

Common Reactions to an Uncommon Christ

Confusion – John 3:1-15

Paul Harvey was a master at telling stories that created confusion and questions and intrigue – and about the time you couldn’t take it any longer, he said . . .

“And now, the rest of the story”

Problem was, I usually heard it while on an errand and had to get out of the car just as he was going to tell the rest of the story

Example – **Spurgeon** story – Look to Jesus! (p. 39 of Be Alive – Wiersbe)

He’d go to a commercial which he usually did himself

And just like that he’d leave you hanging – intrigued, questioning, even confused

There’s a little bit of that in our passage this morning

The story starts smoothly, but a problem is encountered – a twist, a plot knot, questions, even confusion

And eventually Jesus lays out the solution, or “the rest of the story”

In the meantime, we wrestle with Nic, confused!

Read John 3:1-15 (p. 887)

Intro

Nicodemus was very confused – 4, 9

Confused about what Jesus was teaching in order to be a part of the Kingdom of God

He’s an example of the fact that . . .

The PROBLEM

You can be very religious and still very confused (v1)

You can be all pious and righteous in life, and still be mistaken about the things of God

1 – Nic was *a man of the Pharisees*

High moral character (not all Pharisees were hypocrites)

Intense hunger for spiritual things; Meticulous in the holiness of their lives

Striving to live holy

1 – Nic was *a ruler of the Jews* – on the Sanhedrin/Council

Ruling body of 70 priests, responsible for . . .

Spiritual well-being of the Jews; Matters of the law; Temple functions

Deciding disputes; Maintaining order and peace for the Romans

Highly regarded moral/religious leaders

Still spiritually blind, which led to confusion over teachings of Jesus

Describes many people today in religious circles, maybe even you

Confusion about who Jesus was – great teacher, fully man/God, what he did

Confusion about doing the right things to earn God’s favor

Things like – Taking communion; Getting baptized; Giving to the church

Praying for the dead; Baptized for the dead; Maintaining a flower bed at church

Very religious people hold views like these that lead to false expectations and confusion when confronted with the truth about Christ

You can be very sincere and still misguided (v2)

2 – Nic was sincere in that he . . .

Came at all – though afraid of risking his reputation and position, he stepped out

Showed respect – Rabbi – title of respect from one to another, especially council guy

Acknowledged *some* divine stamp of approval on Jesus – *teacher come from God*

But that’s where his sincerity was also misguided

He thought Jesus was a great teacher – but not the Messiah

He thought Jesus had the blessing of God – but not that he was the Son of God

He certainly stopped far short of –

Peter’s confession – *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*

Thomas’ confession – *My Lord and my God*

Mary’s confession – *I have seen the Lord*

He was very sincere, but still misguided

How about you?

The world is full of people who are sincere about their faith, but misguided

Even many who *profess* Jesus as Lord and are sincere, but misguided

Because they worship where . . .

Jesus is minimized; Someone else is exalted along with him

The church is revered as holy or divine; Scriptures are given lip-service/added to

Writings of man (whether of religious books or poems or stories) are elevated above the Word of God

Sincerity is not lacking, but it’s often misguided all the same

Doesn’t matter how sincere you are about Jesus . . .

If you consider him less than what he is

Or his words less than the authoritative truth

You’re misguided

You can be very knowledgeable and still clueless (v2-4, 9-10)

You can know all the facts and still be confused about the truth

Nic not only knew the great signs that Jesus did (v2), but . . .

He was *the* preeminent teacher in Israel at the time

That’s the implication of v10

10 – *Are you THE teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?*

He would have known the Scriptures inside and out

Most likely memorized the entire OT

How can you of all people *not* understand these things?

Despite the fact that he was very knowledgeable – he was clueless

He lacked the spiritual discernment to understand the knowledge he had

Bible scholars all over the world in the same boat

Despite their amazing knowledge of the Scriptures, they don’t get the message

They lack spiritual discernment because they’re not born again

You and I struggle with this when we don’t apply the Scriptures in our lives

Love your neighbor . . .

Care for the least of these

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another

Love your enemies

Jesus makes this lack of spiritual discernment clear with Nic

3 – Jesus is saying . . .

Unless you are born again, alive spiritually, you’re clueless about the things of God
You *can’t* discern them

So for you, Nic, to say that I’m a teacher from God, how would you know?

If you’re not born again, you can’t even perceive the Kingdom of God in the first place, let alone make a judgment on whether I’m a part of it

No wonder you’re misguided and confused!

1 Cor 2:14 – *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

The problem with confusion about Christ is that you may be confused and not even know it, because you’re . . .

Smug in your knowledge
Comfortable in your religion
Satisfied with your sincerity

Fortunately, Jesus gives us the rest of the story, the solution

The SOLUTION

Trust Jesus (v11-13)

11 – *we* – could be referring to his disciples; more likely he was countering the *we* of Nic in vs 2

You spoke as a kind of *informal* representative of those who see me as a great teacher
I speak as *formal* representative of those who already understand these things

The problem is, you don’t believe me – *receive our testimony* (11)

And if you don’t believe me about things you can experience now, things explained by earthly analogy . . .

Why would believe me about even greater things – *heavenly things*, when you haven’t even been there (13)? I’m the only one who has been there

Bottom line: Nic didn’t believe the word because didn’t trust the giver of the word – Jesus
You won’t trust the *offer* of life if you don’t trust the *author* of life – Jesus

And if you don’t believe the teachings of Jesus, you’re never going to clear up the cobwebs of confusion re who he is, what he’s done, and what he requires/desires

Trust Jesus – that’s the first part of the solution to clear up confusion

But it doesn’t stop there – in trusting him, you need to . . .

