

PSALM 121 AND JOHN 3:1-17

IT SEEMS THAT MISUNDERSTANDINGS ARE A PART OF HUMAN LIFE. SO OFTEN WE SEE OR HEAR THINGS AND BELIEVE OUR PERCEPTIONS ARE TRUE, WHETHER OR NOT THAT IS THE CASE.

FOR EXAMPLE, SOME HERE MAY REMEMBER THE OLD TV PROGRAM THAT WAS BROADCAST FOR MANY YEARS, WHICH WAS CALLED THE "WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS".

THE SHOW'S OPENING WAS FAMOUS FOR BOTH ITS SAYING AND THE PICTURES THAT WENT WITH IT.

THE INTRO SAID: "THE THRILL OF VICTORY AND THE AGONY OF DEFEAT." AND A CLIP OF BOTH ATHLETIC SUCCESS AND FAILURE WERE SHOWN.

IT IS THE LATTER I REMEMBER THE MOST- IT SHOWED A SKIER, WHO HAD BEEN PREPARING FOR A JUMP, TUMBLING OFF THE HIGH SKI JUMP PLATFORM.

I ALWAYS FELT A LITTLE SORRY FOR HIM, AFTER ALL IT WAS BAD ENOUGH TO FALL AND LOSE THE COMPETITION, BUT WORSE TO HAVE IT SHOWN ON TV WEEK AFTER WEEK FOR YEARS.

THAT SCENE SEEMED TO SHOW A SPECTACULAR MISTAKE, THAT LEAD TO THE FALL. IT WAS LIKELY A THING THAT THE ATHLETE WOULD NEVER LIVE DOWN.

HOWEVER, LATER SOME FACTS CAME OUT THAT PROVED THAT CONCLUSION WAS NOT ACCURATE.

YOU SEE IN AN INTERVIEW, A WHILE AFTER THE EVENT, THE SKI JUMPER EXPLAINED THAT HE ACTUALLY FELL ON PURPOSE.

HE DID SO BECAUSE HE JUDGED, DURING HIS DESCENT THAT HE WAS GOING TO LAND IN AN UNSAFE AREA, AND COULD BE FATALLY INJURED.

THEREFORE HE INTENTIONALLY FELL, AND IN SPITE OF TUMBLING WAS NOT HURT BEYOND SOME MINOR BRUISES.

THIS INFORMATION OFFERED BY THE SKIER, TEACHES US THAT SOMETIMES CONCLUSIONS, EVEN BASED ON WHAT WE SEE OR HEAR, MAY NOT ALWAYS BE ACCURATE.

THIS BRINGS US TO NICODEMUS, WHO THOUGHT HE KNEW WHAT JESUS WAS ABOUT-HE DREW CONCLUSIONS BASED ON HIS OWN ASSESSMENT OF THE FACTS.

WE REALLY CAN'T KNOW WHAT NICODEMUS EXPECTED TO HEAR FROM JESUS, THAT NIGHT HE WENT TO HIM.

BUT IT IS CERTAIN HE DID **NOT** EXPECT TO HEAR THAT ONLY THOSE WHO ARE BORN AGAIN CAN ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

WE KNOW THIS FIRST FROM NICODEMUS' RESPONSE-IN ASKING "HOW CAN THIS BE?"

YET, WHAT MANY MAY NOT REALIZE IS FOR JEWS SPIRITUAL REBIRTH WAS NOT A FOREIGN CONCEPT.

HOWEVER, IN THEIR MINDS, IT WAS SOMETHING THAT ONLY HAPPENED TO CONVERTS TO JUDAISM.

AND SO NICODEMUS PROBABLY THOUGHT JESUS MUST BE SPEAKING ABOUT ANOTHER KIND OF BIRTH.

IT WAS CONFUSING AND SHOCKING FOR HIM TO HEAR JESUS SPEAKING ABOUT HIM AND HIS FELLOW JEWS NEEDING TO BE REBORN.

IT MAY BE HELPFUL FOR US TO REMEMBER THAT NICODEMUS WAS A PHARISEE, AS WELL AS A MEMBER OF THE RULING COUNCIL IN JERUSALEM.

IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT NICODEMUS' WORDS SUGGESTS HIS VIEW OF THE FACTS ABOUT JESUS WAS BASED ON THE LOGIC OF HIS SECT.

SINCE JESUS DID MANY SIGNS, MEANING/MIRACLES, IT WAS REASONABLE TO CONCLUDE HE WAS SENT FROM GOD.

