

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

JANUARY 6 - 10, 2020



Questions

FOR JESUS

SERMON SERIES

JANUARY 5 - FEBRUARY 23

MONDAY

John 3:1-21, 7:45-52, 19:38-40

In our continuing “Questions Asked of Jesus” series, this week’s centerpiece is “How can someone be born again?” Sanhedrin (ancient Israel’s legal court) member Nicodemus— “Nick at night”—visited Jesus with the apparent aim to disarm Him with charm. But Jesus was neither political nor interested in flattery; instead He rocked Nicodemus’ world with the seemingly unrelated challenge, “*You must be born again*” (John 3:7). Nicodemus had not come seeking salvation—as a committed, legalistic Pharisee, he undoubtedly felt righteous already via faithful Law-keeping. But Jesus loved Nicodemus too much to let him perish under such delusion.

Nicodemus had not fully considered others’ later question, “*What must I do to be saved?*” Paul’s Philippian jailer asked this in Acts 16:30; it was much like the Israelites’ “*What shall we do?*” question responding to Peter’s convicting sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:36-38). The “rich young ruler” queried Jesus similarly (Luke 18:18-23). But Nicodemus felt he already knew, applying the logic of religious legalism: keep trying harder until you stand righteous before God.

Nicodemus did not yet understand, despite the answer standing before him. “*Believe **on** the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*” (Acts 16:31, NKJV; emphasis added). “On” is important here, as it communicates all-in dependence upon Jesus’ righteousness and atoning sacrifice, one’s trust and surrender exceeding mere head knowledge. Peter’s related

answer, “*Repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38).

Nicodemus’ incredulous questions sound reasonable to unbelievers— “*How can a person be born when old? Can one enter a second time into their mother’s womb?*” (John 3:4)—though laughable to us. But the Bible provides hope regarding Nicodemus’ faith journey. He later challenged fellow Pharisees to examine Jesus justly, inviting their rebuke (John 7:50-51). After Jesus’ crucifixion, he joined Joseph of Arimathea in caring for the Lord’s corpse (John 19:30-38). Jesus apparently softened Nicodemus’ once-stony heart with loving truth.

What “Nicodemuses” do you know? Will you stand by silently and comfortably as they walk unwittingly toward judgment? Or will you share the truth in love?

QUESTION

Why did Jesus shift the dialog with Nicodemus to His “*You must be born again*” challenge? Was Jesus’ dialog with Nicodemus apparently fruitful? (What related evidence do we have?)

PRAYERS FOR PARS THEOLOGICAL CENTRE

Iran has 80 million people, of which an estimated 1.5 million are underground Christians living in an Islamic theocratic country. Pars (“Persia” in Farsi) was formed in 2010 to build, support and expand underground house churches. Because of its Christian/Iranian focus, Pars is viewed as an enemy of the state. Pray for its protection.

TUESDAY

John 1:29-34, 2:5-10, 4:7-10

One problem in Bible study is viewing each story or incident only as self-contained. It's easy to overlook context or miss emerging patterns and how the Spirit-inspired writer is painting a picture regarding God's will and ways. Having considered Nicodemus' life-changing dialog with Jesus yesterday, let's step back, first eyeing the Gospels and then John's account of initial events in Jesus' early ministry.

Why did John pen his Gospel, particularly when Mark, Matthew and Luke had done so similarly earlier? Each Gospel targeted different audiences and had a different emphasis. Matthew's focus was Jewish, showing Jesus as Messiah and rightful Heir to Israel's throne. Mark's Gospel likely shared Peter's reflections; fast-paced and action-oriented, its audience was Roman and stressed Jesus as the Suffering Servant. Luke's Gospel originally combined with Acts; some believe these were court briefs for Paul's Roman trials. Luke was meticulously researched, very Greek, presenting Jesus as the Perfect Man. John's Gospel was penned for new believers, emphasizing Jesus' deity—both the Christ and God the Son.

John opens his Gospel with Jesus' divine "genealogy" (John 1), different than Matthew's (tracing His line through Abraham—Matthew 1) and Luke's (detailing Jesus' human lineage back to Adam—Luke 3). Mark's Gospel offers no genealogy—a servant's ancestry is irrelevant. The Apostle John then transitions to John the Baptist—the prophesied

herald to the King (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1)—and Jesus' submission to baptism wherein He identifies obediently with humankind.

