**Born To See**

**John 3:1-17**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night to talk with Him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”

You and I know that he misses the mark in that statement. He gets it partly right in saying that Jesus is a teacher come from God and intimating that only God could do these signs Jesus was doing. But he also completely misunderstands.

If we understand his statement to mean that Jesus IS God, come from God, then he is right. Reading what he says, it is clear that is not what he means. He is not fully with the program. How do we know? He says, “No one can do these signs that you do unless God is WITH him.” Yes, it is obvious that Nicodemus does not believe that Jesus IS God.

Jesus’ reply also makes that clear, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

“Truly, truly! I say to you…” When we see this phrase from the lips of Jesus, it is like He is saying, “Listen up! It is now time to pay attention! What I am about to say is of absolute importance. It is the unvarnished truth which has eternal consequences.”

Something else He says needs to be made clear. He says, “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” That phrase “born again” has taken on a whole life of its own in our world. A more accurate translation would be, “born from above.”

In other words, “Nicodemus, you are not quite understanding it completely. It is only those who have faith who truly understand. This faith comes from above, as one is baptized into me.”

What is the kingdom of God that one cannot see if they are not “born from above”? Is it the kingdom of heaven, paradise on the last day? Yes, but it is more than that!

Nicodemus is a Pharisee, but one who has a very high regard for Jesus for he calls Him “rabbi” and understands Him as one who has “come from God.” He also believes that “God is with Him.”

Nicodemus does not comprehend that Jesus is the One about which the Law and the prophets, especially the Torah spoke, the Christ. The Pharisees had already questioned John about his baptizing. John had declared that the One foretold from of old stood in their midst.

Jesus’ baptism also lies in the background of this entire conversation. At His baptism, the Spirit “came down,” descending upon Him from above and rested upon Jesus. When John the baptizer saw this, he was brought to recognize who Jesus is and confessed, “This One is the Son of God.”

From this testimony of John the Baptizer, and from other places in Scripture where Jesus speaks of the “kingdom” of God, we know that the kingdom is present in His person. It is only those with faith however, who will see Christ in that manner, as the Kingdom of God come among men.

You have heard it said that we walk by faith, not by sight. This is what true “seeing” is. We must be “born to see.” It is something that comes down from above and changes us. It makes us different. It opens our eyes of faith.

Jesus explains this in our text after Nicodemus asks, “How can these things be?”

Jesus replies, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except him who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And 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. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

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

Nicodemus was a member of the Pharisee and one of the Sanhedrin. He was supposed to be one of those be teaching the truthes of God to the children of Israel. But, as Jesus points out, he did not understand.

Judaism had wandered far from the truth, far from what had been revealed to them by God in Scripture. They were in love with the things of the world. They wanted a restoration of the nation of Israel. There was, and still is in Judaism, this expectation that when people live right before God, Israel will be restored as a great kingdom. It is why many are praying for the “restoration of Israel” today.

But are we much different in regard to love of the world?

How many people are as upset with their own sinfulness as they are with the state of the United States and what is going on in our country?

Do people put the same amount of energy and effort in the things of the faith as they do in the things of the world?

Consider the amount of time spent on each of the opposing pairs of things:

 Children sporting events – time in church and home devotions.

 Discussing politics – discussing things of the faith.

 Time in front of the TV – time with the Bible open and in prayer.

Should we ask the question, “What things go on your calendar first?” Is the first thing on your weekly calendar, time in God’s house to be continually renewed “from above” by Word and Sacrament? Or is it something else?

Is time to be refreshed in Christ the priority, or is it shoe-horned in if nothing else is going on?

When you plan vacation, do you bring the Bible along so that you can spend time each day in God’s Word, receiving refreshment “from above”? Do vacation days either begin or end in prayer? Do you figure out where you will be gathered at the Lord’s table for vacation to be refreshed and renewed in the faith even then?

I know how it goes now that it is summer. I have head it all. “It is too nice to be sitting inside church. Besides, we can worship God outside!” Really? I appreciate God’s gifts of His creation. Standing in a trout stream is a gorgeous way to spend a cool morning with steam rising along with the brookies. However, I am not renewed and refreshed in faith by Word in Sacrament if I am not where Christ has promised to visit me with His Presence in that most mysterious way.

Truly, truly I say unto you… We all know the second table of the Law – how we are to live our lives in regard to our neighbors. In fact, we can all point out the violations of ourselves and others in that regard. We especially can point out the sins of others.

But we often think less about, and neglect the first table of the Law. It is as if somehow, God cares less about how we treat Him, than how we treat our neighbor.

Truly, truly, I say unto you… All the commandments flow from the first one – out of fear, love, and trust in God above all things. God’s first three commandments address the issues raised earlier. His name is to be on our lips continually, in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. And while I could probably miss a meal or two to trim some of my excess middling-baggage, we are never to miss being kept holy by our Sabbath rest in Christ.

There are two sins that are brought out by those earlier questions.

First, let me address the Pharisees, the self-righteous sinners, in our midst. Pharisees heard those words and were thinking, “I hope some of those certain folks are present today and heard this sermon, those folks come up with too many excuses to miss services. They need to be called to repentance.”

 To you Pharisees looking around at others, I say, “Repent! You are not saved by the fact that you rarely miss gathering in God’s house. And dare I say it, I am sure your track record in regard to time in God’s Word and prayer is less than perfect. Repent of looking down your nose at others! Repent of thinking you are better when you are not!”

Now, to those who find themselves convicted in their sinfulness, who find themselves marked, knowing they have been less than faithful in being fed and nourished in Word and Sacament, you also repent.

Truly, truly I say to you both – to those repentant, “lift up your heads. Open your eyes.”

You are born to see. Your eyes are opened to see the Kingdom of God, you see Christ, the One who gave His life for the forgivness of sins.

You are baptized into Christ. In repentance, put to death the old Adam, the sinful nature, and be raised up in Christ. Your sinfulness, whether you have failed to put God first, or your Pharisaism thinking that you have, your failure to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength, Christ took into Himself and to the cross. His perfect love of sinners and His perfect obedience to the Father was sacrificed to forgive you.

Unfortunately, your life is lived in the wilderness. It is lived amongst the fiery serpents of the world. They have bitten us and their poison courses a raging path through our bodies, bringing with it death.

God’s One was lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. You are born to see this, to grasp Christ by faith.

You are born to see, as Paul declares, that whenever you eat and drink of Christ, you are proclaiming His death until He comes? (1 Corinthians 11:26) In your eating and your drinking, your eyes of faith are born to see the kingdom of God come to you – you see Christ’s body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins, hidden under the forms of bread and wine.

You are born again, born from above, born to see your place in God’s kingdom. You are part of the body of Christ when you eat and drink that body. It is not just something you “feel”. It is what you are. We are in Christ as Christ is in you.

In Christ we are born to see that we are a part of an eternal kingdom, the Kingdom of God’s Son. This world is passing away, but we are part of an eternal kingdom. We are granted life from the Father, through the sacrifice of His Son, grasped by faith wrought in us by His Spirit. And by that Spirit, we cling to the work of Christ alone, and in doing so, give all glory to the Father. Amen.