Believe that Jesus can and will save you (v14-15)

Jesus says, let me give you one of those heavenly things that you’ll also have trouble with
Believing in the Messiah (a veiled reference to himself at that point in his ministry) for eternal life

Uses a well-known symbol in Jewish circles – *the serpent in the wilderness* – to point out God’s provision for life

Moses lifted up the bronze serpent for God’s people in the Sinai desert, so that having been bitten by the fiery serpents, those who looked at it, would *live*

Why? Because they believed God’s promise that it would save them (Nu 21:4-9)

In the same way, Jesus was saying that the Son of Man was to be exalted through the death of being lifted up on a cross . . .

So that those who look to him for help, *believing* that he can and will save them, would live forever

That’s the analogy that Jesus was making

When the serpent episode happened, they didn’t try to solve the problem by . . .

Taking a pill, hiding out in a cave, pretending the problem didn’t exist, or making laws against fiery serpents

Neither can we overcome our sin problem by . . .

Taking a pill, hiding from the world in a cave, pretending doesn’t exist, or legislating morality (making rules to not sin)

The solution to our sin problem is believing in Jesus

Believing that he can and will save you from the death-bite of sin, when you *look* to him for help

This was/is a summons to look to Jesus in belief as the cure for sin, guarantee of eternal life, and the means by which we can . . .

Get a new life (v3-8)

The third and final key to clearing up confusion about Christ

All comes down to this born again thing

When you talk about *born again* today . . .

People either don’t have a clue what you’re saying
They think it’s related to their church background, family heritage, or some ceremony
Or that you’re a wacko Hollywood celebrity wanna be

But if we understand what Jesus was saying, it helps dispel some of the confusion

3, 7 – *born again*

It means – to receive a new, spiritual life by an act of God’s Spirit within you

In the biblical sense, to be born again means you’ve been given a *new life* spiritually

It affects your whole life – physically, emotionally, everything

Nic was dumbfounded and confused by this (4)

He could not grasp, that being a part of the kingdom required an act of God

An internal, spiritual work of regeneration

5 – Jesus says, *unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot* . . .

Could refer to two births – a physical birth and a spiritual birth

But I don’t think so – he was talking OT language to an OT scholar

Referring to two aspects of the same birth, where God saves us by . . .

Cleansing us from our sins – water imagery; and

Giving us a new heart that beats for God because of the presence of his Spirit in us

That’s what **Ez 36:25-27** says

To be *born of water and the Spirit* is to be cleansed from our sin and given a new life/heart – to be born again!

That's what Paul meant in Titus 3:4-7 – *God saved us according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the HS*

By the cleansing of our sins and the internal, heart-renewal of the HS

6 – don't confuse the two births here Nic

The character of those born is determined by the source of their birth

Physical birth gives us a human nature that desires the things of this world

Spiritual birth gives us godly nature that desires the things of God

7 – So don't marvel at this; it's not complicated

All I'm saying is that in order to enter God's spiritual kingdom, you have to get a new life that comes only from the Spirit

And lest you think that you can figure this one out, just like you Pharisees think you have everything else figured out, you can't!

This born again thing is purely an act of God; It's a HS thing

Uses a play on words here to illustrate it

7-8 – In Greek, the word for wind is the same word for spirit – pneuma

Can mean either wind or spirit depending on the context

So v8 can be read something like this –

The wind/Spirit blows/moves where it wishes . . .

And just in case you didn't catch the play on words, he makes it explicit – *So it is . . .*

The point being – don't think you can get a new life on your own, like you try to earn your salvation on your own through works of the law

It doesn't work that way – As a child of God, *you were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* (John 1:13)

This born again thing is an act of God, you're not going to figure it out

But its effect is unmistakable in the lives of those who experience it

And now, *The Rest of the Story* – **Charles Spurgeon Bio**

The young man did look by faith, and that was how the great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon was converted. He was baptized and preached his first sermon later that year at age 16, going on to preach 600 times before he was 20. At age 20 he accepted his first pastorate at New Park Street Chapel with a membership of 232. It soon became the largest church in the world at that time, where 6,000 people SRO crowded twice each Sunday to worship in a space ¼ the size of a football field.

During his ministry there, he baptized 14,692 people, started and helped hundreds of other churches, founded an orphanage for 500 children, established a pastors' college, operated 21 mission halls, and led in many other great ministries to the poor in London.

During his lifetime, Spurgeon is estimated to have preached to 10,000,000 people. He wrote 135 books (including 63 volumes of 3561 sermons), and edited another 28. Spurgeon typically read 6 books per week and could remember what he had read — and where — even years later. He once said he counted 8 sets of thoughts that passed through his mind at the same time while he was preaching. By accepting some of his many invitations to speak, he often preached 10 times per week.

Greatly blessed by the Holy Spirit, his success was due in large measure to a genius intellect, natural gift of oratory, thoroughly biblical expository messages, and the fervent prayers of his congregational members.

He looked to Jesus, got a new life, and God used him to influence the lives of millions of others, who did the same

And God wants you to look to Jesus, to get a new life by the power of the HS within you, so that you too can influence the lives of those around you

Summary

Confusion is a common reaction to Jesus

Being religious doesn't clear it up

Sincerity isn't the cure

Knowledge can leave you just as clueless as when you started

But if you look to Jesus, believing that he can and will save you, he'll give you a new life

So you can be a child of God, part of His kingdom, confused no more

So that you can influence those around you for the Kingdom of God

If you've never done that, do it now –

Jesus, help! I believe you can save me from the death-bite of my sin

Please give me a new life so I can live forever with you

If you pray that – do two things

Pick up the booklet (Beginning Your Christian Life)

Tell someone who has already done the same thing

If you are born again, I hope you walk out of here with a greater awe and appreciation for what the Holy Spirit has done, and what he can and will continue to do in you, and in those around you