

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 2 November 2014

No. T0857

Speaker: Mr. Gordon Kell

Some journeys Jesus made: Jesus in Jerusalem - John 2:13-3:36

This morning we are going to look the visit of Jesus to Jerusalem and Judea recorded in John 2:13-3:36. The passage can be divided to five key parts:

1. Jesus cleanses the temple (John 2:13-17)
2. Jesus gives a sign (John 2:18-21)
3. Jesus deals with superficial faith (John 2:23-25)
4. Jesus speaks to Nicodemus (John 3:1-21); and finally
5. John the Baptist exalts Jesus (John 3:22-36)

1. Jesus cleanses the temple (John 2:13-17)

At the beginning of our passage we read, *“Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, ‘Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!’ Then His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up’”* (John 2:13-17)

The passage begins just before the Passover when Jesus visits the temple and discovers the marketplace which had been established in the temple court of the Gentiles. Animals were being sold and moneychangers were sitting changing Roman currency into Jewish. In a remarkable act Jesus drives the traders out of the temple. I say remarkable because we see Jesus in a new way. This is not the lowly gentle character acting in grace that we are so familiar with but a powerful man with a real physical presence. My experience of markets traders is that they protect their interests at all costs! You only have to compare Paul’s experience at Philippi and Ephesus to see what happened when the Gospel came into conflict with commercial interests. Yet, in John 2:13-22, traders and customers fled before an angry Saviour.

Jesus often demonstrated His power over disaster, the devil, disease and even death with just the spoken word. And this power was displayed with great meekness. Here it is different. Jesus demonstrates forcefulness in contrast to the lowliness so consistently seen throughout His earthly ministry. His power to forgive, heal and release from the power of disease and death could not be resisted. In the same way His power to drive out those who traded in the temple dedicated to the worship of God, was overwhelming. We should never forget Jesus was Immanuel - God in the midst of His creation. He always maintained complete power over creation and on this occasion we have a rare glimpse of His raw power to drive out unrighteousness.

It is worth considering that God does not take kindly to commercialising spiritual things or, to put it more bluntly, making money out of Christianity. The Lord said we couldn’t serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24) and those determined to act in such a way put themselves under God’s judgment.

2. Jesus gives a sign (John 2:18-21)

Unable to withstand the actions of the Lord in driving out the market traders from the temple the Jews can only ask Jesus for a sign. *“So the Jews answered and said to Him, ‘What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”* (John 2:18-21)

The Jews often resorted to asking Jesus for signs to confirm who He was. In fact, the ministry of Jesus constantly demonstrated that He was the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. What was needed was not a sign, but the simple faith to receive Him into their hearts. John at the beginning of the Gospel wrote, *“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But*

as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:10-13).

Jesus gives them a sign. He tells them, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"* (John 2:19). They misunderstand this statement by thinking that He was speaking about the temple at Jerusalem. But He was speaking of His body and his death and resurrection (John 2:21). It is interesting to note that Ezekiel 10 records that the glory of God, which had first descended on the Tabernacle in Exodus and then upon Solomon's temple, later departed from the temple and had not returned. The temple that the Jews referred to was given the honour of being called the "house of God" but God did not dwell there.

When God gave instruction for the building of the tabernacle He said, *"And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them"* (Exodus 25:8). Now, He was not hidden in the temple behind the veil in the Holy of Holies. God Himself was now present in the Person of Jesus. God had never been so close to His people. Yet this was the Person they were rejecting and would ultimately send to the cross but who would rise again in all the power of resurrection - *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."*

This was a mystery the Jews did not understand and people today still do not understand. But, as John explains, the first disciples remembered what Jesus had said and believed. Today, the disciples of Jesus continue to believe in Him as the resurrection and the life.

3. Jesus deals with superficial faith (John 2:23-25)

Jesus' visit to Jerusalem also served to highlight what we might call superficial faith, *"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man"* (John 2:23-25)

John records this superficial faith in these verses and later in John 6:1-14 when people followed Jesus after He had miraculously fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. Then at the end of the same chapter we read, *"From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away?' But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" (John 6:66-68)*

These verses show us the difference between superficial and real faith. Those who followed Jesus for ulterior motives eventually withdrew but Peter gives voice to what every true Christian believes, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (John 6:68)

4. Jesus speaks to Nicodemus (John 3:1-21)

The character of Nicodemus is a very appealing one. He was Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews and because of his position in the Jewish hierarchy he came secretly by night to speak with Jesus (John 3:2). But he **did** come. We all come in different ways to Jesus; the important thing is that we **do** come. Nicodemus also came out of conviction, *"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"* (John 3:2). He had reflected deeply on what he had seen and heard and this drew him to the Saviour.

