

NBC Devotional
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“They Intended to Make Him King”

The timeline of John’s Gospel gives a growing drumbeat of energy that begins with a simple knock on a door. In John chapter 3, Nicodemus comes to the door of Jesus at night, confessing that no one could perform the signs that Jesus had performed without it being of God. It leads to the teaching of being born again. It was a single conversation between two people that is at the core of our faith.

By chapter 4, Jesus met with the woman at the well and opened a dialogue with her that went deeper than meeting her physical need for water or her emotional need of being accepted. Before long, this one person who had experienced a relationship with Jesus had drawn the entire community to Him. And the knock on the door became a steady drumbeat.

Chapter 5 brings us to the highly populated city of Jerusalem. In the presence of hundreds of people, Christ provides healing to an invalid man. Now hundreds are feeling the growing sound of the approaching Messiah.

After teaching along the lake, the crowd had grown weary and needed food. Here in chapter 6, Jesus performs the miracle of feeding 5000 using just the contents of a young boy’s bag lunch.

Now the drumbeat had grown and people within the crowd became vocal about their belief that Jesus must be the Messiah.

John 6:14-21

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.” Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

As a people who were under the oppression of occupation, it’s easy to understand their misunderstanding. They believed that Jesus had come to be the reigning King they had read about in the prophecies. It’s easier to believe that an earthly king can come and make right the wrongs of their society, rather than believe their fate would change by the coming of the suffering servant.

The feeding of the 5000 was the tipping point when the slow but building drumbeat of Christ could be felt in their hearts. They fell into the same trap that their forefathers had experienced. They wanted an earthly king that would restore the Kingdom of Israel to its former glory. They wanted a King, so they could have power, status, and position in the world among other nations.

But we understand that even the anointed Kings of Israel had problems. The best-known being Saul who became a bit obsessed and paranoid. He feared everyone and everything to the extent of throwing spears at his staff. Then, of course, there is David, who led the people to peace but failed in his own morality. It led to his adulterous behavior as well as murder. Solomon was no better as he accumulated wealth and wives only to discover that earthly things and pleasures gave no eternal satisfaction.

The crowd clamored for a king and even began to whisper that they would take Jesus by force to make him their king.

Yet we understand that earthly kings are only humanity's earthly answers to spiritual problems. They thought they could usher in the Kingdom of God through political leaders and social structures. They assumed that leadership change at the top could bring spiritual peace to the land.

We do the same today. We argue over the blue team and the red team and assume in our circle of selfishness that our view has the answers. We look for earthly answers to spiritual problems and assume that if we had just the right king, the world would become a better place. We fall into the same trap that held the people of Israel captive.

We don't need another king; we need a redeemer.

Jesus knew what they were thinking. He understood their oppression and sympathized with them over their fate, but this passage says that he withdrew to the mountain by himself. He wasn't in this move to usher himself into earthly, political leadership of the day. So, he graciously stepped back and permitted free will.

Do we sometimes think we can hide things from God? Assume he isn't aware of our plans, dreams, and ambitions? Sometimes we think we can make our plans, devise our direction, set our priorities, and THEN ask Him to bless what we've already done.

Just a personal, pastoral, pet peeve. I'm struck by how many boards and teams close meetings in prayer and the prayer that can fall into the trap of, "...now come and bless what we decided to do about this issue."

When we reach verses 16 and 17, we find the disciples getting in the boat and heading off. They had their mission. They had their priorities. They may have even been influenced by the crowd and wanted to make Christ the earthly king as well.

The telling phrase is that Jesus had not yet joined them.

To me, this can be a painful reality for those of us in ministry. We've had our training, and we've been to all the seminars. We have our action plans, our five-year goals, and our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (swot) analysis discussions all completed. We've considered our balance sheets; we review our profit and loss statements, and then consider our progress report from our budget. There might even be time to review our facilities, assets, and even look at market trends. We can even do church, plan our songs, set the agenda, and hear one of our kids sing the special song of the day. But when we look around, Jesus isn't even in the room.

One of the milestone markers in my spiritual formation was the Mount Vernon Nazarene University (MVNU) revival of 1980. Stephen Manley was the guest evangelist who spent the whole week in one chapter of Hebrews. The notes are still written in the Bible I carried to chapel and religion classes at that time. He retold the stories of Abraham, who “waited patiently”.

But we know the story, and Abraham wasn’t as patient as Hebrews would lead us to believe. God had told him that he would be the father of nations. He and his wife were not seeing the pregnancy they anticipated. He knew the mission, direction, and purpose of God, so he took things into his own hands and had a child by his wife’s handmaiden.

In a way only Manley can say something, he stated that Abraham had the will of God as his god, not the God who’s will it was.

We can get so caught up in the excitement of fulfilling the mission of God, that we forget to keep our focus on God. We get ahead of the steps God is offering and when we do, we find ourselves alone, just like the disciples. They looked around and found themselves rowing their boat in the middle of darkness and storms. But even more importantly, they were Christless.

I’m probably reading more into this than I should, but I think it’s fascinating that they were rowing a sailboat. Rowing is moving by our own physical effort, but sailing is letting the wind empower the direction. Is the Holy Spirit of God truly empowering us if we’re doing everything on our own and Christ isn’t even in the boat?

I certainly believe in education and preparation for ministry. I’ve served the MVNU board for 23 years and the Nazarene Bible College board for 10. But if our efforts in fulfilling the mission of God is based on our own efforts, we’ll fail every time. I can’t imagine even taking another step in ministry without knowing that Christ is in it.

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