

Sermon Series: “How Do I Invite Them?” Lord of Life—3/19/2000

Title: “How Do I invite the religious?”

Text: John 3: 1-16

Introduction: Illus.: The Agony of Change

Theme: Many very religious people have a need to be reintroduced to Jesus so that they don’t stay in their religious prejudice about church and God; rather, so that they will find faith and the hope of heaven in Jesus.

Understanding the characteristics of a religious, disconnected person

- They may have heavy-duty religious credentials
 - Nicodemus was among the elite of the elite—but as teacher was spiritually ignorant (9-10)
 - Don’t be fooled by past religious activity—it often hides shallow, present understanding of God, grace, and Jesus
- They may appear or think of themselves as “righteous”
 - But does it point to God or to them—“Let your light shine in such a way before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Mat 5: 16
 - **ILLUS.: THE ARROGANCE OF SELF-PRIDE**
 - Nicodemus could not see how spiritual rebirth possible because he was not looking for a “God-thing” in his life
 - What tips you off to this is a gnawing insecurity/guilt that they haven’t and can’t make God happy
 - “When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their work.” Rom 4: 4-5
- They are scared to death of “organized religion”
 - Nicodemus came late at night—afraid of what religious elite might say—guilt thrown—persecution endure
 - Many “religious” unchurched have been burned by less than Gospel-centered Christians of past—won’t trust easily
 - Wary that they will be trapped into another religion of rules/laws they hide behind the wall of their religiosity

Developing a grace centered witness to the religious

- Don’t get caught up in the religious jargon wars (vs 3)
 - With all the religious wars over “born again” terminology, it was not even what Jesus said—“born from above”
 - Keep your conversation simple, Christ-focused and your purpose about winning souls not debates
 - **ILLUS.: FOCUS—ARNOLD PALMER—FINAL HOLE OF ‘61 MASTER GOLF TOURNAMENT**
- Move from a LOGICAL (earthly) debate to a THEO-LOGICAL (heavenly) discussion (vss. 4-6, 12, 15)
 - Jesus moved from Nicodemus’ logical speculation to theo-logical truths about birth by Spirit and flesh
 - No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. Is 64:4
 - Moving our friends off of an earthly arguments to a heavenly insight is where the power of the Spirit takes hold
- Set aside your agenda and wait on the Spirit’s timing (vs. 8)
 - Jesus compares the work of the Spirit to the coming and the going of the wind—can’t control, can’t even see it
 - **ILLUS.: PATIENT EXPECTATIONS—FRUIT TREE**
 - Often we are too quick to “harvest” the spiritual field and ruin what God has in mind
- Point to Jesus as the One and Only answer (vs. 13, 16)
 - Jesus wanted Nicodemus to realize that God promised only one Messiah and He was it—God in the flesh
 - In a world full of distortions claiming the stage of truth, help your friend to see that there is only ONE WAY
 - Sometimes previously church people have not heard this—unpacking what they know so you can effectively share
- Focus on familiar portions of the Word (vs. 14)
 - Jesus used familiar story of *Moses and the fiery serpents* to connect Nicodemus to God’s story in the cross
 - Finding the common ground in the word with your religious friend to reconnect them to Jesus, crucified and risen
- Give a clear invitation to the free gift of God’s love in Christ (vs. 16)
 - Beatles’ song of the ‘60’s said, “*All we need is love!*”—that is what the world/all of us desperately looking for
 - **ILLUS.: A PEANUTS CARTOON—JUST NEED SOME TO SAY THEY LOVE ME**
 - Make sure that in your witness your friend understands, “For God so loved *Sue/Tom* that He gave His one and only Son, that as *Sue/Tom* believes in Him he/she will have eternal life.”

The Agony of Change

For years, the opening of “The Wide World of Sports” television program illustrated “the agony of defeat” with a painful ending to an attempted ski jump. The skier appeared in good form as he headed down the jump, but then, for no apparent reason, he tumbled head over heels off the side of the jump, bouncing off the supporting structure.

