

VCEFC Daily Devotion
Feb 6-Feb 12, 2006

Feb 6 John 2:13-17 Jesus clears the temple

Notes:

- Passover: It commemorated the deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt; it was one of the three great feasts of the Jews, celebrated in March or April and followed by the weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread. All adult Jewish males were expected to go to Jerusalem (Deut. 16:16), although not all did.
- Selling animals and exchanging money: Since the Jews could not come to the feast with empty hands (Deut. 16:17), for the convenience of the pilgrims coming from a distance to Jerusalem to worship, the priests in Jerusalem instituted a market for selling animals for sacrifice and for exchanging common currency for temple money (with a 12.5% charge). But this ran contrary to what God had originally intended (Deut. 12:5-7) He wanted the people to bring from their own flock the best animals for sacrifice. This would make the offering more personal and self-sacrificial. Now the Jews could bypass all of this and still carry out their religious rituals.
- The temple court: a place which had been set aside for Gentiles to come and seek God in prayer. But the Jews had turned this into a market place of haggling, cheating and merchandising.
- Jesus clears the temple: Jesus as the Son of God has the authority to cleanse His Father's house. The cleansing was appropriate for the season of Passover because that was the time when all the Jews were supposed to cleanse their houses of all leaven (which refers to sins as in 1 Cor. 5:6-8; Gal. 5:9). The temple had become infected with the sin of money making, and needed to be cleansed.

Meditate: Different people go to worship God with different attitudes and purposes. Some seek for self-interest (the people selling sacrificial animals, and exchanging money), some are unprepared (those who bought the animals in the temple for convenience sake), some just fulfill certain religious obligations. Reflect on your own attitude and purpose of going to church to worship God. Are you a true worshipper? How can you prove it?

Feb 7: John 2: 18-25 The new locus of worship- the new temple

Notes:

- Being demanded by His critics to perform a miraculous sign to prove His authority, Jesus pointed to Himself as the new temple- the new locus of worshipping God, and told them the greatest miracle He would perform: His own death and resurrection, which would create a new covenant with God and make the services of the temple no more useful. However, His audience misunderstood Him as usual, and thought that He was referring to the Jerusalem temple.
- By pointing out the deficits of the institution of the temple, Jesus confronted the misdirection and brokenness of the Jewish religious institution. Through His ministry He wanted to show people that the real activity of God, the real temple, was Jesus Christ Himself.

- Many believed: the basis of their faith was miraculous signs. That kind of faith is inadequate. A deeper faith must look beyond the miracles to the true significance of Jesus in one's life, which leads to a personal relationship with Jesus.
- Jesus knew all men: Jesus understood about all of humanity and its capacity for deception.

Meditate:

1. What does "Jesus is the focus of our worship" mean to you? Have you ever misplaced your focus of worship?
2. Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? What is the basis of your faith? Is it what Jesus does for you? Or Who He is?

Feb 8: John 3:1-21 True faith → From seeing signs to born again → seeing and entering the Kingdom of God.

Notes:

- The story of Nicodemus is unique to the Gospel of John (not recorded in other Gospels) He is a member of the Pharisaic party, the strictest, most fundamental sect within the ruling Jewish religious authority. He is also a ruler or leader among the Jews and is mentioned in other two passages (7:50-52; 19:38-42)
- V. 1-2 Being impressed by Jesus' miraculous signs, Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, suggesting that (1) he wanted to have a private conversation with Jesus; (2) he wanted to go deeper with Jesus by learning more from Him; (3) he did not want to openly confess his faith in Jesus for the fear of the Jews.
- V. 8 Born of the Spirit: a gift from God, which is beyond human control. Without the Spirit's work of cleansing and renewal, no one can see the true significance of the Kingdom of God, and thus cannot enter the Kingdom.
- V. 8 The word translated "wind" also means "spirit". The mystery and freedom of the Spirit of God is analogous to the mystery and freedom of the wind that comes and goes.
- V. 9 Being a religious teacher, Nicodemus' rich religious knowledge could not lead him to a true understanding of Jesus' words.
- V 13 Jesus who descended from heaven is the qualified revealer of the heavenly things.
- V. 14-15 When the lives of the Israelites were threatened by bites from poisonous snakes, Moses, as instructed by God, made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole, so that any one who gazed at the bronze snake would be healed. (Number 21: 4-9). Likewise, anyone who looks at the Son of man (Jesus) lifted up in crucifixion and believes will be saved from the curse of sin.
- V. 16 The entire mission of Jesus is rooted in God's love for the world.

