**Sunday 23rd April 2017 Message**

**Lots of love – little faith**

***John 19:38-20:18 (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24)***

***After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. 39 And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. 40 Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. 41 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. 42 So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.***

***20:1 Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."***

***3 Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. 4 So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. 5 And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, 7 and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.***

***11 But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."***

***14 Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."***

***16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.***

***NKJV***

**Introduction**

Every day with Jesus is a celebration of the resurrection power and the gift of life He has made available to us. Death which is certainty for all (ie physical death), has lost it’s sting. No longer do we need to fear the judgment of God and the uncertainty of whether we are on our way to eternal separation from Him or to dwell in His Presence for eternity. Heaven and hell are real, and we make our choice here on earth, not when we stand before God.

Many people believe there is no God and there is no afterlife, yet we see, as in that short clip, there is a hope or a desire for a resurrection and a life completely different to what we have on this earth. There is however, two choices to be made at the same time, do we want a life in heaven and are we prepared to bring heaven to earth by living in the kingdom of God and totally submitted to Him?

Today we are going to continue our examination of the gospel message as described in Johns gospel. Ove the next several weeks we will work through Johns gospel to help us examine our understanding of the gospel so we can present the gospel with certainty and clarity. We started our tour through Johns gospel a few weeks ago in John 1, we jumped for Easter into Chapter 19, and today we are going on a further tour through the end of chapter 19 and beginning of Chapter 20 and a sweep back to part of John chapter 3. Ready? GO.

***Slide – John 19:38-42 Lets read together.***

**Lots of love, little faith**

I have entitled todays message “Lots of love, little faith”. That was the margin note in my Bible next to this account in John of burial of Jesus Christ. The questions that sprung to my mind included

“How many of us proclaiming to be followers of Jesus have more love than faith?”

“Is our love and knowledge of Him su fficient for kingdom experience here on earth?”

“Is our love and knowledge of Him going to get us to heaven?”

“Are we like Joseph of Arithamea and Nicodemus slow to the point of waiting till the end in pouring out our love on Jesus, or are loved ones.”

As a previous pastor of mine regularly included in his messages “Don’t wait till its too late, and try to express your love in flowers. It might look good to those at the funeral but to the person who mattered it’s too late.”

In these few short verse we have two important, little known of, disciples of Jesus Christ, Joseph and Nicodemus. They were both part of that sect that Jesus challenged frequently, the Pharisees, the brood of vipers clan. As Pharisees they had memorized the Torah, attended to religious duties fastidiously, constant ensuring they were righteous in all their deeds, and fasted twice a week, and prayed at least three times a day.

They were both part of the Sanhedrin, the seventy Pharisee religious legal body that dealt with all religious legal matters amongst the Jews. It is this group which unanimously elected for Jesus to be handed over to Pilate. Yet included in that group were two lovers of Jesus, secret disciples, the type of follower of Jesus who kept their faith private in fear of offending anybody, and/or of being ridiculed, and more significantly in fear of being dispelled from the most powerful religious legal body in the nation. Their jobs and life were at stake by being a lover of Jesus.

It is understood from historical accounts that Joseph was a very wealthy person and had considerable influence on the Roman governors. It is possibly that financial influence that swayed Pilate in granting the body to Joseph one of the Sanhedrin. He may also have thought the body was safe in the tomb of one of the chief Pharisees. Matthew 27 tells us that the chief priests and Pharisees obviously ignorant to Joseph being a disciple of Jesus, asked Pilate to have the tomb sealed in case one of the disciples stole the body. Strange thing that, one of the disciples already had the body.

Joseph was clearly close to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary as Matthew tells us they sat and watched Joseph place the body in the tomb, and roll the stone over the entrance. We know little else about Joseph from the Bible but he clearly loved Jesus even in His death. Providing Him, a supposed opposor of the Pharisees, with what was likely a family grave, and going to all the trouble of ensuring the Jewish burial ritual was adhered to an accused criminal. No other crucified person will have been so honoured, their bodies likely thrown into a mass grave.

