**Series: What Jesus Would Say**

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

John 3:1-13

May 4-5, 2013

**“Why The Religious Need to be Born Again”**

In his book, No Perfect People Allowed, John Burke asks—

“What do a Buddhist, a biker couple, a gay-rights activist, a transient, a high-tech engineer, a Muslim, a twenty-something single mom, a Jew, a couple living together, and an atheist all have in common?”

Answer—they are tomorrow’s church

-at first they will come as seekers—they will be on the perimeter, investigating, watching

-is this Christian faith genuine? Is Jesus worth following?

-this is the generation the church must reach if it is to survive—but how?

-in John 3, Jesus gives us a clue—for He has a conversation with a seeker—one even more unlikely than the list we just read—*read verses 1-2*

-seekers are generally associated with the irreligious

-but this man was anything but irreligious

-Nicodemus was a member of the Pharisees—the most religious group in Israel

-more—he was a leading member—John wants us to know Nicodemus was important

-part of the higher social strata—a member of the highest national body in charge of Jewish affairs—a Sanhedrin

-which helps explain why he came by night

*-like most seekers, he did not want to stand out*

-to engage with Jesus would not have been politically correct

-there was much to lose if he went public as a Jesus Seeker

-after all—Nicodemus was a recognized “God expert”

-*the* teacher—maybe Israel’s leading sage

-the seminary credentialed man in the know

-it would not be helpful to be caught as a SEEKER

-a man with serious questions for an untrained carpenter turned wannabe itinerant preacher

“We know”—he wants Jesus to understand from the start he is a man in the know—

-he is paid to know

-we know that You are a Teacher

-but more—there is something of God in your life—YOU ARE FROM GOD

-You have been commissioned by God, sent from God

-and then there are these signs—you are no ordinary teacher

*-give Nicodemus credit for seeing this*

-but then Jesus did other things that confused and baffled—certain inconsistencies, contradictions

-He healed the sick—but then He partied with prostitutes

-He taught the Word in the temple—and then He cleared it out

-He ate at the wrong houses, hung out with the wrong people, and healed on the wrong days

-Nicodemus had to find out for himself who Jesus really was—*for Jesus did not fit his categories*

1. Maybe Jesus was a *prophet*

-a modern day Jeremiah—someone willing to buck the establishment

-maybe he saw what Jesus did in a temple and thought—I wish I had the guts to do that

-a modern day Elisha doing these signs

1. Maybe Jesus was a man *wishing to be religious*—like Nicodemus

-someone Nicodemus could groom, mentor—work on the rough edges—make Jesus like him

-but Jesus did not seem the “Pharisee type”

1. Maybe Jesus was *the Messiah*—but this was a real stretch

-the Messiah Pharisees looked for would not look or act anything like Jesus

Most seekers come in with preconceived notions of Jesus

-actually all of us do—*so what does Jesus do when people come to check Him out?*

*-become “seeker sensitive”?*

-try to be relevant?

-market Himself as someone who can meet your needs?

-accommodate to people who want to follow Jesus on their terms?

-answer the questions people are asking?

-in this conversation—Jesus did none of the above

-in fact—He didn’t answer any of Nicodemus’ questions

*-He answered the questions Nicodemus did not ask!!*

Nicodemus begins by asking WHO—who are You?

-but here is the question Jesus answers—and it is the question seekers need answered—

1. *HOW CAN I GET INTO GOD’S KINGDOM?*

-how can I at least see the kingdom—become aware of what God is up to?

-how can I participate in the reality of God?—*read verse 3*

-we’ve lost the shock value of this verse

-illustration—latest Time—story on Duck Dynasty-a reality show about a fun loving clan of “Born again Christian duck call manufacturers”

-but what does this mean?—someone who has prayed the sinners prayer?

-someone who is an evangelical?

-what did Jesus mean?

1. First—it is striking that of all the people Jesus said—you must be born again—it was Nicodemus

-not to the woman caught in adultery, the woman at the well, the paralytic, the blind man, the crowd

-but to the religious man

-a man who had been brought up to measure everything by performance

-a man faithful to carry out the law, the added 613 rules and 1521 emendations

-what was He saying to him?