Meditate:

1. Are you a born again Christian? Give evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.
2. Can you see the true significance of the Kingdom of God in your life?

Feb 9: John 3:22-36 The witness of John the Baptist: Jesus is from above.

Notes:

- v. 22 Jesus baptized: Only the Gospel of John mentioned about this. However, John later in 4:2 clarifies that “it was not Jesus who baptized, but His disciples.” This baptism authorized by Jesus served the same purpose as John’s baptism-calling people to repentance.
- V. 25 The argument over ceremonial washing: It probably involved some debate about whether or not baptism produced purification and whose baptism was superior.
- V. 26 The disciples of John exposed their competitive spirit. They harbored considerable envy for Jesus’ fame (everyone is going to Him).
- V. 27-30 John the Baptist corrects the rivalry.. He affirms that only God is the authentic source of all good gifts. Jesus’ success in His ministry is God-given. In this way, John the Baptist shifts his disciples’ focus away from the vexing issue of Jesus’ popularity to the true source of the authority to minister. He portrays Jesus as the bridegroom of His people. He is content to play the role of a friend who points others to Jesus, thus “He must become greater, I must become less.”
- V. 31-32 Jesus’ revelation is authoritative because of His heavenly origins (He has first-hand information) and because of His absolute sovereignty (above all).
- v. 34 Jesus’ words are the Father’s words: This is a common theme in John’s Gospel.
- v. 35-36 Jesus is the only way to salvation. Accepting or rejecting the revelation of the Son will result in eternal salvation or eternal condemnation. Eternal life is a present reality for whoever believes in the Son.

Meditate:

1. Would you harbor envy if other people are more successful than you are? What have you learned from John’s response to his disciples?
2. What does the statement, “He must become greater, I must become less”, mean to you?

Feb 10: John 4:1-26

- A contrast: In the previous chapter, Jesus encounters Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, who is incapable to comprehend and accept God’s revelation through Jesus, and in this chapter, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman, who not only able to understand Jesus’ words, but also testifies for Him, which results in the conversion of a number of her fellow Samaritans. The story of the learned, yet perplexed, Nicodemus is a sharp contrast to the simple, yet enthusiastic, faith of the Samaritan woman.
- Samaritans: They differed with the Jews in two ways. First, they chose Gerizim instead of Zion as their holy mountain. Second, they recognized only the Pentateuch (The first five books of the Old Testament) as Scripture. The rivalry between Samaritans and Jews had a long history by this time. The Samaritans had impeded the restoration of Jerusalem after the Babylonian Exile and helped Syria in wars against the Jews. The Jews in turn had burned down the Samaritan temple on Gerizim in 128 B. C. The hostility was mutual, and they avoided interaction with each other.
- V.1-3 Jesus has to leave Judea because the Pharisees’ knowledge of His popularity poses a threat to His mission in the region of Judea.

- V. 6 sixth hour: noon (the hours were counted from 6 a.m.), i.e. the hottest time of the day. Jesus is so tired that he needs to sit down and rest for a while.
- V. 7-9 Jesus starts a conversation with a Samaritan woman: Jewish men were expected to avoid contact with women, including talking with their own wives on the street. However, Jesus disregards the taboos and chooses to cross this geographical, religious and ethnic barrier to reach out to a thirsty soul.
- V. 10-15 The gift of God and the living water: refer to the words and the person of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, Who will give true satisfaction to the deepest longing of the soul, and will transform a life into a well that “wells up”.
- V. 16-18 Jesus turns the conversation because the woman does not perceive the spiritual intent of His words. He has to help her see her true condition and her real need for the true living water that quenches thirst. Unless one is spiritually thirsty, one will not desire living water. When the woman sees her true condition before God, she will understand Jesus’ offer.
- V. 19-20 The woman acknowledges what Jesus says about her past is true. She changes the topic to some religious issues, so as to avoid further disclosure of her personal, sinful life.
- V. 21-26 True worshipper: (1) Know whom you are worshipping: The Father. (2) Know where you are worshipping: in Spirit and in truth: The new life born of the Spirit, living out Christ-likeness (the truth). Thus, true worshippers worship everywhere (no specific place) all the time, as they live out the new spiritual lives within them into Christ-likeness. The Father seeks true worshippers, not good worship.

Meditate:

1. What does this story teach us about the way God relates to people? What does it tell us about the nature of Christian community?
2. Have you received the gift of God- the living water? How does this affect the focus and direction of your life?
3. Are you a true worshipper whom the Father seeks?

Feb 11: John 4:27-42

Notes:

- V. 28-30, 39-42: The encounter with Jesus totally changes the life of the Samaritan woman. Her spiritual thirst is quenched by the living water that Jesus offers her. She leaves her water jar and goes back to her town, because “she abandons the bringing of water for the bringing of man to Christ.”. Indeed, it takes great courage for the Samaritan woman to bring the good news to those who have rejected her. But the living water grants her courage, and she regains her voice in the community. Her witness is heard and believed. One sign of discipleship is the testimony given to others- words that eagerly spill out because of the preciousness of discovery. However, it is also important to note that people only come to true faith when they have come and seen and experienced Christ for themselves.
- v. 31-34 Jesus finds nourishment in His relationship with God the Father, by doing His Father’s will, and by completing His Father’s work. True spiritual food that can nourish the growth of spiritual life is obtained by DOING rather than just

KNOWING God's will. That explains why many people accumulate knowledge of God but their lives do not bear spiritual fruits.

- V. 35 Four months is the approximate interval between sowing and harvesting. After sowing, the farmer has to wait for the harvest. However, for spiritual harvest, there is no need to wait, because Jesus has planted the seed and now the harvest is coming in. Evangelism is a cooperative effort, in which the preparatory work of God joins with our witness to what He has done and is doing in the world.

Meditate:

1. What is your true heart's desire? Is it bringing water to quench your thirst or bringing people to Christ?
2. What kind of practices have you engaged in for the nourishment of your spiritual life?
3. Have you "opened your eyes and look at the field" and seen that the crops are ripe for harvest (i.e. people are ready to receive Christ)? Jesus has done the hardest part- He died on the cross, and we have the privilege to reap the benefits of His labor- to participate in His salvation plan for the world. Are you ready to go?

Feb 12: John 4: 43-54

Notes:

- V 43-45 The Galileans welcomes Jesus as a miracle-worker rather than a prophet or Messiah.
- v. 46-47: Capernaum is about 15-20 miles from Cana. The royal official comes all the way to beg Jesus to go and heal his son who is at the point of death.
- V. 48: In speaking to the man, Jesus also speaks to all the Galileans and rebukes them for being sign-seekers whose faith are based on seeing miracles, not on seeing Jesus for who He really is.
- V. 49-54 Note the progression of the faith of the official: First he believes that his son will be healed if Jesus goes to his house, then he believes the word of Jesus, and finally he believes in Jesus and his entire household follows him in that life-changing belief.

Meditate:

1. What is Jesus to you? A miracle worker? Or the Lord of your life?
2. What does it mean to "take Jesus at His word"? How does your trust in Jesus' words affect your choices in life?