

God Works Through Broken People

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 May 2006

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 00] I was interviewed by The Citizen this week. A 50-minute long interview from a woman by the name of Jennifer. I think she normally publishes under the name Jennifer Jackson, but I think that byline is going to be changed soon to Jennifer Green because she's been recently married.

And I guess there was a bit of telephone tag, this woman wanting to talk to me to set up an interview, so I knew she wanted to talk to me and interview me. My wife and I talked about it. I was very uneasy about being interviewed by a reporter of The Citizen. The press aren't often friends of people like myself and many of you who hold our views on some issues of the day. But after praying about it and discussing it with my wife, I decided I'd do the interview. So on Thursday morning, she said she'd like to talk to me for 20 to 30 minutes, and she interviewed me for 50 minutes.

And she talked to me about our network membership, about us withholding apportionment, about a lesbian priest, a woman married to another woman who's a priest in the Diocese of Ottawa, and my role in an open letter about that, about essentials.

[1 : 17] We covered the whole gamut. The article didn't come out on Saturday, yesterday. That means it's, I think, coming out this coming Saturday or Sunday. You can pray for her as she writes.

I ended up thinking that she was quite fair-minded, and so just pray that as she thinks this week about how she's going to write that article, that she will be fair-minded about how she portrays us. One of the reasons, as you know, I'd be nervous about interviews, because once you're interviewed, I mean, you're just complete, we're completely helpless. I'm helpless. You know, she can make me look really bad or make me look good or somewhere in between.

But, you know, I can't replay for you the entire interview, not that I could remember it, but early on in the interview, I said to her, I said, you know, if there was a verse which really described my heart, where my heart is, and where I'd like my heart to grow more and more, and I think it describes the heart of this congregation, it is these words of Jesus, Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

[2 : 37] And I said, that's my heart, and that's the heart of this congregation. And before I could start to explain it, she said to me, she said, that's beautiful. Where is it from?

And so I told you, I told her Matthew 11, 28 to 30, it's the words of Jesus, and I said, you know, we're a broken people.

We at St. Albans don't view ourselves as being the pure, the holy, the mighty, the strong, the good, the blessed, or any of these types of things. We are ones who are born broken, and we need a savior, and we need to come to Jesus, and we need to take his yoke upon us.

That's what we need. That's what everybody needs. And I said to her, I said, you know, it's far more important to me that people come to Jesus, and start to learn to take his yoke upon them than they deal even with their sexuality.

It's always more important to come first to Jesus. That's my heart. And then as we were talking as well later on, I said, you know, at the heart of this dispute and this crisis in the church, it can be talked about as a crisis of authority, but really it's ultimately about whether the Bible is the Bible, whether the Bible has authority in our lives.

[3 : 53] You see, it's really about two completely and utterly different views as to what the Christian faith is. Is the Christian faith the story and the invitation of how God has broken from outside the created order and broken into our created order, reaching down to us human beings to bring salvation to us, and we, in a sense, are to open our arms and to receive it?

Or is the Christian faith about human beings' attempts to image God, frame God, reach out to God, create God?

Is it all about ultimately us human beings reaching up to God, or is it all about God reaching down to us? And I said, they're completely and utterly different faiths, and I believe, and the people at St. Albans believe, that Christianity is about God reaching down to us and us receiving that which only God can do.

This is not just some clever idea of mine. This is, in fact, what Jesus teaches us in the Gospel today. And so if you turn in your Bibles to page 919, page 919, Luke, sorry, Luke, if you turn to Luke, it'll be wrong.

John chapter 1, verses 43 to 51. I know some people bring their own Bibles, don't use the Pew Bibles, and that's good. John 1, 43 to 51.

[5 : 26] And the story goes, you know, continues like this. The following day, Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and he found Philip and said to him, follow me.

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, we have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

I just want to pause here. There's a couple of interesting things here, just about verse 45. Years and years ago, when I was in university, decades and decades ago when I was in university, I tried to read a Russian novel by myself for the first time.

I tried to read Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment. And some of you may have heard this before. I was about a third to a halfway through the book. I was really struggling with this book. I was reading it because it's supposed to be great literature.

And I wanted to try to read great literature and learn and become wise and learn it and all of that stuff. And I'm slogging through this and slogging through this and slogging through this. And I can't remember if it was somebody who told me or if I finally figured it out for myself.

[6 : 37] But Russians have all sorts of different names. And so I had been thinking there were about 12 characters in this book when there were only four.

Because they'd keep naming the same person and sometimes it would be their nickname and sometimes it would be the full name and sometimes it would be this other name. And I kept thinking there were all these different characters trying to wonder how on earth these guys seem to be coming in and out.

And then I finally figured that out. And so I went back to the book and read the book from the beginning, now very carefully following the names of the characters and keeping the same guy straight all the way through.

Jewish people had lots of different names, especially Galileans at the time of Jesus. They'd have sort of like more Greek sounding names and Jewish names and a variety of names. So Nathaniel is Bartholomew in case you're wondering.