1. if you would see God’s dominion—find, experience, participate in eternal life—you will have to do something radical

-not a simple prayer to add Jesus to your life

-born again means going back to ground zero

-REMADE—regenerated, reconceived, reborn—not from below, but from above

-not “one more spiritual step”

-not some religious tune up—we’re talking spiritual overhaul

-not some religious makeup—but a spiritual makeover

-not renovation—but demolition and start over

Illustration—Borin house—not keeping the footprint

-which raised a second question for Nicodemus—*read verse 4*

-Nicodemus assumed Jesus was referring to a second physical birth

*-“You’re telling me that to be in God’s kingdom—I have to turn the clock back, I have to enter my mother’s uterus—climb up the birth canal?”*

*-“I need You to point me forwards—and you are pointing me back”*

-clearly he is thinking in rational, human terms

-still stuck in the biology, the physics—rather than theology

-born again language left him completely disoriented—it was all rather absurd

-but Jesus did not answer this question either

-He did not answer HOW? He answered WHY?

1. *WHY DOES ONE HAVE TO EXPERIENCE SPIRITUAL BIRTH?—read verses 5-8*
   1. unless there is a rebirth from above

-a rebirth of the Spirit—not of the flesh

-a work that transcends psychological change, a moral turning, a religion of works, an observance of rules

-a work that alone leads to a radical reversal of the direction of the will—a change in one’s heart

-a work not of our accomplishment but His—*there will not be the necessary change*

-it will be a change on the outside, change that is superficial

*-and this gets no one into the kingdom*

-this is why you have to have rebirth

* 1. but you can‘t manufacture this—systematize this—control this—like you have with your religious codes

-the Spirit is elusive, unpredictable, incalculable, mysterious, and disruptive

-we have no idea when—from where—where to

-we just know His effects

-for God is like the wind—whose intensity is determined by the context

-you can’t determine, regulate, and control Him, domesticate Him

-and the same will be true for those who are in the Spirit, by the Spirit, of the Spirit

-there is a certain predictability—that’s why Nicodemus cannot figure things out—fit in neat boxes

-the conversation is coming to a close—and from this account, Nicodemus remains a seeker

-still asking questions—but missing the question he should be asking—*read verse 9*

-true to form—Jesus does not answer his question

-He now answers a more probing—more disturbing question

1. *WHY DO SO MANY SEEKERS REMAIN SEEKERS?—read verses 10-12*

-Jesus feigns amazement with Nicodemus” obtuseness, denseness

-this is irony—aren’t you supposed to be *the* Teacher of Israel—you are the reverend doctor professor—master of divinity, doctor of theology, high mucky muck, and you do not get it?

-have you never heard of God and His power to do the impossible? (Bruner)

-never read about the renewing work of the Spirit spoken by the prophets?

-Ezekiel 11:19-20—a day will come when I will put a new spirit in them—and I will be their God

-Ezekiel 36:25-27—I will sprinkle water on you and cleanse you—and I will put My Spirit in you—and I will be your God

-did you not read in the prophets of a day God would bring a radical change, a circumcision—not of the flesh—but of the heart—a coming of the Spirit?

-what—did you buy your degree?

-Jesus has this way of exposing those who thought they knew everything as those who know nothing

-but look closer—and it’s not Nicodemus intellect that was really the issue

-Jesus knew Nicodemus was plenty smart—*it was not his density but his receptivity*—*verse 11*

-he is sensing what Jesus is calling for—radical transformation

*-not to be a fan—but a follower*

-and like most seekers-this is more than he cares to seek

-and so he remained stuck at earth level, entry to kingdom level—verse 12

1. unwilling to embrace the One who has made possible our reconciliation

-the One who alone has access to heaven—verse 13

-the One who made possible the opened heaven—the Catalyst for divine activity

-the One who makes possible eternal life—verse 15

-the Savior who rescues humanity—verse 16

1. unwilling to change a lifestyle—verse 19

-seekers generally prefer to stay at the level of seeking—for fear of exposing a life they wish to keep, a position they don’t want to jeopardize

-like Nicodemus—who remained a seeker—like some in the church

-ready to believe, but unwilling to believe—belief is never attributed to his name

*-like most seekers—he was never far from the kingdom—but he remained outside*

CONCLUSION

In his Not a Fan, Kyle Idleman, like David Platt and others who are unimpressed by superficial American church goers, notes—

“There comes a time when you need to define the relationship. It can be awkward, uncomfortable, but eventually every healthy relationship reaches this point. Is it casual or committed? Have things moved beyond admiration to devotion, from a fan to a disciple”

-where are you?

1. -will it be a religion or a relationship?