

DO I NEED TO CHANGE?

Scripture: John 3: 1-21
Date: January 26, 2020

EPIPHANY VISION 2020

In this series we've recognized that normal eyesight is 20/20. Twenty twenty vision is where things are the clearest and cleanest to see – to know the world around you. Epiphany is a revelation or understanding that exemplifies our ability to see and understand God clearer. Maranatha has been using questions to leverage our understanding of what it is that we're seeking so that when Epiphany (revelation / understanding) happens we can discern it.

WHY CHANGE?

NICODEMUS

We began by looking at John's disciples coming to Jesus and Zacchaeus climbing a tree with a question - Are You the One? Nicodemus on the other hand connects with Jesus not needing that question answered. His approach begins a recognition of Jesus' authority as Nicodemus addresses Jesus as teacher affirming the works of Jesus as from God.

But there is an indication – in the response of Jesus in vs. 3 – that somehow Nicodemus has asked about seeing and entering the Kingdom of God. A phrase that John the gospel writer does not use frequently but he repeats it here – vs. 3 and vs. 5. Nicodemus asks some question that seeks to understand - how one can move beyond religion into a relationship with the kingdom of God

MY STORY

In 1983 I was between phases of my life working at a summer residential camp for children when I was asked if I was a Christian. There was no condemnation in the question merely curiosity. Curiously I answered no – which was unusual because I was born and raised in the church, baptized and professed my faith before the church and was even involved in leadership of the church.

Yet – in hindsight – it was clear that God was on the move within me. Changing my heart and my perspective from religion to relationship. I should have said yes – but didn't and spent the rest of that summer trying to answer that question. Trying to understand who these people were and what made them different - in their prayers, in their passion, in their love and concern for me. Trying to understand what was different about me – in my religion about Jesus vs. my relationship with Jesus

WHAT CHANGE?

NICODEMUS

Jesus answers the unknown / unspoken question from Nicodemus with a reply - You must be born again. The word for again has as part of its meaning as **above**. Thus the answer to Nicodemus' question on Kingdom comes not from earthly answers - but from heaven above

There is an earthly human birth from our mothers but there is also a spiritual birth from our heavenly Father. One is a mystery as the process is beyond human understanding as well as human effort. The spirit of God blows where and when and how it pleases creating passion and purpose according to it's perfect and pleasing Will. We can't predict it and we can't program it we can only delight in it

Nicodemus doesn't get it and asks followup questions – How can this be (can one be born into their mother again – ridiculous !!)? and How can this happen? Being born again – born above is also born beyond his understanding and expectation

MY STORY

So – the summer of 1983 – was an amazing summer as I encountered all kinds of things my United Church upbringing hadn't prepared me for - passionate worship, meaningful prayer, amazing relationships with other Christians and deeper understandings of Jesus.

So late in August of that summer - after many late nights filled with many many conversations, I decided I would 'try' Christianity. I didn't want to fail so I thought I would 'demo' Christianity to see if I could accomplish this different faith perspective in action. Needless to say I failed – quickly and miserably

What God taught me early and often that week was that you can't try Christianity – you can't play at Christianity. If you want to be changed by Christ – it's got to be all in.

From God – For you because that's how grace works and that's how grace grows!

HOW CHANGE?

FROM GOD

Jesus declares in verses 16 and 17 that new life is found through God's saving grace in Christ. That the world would not be condemned - even though it deserved it. But would be saved – or rescued is also a translation of that word

Because of God's giving of his Son (vs. 16) God's rescue would include:

Jesus' life on earth showing what God's kingdom looks like

Jesus' life on earth would show what God's kingdom is lived like

Jesus' death on the cross would forgive our sins

Jesus' death on the cross would reconcile us back to our covenantal place with the Father

Jesus' resurrection from the grave would powerfully triumph over sin and death forever more

Jesus' resurrection from the grave would provide His power to free us to live obediently and abundantly in and for His kingdom here on earth and in the world yet to come !