SO HIS CONCLUSIONS WERE RATIONAL ONES, BASED ON WHAT HE AND OTHERS SAW WERE THE FACTS.

JESUS, HOWEVER, THROWS HIM A CURVE BALL, SO TO SPEAK, BY IGNORING THE COMPLIMENT HE WAS GIVEN.

INSTEAD JESUS PRESENTED TO THE PHARISEE WHAT WAS AT THE HEART OF HIS OWN TEACHING- WHICH WAS THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HOW TO ENTER IT.

BEFORE WE LOOK INTO THIS FURTHER, WE NEED TO ADDRESS SOME EXPECTATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN RECORDED CONCERNING NICODEMUS.

FIRST, MANY PEOPLE HAVE CONCLUDED NICODEMUS WENT TO SPEAK TO JESUS AT NIGHT, SO OTHERS WOULD NOT SEE HIM.

WHILE THIS MAY BE TRUE- IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT IT WAS ONLY AFTER SUNSET THAT HE HAD THE TIME TO MEET WITH JESUS.

OR IT MAY BE NICODEMUS WENT AT A TIME WHEN HE COULD SEE JESUS ALONE.

DOING SO WOULD SHOW JESUS HE WAS NOT SEEKING TO TRAP HIM, BUT RATHER TO HAVE AN HONEST PRIVATE - CONVERSATION.

SECONDLY, PHARISEES, FOR THE MOST PART, WERE NOT BAD PEOPLE, EVEN THOUGH MOST CHRISTIANS HAVE A NEGATIVE CONCEPT OF THEM.

ACTUALLY, THE PHARISEES CAME INTO BEING DURING A TIME WHEN THE PAGAN CULTURE WAS ATTACKING THE FAITH CONCEPTS OF THE JEWS.

THE ORIGINAL PURPOSE OF THE PHARISEES WAS TO TEACH AND UPHOLD THE TORAH-MEANING BIBLICAL LAW.

THEY DID SO IN THE HOPE THAT THE JEWISH PEOPLE WOULD NOT BE ABSORBED BY THE OUTSIDE CULTURE.

UNFORTUNATELY THIS GOOD THING EVENTUALLY LED TO A RIGID RELIGIOUS VIEW.

AND IT WAS THE STRICT PRESERVATION OF THEIR WAYS THAT BROUGHT MANY PHARISEES INTO CONFLICT WITH JESUS.

ONE OF THE REASONS FOR THIS RESISTANCE TO JESUS WAS THE PHARISEES' EXPECTATION THAT UPHOLDING THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS WAS A KEY FACTOR IN THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM.

THE KINGDOM, IN THE EYES OF THE JEWS, WAS OF COURSE THE RETURN OF KING DAVID'S LINE, AND ISRAEL BECOMING A POWER BROKER IN THE WORLD ONCE AGAIN.

THIS MEANS MOST PHARISEES WOULD HAVE APPROVED OF JESUS TEACHING HIS DISCIPLES TO PRAY:

“YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN”.

BUT THEY WOULD HAVE DISAGREED WITH THE KINGDOM OF GOD BEING OPEN TO NON-JEWS, OR TO THOSE AMONG THEIR OWN PEOPLE WHO DID NOT PROPERLY FOLLOW THE LAW.

THE EXPECTATION WAS THAT THE MESSIAH WOULD COME TO SAVE ONLY RIGHTEOUS JEWS AND CONDEMN THE REST OF THE WORLD.

CONSEQUENTLY, JESUS' STATEMENT THAT GOD LOVES THE WORLD-MEANING NOT ONLY THE JEWS, BUT EVERYONE, WAS A REAL CHALLENGE FOR NICODEMUS.

THE SUGGESTION THAT GOD LOVES OTHERS, AND NOT ONLY HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE, WAS INEXPLICABLE TO MOST JEWS BACK THEN.

AND SADLY, AMONG MANY PEOPLE TODAY THE OPENNESS OF GOD'S KINGDOM IS STILL A CHALLENGE FOR CERTAIN PEOPLE, INCLUDING SOME CHRISTIANS.

THEY, LIKE NICODEMUS, HIS FELLOW PHARISEES, AND MOST OTHER JEWS, SEE THE KINGDOM IN TERMS OF “US AND THEM”, RATHER THAN ABOUT GOD.

BUT WHEN WE SEE THE KINGDOM IS ABOUT GOD, FROM WHOM OUR HELP, AND EVERYONE ELSE'S HELP, COMES, IT CAN CHANGE OUR PERSPECTIVE.

