

Bible Study Lesson Summary, Oct. 14, 2018

This Sunday, Oct. 14, your readings should be Day 302: Chapter 31:23-32:44 of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapter 17:15-27 of the Book of Sirach, and Chapter 6:22-40 of the Gospel of St. John.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

This gospel is very different than the other three. There are very few miracles. It is probably written much later than they were so John presumes that everyone knows about the miracles so he focuses on the teachings of Jesus.

Jn. 3: This is a critical chapter in understanding baptism. This chapter is an example of how John's Gospel is different than the other three, which are similar or "synoptic." John is not just trying to tell us about Jesus. He is using particular stories to further explain particular sacraments. This story about Nicodemus uses Nicodemus' confusion to help clarify what Jesus is talking about. Notice the different levels of the conversation coming from Nicodemus' basic level of the process of natural birth, being used by Jesus to help him understand supernatural rebirth. Vs. 2 lets us know that it happens during the night that at first glance is simply to let us know that Nicodemus is trying remain hidden. But the reality is that he is in the dark and Jesus wants him to see the light. Coming into the kingdom of God in vs. 3 is only going to happen to those who are born into God's family. They have to have a spiritual birth. In vs. 5 we find out that this will happen by water and the Spirit. Regular birth makes us a member of a human family. This spiritual birth makes us a part of God's family or kingdom.

Vs. 14 brings in the salvation aspect of this rebirth. In the time of Moses the bronze serpent was the symbol that saved the people from death. Now belief in Jesus will do that. Then we have the famous Jn.3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." For some this became the Jesus prayer. For the Catholic Church it means believing in Jesus enough to do what he says, starting with being baptized. But they do have to see the light rather than staying in darkness, as in Nicodemus having this conversation at night. In vs. 22 we find out that Jesus' disciples did understand and started to baptize people and didn't just tell people to "believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior." The next verses are simply to separate John's baptism from Jesus'. In vs. 30 John says: "He must increase; I must decrease." John was the light pointing to Jesus. Now the real light must shine and the sign decrease. This is why we celebrate John's birthday on June 24. Then the days start getting shorter and on 12/25 they start getting longer or increase.

Jn. 4: Vs. 2 tells that Jesus didn't baptize. In the name of the Father and me and the Holy Spirit. Then we have the story of the Samaritan woman to give an example of coming to Jesus to receive the water that will give eternal life. She represents all Samaritans for she has five husbands. This territory had to be conquered and the conquerors settled five nations there to intermarry so national pride would not cause problems. This would have humiliated the originals which might explain why so many of the people needed what Jesus had to offer and came to believe in him. (vs. 41) Vs. 43-45 are confusing because it sounds like Jesus is going there to be ignored, which would fulfill prophecy.

Vs. 46-54 are the cure of the boy from a distance. This is a sign that distance is no obstacle, which will be important when Jesus ascends.

Jn. 5: This chapter starts with a miracle that John seems to be using to build the tension early on. It is used as a sign of who Jesus is. These first 12 chapters are what scholars call the Book of Signs. After that comes the Book of Glory which is about Jesus' act of love. But these "signs" are specifically meant to point to things. So in curing on the Sabbath Jesus is creating tension. In vs. 17: "but Jesus answered them, "My Father is at work until now, so I am at work." This claim of divine of divine sonship gets him marked for death. Vs. 19-47 are all about what it means for him to be the son of God.

Jn. 6:1-21: The multiplication of loaves and fish starts with Jesus on a mountain, like God on Mount Sinai going to feed the people in the desert. He is showing his divinity and in vs. 15 the people respond by wanting to make him king. Vs. 16-21 is Jesus walking on water but the key line is in vs. 20 when Jesus says. "It is I." Or I am, the name of God.

THE BOOK OF SIRACH

Sir. 13:14-27: These sayings on how we associate with a rich person vs. a poor person are good reminders to pastors. I have had a few that have slipped into treating only the ones with money with real respect.

Sir. 14: Vs. 3-16 talk of the use of wealth. This is a very powerful theme in Jesus' teaching. One of his themes was in terms of letting go of the things of this world (because we can't take it with us). Vs. 20-27 are a precursor of the Beatitudes. "Happy the man" is the same as "Blessed." These are more about a search for wisdom whereas Jesus was more a call to action.

Sir. 15: Vs. 1-10 are more ideas about the search for wisdom. The rest of the chapter is about our free will. Vs. 15: "If you choose you can keep the commandments; it is loyalty to do his will." So our free will gives us the option to do the Lord's will (thy kingdom come, thy will be done) or choose sin with its consequences.

Sir. 16: Vs. 1-3 make me wonder if we can trade in worthless, or Godless, children. Vs. 12 is a summary of vs. 4-21: "Great as his mercy is his punishment; he judges men, each according to his deeds." Vs. 22-28 start a praise of God's good creation, which continues in chapter 17.