The Lord calls His first disciples (John 1:35-51) and performs His first public miracle at Cana's wedding (John 2), picturing God's desired intimacy with the Bride of Christ. In turning the ritual purification water into wine, Jesus illustrates God's new covenant supplanting the old. Christ then cleanses the temple, preparing things for right relationship with God. Jesus was unmoved afterward by the people's adulation at Passover—He wasn't running for office. Then the Nicodemus dialog (John 3)—Jesus called even religious "VIPs" to know Him. Afterward, the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4)—Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), including outcast "nobodies."

Where do you see yourself in this amazing, unfolding story? How is God calling you?

QUESTION

Why were there four Gospels? What's the significance of the Lord's first public miracle at the wedding at Cana?

PRAYERS FOR PARS THEOLOGICAL CENTRE

Gross abuses of power by Iran's leadership and on-going hardships suffered by the general population, coupled with little governmental aid, have led to a growing disillusionment with Islam and an increasing acceptance of Christianity. Pray for protection of the underground Christian church facing persecution and severe penalties.

WEDNESDAY

John 3:3-9; Genesis 3:12-19; Ephesians 2:1-5

Ever wonder why many Christian tenets seem paradoxical to unbelievers? For example, “*the last shall be first*” (Matthew 20:16) and “*when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Corinthians 12:10). In Thessalonica, was it fair when Paul’s and Silas’ adversaries called them “*men who have turned the world upside down*”? (Acts 17:6). We are commonly encouraged, biblically, to be “in the world but not of it.” Is following Christ so counter to the world’s ways?

As with God, humans are triune: body, soul and spirit. Before their rebellion, Adam and Eve were in perfect communion with our Creator, spirit-led with soul following and body third in line. After the fall, however, they became flesh-led, their souls following and spirits subordinated and withering in separation from God. This is our state from birth, a consequence of the original sin undergirding our fallenness—being “upside down” from how the LORD intended, naturally inclined toward selfishness and sin. We aren’t sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.

When one responds to the Holy Spirit’s prompting, sincerely asking God’s forgiveness and turning from sin while accepting Christ, that person is “born again” and miraculous things happen. All of their sins—past, present and future—are forgiven, their “sin slate” wiped clean (Is. 43:35). Due to Jesus’ atoning work on the cross—whereupon He took our deserved judgment fully and finally—the Savior thereby could make His final Calvary declaration, “*It is finished!*” (John 19:30).

Upon surrendering to Christ, we are legally justified (found innocent) in God’s eyes. Moreover, we receive Jesus’ holy standing before God and the Holy Spirit then indwells us—a “down payment” on eternity. The Spirit thereafter teaches, encourages and equips us to serve Him, demonstrating our restored “right-side up” orientation.

Unbelievers’ view that Christ followers are “upside down” is a matter of perspective. Paradoxically, it’s when we’re restored to right orientation and relationship with God—Spirit-led, our soul following closely and flesh subordinate—that the world sees us this way. Do you know anybody who is spiritually “upside down”? Do your life and conversations winsomely and lovingly show them Jesus Christ?

QUESTIONS

Why does the fallen world tend to see Christians as “upside down”?
What happens when we are born again?

PRAYERS FOR PARS THEOLOGICAL CENTRE

Pars is developing a three-year online Bachelor of Theology degree, secret week-long training conferences outside of Iran (typically in Turkey), mentoring and field ministry to support emerging leaders in evangelism, discipleship, pastoring and social action, counseling for leaders and members, Christian books in Farsi, multi-media ministries broadcasting video lectures into Iran. Pray for the increase of Christian leaders in Iran.

THURSDAY

Matthew 7:21-23; Romans 4:1-8; Ephesians 5:3-7

Dad was a proud, stubborn, “good person” heavy with self-righteousness. In later years, having not attended church in many years, he continued to refuse when invited to join me worshipping. Exasperated, I once asked, “What makes you think that you’re right with God, that you’ll go to heaven when you die?” Dad’s baffling answer: “Predestination.”

When some friends once were going through a hard time, I asked the wife, “How’s your relationship with Jesus Christ?” She responded, “I’m fine, and Jamie did the whole ‘born-again thing’ in high school.” I had numerous spiritual exchanges with a former colleague, a guy whose attitudes were pretty ungodly. In one of those conversations, he remarked, “I *may* be a Christian—I ‘said the words’ at youth camp as a kid.”

These discussions remind me not only what many people misunderstand regarding what salvation entails—touched upon earlier this week—but also what being “born again” is not. It is not saying some “magic words” meaninglessly and/or to please others—remember, “*God looks upon the heart*” (1 Samuel 16:7). Spiritual rebirth is **not** a system or a process to follow—Jesus doesn’t just show us the way, He *is* the Way (John 14:6). It is **not** a heavenly reward for “doing our very best for God”—that’s not a personal relationship but a legal one, the stuff of religion.