IT REMINDS US THE KINGDOM IS ABOUT GOD'S GLORY AND WILL.

AND, AS JESUS DECLARED GOD'S THE LOVE IS THE GATE TO HIS KINGDOM.

AFTER ALL, THE KINGDOM IS OWNED AND RUN BY GOD, WHO, BECAUSE HE LOVES THE WORLD, MAKES FORGIVENESS AND THUS ENTRANCE INTO HIS KINGDOM POSSIBLE.

THIS IS THE SOLE REASON JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD AND DIED ON THE CROSS.

ANOTHER PREACHER, EXPRESSES THIS WONDERFUL TRUTH WITH THIS WORD OF HOPE:

“GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, AND .IT CHANGES EVERYTHING. IMAGINE WHAT THE WORLD WOULD BE LIKE, WHAT YOUR LIFE WOULD BE LIKE, IF GOD DID NOT LOVE.”

YET, GOD'S LOVE IS NOT COERCIVE. INSTEAD IT IS OFFERED TO THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, WHO HAVE THE CHOICE TO ACCEPT IT BY FAITH OR NOT.

JESUS DOES SPEAK OF A TIME OF JUDGMENT AND SORTING ONE FROM ANOTHER.

HOWEVER, CHRIST'S FOCUS AND HIS PURPOSE IN COMING TO EARTH-WAS NOT CONDEMNATION BUT SALVATION, AS IT IS RECORDED IN **JOHN 3:16 & 17**.

THE SAVIOR'S PURPOSE IN BEING BORN IS EXPLAINED IN A REFLECTION IN THIS WAY:

"GOD DIDN'T GO THROUGH ALL THE TROUBLE OF SENDING HIS SON TO POINT AN ACCUSING FINGER, TELLING THE WORLD HOW BAD IT WAS. HE CAME TO HELP, TO PUT THE WORLD RIGHT AGAIN."

JESUS, AS WE KNOW BY LOOKING AT THIS PASSAGE, FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF AFTER CHRIST'S RESURRECTION, CAME TO BRING IN THE KINGDOM IN GOD'S WAY.

THUS HE CHALLENGED NICODEMUS THAT NIGHT, TO LET GO OF HIS EXPECTATIONS ABOUT HOW THE KINGDOM SHOULD OR WOULD COME INTO BEING ON EARTH.

INCLUDED IN THAT WAS THE CHALLENGE TO REALIZE THE REAL ENEMY WAS NOT ROME OR ANY OTHER WORLDLY POWER. INSTEAD THE REAL ENEMY WAS AND STILL IS-SIN.

CONSEQUENTLY, THE SAVIOR SPOKE TO NICODEMUS ABOUT BEING BORN AGAIN- OR AS THE GREEK WORD IS ALSO TRANSLATED "BORN FROM ABOVE".

HERE JESUS WAS POINTING TO SPIRITUAL BIRTH, WHICH IS NOT SOMETHING WE DO- BUT GOD DOES.

HE WAS TEACHING NICODEMUS THAT BEING BORN A JEW, AND A PHARISEE, BEING A TEACHER AND LEADER OF HIS PEOPLE- DOES NOT EARN HIM A PLACE IN THE KINGDOM.

INSTEAD IT IS GOD'S GRACE, MANIFESTED THROUGH HIS LOVE THAT OPENS THE GATES OF THE KINGDOM.

THIS LOVE AND GRACE ALSO, PROVIDES ETERNAL LIFE- NOT JUST IN THE FUTURE, BUT RIGHT NOW.

OF COURSE THE MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S GRACE WOULD NOT BE REALIZED UNTIL JESUS WAS LIFTED UP ON THE CROSS FOR ALL TO SEE.

THIS IS WHY JESUS' MENTIONING MOSES HOLDING UP A BRONZE SERPENT IS SIGNIFICANT.

**NUMBERS 21:5-9** TELLS THE STORY OF ISRAEL'S REBELLION AGAINST GOD, WHILE IN THE WILDERNESS.

THE LORD, FINALLY HAD ENOUGH OF THE ANGER AND COMPLAINING OF HIS PEOPLE, THAT SHOWED THEIR LACK OF TRUST IN HIM.

SO GOD GOT THEIR ATTENTION BY SENDING POISONOUS SNAKES AMONG THEM, AND THOSE WHO WERE BITTEN DIED.

