

SLIDE Children's Moment

March 16, 2014

Theme: Born Again

Object: Butterfly

Scripture: "Jesus answered and said to him (*Nicodemus*), 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"

(John 3:3 NASB)

SLIDE "*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*" is a wonderful book by Eric Carle. The story begins with a tiny egg on a leaf in the light of the moon. On a Sunday morning, the warm sun came up and -- pop! -- out of the egg came a very small and very hungry caterpillar. He began to eat, and eat, and eat, but he was still hungry. Finally, he had eaten so much that he had a stomachache! He had eaten for a week for the next day was Sunday again. The caterpillar ate through a nice green leaf, and his stomach felt much better. He built a small house, called, **SLIDE** a cocoon, around himself and stayed in there for more than two weeks. Then he nibbled a hole in the cocoon and pushed his way out. Guess what? He wasn't a caterpillar any more; **SLIDE** he was now a beautiful butterfly.

The story of "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" reminds me of the story of a man in our Bible lesson for today. This a story about Nicodemus. I will call him Nick – he was a very religious man and was a leader of the Pharisees. He spent a lot of time studying the Scriptures, but there still was a lot he did not understand. Nicodemus came to Jesus late one night, because he was hungry. No, he wasn't looking for a late night snack; he was hungry for spiritual food. He was hungry for the truth about the kingdom of God. He came to Jesus because he had questions and he knew that Jesus would have the answers.

"Teacher," Nicodemus said to Jesus, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. No one could perform the miracles that you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can a man be born again?"

Jesus went on to explain to Nicodemus that a person is "born again" when the Spirit of God enters into his heart and soul. "Humans can reproduce human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say,

SLIDE 'You must be born again.'"

"How are these things possible?" Nicodemus said scratching his head.

Think about the story of "The Hungry Caterpillar?" When he came out of his cocoon, he wasn't an improved caterpillar, was he? No, he was a totally new creation. **SLIDE** A butterfly! That's the way it is when we let Jesus into our heart. He doesn't just make us a better person. He makes us a new creation!

Heavenly Father, we praise you that in Christ Jesus we are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Slide Are Jesus' Teachings True?

Last week we asked the question, "Who is Jesus?" As we examined the scriptures we were able to answer this question in the negative that Jesus was **not** "a good man" or a deceiver or crazy. This left us with the only possible true answer - that Jesus is who He said He was – He is God in the flesh. Now in this next passage of scripture we will study this morning – John chapter 7, verses 14 to 24 the question posed is, "Are Jesus' teachings true?"

Truth is an interesting idea and it has varied in what it means throughout history. Winston Churchill made the following observation, **Slide** "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on." In today's world this is even truer than it was in Churchill's time. As we all know, "If it is on the Internet – it has to be true." Truth as a moving target can be seen in a survey of Americans that showed two interesting concepts about the perception of truth. The survey indicated that while an estimated 74 percent of Americans strongly agree **Slide** "there is a God, and He created the world" an estimated 65 percent either strongly agree or somewhat agree with the assertion that **Slide** "there is no such thing as absolute truth." How can people hope to see God or Jesus for who God is - if they do not believe there are absolute truths that do not change with the times or the whims of people? **Blank**

As we began this section of scripture from the beginning of John chapter 7 we saw that Jesus stayed back from the group of people that included His half-brothers as they traveled to Jerusalem and then Jesus traveled privately to Jerusalem. During the first part of the week long Feast of Booths Jesus either had not arrived yet in

Jerusalem or He was staying out of the public eye. People were curious about Jesus and were asking personal questions about Him. We see this in verses 11 and 12, “So the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, ‘Where is He?’ There was much grumbling among the crowds concerning Him; some were saying, ‘He is a good man’; others were saying, ‘No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray.’” These questions were about who Jesus is. However, things now shift and the concern is about His teachings. Beginning in verse 14 we read, “But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and *began to teach*. The Jews then were astonished, saying, ‘How has this man become learned, having never been educated?’” Jesus’ teaching captivated the crowds by His straightforward approach and depth of knowledge of the scriptures. His teaching touched their hearts with its truth. However, I am sure that the Jewish religious leaders were there prompting the people to ask themselves by what authority does this Jesus teach? He had never received formal training from one of the rabbinical schools as they had. If they did not recognize Jesus as having the proper training and background to teach, well then, they certainly did not want the people to listen to Him. These Jewish leaders, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, said the same thing about Peter and John in the Book of Acts where we read, **Slide** “Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.*” (Acts 4:13 NASB)

These Jewish leaders had no understanding of God the Holy Spirit and how when one submitted their life to and believed in Jesus as the Messiah they were indwelt by God the Holy Spirit and given spiritual wisdom and power. As we saw in the Children’s Moment – they are “born again” and are a “new creation.” Jesus now and His disciples later posed a threat to the power structure and position of these Jewish authorities within the Jewish society. **Slide** John MacArthur wrote, “His (*Jesus*)

unexpected public appearance caught the Jewish authorities off guard, and thwarted any plans they might have made to seize Him quietly when He arrived in Jerusalem.”

Blank Many people had a favorable view of Jesus because of His miracles: His changing the water-to-wine, His many healings of the sick and the feeding of the thousands with a few fish. **Slide** With Jesus suddenly appearing publicly in the temple the authorities could no longer deal with Jesus quietly and privately. With Jesus’ public teaching touching the hearts of the people all the plans of the Jewish authorities were ruined. With these wonderful teachings of Jesus the people began asking the same questions people ask today **Slide** when they hear the gospel for the first time, that questions are, “Can this be truth?” and “How can anything so contrary to what society teaches be true?” **Blank**

At the time of Jesus no one in Jewish society taught anything original in thought. The rabbis taught by quoting the Old Testament scriptures and other rabbis. Quoting sayings of rabbis who were dead was popular; the Jewish Talmud is filled with quotes of rabbis long dead. Jesus did not follow this tradition and taught a new gospel that touched people’s hearts. The truths Jesus taught created a gulf between current human tradition and the revelation from God. God’s revelation is absolute truth in comparison with the teachings of men and their traditions, which at best have some truth. In their case what Benjamin Franklin said proves true over and over, **Slide** “Half a truth is often a great lie.” **Blank** Remember, the survey showed that about 65% of Americans do not believe in absolute truth and I believe the percentage was most likely the same at the time of Jesus. Absolute truth has a habit of getting in the way of what men want. Any proclaimed truth coming from men, like Joseph Smith, Buddha, Popes and Mohammed, should be questioned and held up to the scriptures; which will reveal if these men’s teachings are true or false. The fact that Jesus’ teaching came directly from God the Father and the Jewish religious leaders rejected

it revealed that what they taught was not from God, but of men. Later this truth test of the scriptures would reveal the same about men teaching false doctrines

throughout history until this very day. God tells us, **Slide** “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ declares the LORD.” (Isaiah 55:8 NASB)

None of this should catch us by surprise, remember what the Apostle John wrote at the beginning of his gospel, **Slide**³ “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” Jesus created

the very world we live on and the universe the earth is suspended in, yet most people do not want to believe this because it would make them accountable to the

Creator. **Slide**⁴ “In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.” As we have seen throughout the Gospel According to John and we see again here in our study this

morning – Jesus came to bring the light of God to the world and to bring salvation to those whom God has chosen. **Slide**⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the

darkness did not comprehend it.” (John 1:3-5 NASB) Even though Jesus brought true light and offered salvation to mankind, most people would not understand, for they lacked spiritual wisdom and would reject the truth of God. The Light of God both convicts and brings salvation to mankind.

Slide Jesus’ Source of Knowledge

Beginning in verse 16 and continuing until verse 24 Jesus boldly teaches the truth despite the growing opposition. Beginning in verse 16 He tells everyone the source of His teachings and where His knowledge comes from. Jesus answers His questioners plainly so there would be not doubt by saying, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.” Today as the survey showed about 70% of Americans believe there is a god who created the universe, however, many of these believe that God is no longer actively involved. How different this view is from those of true Christianity

based on the teachings of Jesus; we believe God is not only holy and sovereign over all history, but He sustains life and is concerned with and involved with mankind and people's daily life redeeming His chosen and driving the world towards His righteous and final judgment. Most people do not find the truth of God. **Slide** As Winston Churchill said, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened." This described society during the time of Jesus, during the life of Churchill and it describes our society today.

