



Sermon Transcript

Toolkit for Living in Christ

Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:14-21 | Fourth Sunday in Lent | March 10, 2024 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

In January, I started to pull in a few ideas from author Adam Grant, an organizational psychologist. He talked about ways to re-think and I pondered how they could be applied within the church.

After worship, one of our members, Heather, was excited to share with me some podcasts with Adam Grant and Brene Brown.

She also included a link to a conversation that Brene Brown had with James Clear. He wrote a book called Atomic Habits—basically about how to create the systems in our life to accomplish what we want our identity to be.

Is it just me or do those guys have something in common???

Anyway, in that conversation with Brene Brown, here is what James Clear said that has been on my mind all week.

Your current habits are perfectly designed to deliver your current results

It's almost too obvious, but Clear names this in such a profound way it's made me re-think so much.

He says that it's about identity. For example, if your goal is to be healthy, when confronted with choices, ask yourself:

What would a healthy person choose to do?

The goal isn't to run a marathon, it's to be a runner. When confronted with choices, what would a runner do, eat, behave, in this situation?

Ok, so hold on to that thought while we consider the ramifications of the identity choices found in the two scripture passages this morning.

It's FASCINATING to think about what is going on here. What would James Clear have said to the Israelites wandering around in the wilderness, for example?

What would Nicodemus, the man talking to Jesus, have done if he would shift his identity????

John 3, verse 16, is the most well known verse in the Bible. For God so love the world he gave his only son... it's an identity statement for us as Christians. But what else Jesus

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has to tell Nicodemus, and us, is incredible—it's Jesus giving us a toolkit on how to get out of the systems we're in and aspire to live in the fullness of Christ.

How? It actually all goes back to the Israelites.

What about the line that James Clear said to Brene Brown. **“You don't rise to the level of your goals, you fall to the level of your systems.” (QUOTE with book)**

If the goal is to reach the promised land, the people are not rising to accomplish that goal, are they?

Instead, they whine to Moses AND God:

“Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” (on slide with book)

It can't get worse than this.

Right?

But it DOES! Suddenly, venomous snakes appear and start biting people. Many of them died.

What do the people do?

They rise to the level of their system. They remember who delivered them. They remember how the LORD brought them out of Egypt, how the LORD had helped them survive in the wilderness especially against their enemies.

They remember their identity: Oh right, “We are a chosen people.” The LORD will provide.

They turn to Moses for an answer.

They repent for complaining against Moses and God. They ask for deliverance.

The answer might seem a little weird to us, but when Moses turns to God, the answer is to put a bronze serpent on the end of his pole and as the people look upon it, they will survive.

It's this snake on a pole that Jesus actually references when he's talking to Nicodemus.

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Why does he tell this to Nicodemus?

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Nicodemus isn't just a random guy. He's a Pharisee. A leader within the religious circle that eventually arrests Jesus for blasphemy.

Nicodemus has a lot at stake and it's a risk to talk to Jesus. He can't be seen. So he comes to see him at night. There is something about Jesus that he's drawn to. He wants to learn more.

Jesus uses an illustration that would be very familiar to someone educated in the scripture—the snake on a stick.

With the story about Moses, we aren't told if the poisonous serpents disappear, only that God provided a way for those who had been bitten by the serpents to live.

In comparison, putting Jesus on a pole—the cross—to die for our sins doesn't take away our sinfulness. But it does give us a way to live eternal life.

How does this experience change the system that Nicodemus is working in?

I think Jesus is offering Nicodemus a chance to change his very identity. Nicodemus is working in the shadows. Jesus literally calls him out of that.

²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

Jesus is telling Nicodemus—I know what evil is lurking behind closed doors. I know that in the darkness, corruption and greed exist.

But Jesus offers something different. In the light, there is freedom. There is hope. There is God.

We don't hear much from Nicodemus after this. Which isn't surprising. But he does emerge. Twice.

First, during an argument in John 7, Nicodemus does state that, based off the law, Jesus deserves a trial to defend himself if arrested. He's standing up for Jesus and then quickly is rebuked by his peers.

Then, out in the light of day, in John 19, he helps Joseph of Arimathea to prepare the body of Jesus for burial.

Maybe an identity shift has happened.

What is our identity, then? Why do these stories of snakes and eternal life have anything to do with us?

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I think Logan, who was baptized this morning, helps us understand what our identity is. In fact, just look at the list of responsibilities that Jake and Andrea, and your godparents, and the rest of us at Faith agree to do.

Let's make this even more personal. If our goal is to live a Christian life, when confronted with choices, ask yourself:

How would a Christian choose to live?

How do we build a system that supports our goal of living a Christian life?

Remember our current habits are perfectly designed to deliver our current results and we don't rise to the level of our goals, we fall to the level of our systems.

How would a Christian choose to live?

It's everything. It guides how we care for others and the world God made.

It means we actively advocate for justice and peace for people are suffering, unrepresented, or don't have a voice.

We are children of God. That's our identity.

We are the light of Christ in the darkness. Choose to live our Christian lives in communion with each other, for the sake of the world that God loves so much that he gave his son for us to have eternal life! Amen.