BUT AFTER THE PEOPLE CONFESSED THEIR SIN, MOSES PRAYED FOR GOD TO FORGIVE THEM. THEN GOD HAD HIM MAKE A BRONZE SERPENT AND PUT IT ON A POLE.

ANYONE WHO WAS BITTEN AND LOOKED TO THE BRONZE SERPENT- AS A SIGN OF TRUST IN GOD, WOULD NOT DIE.

THUS JESUS' WORDS TO NICODEMUS, ABOUT THE SON OF MAN BEING LIFTED UP, TESTIFY, IN ADVANCE, ABOUT THE CROSS.

HE WAS GIVING NICODEMUS A SIGN FROM THE PAST THAT WAS MEANT TO PLANT A SEED WITHIN HIM ABOUT THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION WHEN IT CAME.

HE WAS SAYING HIS OWN DEATH WAS GOD'S PROVISION, NOT ONLY FOR THE JEWS, BUT SO THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED FROM SIN, THROUGH HIM.

HERE, JESUS WAS CALLING NICODEMUS, AND THROUGH THE GOSPEL CALLING US, TO HAVE FAITH IN GOD'S LOVE, AND HIS WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE.

TRULY, THE SAYING "LET GO AND LET GOD"- IS NEVER MORE APPROPRIATE WHEN SEEKING RELIEF FROM THE BURDEN OF OUR OWN SINFULNESS.

LIKE THE PSALMIST, JESUS CALLS US TO LOOK TO HIM AND PUT OUR HOPE IN GOD, ESPECIALLY IN HIS LOVE.

INDEED, IN A VERY REAL SENSE THE LOVE OF GOD IS BOTH THE REASON FOR OUR FAITH JOURNEY AND OUR ETERNAL DESTINY.

THE LESSON HERE IS THAT WHILE SIN CERTAINLY ANGERS GOD, THE FATHER'S LOVE IS MORE POWERFUL THAN SIN.

THE OPENING VERSE OF A HYMN DESCRIBES HIS LOVE, AND THE RESPONSE GOD DESIRES FROM US IN THIS WAY:

"O LOVE THAT WILT NOT LET ME GO, I REST MY WEARY SOUL IN THEE.

I GIVE THEE BACK THE LIFE I OWE, THAT IN THINE OCEAN DEPTHS IT'S FLOW MAY RICHER, FULLER BE."

TRULY THE FULLNESS OF OUR LIVES, AS GOD INTENDS THEM TO BE LIVED, IS FOR US TO BE BOTH SUBJECTS IN HIS KINGDOM, AND CHILDREN IN HIS FAMILY.

AND SO, RETURNING TO THE AFTER-HOURS MEETING BETWEEN THE MESSIAH AND THE PHARISEE-

JESUS, I THINK, WAS TRYING TO GET NICODEMUS, TO OPEN HIS HEART TO GOD'S LOVE.

IF HE COULD DO SO HE WOULD BE ABLE TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD, JESUS WAS BRINGING INTO THE WORLD ACCORDING TO JOHN 19, NICODEMUS HELPED TO BURY JESUS, WHICH TELLS US HE DID INDEED OPEN HIS HEART UP TO GOD'S LOVE.

WE ARE INVITED TO DO THE SAME THING, SO THAT, AS JESUS PROMISES, WE MAY EXPERIENCE BEING BORN FROM ABOVE AND RECEIVE NEW LIFE NOW.

AND FOR THOSE ALREADY REBORN IN CHRIST WE CAN CONTINUE TO RECEIVE THE BLESSING OF GOD'S GREAT LOVE DAY BY DAY.

THIS IS WHY WE CAN LOOK TO GOD AS THE ONE FROM WHOM OUR HELP COMES.

LISTEN TO THIS A POEM, BY AN UNKNOWN AUTHOR, THAT SUMMARIZES THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IN A POWERFUL WAY.

FOR GOD THE GREATEST GIVER.  
SO LOVED THE GREATEST DEGREE  
THE WORLD THE GREATEST COMPANY  
THAT HE GAVE THE GREATEST SACRIFICE

HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON THE GREATEST GIFT  
THAT WHOSOEVER THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY  
BELIEVETH THE GREATEST SIMPLICITY  
IN HIM THE GREATEST ATTRACTION  
SHOULD NOT PERISH THE GREATEST PROMISE  
BUT THE GREATEST DIFFERENCE  
HAVE THE GREATEST CERTAINTY  
EVERLASTING LIFE THE GREATEST POSSESSION

THIS IS ONLY MADE POSSIBLE BECAUSE GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD IS GREATER THAN SIN, AND GOD'S DESIRE TO FORGIVE GREATER THAN HIS DESIRE TO CONDEMN.