Saving belief also transcends mere head knowledge. One can know much about God without having a personal relationship with Him—“*Even the demons believe, and shudder*” (James 2:19). Many consider salvation sentimentally, maintaining that “God will welcome all ‘good people’ to heaven” regardless of their lifestyle or what they believe. However, spiritual rebirth is no mere, one-time “get-out-of-hell free” card—regeneration yields godly fruit, brokenness over sin, and desired faithfulness to God and His ways. As well, it is the *Object* of one’s faith—not faith’s sincerity or magnitude—which is foundational to redemption.

I led Dad in the sinner’s prayer on his deathbed. Was his prayer sincere and saving? Only the Lord knows. Judging another’s salvation is above my pay grade. But it’s not above God’s!

QUESTIONS

Why do many seem to think that salvation results merely from “saying the right words”? What are some examples of what “being born again” is not? What does “It is the *Object* of one’s faith—not faith’s sincerity or magnitude—which is foundational to redemption” mean?

PRAYERS FOR PARS THEOLOGICAL CENTRE

Pars has trained more than 500 Persian pastors, produced 25 video-based BA modules, broadcast 2,500+ hours of teaching via satellite TV, held 50+ formational conferences, organized two Iranian Leaders’ Forums, published a quarterly magazine about living like a Christian, and currently has about 350 students in its online BA degree program. Pray for Pars’ amazing staff.

FRIDAY

John 21:15-17; Luke 6:46-49; Mark 8:17-21

Let's conclude with some favorite questions the Savior asked. A key to loving others—and witnessing—is meeting people where they are. To do this well, we must ask good questions and listen intently and caringly to others' answers. Jesus was a Master here. Two favorite questions Christ posed are: “*Do you want to be healed?*” (John 5:6) and “*Who do you say that I am?*” (Luke 19:20). One's resultant answers underpin salvation.

A heartfelt, repentant and forgiveness-seeking “Yes!” response to “*Do you want to be healed?*”—relating to restoring right relationship with God—enables the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. Psychiatrists know that they cannot cure anyone's psychological disorders alone; therapists' success requires clients sincerely desiring wellness. As God the Son (Colossians 1:16), Jesus understands this supremely. Though the Healer, God does not impose healing—and His desired reconciliation—upon anyone, as that would be unloving.

The Apostle Peter excellently answered “*Who do you say that I am?*”—also fundamental to saving faith: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” (Matthew 16:16). One's response here distinguishes saving belief from something else. It's also a dividing line between true Christianity and cults self-labeled as “Christian”; not knowing Jesus as God the Son is not knowing Jesus.

Other favorite questions relate to Jesus' encounter with the adulterous woman entrapped by the Pharisees, “*Woman, where are [your accusers]? Has no one condemned you?*” (John 8:10). Our Redeemer deftly shamed her persecutors into leaving, undermining the “two or more witnesses” required for valid legal trials in ancient Israel (Deuteronomy 19:15). Jesus departed without condemning her, while righteously and lovingly admonishing, “*Go and sin no more*” (John 8:11).

Today's Scriptures feature other favorite questions, one indicating a saving relationship with Him: “*Do you love me?*” (John 21:17). There is also the convicting, “*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I say?*” (Luke 6:46) warning. I also appreciate Jesus' frustrated (highly paraphrased) “*Don't you pay attention and use your heads?*” questions of the disciples after feeding the multitudes (Mark 8:17-21). What questions do you lovingly ask regularly, especially of those who may not know Christ?

QUESTIONS

What is your favorite question that Jesus asked another? Why did Jesus ask the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5:6, “*Do you want to be healed?*” What are some of your key learnings in considering the questions that Jesus asked?

PRAYERS FOR PARS THEOLOGICAL CENTRE

Many Iranian Christians struggle with high levels of depression, anxiety, grief and loss, a shattered world view, and family dysfunction. They result in part from on-going abuse and overwhelming social problems that come with a hidden life in an oppressed society. To help, Pars has developed a Centre for Christian Counseling. It is in-person, online, and mobile in-country. Pray for its success.



Glenkirk Church | 1700 Palopinto Ave. Glendora, CA 91741 | 626.914.4833
www.glenkirkchurch.org |  @GlenkirkChurch |  Facebook: GlenkirkChurch