

Lent 2 John 3:1-17 (Gen 12:1-4a Romans 4:1-5, 13-17)

What difference does the promise from Jesus make?

Intro:

Who is Jesus?

Who is Jesus to you?

We have here in this passage from John a man named Nicodemus.

He was a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews and he recognised Jesus, he knew Jesus to be a Rabbi, a teacher and someone who has come from God.

He saw something different, extraordinary.

Nicodemus knew that Jesus had the presence of God with Him.

But as we read the rest of the passage, whilst recognising that Jesus was someone special, we get the impression that Nicodemus hasn't yet quite grasped who Jesus is, beyond the outer appearance.

But he clearly wants to know more because he has come and sought Jesus out, at night, and started a conversation with him.

Yesterday I was left wondering who or what people think Jesus is.

I was chatting to a lady who was embarking on a major life change and she said to me that if it weren't for her faith she does not know how she would have even made yesterday. But the rest of the conversation suggested to me that for her, Jesus was just one 'tool in her spiritual tool box'.

I may well have been mistaken but as she was setting off, literally leaving her country, kindred and house, just like Abram, I am not sure that she was as confident as Abram.

Someone else I was talking with yesterday said that he was confident that there is a higher power, but he does not yet know what that looks like. But he is searching.

If I had asked either of these 2 people who Jesus is, I wonder what they would have replied?

Nicodemus knew that Jesus had come from God, that He had the presence of God with Him. And I think he was inquisitive to know more, to find out more from Jesus as to just who He was.

And Jesus, even though it was at night, engaged in conversation with Nicodemus. Helping him to understand more and to give him an incredible promise.

**Let's** look for a moment at how this conversation **unfolds...**

Part 1...

Jesus immediately raises the topic of 'the Kingdom of God' and the need to be born 'from above' Nicodemus becomes very literal and asks how one can be 'born again', thinking of the practicalities of a physical, human birth.

What we miss is that the Greek word for 'from above' is the same as 'again' = anōthen

So Jesus was saying 'no one can see the kingdom of God without being born anōthen' (from above) and Nicodemus replied 'How can anyone be born anōthen (again) having grown old, having already been born physically?

Part 2...

Jesus moves the conversation on to talk about the need to be born of water and the Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

For Nicodemus, a good Jewish leader, Judaism had a good deal to do with being born into the right family, of coming from good Jewish blood and being a child of Abraham.

Jesus was saying that to see, to enter into the Kingdom of God this was not enough. It was not just about a physical birth but also a spiritual birth. And just like the wind blows where ever it

chooses, so the Spirit will move. The Kingdom of God is for more than just those born of the predictable, noteworthy Jewish ancestry.

Let's just side step for a moment.

In our Genesis reading Abram was asked by God to leave country, kindred and home, (What a sacrifice) to go to a new land that God would (in the future) show him, and make of Abram a great nation, even though we know that his wife Sarai is barren

A couple of chapters later in chap 15, God established a covenant with Abraham promising him an extra ordinary family and Abraham believed Gods promise.

In vs 13 of our reading from Romans today we see that 'the promise that Abraham would inherit the world... came through the righteousness of faith'

Abraham would inherit the world! Why? Because of his faithfulness.

Abraham was the great father of the Jewish nation, but the promise of God goes much further than that to extend to the world.

Back to our conversation with Nicodemus and Jesus

Nicodemus wants clarity, he says to Jesus 'How can these things be?'

In other words... what are you talking about Jesus? being born again, not just of water but of the spirit? What are you saying about the kingdom of God? Is it really not enough to be a good Jewish leader, with a good Jewish ancestry?

Part 3...

Jesus responds with several questions...

You're a teacher but you don't understand?

If you don't get the earthly bit of this, how can you get the heavenly bit?

And then Jesus goes on to tell Nicodemus the most amazing thing. Jesus makes THE BIGGEST promise EVER MADE to Nicodemus and this promise is probably one of the first verses of scripture that many of us ever learnt....

For God so loved that world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life!

For GOD	God - the greatest source
so LOVED	the greatest heart
the WORLD	the greatest extent
that HE GAVE His only begotten SON	the greatest gift
that WHOEVER	the greatest invitation
believes in HIM	the greatest terms
may NOT PERISH BUT	the greatest difference
have EVERLASTING LIFE	the greatest promise

This promise is huge!

Who is Jesus?

Well, if we believe that He IS the Son of God, then He is the greatest gift ever offered to us. And if we choose to accept this gift then we receive the greatest promise. The promise of everlasting life, not because of our own greatness, but because God LOVES the world and sent His son not to condemn us but to save us. In fact, not just us but THE WORLD. PAUSE!

God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

I did miss 2 verses out.

Jesus said that 'just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.' vs 14+15

Nicodemus would have understood the first part of this better than us

Back in the time of the exodus, when Moses was leading the people, many Israelites were being killed by poisonous serpents. We can read in the book of Numbers

The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' **6** Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. **7** The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people.

**8** And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' **9** So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live. (Numb 21:5-9)

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that He was going to be lifted up, not on a pole but on a cross, and all those who look up to him and believe will be saved from the deadly disease of sin and be saved for eternity.

Who is Jesus to you?

In this chapter from John's gospel we are introduced to the man Nicodemus, who comes and seeks Jesus out to find out more. Throughout the gospel we find out more about Nicodemus.

In chapter 7 we discover that as a member of the Pharisees, he urges his colleagues to hear Jesus out before judging Him, to give Him a fair hearing. He is defending Jesus.

And then in chapter 19, after Jesus' death, we read that Nicodemus takes a mixture of myrrh and aloes with which to anoint Jesus, and along with Joseph of Arimathea, gives Jesus a proper burial. I think that Nicodemus had come to a greater understanding of just who Jesus was.

Maybe after looking up to Him dying on the cross Nicodemus accepted the greatest invitation and received the greatest gift - to believe Jesus to be the Son of God.

A gift that came from the greatest, purest source of love

And then he could live with the assurance of the greatest promise - to have everlasting life.

Who is Jesus to you? And how, this Lent, do we respond to the greatest promise of all time?