Slide Jesus' Surety – God's Will

Reading verses 17 and 18, Jesus said, "If anyone is willing to do His (God's) will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." Is this not a test we should apply to all who claim to teach on behalf of God? "Who is the focus of their teaching?" Is the focus on Jesus and the Word of God? Or is it how special God has made them? If the focus is that they are special and God allows them to interpret scripture in ways that serves them instead of being consistent with the scriptures, then it cannot be the very word of God. This test would certainly disqualify some of the TV personalities/preachers or evangelists. Testing their scriptural validity would mean people would quit sending them money so they will heal them by their own power. These strong, charismatic and convincing personalities speak for themselves and seek their own glory. Remember what Ben Franklin said, "Half a truth is often a great lie."

Some people might say the scriptures of the Bible are hard to understand and accept. They are absolutely right. This is the reason God has spoken to us through His Living Word, Jesus and His Written Word, the scriptures and regenerates our soul

by God the Holy Spirit. God's teaching of Jesus as the Messiah and His plan for salvation began at the beginning in the Book of Genesis and the story continues through to Revelation. **Slide** "In the beginning God (אֱלֹהִים - 'elohiym) created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1 NASB) *Elohiym* the word translated here as "God" is the singular name of God with a plural meaning. So from the beginning God begins teaching that He is beyond man's attempt to completely define Him. We have come to understand there is One God with three personalities - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – we call this the Trinity. This truly is a hard concept to get our brains around. Without the spiritual wisdom given by God the Holy Spirit we would never be able to grasp the Trinity. We read at the end of this great revelation of salvation God began in Genesis, **Slide** "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 22:13 NASB) The scriptures, the Word of God is exactly what Jesus was teaching in the Temple during the Feast of Booths **Blank** – verse 16 says, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me." The Bible is the very Word of God and the Word of God teaches about God the Father who sent Jesus, God the Son to fulfill God's plan for all mankind. Jesus is "the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Much of mankind may deny Jesus, God's judgment and His righteousness – by denying the existence of God, truth, eternity and hell. However, the world takes this stance at their own peril – we read, **Slide** "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, **Slide** because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man (*Jesus*) whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31 NASB) Since the day Jesus rose from the dead, no person has any excuse to not know who Jesus is and believe He is God incarnate. The truth of what David told his son Solomon remains true to this day, **Slide** "As for you, my son

Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.” (1 Chronicles 28:9_{NASB}) We want to think we are the masters of our own salvation, but it is God that directs us so we can find Him.

Slide Jesus’ Selflessness

Verse 18 has an additional dimension found in the second half, which says, “He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.” Jesus always, always, sought the glory of God, the One who sent Him to secure salvation for mankind. On the other hand the scribes and Pharisees sought self-promotion as Jesus said in Matthew, **Slide** “But they (scribes and Pharisees) do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their *phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues.” (Matthew 23:5-6_{NASB})

Slide * *Phylactery* - Small prayer case containing Scripture passages worn at times of prayer by pious Jews. Orthodox Jewish males wear two small black leather cubes or boxes, with Scripture inside, at the time of prayer. The phylactery contain a strip of parchment on which four passages from the OT were written in Hebrew. The passages were Exodus 13:1-10; 11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; and 11:13-21. The Deuteronomy 6:4-9 passage contains the “Shema”—the confession of God being one Lord.

Slide For the scribes and Pharisees it was about false piety, show and position. This is the obvious different between Jesus’ desire, His purpose and that of man.

Slide The Law Condemns

Verse 19 Jesus speaks to those who trust in the law saying, “Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?”

