

CLEAN SLATE

Religion is tough isn't it? So many different kinds. So many different God's. So many different paths. Then you get to Christianity and I think we have done a good job over the years making that very confusing as well. Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Reformed, denominational, nondenominational, traditional, contemporary, small, medium, large, Mega. It is easy to see why someone considering religion and Christianity would be confused at best if not outright frightened.

The last 2 weeks have been an eye opener for me. The last two weeks have shown me, that three times in the New Testaments God has made it easy for us. Easy, and simple, but so much so we may have missed it. I want to share with you today the 3 areas of simplicity I see in the New Testaments. I call them:

Eyes at Night "Not the all seeing Eye, or the Evil Eye"

Crazy Man "Not Steve Martin"

Fire Starter "Not the camp fire version, or the Pokemon Charzard"

Three stories most of us have heard, three scriptures from the Gospels and Acts, that when put together provide all those who are searching for what they are looking for.

Eyes at Night:

John 3: 3-8

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked.

"Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are

born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'



So last week we heard about this Rabbi, this Pharisee, this very important man that came to Jesus at night. He came to him searching for answers. He came to him blind of the truth, and what did he find? The answers. He found the light. He found the truth. He found the easy way, not 613 rules, but one. At first this message is very strange and maybe hard to grasp, but what Jesus is saying is simple. God's Love, through Jesus is all you need. Believe in Jesus.

Crazy Man

Matthew 3:2, 5

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.



I love this story. It is one of the few in the Bible that really strikes me as one of those V-8 moments. This wild and crazy and unkept man, a man who the prophets from the old testament said would come, is standing by himself offering an unheard of challenge and free gift. What is he saying? Tell God you are sorry, ask him for forgiveness, be washed clean by the water of his Grace and you are forgiven. WHAT!!! NO WAY CAN IT BE THAT EASY! That is what the Pharisee’s said.

Fire Starter

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”



Acts 2: 1-4

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Some of you have had this kind of moment. Some of you have experienced the fire of the Holy Spirit fill you with, EVERYTHING YOU NEED. I know this by having the opportunity to talk with many of you. Some of you have had the Holy Spirit blow on you a little here, and a little there, your whole life. This is one of the most difficult and simple things in the New Testament. Difficult because our human brains struggle to process being baptized by fire, or a spirit. Our logical brains simply can’t explain it.

Simple because if we are open, if we allow our hearts and minds and souls to be open to this possibility, God send his spirit onto us and changes us forever.

I know I said three stories but let me share one more. This story is about a highly educated, highly respected, religious scholar who also happened to be a Roman citizen which was like having a golden ticket. This man, well he Judged. He did not John 3: 17. He was determined he knew more, he knew what was best, and set out to kill everyone who claimed to be a follower of Jesus. That me say that in a different way. He set out to Kill, in the name of God, everyone who loved God's son. Now that is messed up. What happened to this man, what did God do to him? God/Jesus did what they do to all, they loved, they showed him the light, they baptized him with water, with fire, and he was born again and became the man we know as Paul and took the message of Jesus Chris to the World.

What did the last two weeks teach me? What do these four stories teach me? God offers all of us what we are asking for. He offers all of us what we are asking for. A CLEAN SLATE! A fresh start. A second chance. It is that simple, God's Love! We just have to get out of the way with all of our smarts, with all of our understanding. We have to make it simple:

Sorry God.

Forgive me.

I Love you.

I accept your Love.

My prayer is that you hear this, you live this, you share this, and you spread this. God's Love is simple, and for everyone.

Our scripture lesson today says it best:

You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.

So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

AMEN