

3-8-20 MANAGING THE RAT RACE OF LIFE: THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF TRULY BELIEVING John 3:1-21; 1 Timothy 4:7-8

There is a story in the Gospel of John – early in the ministry years of Jesus the Christ. A Jewish religious leader --- a part of the ‘religious establishment’ --- came to visit with Jesus under the cover of darkness -- - he did not want to be seen and he did not want a ‘scene’ to distract his seeking inquiries of Jesus. Nicodemus’ spirit was touched by the life and teachings of Jesus --- he wanted to believe but he wanted to understand within his capacities and abilities. Let’s see what Jesus shared with Nicodemus and then ask, “HOW JESUS’ WORDS MAY APPLY TO US.”

JOHN 3:1-21: Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He 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.”

³Jesus 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!”

⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, **NO ONE can enter the kingdom of God UNLESS they are born of water and the Spirit.** ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, **but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.** ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The 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? ¹¹Very 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.** ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever 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. ¹⁹This is the VERDICT: **Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.** ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But 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.

TEXT & CONTEXT:

NICODEMUS

JESUS’ TEACHING

REFLECTIONS & APPLICATIONS:

1. DO WE LIVE AS THOUGH WE ARE “BORN OF THE SPIRIT”? (imagine --- Jesus in us— DO WE LIVE IN AWARENESS OF GOD’S PRESENCE WITH US?)
2. OUR SOCIETY & CULTURE ARE SOOOOO CONSUMED WITH PHYSICAL HEALTH & APPEARANCES --- ARE WE EQUALLY CONSUMED AND CONCERNED ABOUT THE “INSIDES” OF OUR LIVES --- and the LIVES OF OUR FAMILIES?
 - a. NOTE: A POTATO
 - b. NOTE: THE “VASA”
3. ARE WE AS CONCERNED ABOUT OUR SPIRITS, OUR SOULS, and OUR INNER BEING AS WE ARE ABOUT OUR PHYSICAL HEALTH? (of what is on the inside versus the outside)

4. THERE IS A SPIRITUAL REALM --- DO WE CARE?
5. WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL?
 - a. FOR OUR SAKE
 - b. FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS
6. TO SURVIVE, TO MANAGE, TO OVERCOME THE “RAT RACE” OF OUR LIVES --- REQUIRES US TO RESET AND REFOCUS OUR LIVES UPON THE SPIRITUAL ----
 - a. DO YOU BELIEVE?
 - b. IF SO --- ARE YOU PREPARED TO “LIVE” ACCORDINGLY?
 - c. IF SO --- ARE YOU WILLING TO PRACTICE & DEVELOP YOUR SPIRITUAL BEING AS WELL AS YOU PHYSICAL BEING?

DEAR GOD, I COME BEFORE YOU AS A PERSON WHO LIVES (too often) ACCORDING TO MY WAYS RATHER THAN YOUR WAYS. I AM SORRY. I SAY, THAT I “BELIEVE” IN JESUS, BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE ENOUGH. PLEASE HELP ME TO BELIEVE SO THAT MY ACTIONS MAY REFLECT THE SPIRIT OF GOD THAT DWELLS WITHIN ME. PLEASE HELP ME TO DEVELOP SPIRITUAL PRACTICES SO THAT I MAY BE BORN AGAIN --- BORN IN SPIRIT & TRUTH --- BUT EVEN MORE, MADE FREE FROM THE “RAT RACE” OF THIS WORLD --- BORN INTO THE WORLD OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. FATHER, I BELIEVE AND WANT TO LIVE ACCORDINGLY TO THOSE BELIEFS. I WANT TO BE A PERSON “SAVED” BUT ALSO A PERSON ABLE TO BE USED BY YOU TO BE A LIGHT & HELP TO THE WORLD IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS, INCLUDING MY FAMILY, MY COMMUNITY, and MY WORLD. THANK YOU, GOD, FOR **CARING FOR ME AND FOR BEING WILLING TO BE MY COACH, MY LOVING & CARING SHEPHERD, MY PARENT & PROTECTOR, and PROVIDER BECAUSE I AM A CHILD OF GOD.** IN JESUS’ NAME, AMEN.

Paul writes in 1 Timothy 4:7-8: “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales **RATHER, TRAIN** yourself to be godly.”⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise **for both the present life and the life to come.**”

1. The **PRACTICE OF SCRIPTURE MEMORY & REMINDING OURSELVES THAT GOD CARES FOR US** – Psalm 23
2. The **PRACTICE OF EXAMEN** – sports teams review game films to see where they did well and where they need to keep working ---likewise, spending even a few minutes each night **EXAMINING** how we lived that day according to our faith --- the good and the bad **HELPS US** to continue to grow and improve in our desire to live as Jesus would have us live. We open ourselves each night to thank God for the successes and to ask Him for help in the areas that we need to continue to improve.
3. **The PRACTICE OF FASTING** – fasting from routine habits and consumptions, even for a short-time reminds us how dependent we are upon so many things. Do we miss our time with God as much as from our habits and distracting, consuming activities?
4. **THE PRACTICE OF TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES** – when our bodies are ‘run down’ and ‘out of gas’ we make bad decisions and we tend to isolate ourselves from God & others – it is **VERY CRITICAL** that we take care of ourselves – for our soul’s sake.
5. **THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIP** – Acknowledging that God is God, and we’re not, helps to **RESET** and **REFOCUS** our lives – the playing of favorite songs and other acts of worship are important.
6. **THE PRACTICE OF CONFESSION** – confession of our faith & love and confession of our needs, vulnerabilities, fears, failures, etc. helps to open the door of reconciling relationships with God and with others.
7. **THE PRACTICE OF DAILY PRAYER** – spending time with God – sometimes sharing with God our needs, fears, and cares; sometimes opening ourselves to God’s Spirit that we may receive **INSPIRATION, ENCOURAGEMENT & DIRECTION** and sometimes being drawn into the presence and being of God works to encourages us and draw us closer to God.
8. **THE PRACTICE OF DAILY REFLECTION UPON THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD, THE BIBLE** – spending time, even 5-10 minutes a day opens our lives to the **LIVING WORD** of GOD – useful for teaching, encouragement, resetting our lives and so much more.

These practices are available on the church website: southharborcreekumc.org (under “Daily Devotions.”)