

March 24, 2019

John 3:1-18

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The gospel of John is the life story of Jesus purportedly written by the Apostle John. It's most likely the last of the four gospels in the Bible in terms of when it was written. This conclusion comes from language/vocabulary choices as well as the opinion that the theological reflection in John is much more developed and mature than in Mark, Luke and Matthew. John's account of Jesus is filled with poetry and paradoxes between light and dark, deafness and hearing, blindness and sight. John tells us his purpose for writing the gospel in 20:31, "But these [stories] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." We jump into the early middle of John, in a chapter that is commonly read during the season of Lent in worship.

He came to Jesus by night : Throughout John's gospel the night in the time of confusion, , ignorance, untruth, evil. Judas leave the light to go out in to the night of Satan (John 13:30) whereas here Nicodemus comes out of the night into the light (see v19-21) Nicodemus shows up three times in John's gospel: 1) here, at night, 2) John 7:50 in the day to ask questions of Jesus; and ; 3) John 19:39 when he collects the body of Jesus before the sun sets on the sabbath.

born from above: This expression is a double entendre for in the Greek it's ἄνωθεν pronounced /anōthen/ which can be translated as 1) from above, or on high; or 2) again as in a second time. Nicodemus seems to understand one meaning while Jesus implies another, hence the confusion of the former throughout the conversation..

the kingdom of God: this expression is widely used in the other gospels, but here in John this is the only time it's used.

heaven : οὐρανῶ pronounced /ouranō/ means sky, the atmosphere, the heavens. It's any and everything above the earth (soil) until the outer reaches of the atmosphere, what we can fathom - the heavenly realm: the residence of God.

Spírit | Wind | Breath: In Greek /pneumos/ and in Hebrew /ruah/ one word means all of these things. So Jesus is also saying that God's breath or Spirit moves through the world as the wind moves through the world.

Sound curiously the word used in verse 8 φωνῆν pronounced /phōnēn/ is the word for both "sound" and "voice", Here again is the playful language of a double entendre meaning both the "sound of the wind" and also "the voice of the Spirit."

THE WORLD κόσμος: in Greek pronounced /kosmos/ from where we get our word Cosmos. It's actually more than the "world," meaning something more akin to "For God so loved the whole universe" - the entirety of the earthly and heavenly realms.

¹ Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³ Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see **the kingdom of God** without being born ~~from above~~." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter **the kingdom of God** without being born of water and Spírit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spírit is spírit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You] must be born ~~from above~~.' ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the *sound* of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spírit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

¹¹ "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about **earthly** things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about **heavenly** things? ¹³ No one has ascended into **heaven** except the one

who descended from **heaven**, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved **THE WORLD** that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into **THE WORLD** to condemn **THE WORLD**, but in order that **THE WORLD** might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into **THE WORLD**, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 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.”

Psalm 115

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ Not to us, O Lord, not to us,
but to your name give glory,
for the sake of your steadfast love and your
faithfulness.

² Why should *the nations* say,
“Where is their God?”

³ Our God is in the **heavens**;
he does whatever he pleases.

⁴ Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

⁵ They have mouths, but do not speak;
eyes, but do not see.

⁶ They have ears, but do not hear;
noses, but do not smell.

⁷ They have hands, but do not feel;

as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness: this refers back to the story of God’s deliverance of the Israelites recorded in Numbers 21:4-9.

⁴ From Mount Hor the Israelites set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵ The people spoke against God and against Moses, “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.” ⁶ Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷ The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” ⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Using one Biblical story to comment upon, and interpret another one is classic Rabbinical teaching.

Light - darkness: again we see this metaphorical contrast between day/night; light/darkness; good/evil; of God/not of God. The words of verse 19-21 harken back to the beginning prologue words of John’s gospel which set up the whole story (John 1:1-14):

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The **light** shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the **light**, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the **light**, but he came to testify to the **light**. ⁹ The **true light**, which enlightens everyone, was coming into **THE WORLD**.

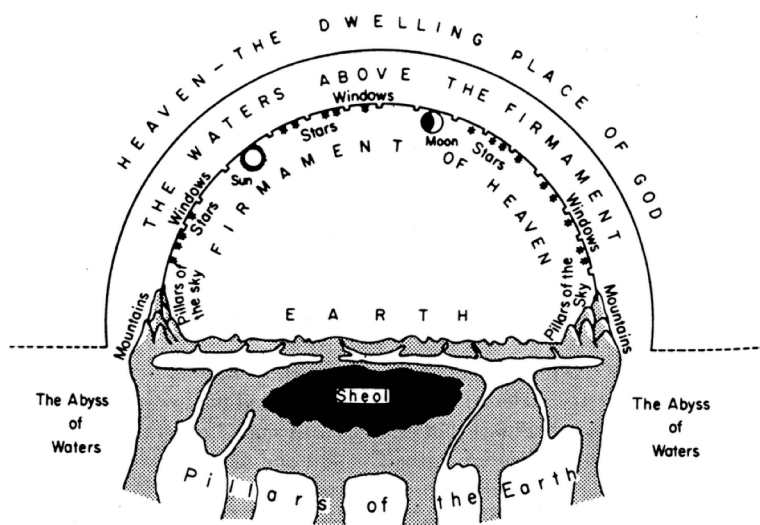
¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were **born**, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but **of God**.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

the nations: אֲרָם in Hebrew, pronounced /gō-w-yim/ as opposed to Israel. In Hebrew the word "nations" always means everyone, or all nations, besides the Jewish or Israelite nations. It's like saying "everyone else besides the people of God"

heavens: שָׁמַיִם in Hebrew pronounced /Shamayim/ - the word for "heaven" (literally heavens, plural), denotes one component of the three-part biblical cosmology, the other elements being *erets* (the earth) and *sheol* (the underworld). *Shamayim* is the dwelling place of God and other heavenly beings, *erets* is the home of the living, and *sheol* is the realm of the dead, including, in post-Hebrew Bible literature (including the New Testament), the abode of the righteous dead.



earth אֶרֶץ in Hebrew pronounced /erets/ meaning land, earth. In larger meanings it represents the whole earth (as opposed to a part); and earth (as opposed to heaven); as well as the inhabitants of earth (inhabitants).

In meaning land, it often represents a territory, district, or region tied to a particular tribe.

It means the ground, or surface of the earth.

It came to represent the land that belonged to Israel, as opposed to Canaan.

feet, but do not walk;
they make no sound in their throats.
⁸ Those who make them are like them;
so are all who trust in them.

⁹ O Israel, trust in the Lord!
He is their help and their shield.
¹⁰ O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord!
He is their help and their shield.
¹¹ You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord!
He is their help and their shield.

¹² The Lord has been mindful of us;
he will bless us;
he will bless the house of Israel;
he will bless the house of Aaron;
¹³ he will bless those who fear the Lord,
both small and great.

¹⁴ May the Lord give you increase,
both you and your children.
¹⁵ May you be blessed by the Lord,
who made **heaven** and **earth**.

¹⁶ The **heavens** are the Lord's **heavens**,
but the **earth** he has given to human beings.
¹⁷ The dead do not praise the Lord,
nor do any that go down into silence.
¹⁸ But we will bless the Lord
from this time on and forevermore.
Praise the Lord!

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- What shimmers in your attention in this reading?

- What does the contrast between earth/heaven; light/darkness point towards?

- How does ancient Jewish cosmology (their understanding of the cosmos) seem silly?; How does it make sense?

- How does understanding the cosmology of ancient Israel impact your hearing of John 3:16-17? How does it shape your vision of the presence or demeure of God?