New Life: \_\_\_\_\_\_ Things \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

John 3: 1-10

042521

[Sermon title is fill in the blank this morning. If you figure it out, don’t say it, don’t post it, I’ll ask you for it later…]

[Dr. Hayes NT Course Duke]

* Registrar had a bad day, signed me up for the class
* First day, single table, about 8 students and a pre-eminent NT scholar
* When asked to read the Bible, I pulled out my NIV; the others pulled out the Greek NT and translated on the spot…
* I was in way over my head, spent hours translating before class, then went to class and tackled the homework.
* **Problem: I didn’t have the *prerequisite***
* I was attempting something that I didn’t have the foundation for…

Have you ever been there?

**[job application]** that asks you to list your computer proficiencies and you check some boxes that you’ve heard of but don’t really know. It’s all good until it isn’t.

**[Kid’s sports]** you’re convinced that little Jr. is an amazing athlete, so you sign him up for a sport and “play up”…only to find out he’s not close to ready.

[Cart before the horse picture] What’s wrong with this picture?

Working or racing with a set up like this is never going to work, right?

**What’s this have to do with us this Sunday morning?**

I. It’s easy to get the cart before the horse

Sometimes we need sermons about how to:

* improve your marriage
* succeed at work
* propel us to personal fulfillment in life

It is pretty common to find a Christian book or church that will give you:

* 7 secrets to a good love life
* 10 keys to financial success
* 12 steps to freedom from addiction

We’ve got to be careful not to get the cart before the horse…

* We can pursue the **look and feel** of Christianity without the **heart change** of Christianity
* We can focus our efforts on doing the right thing, singing the right songs, keeping the right traditions, helping the right people…

But fail to get the first thing first…

II. Nicodemus is a perfect example

* John 3: 1-10

*Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”*

*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 Spiritgives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*

*“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.*

*“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?*

II. Nicodemus is a perfect example

* A Pharisee -a very religious Jew who knew the Scriptures well.
* John tells us that he was a ruler of the Jews, so he had the respect of many as well authority.

**Why does John give us the story of Nicodemus?**

* A person who knew the Scriptures
* A person who was wealthy
* A person who had a good position of power/authority
* A person who was considered a “good” person

**Nicodemus had everything going for him.**

* This is the person you want in your church
* This is the person you to be connected with
* This is the type of person that everyone would have thought would be good “disciple” material

**Perhaps this is exactly why John gives us the story of Nicodemus**

* In Nicodemus we see the story of every “good” person who has tried to live for God in their own strength
* In Nicodemus we see church attendees and members who are active in their church, respected in their community, morally better than others and yet have an unregenerate heart.
* John wanted the Church to see an example of the absence of spiritual life in a person who outwardly appeared to have all the appearances of righteousness.

We have substituted all kinds of cosmetic changes for true heart change. We encourage people to pursue new and better spiritual gifts. We tell them to recover ancient devotional techniques. We try to beef them up on a particular doctrinal system, as if more correct facts will do the trick in itself. We tell them to show audacious, mountain-moving faith in prayer. We tell them to get radically committed to the Great Commission. **These things all have their place, but all we are doing is piling superficial changes onto a heart that doesn’t really love God. None of those things can produce love for God. Only the gospel can.** -JD Greear

**Job one** of the Church, **priority one** of Jesus, was to change the hearts of those he encountered.

[**Luke 5,** The Man on the Matt. “…your sins are forgiven.” Also, “…get up and take your mat and go home.”]

There might be 1,000 changes that you need in your life, but job one is a heart at peace with God.

To put it succinctly, The Bible teaches us that a person’s heart, their entire being is so broken by the indwelling presence of sin, that there is nothing we can do to remedy or fix the situation.

* There is no meeting, no method, no modification of behavior, no meditation, no medication, no magic wand, no mere flexing our will power, that can fix our broken lives.

We must have a new birth; we must be regenerated by Author of all life.

More succinctly, If we want the New Life that Jesus’ death and resurrection makes possible, we have to begin by being born again.

* Jesus told Nicodemus he needed to do something that was impossible
* Jesus told him he needed to do something that seemed absurd
* Jesus told him that he needed to do something that grabbed his attention!

III. Have you been born again?

* Have you repented and asked for Christ to reign in you?
* Have you surrendered your self-rule and invited Jesus to rule?
* Have turned from walking the way of the world, and decided to follow Jesus?
* Or are you struggling to masquerade as a Christian without the heart change that Jesus offers Nicodemus and all of us?

IV. Jesus explains that the new birth is “of water and the Spirit”

* Some take water to mean baptism, this is unlikely because there is no precedent in the context for Jesus to be talking about baptism
* Some take water to mean physical birth, but it hardly seems necessary for Jesus to explain that to Nicodemus.
* Water and Spirit go together here, this is most likely a reference to the prophecies in Ezekiel where God promises forgiveness and a new heart.

*“‘For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”*  --*Ezekiel 36:24-27*

What Jesus was telling Nicodemus was not a new idea.

* It was prophesied by Ezekiel. Isaiah, Jeremiah and other prophets
* God would give his people, new hearts, circumcised hearts, clean hearts
* Now it was possible in the man sitting face to face with Nicodemus
* The prophets pointed forward to the New Life that would be found exclusively in Jesus.
* What Nicodemus could not accomplish by keeping the many laws of Judaism was possible with the help of God’s Spirit in his heart.
* **What was possible for Nicodemus with the help of God is also possible for us.**

V. So how is one born again?

* Come to grips with the reality that sin is all around you and even in you
* That sin has detrimental effects on you, your family and friends, and the world around you
* Realize that God has made it possible for your sins to be forgiven and a New Life to begin
* Believe that this New Life is found only in Jesus Christ
* This is keeping First Things First [Sermon Title]
* Pray and ask God to forgive you and begin a New Life in Christ

Close: [Picture of Rene Compean’s soot-stained legs] **Band quietly take places while I tell this story. Nick plays under the story from the keys.**

April 12 of this year, Rene Compean set out on a 2-hour hike in the Angeles National Forest in Southern California. He lost his way and for hours tried to regain his bearings but couldn’t. Temperatures were dropping, night was falling, he was out of water and afraid. He climbed to the highest point he could reach and tapped out “SOS. My phone is going to die. I’m lost.” He attached the photo you see and sent it to a friend. With only one bar of service, he had no idea if it made it out…then his phone battery went dead. Later it was determined that his location settings were disabled on his phone.

Ben Kuo (picture) was working from home about 60 miles away when he saw the tweet from the LA County Sherriff’s department with Compean’s picture. The Sherriff’s department had already searched all night for Compean to no avail. This was their last-ditch effort to see if anyone recognized the terrain. Ben Kuo works in the tech industry, but also has a unique hobby of finding the locations he sees in TV Shows, Film, and social media. Using the methods he’d honed over the years, he matched satellite maps, key land markers, and Google Earth and estimated where the photo was taken. He was accurate within less than a mile. In no time and LA County helicopter spotted Compean and he was saved. [rescue photo]

If you haven’t been born again, you are in a more desperate spot than Rene Compean. You’re lost and out of options.

Good news, you don’t need Google Earth and a helicopter, you need the New Life that only Jesus can offer you.

Jesus has already found you. You can choose New Life today and you can have a better tomorrow because of what you do right now.

**Prayer**: Jesus, I want the New Life that only you can offer. I’m turning from my own ways right now. I’m choosing to accept your grace and forgiveness in my life. I want to put first things first by asking you to change my heart right now. Please help me as I begin this New Life walking with you.

Text for Prayer: 913 214 9123

**Closing Song**: Evidence

**Benediction**: