

BACKGROUND NOTES AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

For May 12, 2024

Pastor Kerry

Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-11; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1;

1 Peter 3:21-22

The Kingdom of Heaven—Jesus is King

For forty days following his resurrection, Jesus has been with his disciples, teaching them, preparing them for what was to come next. Now it was time for him to leave. As Jesus prepared to be taken up into heaven, his disciples had one last question: “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6)?”

Behind that question, I see 600 or more years of history. Once the people of Israel had been a proud independent kingdom. But ever since their nation was conquered and their independence was lost, the cry of the people was, “how long?” How long will it be before God restores the nation and establishes justice for the people of Israel? Perhaps this hope was behind many of the cheers on Palm Sunday. Hopefully by this time, his disciples realized that the kingdom of God was more than national independence, but still they asked whether it was now time to restore the kingdom. Was it now time for God’s justice to reach all people? Was it now the time to put an end to wars and oppression? Was it now time to put an end to poverty and disease?

Jesus’ only answer to this question of when, was to say, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority (Acts 1:7).”

I still hear that question of the disciples today. Maybe the form of the question is a little different. I find myself asking how long will there be war and the suffering of those who are innocent, such as in Gaza or in Israel? How long will hunger be real, whether in Lancaster County or in South Sudan? Why are people so filled with hatred for those of those of a different race or nationality? When will God come and put things right? Perhaps Jesus would still answer us, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.”

But part of our Christian hope is that someday, Jesus will return and put all things right. This was the message of two men in white robes: “This Jesus,

who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).” This passage begins with the question of when, which goes unanswered, but ends with the promise that someday, Jesus will return to complete what he started.

We, like the original disciples, are caught in this in-between time. While Acts 1:6-11 begins and ends by talking about the kingdom, in between verse 6 and verse 11 come Jesus’ words to his disciples: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).” While we may wonder when God will make right all that we see around us, I hear Jesus telling us we have work to do. While we can never bring in the kingdom ourselves; while we cannot fix all the evil and disease that there is in the world, we have a role to fill. We are to be his witnesses.

We are to be his witnesses with our acts of mercy, living out the example of our Lord. We need to be about feeding the hungry, comforting the sick, offering hope to the outcast and challenging oppression and hatred in all its forms. We are to be his witnesses, telling our world why we live as we do, for we have been touched by the love of God in Jesus Christ. And we are to be his witnesses by offering the hope of the day when Jesus will return and put an end to all suffering and wipe away all tears. (See Revelation 21:3-4.)

As we are his witnesses to the end of the earth, we are not alone. Jesus has promised that God would send the Holy Spirit. God is at work within, sending us the power to proclaim to the world that there is hope. The kingdom of God is coming. In the meantime, we are to be witnesses of that hope.

BACKGROUND NOTES AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

For May 19, 2024

Pastor Kerry

John 3:1-8

The Kingdom of God—Born By the Spirit

Translation problem

John is doing a play on words that really cannot be easily translated into English.

The King James Version translates John 3:3 as:

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

The King James Version is followed by the Revised Standard and New Living Translation:

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (Revised Standard Version).

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” (The New Living Translation).

But the New Revised Standard Version and the Contemporary English Version have:

Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (New Revised Standard Version)

Jesus replied, “I tell you for certain that you must be born from above before you can see God’s kingdom!” (Contemporary English Version)

Which is correct? Being born again or being born from above?

Well? Both. The ancient world also liked wordplay. The Greek of the Gospel of John uses the word “*anōthen*,” which can mean either “again” or “from above.”

In verse 4, Nicodemus, with whom Jesus is speaking, understands Jesus to be saying that one must be born a second time, and he asks, “How can

anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" In replying to Jesus in this way, Nicodemus is missing what Jesus is trying to say. There is a sense that Jesus is speaking about the change that needs to come to one's life, so Nicodemus is not totally wrong when he asks about how when being born again, but just being born a second time as a child will not do it.

