) Leaders have to know what is going on.

- b) They keep their influence by knowing how to deal with current trends,
 - (1) knowing ahead of time
 - (2) good and bad things on the way.
 - (a) Jesus was popular.
 - (b) Was He good or bad?
- 5. As a leader, nighttime may have been the *best time* for both of them.
 - a) Leaders are busy doing things that they have no time for other leaders.
 - b) Therefore, nighttime is not only the best time, but the *only* time.
- E. However, John only told us that Nicodemus approached Jesus by night.
 - 1. John did not tell us *why*, because
 - 2. the Gospel, the Good News, is not about *Nicodemus*.
 - a) It is about Jesus of Nazareth,
 - b) the carpenter who also happened to be the Son of God!
 - (1) Scripture does not exist for *our curiosity*.
 - (2) John provided no insight into the thinking of Nicodemus.
 - (a) We only need to know what Jesus *taught* Nicodemus, for
 - (b) we all need the same thing.
- F. Then Jesus shook up the thinking of the Pharisee.
 - 1. Jesus was truly a teacher come from God, so
 - a) the Lord knew that Nicodemus
 - b) had a question, something he wanted to know.
 - (1) Therefore, the Lord bypassed introductory pleasantries and
 - (2) went right to the heart of the Pharisee.
 - 2. Jesus informed this older man that he needed to be born again:

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

– John 3.3

3. Then Jesus added another startling picture:

5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the *Spirit*, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

– John 3.5

- a) The Pharisee thought only in *earthly* ideas.
- b) Jesus thought in *heavenly* ideas.

4. Then Jesus laid side-by-side the earthly and the heavenly:

8 “The *wind* blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the *Spirit*.”

– John 3.8

G. For the moment, Nicodemus did not get it.

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?”

– John 3.4

9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

– John 3.9

II. The Samaritan Woman (John 4)

A. Nicodemus met Jesus at night, but

- 1. Jesus met a Samaritan woman in the middle of day.
- 2. Jesus approached this woman.
 - a) Nicodemus met Jesus *intentionally*.

- b) The Samaritan woman met Jesus *unintentionally*.
- B. *Nicodemus began with spiritual comments, and then*
 - 1. Jesus kept the conversation spiritual but used *earthly* images.
 - 2. With the Samaritan woman,
 - a) *Jesus began the conversation with earthly comments.*
 - b) The fact that He would talk to her shocked her.

9 Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

– John 4.9

- (1) Whereas, Nicodemus was shocked by what Jesus said,
- (2) not that Jesus would speak to him.
 - (a) Nicodemus was a man, a Jew, a leader, an accepted man.
 - (b) The Samaritan woman was a follower, a rejected woman.
- C. She questioned why a Jewish man would *ask her* for something.
 - 1. Did she mistrust Him?
 - a) The Jews despised the Samaritans and
 - b) the Samaritans returned the favor.
 - 2. Did she mistrust Jesus because of the life she lived?
 - a) In verse 18, we learn that she had been married five times and
 - b) the man with whom she currently lived was not her husband.
 - (1) Did she see herself as a *failure*?
 - (2) Did she think men only wanted to *use* her?
 - (3) Was she *emotionally* scared?
 - 3. Perhaps it was the opposite.
 - a) Did she have five husbands and now a sixth man because

- b) *she used men?*
 - (1) Did she think this stranger might be *another man to use?*
- D. We like trying to figure out the inner workings of people,
 - 1. which is why psychology has become popular, because
 - 2. it purports to give us insight into human personality, motives, and living.
 - a) We want personality and motive theories because
 - b) they help us to understand behavior, or so we think.
 - (1) With theories we can pigeonhole a Nicodemus.
 - (2) With psychological insight we can figure what moves this woman.
- E. Although, the Lord,
 - 1. who can discern the thoughts and intents of the heart,
 - 2. revealed nothing in these cases.
 - a) The Holy Spirit,
 - (1) who searches all things,
 - (2) even the deep things of God and man,
 - b) did not move John to write anything about this woman's thinking.
- F. Jesus dealt with her and the Pharisee as they were.
 - 1. The narrative is not about the woman or the Pharisee.
 - 2. John used these people to show us
 - a) that we should put our hands in the hand of the Man from Galilee
 - b) who stilled the waters and troubled hearts.
- G. After the woman showed shock
 - 1. that a Jewish man was humble enough
 - 2. to ask water from a Samaritan woman, He said,

10 "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living

water.”