Anyone who trusts in the Law of Moses is condemned by that same Law for no one keeps ALL of the Law. All people are sinners and by their very nature they break the

Law. The Law of Moses was given to reveal mankind's sin and their desperate need for a Savior, but the Law does not save. So here we find Jesus revealing by the very Law of Moses these people are sinners. King David sinned against God in a number of ways and yet, when confronted with his sin he became repentant and sought God's mercy and forgiveness. These people Jesus is talking to show no remorse for the plotting and desiring to kill Jesus. These Jewish leaders show themselves to be hypocrites – for the legalist uses the Law to condemn others and twists the law to excuse themselves. Jesus as a man was innocent and Jesus as God - all owe Him submission. How do these leaders and the people respond? Look at verse 20, “The crowd answered, ‘You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?’” Since Jesus’ condemnation of them struck home they attacked Him to hide their responsibility. To accuse the Son of God to be possessed by a demon is to say Jesus was in league with Satan. In Matthew Jesus speaks of those who would associate the work of God in such a way. Jesus speaks clearly saying, **Slide** “Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. **Slide** Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age to come*.” (Matthew 12:31-32 NASB) To associate the salvific work of Jesus by the power of the regeneration of the Holy Spirit very well could be an unpardonable sin. **Slide** These leaders hearts were hard against Jesus and the Holy Spirit and they continued in their hatred of Jesus until they had put Him to death. But, beyond His death the scriptures shows that their hatred continued. They operated out of self-serving pride and fear and at the same time they continued persecuting those who followed Christ.

Slide Jesus' Signs

Ignoring the Jewish leaders remarks Jesus continues saying in verse 21, “I did one deed, and you all marvel.” Verses 22 and 23 make clear that Jesus is referring to His healing the sick man at the pool of Bethesda. “For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on *the Sabbath you circumcise a man*. The Law of Moses is found in several places in the Old Testament. Let me read from Genesis 17:12, Slide “Every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations.” If the 8th day happened to fall on the Sabbath the Jews would circumcise the baby despite the Law given by God against working on the Sabbath, for as Moses wrote in Exodus 20:10, Slide “The seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it you shall not do any work.*” So we see the Jews made exceptions to the Law given by God for here circumcision took precedence over the Law. Blank Jesus now says, “If a man receives circumcision on *the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?*” This miracle of the healing of the man by the pool and the many others Jesus healed proved that He was indeed who He claimed to be – the Son of Man or the long awaited Messiah. Instead of reacting to Jesus’ miracles and incredible teaching with awe and repentance they plotted to kill Him. It is the same today. People may choose to see the truth of the scriptures, which have been proven true time and time again throughout history. But, if their hearts are hard against God and the truth - they will not understand and accept the truth. If these pious Jews did not object to the ceremonial cleansing of a small part of the body on the Sabbath, by what logic do they object to Jesus’ cleansing a man’s entire body and making him well on the Sabbath?

Jesus, our Lord, concludes this exchange by saying, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” This statement is one like a double edged sword; on one edge it was an indictment of their complete lack of consistent moral and theological standards and on the other edge it was a plea for these people to become consistent with the Word of God and abandon the inconsistent standards of their society, and to repent and be saved. He is asking people to judge Him by the standards of scripture, by His teachings, by His miracles and by the totality of His life. Remember what Jesus told these leaders in verse 17, “If anyone is willing to do His (God’s) will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.” The same challenge lays before people today. Are the scriptures and the teachings of Jesus true or not? Is Jesus who He says He is? History demonstrates the scriptures to be true. History demonstrates Jesus is who He says He is by His teachings and miracles - not only those miracles He performed while He walked this earth, but also the miracles that can be observed in sinner’s lives turned into lives of worship. The only way to remove the stench of your sin is for it to be washed away by the cleansing of the sacrificial blood of Jesus. Will you come to Jesus and be cleansed? Will you come to Jesus and drink from His fountain of life? If you do, you will thirst no more. The choice is before each person as it has been since Jesus first taught. Paul was clear when addressed the people in Romans saying, **Slide** “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20 NASB) No one has any excuse – whom will you choose this day and the rest of your days to serve?