Jesus goes on to tell Nicodemus that one needs to be "born of water and Spirit." The water is perhaps the water of baptism that is of repentance. And the Spirit, that is the Spirit of God. What Nicodemus is being told is that there needs to be a change in his life. It is not simply the change of starting over, but a change that comes when the Holy Spirit enters our lives and changes us. At this point, Nicodemus can only hear the call to start over, but not the call to be renewed by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

As I reflect on how to translate "*anóthen*," I do not think any simple translation can fully capture what Jesus is saying in the Gospel of John. There is a great truth in the fact that meeting Jesus requires a new start in our lives. Somehow our lives need to be different because Jesus has come into our lives. But it is more than just starting over. I have made many restarts in my life. I have changed from being a student to one who is working. I have changed from one who was single to one who was married. I have changed careers, and now I have transitioned from the working life into retirement. But in all these changes, I have remained basically the same. It is more than just being born again or starting over. There needs to be change that is beyond ourselves. It is the change that takes place when God enters our lives. The Holy Spirit from above fills our lives and changes us in ways that we could never do ourselves.

The Holy Spirit does not just change our lives once, but our faith is that the Spirit is still working in us, encouraging, strengthening, and guiding us in the ways of Jesus Christ.

It is good to be born again, but it is also important to be born from above.

BACKGROUND NOTES AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

For May 26, 2024

Pastor Jacob and Nick Hollinger

The Kingdom of Heaven—The work of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

John 3:9-17

Many people are familiar with John 3:16: “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. We see references to John 3:16 posted at football games and other places. The full verse is often quoted as a summary of the Gospel message. And in many ways, it is.

I also remember the words of one of my teachers who told us that if we are going to quote John 3:16, we also need to quote John 3:17, which reads, “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” In some ways, John 3:17 adds no new information, but it does offer a clarification of John 3:16. What was God’s hope in sending Jesus? Was it that some might be saved, and others condemned, or was the purpose to offer eternal life to all? How we answer that question reflects the understanding we have of God as well as on our understanding of our purpose in this world.

I like to think in pictures. I can imagine a number of different pictures that one might have of God. Is God like a traffic cop whose car is hidden by the bushes, waiting to pull out and nail the next speeder? Is God a kindly old grandfather type, one to whom you come with your problems and who will always speak a kind word? Or is God like a wise and good parent who will correct the child for the child’s own good, who wants the best for the child and dreams of the child reaching adulthood with a good relationship to that God? While no image is a perfect way to describe God, the images we hold in our minds do say a lot of how we view God. If God is like the traffic cop, then God is to be feared. If God is a kindly old grandfather, God is nice to have around, but not too important. But if God is more like the image of a good parent, then God is one who can have an impact on our life.

I think of my own father. There were times that I perhaps feared him or at least protested his rules, but as I grew to adult and looked back, I had no doubt he was always seeking the best for me. I realize not all people have a good relationship with their parents, so perhaps this image is not as meaningful. For me, however, I understand their goal in caring for and even

disciplining me, was for me to reach my best. This is the message I see in John 3:17. In all that God does, God is seeking us, calling us for our own good, wishing for us to entering a relationship with God. This is why God sent his Son, Jesus Christ.

I think John 3:17 can also speak to our understanding of what it means to be a part of the family of God. Again, I think in pictures. One picture of those who have been saved is a group of people gathered safely within the walls of the church. They are safe and they celebrate that they are no longer part of the sinful world outside. Another picture I can imagine is that of the people of God going out into the world, feeding the hungry, caring for the hurting, being the hands and feet of Jesus. The first picture is not completely wrong. We need to celebrate what God has done. There are times we need to retreat from the world to be renewed. But I would say that John 3:17 says to us that the first picture is incomplete and needs to be joined with the second. If God's purpose is not to bring condemnation but that the world might be saved through him, then the people of God need to share in that ministry.

As people who have experienced the love of God through Jesus Christ, let us share in that ministry with our words and lives.

Answers to April Trivia

Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven, but in the Bible many earthly kings are also mentioned. Can you match the kingdom and their kings

Kingdom

- 1 Egypt __C__
- 2 Babylon __E__
- 3 Rome __D__
- 4 Persia __A__
- 5 Judah __B__

King

- A Cyrus
- B Hezekiah
- C Pharaoh
- D Augustus
- E Nebuchadnezzar

Bonus: What Phoenician City-State might remind you of a part of a car?
Tyre

May Trivia

What if an advertising agency came up for titles for some of Jesus' parables. Can you identify the parables of Jesus by these advertising slogans?

For a Lawn and Garden Center: "Our soil beat the 3 next competitors hands down."

For a Real Estate Company: "Every property comes with a hidden treasure."

For a travel insurance company: "We are your neighbor there to help you on the road."

For a private detective service. "We find and bring your wayward son home."

For a Home Goods Store: "Our magic brooms find coins and lost objects even in the dustiest rooms."