Sir. 17:1-18: This is that continuation of God's good creation, which we are a part of; for we are meant to be good. Vs. 17; "A man's goodness God cherishes like a signet ring, a man's virtue, like the apple of his eye."

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

Jeremiah tries to get the people to reform to no avail. This book is warning after warning. But he does foretell a remnant being saved. The book is about the time from 612-587 B.C. Everything is falling apart in the two kingdoms.

Jer. 17: Vs. 5-10 are verses that come up in the liturgical cycle of readings. It is a helpful image of how being close to God helps in hard times. “He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream...” (vs. 8) Vs. 10 reminds us again that a man will be judged “according to the merit of his deeds.” Vs. 12-18 sound like they come straight from Psalms. The rest of the chapter is about observing the Sabbath. Follow Sabbath rules and the Throne of David will be strong; don’t obey them and “I will set unquenchable fire to its gates, which will consume the palaces of Jerusalem.” If that is the case about Sabbath in the OT or model image, then the reality of the NT covenant would be even stronger.

Jer. 18: Jeremiah uses the image of a potter working on a pot to show how God is working on His people. Vs. 13-17 are more about the sins of the people and God’s dealing with them. Vs. 18 is about Jeremiah but in this he is prefiguring Jesus. “Let us destroy him by his own tongue; let us carefully note his every word.” It is like God knew all of this would happen. Of course he did.

Jer. 19: Because of all the evil the people are doing they will be treated like a flask and will be crushed. Vs. 11: “Thus will I smash this people and this city, as one smashes a clay pot so that it cannot be repaired.”

Jer. 20: Jeremiah is placed in stocks. He obvious has a tough time with this assignment that God has given him. Vs. 7, “You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed. All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me.” Vs. 9, “I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart...” Vs. 11, “But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph.”

Jer. 21: Here Jeremiah is warning the king and the people. Vs. 9: “Whoever remains in this city shall die by the sword or famine or pestilence. But whoever leaves and surrenders to the besieging Chaldeans shall live and have his life as booty. In other words God will not help them win this battle because of their infidelity.

Jer. 22: Vs. 3b: “Do not wrong or oppress the resident alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.” These are the most vulnerable in their society. The unborn are the most vulnerable now. Then come some warnings for the kings.

Jer. 23: Vs. 1-6 speak of how the Messiah will solve the problem. “You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds. I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply.... Behold...I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely...” This is a powerful set of verses for clergy in today’s scandals.

Jer. 24: He uses two baskets of figs. One basket is good figs and signifies how God will take care of the exiles of Judah when they are taken to the land of the Chaldeans. The other basket is bad figs and signifies how God will treat King Zedekiah and the remnant of Jerusalem remaining in Judah and those who have settled in the land of Egypt.

Jer. 25: Vs. 9: “I will doom them, making them an object of horror, of ridicule, of everlasting reproach.” Vs. 11: “Seventy years these nations shall be enslaved to the king of Babylon; but when the seventy years have elapsed, I will punish the king of Babylon and the nation and the land of the Chaldeans for their guilt...”

Jer. 26: Jeremiah, like Jesus, has done the will of the Father. The result in vs. 8: “You must be put to death!” The prophet Uriah had done just like Jeremiah (vs. 20-24) did the same thing and was actually killed. At is point Jeremiah is spared.

Jer. 27: Same message of surrendering to Babylon and be spared.

Jer. 28: Hananiah claims to be a true prophet and preaches against Jeremiah. Vs. 15-16: “To the prophet Hananiah the prophet Jeremiah said: Hear this, Hannaniah! The Lord has not sent you, and you have raised false confidence in this people. ...this very year you shall die, because you have preached rebellion against the Lord.” He died that year.

Jer. 29: By this time many of the people are in exile and Jeremiah writes them a letter. He again lets them know (vs. 10) that they will not be able to be free until 70 years have passed. Then another false prophet, Shemaiah, preaches without a license from God and is punished.

Jer. 30: As you will see in the notes, this chapter and the next are out of place in this book. I think that someone must have seen the reference to the yoke in vs. eight and connected it with what had just been mentioned in chapter 28. But these two chapters presume that a lot that has already happened, is still to come. There is actually good news about some of the things that God will do. At this point in the book God has already told them that it is too late for that.

Jer. 31:1-22: This has more good news that is out of place, but there is one part that is significant and that is vs. 15-17. “Thus says the Lord: In Ramah is heard the sound of moaning, of bitter weeping! Rachel mourns her children, she refuses to be consoled because her children are no more.” This is referenced in Mt. 2:18 when Herod has the infants in Bethlehem killed.