But I doubt Nicodemus was expecting the challenging way Jesus spoke to him. Jesus gets straight to the point: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John 3:3)

What Jesus says confuses Nicodemus but Jesus explains that unless we are born of water and the Spirit, we cannot enter the kingdom of God. This is a reference to the word of God (see Ephesians 5:26) and the Spirit of God as the means by which spiritual, as opposed to natural birth, takes place. The plain message was that whatever advantages Nicodemus had as a godly Jew he needed the salvation Jesus had come to provide.

It has often been commented that we would have expected Jesus to speak to Nicodemus about worship and to tell the women at Sychar's well, in John 4:1-26, about the need to be born again. But God's grace is paramount. The first need is to be born again and it does not matter how good we think we are, we need God's salvation. Equally John 4 teaches us that no matter how failing we are, God can transform us into worshippers.

New birth is the work of the Spirit. Like the wind it is unseen but its effects are clearly evident.

This new teaching confounded Nicodemus but Jesus expected that those who were teachers in Israel ought to have an understanding of these things. They should have known about the coming Messiah and the salvation He would

bring. Simeon and Anna certainly did in Luke 2:25-38. But Nicodemus was proof, in spite of his undoubted qualities, that the spiritual leaders of Israel were unprepared for the Saviour who was then present with them or mindful of the heavenly sphere into which He would take His people, *"Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"* (John 3:10-12).

Jesus then unfolds this mystery. He was the Saviour come down from heaven and by His death upon the cross would bring about a salvation received only by faith, *"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:13-15).

The basis of the salvation was the love of God and sacrifice of the Son of God. This is expressed in the wonderful words of John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

Here we have the greatest Person, expressing the greatest love, for those in the greatest need, by giving the greatest gift, and extending the greatest invitation to have the greatest gain. This wonderful two thousand year old message is still broadcast through the world and still reaches into the hearts of some who hear it.

John 3:17 adds that *"God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."*

Jesus goes on to contrast the effect of darkness within the heart of man with the blessings resulting from God's light shining into our hearts and lives. *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God"* (John 3:19-21)

5. John the Baptist exalts Jesus (John 3:22-36)

In the final part of the passage we have been looking at we move into Judea and learn of the baptisms conducted by the disciples of Jesus and John the Baptist.

"After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. For John had not yet been thrown into prison" (John 3:22-24). John hears of the numbers coming to Jesus. Whether those who reported this were looking for a negative response from John in regard to His work is uncertain. But what it did do was to give John the opportunity to exalt Jesus.

"Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified - behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!' John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, "I am not the Christ," but, "I have been sent before Him"'" (John 3:25-28)

There is a wonderful humility about John the Baptist given for our learning. He describes himself as the friend of the bridegroom: *"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled"* (John 3:29)

John then joyfully accepts that Jesus takes the first place and that his ministry is coming to a close: *"He must increase, but I must decrease"*, he says (John 3:30).

He also distinguishes the heavenly character of Christ, the Son of God, and his own earthy ministry: *"He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all"* (John 3:31)

Jesus had already spoken to Nicodemus about the understanding of heavenly things (John 3:12). Here further mention is made of the revelation of what is from heaven and the spiritual blessing we enter into as a result of God's love, the Saviour's work and the ministry of the Holy Spirit: *"And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure"* (John 3:32-34).

John 3 ends on a profound note. John's Gospel is all about the love of God revealed through the Son of God. The divine love is expressed in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. This love is eternal but expressed in time. The Father loves the Son, the Son of God has revealed the love and grace of God and through faith in the Saviour we have eternal life: *"The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him"* (John 3:35-36)

I would like to end my talk this morning by going back to Nicodemus. His story does not end in John 3 but continues in John 7, when in John 7:45-49 the officers sent to arrest Jesus return, *"Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, 'Why have you not brought Him?' The officers answered, 'No man ever spoke like this Man!' Then the Pharisees answered them, 'Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."*

It is at this point that Nicodemus stands up for Jesus, *"Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, 'Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?' They answered and said to him, 'Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee."* (John 7:50-52)

As we know, ultimately Jesus is arrested, judged unjustly and crucified. In John 19, after the death of Jesus another secret disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, requests from Pilate the body of Jesus and he and Nicodemus bury Jesus, *"After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby"* (John 19:38-42).

It is very touching that the Scripture says, *"Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night"* (John 7:50) Nicodemus had personally heard Jesus say, *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:14-15).

Nicodemus had seen those words fulfilled and the love expressed at Calvary had transformed him from a secret disciple to one who unashamedly devoted himself to the Saviour. May the Saviour's love have the same transforming impact in our lives and enable us to demonstrate His love to others.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.