FOR CREATION

God is expanding the opportunity for life change beyond Nicodemus, the Sadducees and even the Israelite people but to ALL of God's creation. For all of creation has fallen into sin and ALL of God's creation needs a rescue, a salvation, a redemption and it's only God that can provide it

The global perspective is indicated when Nicodemus arrives on behalf of others in the Jewish ruling council (the *we* in vs. 2). It's confirmed when Jesus responds in verses 11-12 with *you* – plural.

God is seeking change of redemption and restoration to ALL and the words of Jesus indicate that the vision is expanded to *everyone* who believes (vs. 15) and to *the world* (vs. 16-17).

WHERE CHANGE?

BORN ANEW

John's gospel is filled with the theme of light and darkness (John 1: 4-13 and John 3: 19-21). In this we understand that the reality of being changed by Jesus is that we see and understand the reality of the darkness in the broken, sin filled, pain riddled creation in which we exist.

Yet the light reveals a change of being born again into a new life – a new opportunity. As such the reality of being changed by Jesus is that we also see – by faith – the reality of God's redemptive work within this fallen creation

However, born again is not about a onetime only thing. One of the other parts of the definition of the Greek word – *anōthen* - is the understanding of duration. It implies a length of time – a process.

Being born again IS once in a time – for those who believe. A choosing, a commitment, a changing. Yet being born again is ALSO ongoing – for those who continue to believe. Continuing to hunger for more of God and also continuing to being changed by God into people of praise, people of service, people of growth, people of love.

MY STORY

So – on August 31, 1983 at 12:30 p.m. – I made that choice to surrender and submit to God. To allow God to change me to who He wanted me to become - a process that is still stubbornly underway !!!!

But then I had another thought. That while I was willing to be a 'born again' Christian - I didn't want to go to Africa as a missionary and that's what I thought 'born again' Christians did ! God reassured me that I didn't necessarily have to go to Africa. In fact while studying at seminary in Toronto I chanced discussions with some students from Africa and Asia who revealed just how many missionaries were being sent from Africa and Asia to Canada to help us in our process of becoming Christians!!

There were going to be many changes of growth – in my thinking and in my living. Many more opportunities of being born again and again and again. Continually choosing to follow Christ, continually surrendering to Christ.

There would be many more challenges of life and resistances but also many ‘successes’ as well.

CHANGE - CHALLENGES

INEVITABLE BUT NOT IRRESTABLE

Change is something that we struggle with. We want change in our world - we want change in our church - but we're unwilling to change ourselves. YET change is inevitable. We grow older, we get frailer – life is always changing. It's not whether we will change - it's the response that's the key

John Maxwell writes that - change is inevitable but growth is optional

Glenda Cloud writes that change is inevitable, but growth is intentional

CHANGE – CELEBRATION

CHANGE FROM ABOVE

Yet while life is constantly changing – God remains steadfast and true. His nature, His character remain an anchor in the midst of a changing world. His call to us for change is based on His desire for us to be more like who we were made to be. In that context we are called to be changed – not adjusted or adapted but completely made over.

CHANGE FROM WITHIN

Made over in HIS image and for HIS glory!! A changing of being born over and over further up and further into a relationship with God and for God!

AMEN

These truths are affirmed when Jesus declares three times to Nicodemus - with a strong statement - *Truly truly I tell you*

In the Greek language the word truly – phonetically is Amen!! The word truly is our word AMEN !! Another definition is *so be it*. Combined it means the truth – so be it !!

It's reinforced by its repetition – truly truly, truthfully, truthfully – Jesus tells us that we need to be born again in order to see and belong to the kingdom of God. Truthfully truthfully by His grace and for His glory we become born again. Truthfully truthfully by His power and for His purposes we live born anew.

Amen amen become a declaration of His work – His power – His answers

To us

For us

Within us

Through us

AMEN