Nicodemus is clearly on the scene at the same time expressing his love for Jesus with a very expensive amount (75 pounds) of mixture of myrrh and aloes. These were placed by Joseph and Nicodemus between the wraps of the linen shroud, forming a gum that held it all together and a mask for the stench of decay, and over Jesus face/head they wrapped another cloth. All of these wraps of linen, as custom tells us, were on top of the one piece of linen which enveloped the body.

We will come back to Nicodemus a little later, but note this is the man who once came to Jesus by night before, and was a secret believer. Here he is at night again adoring the one he knew was from God but failed to speak openly about.

If you think Peter had guilt problems for denying Jesus three times, imagine what these two guys felt having been part of the court that had placed Jesus in the hands of His executioner.

Now let us continue in chapter 20 and see another person who loved Jesus so much, even in death, because she had been forgiven much

***John 20:1-18 2 Slides Let us read together***

Mary just before dawn, goes to pay her respects and show her love to her departed Lord. She has no need to go in the dark, she has openly shown her love before, perhaps she feared rebuke from the soldiers who should have been on guard, we do not know. To her amazement the stone which had been sealed, and was possibly 1-2 tons in weight had been moved away, she jumped to a conclusion, the body had been moved and runs to tell Peter and John.

**The stone had not been moved so Jesus could get out, but so that we could get in.**

Surely she had heard what Jesus had said to His disciples on a number of occasions that on the third day He would rise again? Perhaps she had heard, perhaps she had gone to see if it was true, but her faith failed her and she came to the wrong conclusion. Her love for Jesus was strong but her mind was full of doubts.

Just think about this for a minute, the Pharisees knew Jesus had said He would rise from the dead, and that is why they asked Pilate to seal the tomb. Yet Mary and the disciples seem to have forgotten.

After the disciples had been and gone, not knowing what to make of the open empty tomb, Mary remained and wept over the loss of the body, as well as her Lord.

She looks in the tomb and see’s two angels in white, no surprise to Mary?, there they sit at the head and foot of where Jesus’ body had lain. Her faith, even her hope had not been raised at this awesome sight, her love which had turned to grief blinded her. They ask who is she looking for, and she tells them she is still looking for a body, and turns and there is the body stood in front of her and no flicker of recognition because of her broken heart. The body, the risen body of Jesus, asks “Woman, why are you crying, who are you looking for?” Even the sound of His voice does not initially stir any recognition, ever been there when you are desperately seeking and answer to a situation you do not understand? Very often we miss the recognition of the voice because our faith is blinded by the state of our heart.

It is highly likely that the resurrected body of Jesus looked different to the body that Mary had known, the same is true of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

If we had read on we know Jesus calls her by name, Mary, and that is when her eyes are opened. John interesting says she called Jesus Rabonni, and then says which means teacher, a clear indication he writes his account for gentiles not Jews as Jews would know what Rabonni meant.

Peter and John also loved Jesus, in fact John said he was the disciple Jesus loved, did not have their faith stirred to see the promised resurrection Jesus had spoken about, and that scripture had foretold. Grief at the loss of their teacher, and uncertainty of the future, also shrouded their mind. There was not even a discussion about the meaning of the empty tomb, they just went to their own homes. Didn’t even go and have a cup of Hebrews tea together. Note John says when he saw how the cloths lay, he saw and believed, but neither of them understood. Isn’t that encouraging, you can see a miracle, and believe in the miracle, but it does not mean you understand why it has happened. There are so many things in life that are miracles and we never understand at that moment in time what God is upto, even when He has told us beforehand.

Even though Peter rebuked Him over the claim Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34, Luke 18:33

**Slide**

The description of the linen cloths that had wrapped Jesus body lying there surely would have stirred some thought. The body had been removed from inside the shroud without being unwrapped and the cloths had just collapsed where the body had lain. The handkerchief (large piece of linen) which had been wrapped round His head separate from the rest, interpreted folded but could mean wrapped as it was.

**Nicodemus**

In a moment we will turn to John 3 and look at the time Nicodemus first spoke to Jesus and acknowledged that He was sent from God. However, first let me give you a known summary of the life of the man in scripture

**Slide** – John 3:3 see the kingdom of God

Nicodemus

— the people is victor, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. He is first noticed as visiting Jesus by night (John 3:1-21) for the purpose of learning more of his doctrines, which our Lord then unfolded to him, giving prominence to the necessity of being "born again." He is next met with in the Sanhedrin (7:50-52), where he protested against the course they were taking in plotting against Christ. Once more he is mentioned as taking part in the preparation for the anointing and burial of the body of Christ (John 19:39). We hear nothing more of him. There can be little doubt that he became a true disciple.

Lets read together the passage from **John 3:1-9 Slide**

Nicodemus a Pharisee of the Sanhedrin even though he comes by night, perhaps in fear of being seen, or more likely to have a private in depth discussion with Jesus at a time He was most unlikely to be disturbed.

He starts with an incredible accolade of Jesus as a man sent from God authenticated by signs and wonders. Jesus does not stop the high praise, or say thank you very much, but goes straight to the point with emphasis.

You cannot SEE the kingdom of God without being born again. If you have been a Christian for a while you will know that regeneration/reborn/recreated is part of the gospel message. It is interesting that Jesus uses the word SEE. In fact it could be said that Nicodemus had SEEN the kingdom of God and recognised it in Jesus’ teaching and signs and wonders. Was Jesus saying Nicodemus had been born again? Unlikely as the beginning of being born by the Spirit would not happen till after Jesus’ resurrection, but it was the privilege of many to see the impact of the kingdom of God through King Jesus’ life.

There is a truth that many people conceive their faith by hearing and seeing the evidence of the kingdom, but there is a period of pregnancy and growth in the womb, before birth takes place. There are many who think they became a Christian when they first conceived the truth, they may say things like I have always been a Christian, or I think I am a Christian, or even I do not want to be a “born again” Christian, due to misconceptions as to what the phrase is meant to mean.

A born again Christian is meant to be a person who has radically changed because of the indwelling of the Spirit in their lives. People around you will notice the difference, and you too should know the difference and the time when you let Jesus be King in your life.

So are you born again? You may say that is a strange question to ask a church full of “believers”. The apostle Paul dared to challenge us to examine ourselves

**Slide** ***2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.***

I know Joseph, Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene, Peter and John who we talked about were not “born again” by Spirit, but I bet they thought they were of the faith.

Some people who think they are Christians, are also like babes in the womb, the word of faith has been conceived in them, but there has yet to be total surrender and radical change. In fact some of them might even say I am a Christian but I am not willing to change everything in my life. Are you perhaps one of those? The consequence is that in this life you do not get to SEE all of the kingdom of God in this life.

I love the YLT translation of the next verse

**Slide *John 3:5 Jesus answered, 'Verily, verily, I say to thee, If any one may not be born of water, and the Spirit, he is not able to enter into the reign of God; Youngs Literal Translation***

Remember, I started this series beginning an exploration of the gospel with the emphasis on the Jesus’ desire was to impact the world with the message of the kingdom and the King, not just about salvation from judgment, and a ticket to heaven. Even in the Lords prayer He explains we should live and pray that Gods will be done on earth as it is in heaven ***Matt 6:10.***

He also said the end will not come until the “gospel of the kingdom” had been preached in the whole world ***Matt 24:14*** That is very different from the Bible being translated into every known language, although that is a sign the end can be closer. Yet I am more perturbed that the church has lost the sense of what the kingdom of God in earth is meant to be like and who is in charge. We have become focussed on personal gain and benefit.

As you can see in verse five, Jesus moves on His explanation to Nicodemus to say you have to be BORN OF WATER AND SPIRIT to ENTER the kingdom. You SEE and you ENTER are two stages which I think we often miss. I also think we often miss that in this verse we have underlined the coming together of the WORD and the SPIRIT. Jesus had I believe double meaning in the verse clearly water is of the flesh, and spirit of the spirit, but as often happens there are multiple meanings in a verse. When the WORD and SPIRIT come together in a person’s life then the kingdom of heaven can be manifest on the earth wherever they go.

**Concluding Comments**

You MUST be born again if you want Gods will to be done on earth as it is in heaven wherever you come into contact with this world. That is your privilege and mission.

We must examine ourselves as to whether we have remained in the faith, or just in name.

We should also remember

***Matt 7:13-14 Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.***

***NIV***