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THIS POWERFUL AND PRICELESS GIFT! AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY- JOHN 3:1-17

DURING THAT MEETING JESUS CHALLENGED NICODEMUS THAT NIGHT, TO LET GO OF HIS EXPECTATIONS ABOUT HOW THE KINGDOM SHOULD OR WOULD COME INTO BEING ON EARTH.

INCLUDED IN THAT WAS THE CHALLENGE TO REALIZE THE REAL ENEMY WAS NOT ROME OR ANY OTHER WORLDLY POWER. INSTEAD THE REAL ENEMY WAS AND STILL IS- SIN.

CONSEQUENTLY, THE SAVIOR SPOKE TO NICODEMUS ABOUT BEING BORN AGAIN- OR AS THE GREEK WORD IS ALSO TRANSLATED "BORN FROM ABOVE".

JESUS WAS POINTING TO SPIRITUAL BIRTH, WHICH IS NOT SOMETHING WE DO- BUT GOD DOES.

HE WAS TEACHING NICODEMUS THAT BEING BORN A JEW, AND A PHARISEE, BEING A TEACHER AND LEADER OF HIS PEOPLE- DOES NOT EARN HIM A PLACE IN THE KINGDOM.

INSTEAD IT IS GOD'S GRACE, MANIFESTED THROUGH HIS LOVE THAT OPENS THE GATES OF THE KINGDOM.

ANOTHER PREACHER, EXPRESSES THIS WONDERFUL TRUTH WITH THIS WORD OF HOPE: "GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, AND .IT CHANGES EVERYTHING. IMAGINE WHAT THE WORLD WOULD BE LIKE, WHAT YOUR LIFE WOULD BE LIKE, IF GOD DID NOT LOVE."

YET, GOD'S LOVE IS NOT COERCIVE. INSTEAD IT IS OFFERED TO THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, WHO HAVE THE CHOICE TO ACCEPT IT BY FAITH OR NOT.

JESUS DOES SPEAK OF A TIME OF JUDGMENT AND SORTING ONE FROM ANOTHER.

HOWEVER, CHRIST'S FOCUS AND HIS PURPOSE IN COMING TO EARTH-WAS NOT CONDEMNATION BUT SALVATION, AS IT IS RECORDED IN JOHN 3:16 & 17.

THIS LOVE AND GRACE ALSO, PROVIDES ETERNAL LIFE- NOT JUST IN THE FUTURE, BUT RIGHT NOW.

HERE, JESUS WAS CALLING NICODEMUS, AND THROUGH THE GOSPEL CALLING US, TO HAVE FAITH IN GOD'S LOVE, AND HIS WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE.

TRULY, THE SAYING "LET GO AND LET GOD"- IS NEVER MORE APPROPRIATE WHEN SEEKING RELIEF FROM THE BURDEN OF OUR OWN SINFULNESS.

OF COURSE THE MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S GRACE WOULD NOT BE REALIZED UNTIL JESUS WAS LIFTED UP ON THE CROSS FOR ALL TO SEE. AND THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S DEATH COULD NOT BE GRASPED UNTIL HIS RESURRECTION.

LISTEN TO THIS A POEM, BY AN UNKNOWN AUTHOR, THAT SUMMARIZES THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IN A POWERFUL WAY.

FOR GOD THE GREATEST GIVER.

SO LOVED	THE GREATEST DEGREE
THE WORLD	THE GREATEST COMPANY
THAT HE GAVE	THE GREATEST SACRIFICE
HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON	THE GREATEST GIFT
THAT WHOSOEVER	THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY
BELIEVETH	THE GREATEST SIMPLICITY
IN HIM	THE GREATEST ATTRACTION
SHOULD NOT PERISH	THE GREATEST PROMISE
BUT	THE GREATEST DIFFERENCE
HAVE	THE GREATEST CERTAINTY
EVERLASTING LIFE	THE GREATEST POSSESSION

THIS IS ONLY MADE POSSIBLE BECAUSE GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD IS GREATER THAN SIN, AND GOD'S DESIRE TO FORGIVE GREATER THAN HIS DESIRE TO CONDEMN.

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR THIS POWERFUL AND PRICELESS GIFT! AMEN

: