

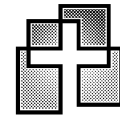
The Gospel of John



Notes From the Podium

These notes are intended to augment your own reading and study of the lesson. Please use as an aid to help you incorporate the main message of the lesson into your lecture.

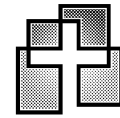
- I. Jesus' view of the Temple elite - this is important to understand as it brings clarity to Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus.
 - a. Jesus says "destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up." He says, "destroy this Temple" not "I will destroy this Temple" or "the Temple will be destroyed." Rather, Jesus is implying that **they** will destroy this Temple – the temple elite.
 - i. To what is Jesus referring when He says "temple?" There are three meanings. First, His body – His body is the true temple/tabernacle of God. Second, the Jerusalem Temple which is the center of Jewish Worship. Third, the cosmos/universe is also alluded to. (The Temple was understood to be a micro-cosmos – a thorough reading of Genesis and the construction of the Temple reveals the 'temple' to be a micro-cosmos in which man approaches God to offer sacrifice.)
 - ii. Each of these three meanings can be applied when Jesus says He will "raise it up." First, He will resurrect His body. Second, He will raise a new structure of living stones, His Church, that will be the center of man's worship of God offering Him an acceptable sacrifice of the True Lamb. Third, He will "raise" or inaugurate a new creation, a new beginning for the created order, for the cosmos.
 - iii. Throughout the gospel when Jesus exhorts His Church to watch, He is referring to our watching on all three of these levels. First we watch for our own death as a personal encounter of dying with Christ and thereby rising with Him. Second, we watch for Christ's coming in the Church as He gives Himself entirely to His faithful in and through the Church **mind** (Sacred Scripture, Church Teaching), **body** (the Holy Eucharist), and **soul** (Baptism, Confirmation, etc...). Third, we watch for Christ's (cosmic) coming at the end of *History* as we await His return at the end of time. This is the "advent" posture of the church. This has always been noted liturgically in significant ways – not the least of which is the ancient posture of facing east when celebrating Mass. It is a misconception to say that "the priest used to have his back to the people." Rather, he and the people are gathered, faced in the same direction, representing the "advent" posture of the whole Church, waiting for the return of Christ in history. Because the sun rises in the east it symbolically represents the direction from which the True Light of the world would come. And so the people and the priest would all face east, waiting...
 - iv. Because of the threefold meaning of "temple" Jesus speaks in a complex way, addressing all three meanings simultaneously.



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- b. This is the view John depicts Jesus having toward mere ‘human faith’: It is “destroying” and will destroy the cosmos, it is destroying and will destroy the Temple of Jerusalem (the practice of Israel’s faith), and it is destroying and will destroy Jesus, the true Tabernacle of God.
 - c. This view of Jesus demonstrated in the Temple sets the stage for His encounter with Nicodemus.
- II. Nicodemus – his dialog with Jesus is intended to contrast the gift of supernatural Faith against the mere natural faith of Nicodemus and the temple priests.
- a. Faith.
 - i. There is a difference between human faith and the supernatural gift of Faith. We use human faith to come to knowledge all the time.
 - 1. *Example of human faith* – “I was not present when man landed on the moon in 1969, however, I believe he did.” This is an example of human faith that leads to the belief that something is true because it is reasonable and worldly evidence suggests it to be so.
 - 2. *Example of divine Faith* – “I believe that Jesus is God made man.” This is not a statement of human faith. Rather, it is a declaration of divine Faith. Such a statement can only be made when a man’s intellect is informed by something other than mere human reason and worldly evidence – when it is informed by God through the gift of Faith.
 - ii. As we read this passage with Nicodemus we must understand that Faith in Jesus as the messiah and Eternal Son of the Father comes from God and is therefore regarded as a divine gift. Recall the times in which people profess this type of Faith in Jesus and how He responds in these or similar words, “no mere man has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.” (Matthew 16:17)
 - b. Interpreting this passage of John requires one to recall Jesus’ encounter in the Jerusalem Temple (a temple that has become one of mere human faith) and an understanding of the name “Nicodemus.”
 - i. After this encounter in the Temple and His prophetic statement about the “Temple,” John records that Jesus did not trust Himself to man because He knew them and did not need the witness of man – in other words He has no need for “human faith.” John identifies Nicodemus as a “man” deliberately in this context to show that Nicodemus is part of this “temple elite” to whom Jesus does not appeal.
 - ii. “Nicodemus” means “people crusher.” This name represents what mere human faith can do – crush people. In Our Lord’s words, place heavy burdens upon them.
 - iii. Putting the above together combined with the general sense of John that Nicodemus is a naturally good man we see that Nicodemus represents both the best and worst of human faith. Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus is an encounter with a man who represents the whole range of human faith. Notice ‘human faith’

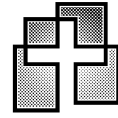


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(in the person of Nicodemus) approaches the true God enveloped in darkness, at night.

- iv. Despite the fact that Nicodemus is drawn to the Light of Christ and is ready to confess that Jesus is the Messiah, he is still enveloped in darkness.
- c. Now that it is clear Jesus is taking on “human faith” and declaring it to be deficient, what then is the remedy being offered? And what is the obstacle to that remedy?
 - i. The Remedy Jesus offers – one must be born anew if he is to enter the Kingdom of God. He must be born of water and the Spirit.
 1. The Greek word translated as “anew” can mean both “again” or “from above.” Jesus is ‘double speaking’ again. He addresses several points at once. To be born anew in the sense of “again” is to imply a “re-thinking” – in other words “think again.” To be born “from above” implies a supernatural birth in the Holy Spirit. This birth begins by receiving the gift of divine Faith from above.
 2. “Grace builds on nature.” This is a Christian principle that simply means that as a rule the grace of God works with the natural order and builds upon it. Consequently, our Faith never asks us to abandon reason, rather it builds upon it. One can see Jesus’ double meaning of being “born again” and “born from above” as a perfect example of this principle. Jesus’ invitation to be born anew is an invitation on a natural level to re-think what Nicodemus thinks he knows. The hope is that Nicodemus’ rethinking on a natural level might help him be open to the grace of receiving the divine gift of Faith. If he does rethink on a natural level then he would begin the process of being born “from above” and his next step would be to accept the gift of Faith from above.
 3. The process of being born from above continues by the gift of Faith (from above) leading one to fulfill Our Lord’s prescription of being born by water and the Spirit – Baptism. This is the remedy to the problem of mere human faith.
 - ii. The obstacle (hidden in human faith) to receiving the gift of divine Faith that leads to baptism (necessary to be born anew) is self-righteousness.
 1. Self-righteousness is a greater obstacle to divine Faith than sin. Sinners are accepting the gift from above, the Temple elite are not. Why? Because Self-righteousness is hiding behind human faith.
 2. Self-righteousness is the reliance upon one’s own self as the only authority. Divine Faith is a gift offered by God that cannot be accepted if a man places his authority over and above God’s. To be born from **above/another** is, in other words, to submit oneself to that which is over and above Him – God. This is contrary to a self-righteous man who is in himself the only authority and will submit to no one but himself.



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3. This problem of self-righteousness which is hidden in human faith is not only an obstacle to divine Faith but is also the problem that has led to the destruction of the Temple (in all three senses). Self-righteousness, not submitting to God's authority over oneself, led to the destruction of the cosmos/temple (original sin), the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem (60-80AD), and the Temple of God/Jesus (Crucifixion).
4. Jesus makes the point that Nicodemus's mind, which is informed by Sacred Scripture, should be all the more ready to accept what Jesus is saying. However, the lesson here is that to be merely "informed" by Sacred Scripture does not necessarily mean to be "formed" by it. Such is the case with Nicodemus.

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