What viewers didn’t know was that he chose to fall rather than finish the jump. Why? As he explained later, the jump surface had become too fast, and midway down the ramp, he realized if he completed the jump, he would land on the level ground, beyond the safe sloping landing area, which could have been fatal. As it was, the skier suffered no more than a headache from the tumble. To change one’s course in life can be a dramatic and sometimes painful undertaking, but change is better than a fatal landing at the end.

All We Need Is a Little Love

Charlie Brown and Lucy are leaning over the proverbial fence speaking to one another:

CB: All it would take to make me happy is to have someone say he likes me...

Lucy: Are you sure?

CB: Of course I’m sure!

Lucy: You mean you’d be happy if someone merely said he or she likes you? Do you mean to tell me that someone has it within his or her power to make you happy merely by doing such a simple thing?

CB: Yes! That’s exactly what I mean!

Lucy: Well, I don’t think that’s asking too much... I really don’t... [Now standing face to face, Lucy asks one more time] But you’re sure now? All you want is to have someone say, “I like you, Charlie Brown,” and then you’ll be happy?

CB: And then I’ll be happy!

Lucy: [Lucy turns and walks away saying] I can’t do it!

The Arrogance of Self Pride

A sightseeing bus was making the rounds through Washington, D.C., and the driver was pointing out spots of interest. As they passed the Pentagon building, he mentioned that it cost taxpayers millions of dollars and that it took a year and a half to build. While everyone was looking at it, a little old woman piped up: ***"In Peoria we could have built the same building for less, and it would have been completed even sooner than that!"*** The next sight on the tour was the Justice Department building. Once again the bus driver said that it cost so many millions to build and took almost two years to complete. The woman repeated: ***"In Peoria we would have done it for less money, and it would have been finished much sooner."*** The tour finally came to the Washington Monument, and the driver just passed slowly by without saying a word. The old woman was curious. ***"Hey," she shouted to the driver, "what's that tall white building back there?"*** The driver looked out the window, waited a minute and then said, **"Search me, lady. It wasn't there yesterday."**

Focus

Golf immortal Arnold Palmer recalls a lesson about overconfidence: It was the final hole of the 1961 Masters tournament, and I had a one-stroke lead and had just hit a very satisfying tee shot. I felt I was in pretty good shape. As I approached my ball, I saw an old friend standing at the edge of the gallery. He motioned me over, stuck out his hand and said, "Congratulations." I took his hand and shook it, but as soon as I did, I knew I had lost my focus. On my next two shots, I hit the ball into a sand trap, then put it over the edge of the green. I missed a putt and lost the Masters. You don't forget a mistake like that; you just learn from it and become determined that you will never do that again. I haven't in the 30 years since.

PATIENT EXPECTATIONS

A man once bought a home with a tree in the backyard. It was winter, and nothing marked this tree as different from any other tree. When spring came, the tree grew leaves and tiny pink buds. "How wonderful," thought the man. "A flower tree! I will enjoy its beauty all summer." But before he had time to enjoy the flowers, the wind began to blow and soon all the petals were strewn in the yard. "What a mess," he thought. "This tree isn't any use after all." The summer passed, and one day the man noticed the tree was full of green fruit the size of large nuts. He picked one and took a bite. "Bleagh!" he cried and threw it to the ground. "What a horrible taste! This tree is worthless. Its flowers are so fragile the wind blows them away, and its fruit is terrible and bitter. When winter comes, I'm cutting it down. But the tree took no notice of the man and continued to draw water from the ground and warmth from the sun and in late fall produced crisp red apples. Some of us see Christians with their early blossoms of happiness and think they should be that way forever. Or we see bitterness in their lives, and we're sure they will never bear the better fruit of joy. Could it be that we forget some of the best fruit ripens late?