– John 4.10

- a) Jesus used a figure of speech again.
 - (1) With Nicodemus it was “birth,” “water,” and “wind.”
 - (2) With the Samaritan woman it was “water.”
- b) Jesus changed the conversation
 - (1) from water for *His body*
 - (2) to water for *her spirit*, saying further,

13 “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

– John 4.13–14

H. Then Jesus brought up an idea that He brought up with Nicodemus.

24 “God is *Spirit*, and those who worship Him must worship in *spirit* and truth.”

– John 4.24

- 1. Spirit!
 - a) Nicodemus, you must be born of the *Spirit*.
 - b) Woman, you must worship God in *spirit*.
- 2. Jesus knew the messed up life of this woman, and
 - a) she quickly diverted attention to the arrogance of the Jews
 - b) for saying that worship must be in Jerusalem.
 - (1) Preventing a debate over the place of worship,
 - (2) Jesus introduced a new world to her,

- (a) just as He did with the Pharisee,
- (b) the world of the spirit.

- I. The woman got it at that moment.
 - 1. The wise, educated, has-it-all-together ruler of the Jews,
 - 2. did not get it right away.
 - a) He did later.

III. The Heart of the Action

- A. John put two lives before us, and
 - 1. the connecting point was the *Spirit of God*.
 - 2. The Spirit of God was the heart of the action.
 - a) The Spirit of God entered the lives of these people
 - b) in ways that breath, wind, or water never could.
 - (1) The Spirit of God entered their thinking
 - (2) through the ordinary images of life.
- B. Look at these two people whom Jesus welcomed.
 - 1. One was a man; the other a woman,
 - a) because *gender*
 - b) is nothing in Christ.
 - 2. One was in a city; the other out in the country,
 - a) because *geography*
 - b) is nothing in Christ.
 - 3. One was respectable; the other was not,
 - a) because *background*
 - b) is nothing in Christ.
 - 4. One opens a conversation with *religion*; the other with the *mundane*.
 - 5. One *person* started the conversation; in the other *Jesus* started it.

6. *The man* risked his reputation by association with Jesus; *Jesus* risked his reputation by association with a Samaritan.
7. Nicodemus was an *insider*; she was an *outsider*.
8. Nicodemus was a *professional*; she was a *layperson*.
9. Nicodemus was *conservative*; she was *liberal*.
10. Nicodemus took the *initiative*; she *let* things happen.
11. Nicodemus was *named*; she was *unnamed*.
12. *Humanity* took a risk; *deity* took a risk.

C. *Spirit* was common to both.

1. The Spirit puts us in the spirit:

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

– John 3.6

2. Once in the spirit, we continue
 - a) to live in the spirit by the *water* within us and
 - b) we *worship* in the spirit.

D. The picture was not of the man or the woman.

1. The portrait shows Jesus.
2. The man and the woman provided the *backdrop*, but
 - a) Jesus was the *diamond*.
 - b) We gaze upon Him, not them.

E. Jesus and the Spirit of God occupied the heart of the action.

1. Jesus and the Spirit should occupy our hearts.
2. We should be people of the Spirit.

Exhortation:

I. What I am saying to you is what Jesus said at another time found in John 6.

- A. Thousands of people saw Him as a source of free food, because
- B. He had just fed them by making bread miraculously.
 - 1. However, He wanted them to see what He was about.
 - 2. It was not free food for the body.

**63 “It is the Spirit who gives life;
the flesh profits nothing.
The words that I speak to you are spirit,
and they are life.”**

– John 6.63

II. Do you believe these things?

- A. Are you like the Pharisee?
- B. Are you like the Samaritan woman?
- C. Are you somewhere in between, or a little of both?

III. If you believe in Jesus and

- A. want Him and the Spirit of God to be the heart of the action in your life,
- B. He accepts you, regardless of extreme background.

IV. Be born again right now!

- A. Otherwise, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.