In case you're looking at some of the other lists of the disciples and you say, I don't see Nathaniel there anywhere. Nathaniel is probably Bartholomew. And so Philip, who's from Bethsaida, he comes and finds Nathaniel.

[7 : 43] And one of the things that Philip does here is really cool. It's a real encouragement for us. He says, we have found him of whom Moses and the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Now the thing which is so neat about this is that Philip gets half of it wrong. Okay, this is a real encouragement to you and me. Like when it comes time to witness about Jesus, don't ever say to yourself, I have to wait until I've figured out everything perfectly before I can witness about Jesus. Philip gets half of it wrong. Jesus is not from Nazareth. He was from Bethlehem and he's not the son of Joseph. He was, I mean, in a sense, the stepson of Joseph.

He got two of the things wrong, but he was just full of enthusiasm to tell Nathaniel, his buddy Nathaniel, about Jesus. And so he does it. And it's really neat because, see, God always honors our hearty desire to share Jesus.

God doesn't sort of look down at heaven and says, oh, dang it, there's George attempting it again. You know, when's he going to finally smarten up? Like, when's he going to start reading better books? You know, you know, God takes our faltering, stumbling attempts to witness to Jesus and he just throws a party and the angels are singing hallelujah and God says, you know, I can handle his foolishness.

[9 : 06] You know, I can work through this. And so Philip is filled with this. He gives sort of two of the things, he says some of the things wrong and Nathaniel says to him, and this is the other thing, you know, verse 46, and Nathaniel said to him, can anything good come out of Nazareth?

Philip said to him, come and see. Now, there's sort of two interesting things about this. You know, we're from Ottawa and at least we live in Ottawa and maybe we're not from Ottawa but we live in Ottawa and it's easy for urban people to look down the nose at rural people and, you know, but rural people look down their noses sometimes at other rural people because, like, from an Ottawa perspective, rural Canada is sort of anything in Ontario other than southern Ontario and Ottawa. Like, the rest of it's sort of, like, rural or small town, you know? But, you know, with people there, they can look down their noses at things just like we think it's something special to be from Ottawa but Toronto knows they're the centre of the universe and if you're from New York they know that they're really the centre of the universe and Paris knows that they're really the centre of the universe and so you can always find people who look down their noses at other people.

When I was in my rural parish in Eganville, I did the funeral of this woman and lived in Killaloo. Now, Killaloo has a population of 600 people and people were telling me about this woman and they said that one of the things that characterised her life for many years is that she looked down her nose at people from Tremor.

Now, Tremor, there's nothing in Tremor. It's a bend and a road with an old school and a church. That's Tremor and people from Tremor, often now people who go to that church are from expensive cottages on Round Lake but years and years ago, I guess, this woman thought that people, she lived in a town of 600 people and she thought, well, the people who live and who go to Tremor, they're hillbillies but I live in the village of Killaloo.

[11 : 11] So, here's Nathaniel from Bethsaida like a little hole in the wall saying, can anything good come from Nazareth? You know, like they have the wrong accent, they're not very well educated and, you know, the fact of the matter is that often in this world we have to deal with prejudice and one of the prejudices that Nathaniel had was just literally he was so big on thinking that being from this little hole in the wall Bethsaida is important.

Nathaniel's, I mean, in Nazareth there's a smaller hole in the wall so they could look down their noses on Nazarene and people from Nazareth and that, at first, that sort of just honest prejudice comes out and it's so neat because Philip doesn't, in a sense, deal with the prejudice he said, just come and see him.

Just come and see him. And, you know, one of the things that we can do is, because often when we're trying to share the gospel or talk about the Christian faith is we can be, people can be filled with prejudice about the Christian faith, they can be filled with prejudice maybe about Christians or even you or the people who would come to this church or some other church and the thing is, is in a sense not to be deflected from it, to be conscious of it, but just say, yeah, come and see.

Like, why don't you come and read the Bible with me? Like, why don't you come and meet some of the people who love Jesus? Like, just come and see. Like, a brilliant response to it. So the story continues.

Nathaniel said to him, can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, come and see. Now, Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and said of him, behold, an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile.

[12 : 45] It was a bit prejudiced, but there's no hypocrisy in him. He's no guile. And Nathaniel said to him, how do you know me? Jesus answered and said to him, before Philip called you when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.

Nathaniel answered and said to him, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. Now, this sounds a little bit incommensurate of a response to us from a very simple observation of Jesus.

This is a simple miracle that Jesus performs. And John, as we're going to see in a moment, not in a moment, but next week, John has organized his gospel around a series of significant miracles and John draws out the significance of the miracle for who Jesus is and our deepest human needs.

And here we see John just sharing a simple miracle of Jesus but making no comment about it whatsoever. And this is the miracle. This is why, like it wasn't as if, you know, Jesus is walking down the aisle and he turns to the left and he sees one of you sitting to his left and then later on he says, well, I noticed you when you were sitting.

It's not like that at all. Nathaniel was somewhere where, humanly speaking, Jesus could not possibly have seen him. And so, Jesus begins by making an observation about Nathaniel's character.

[14 : 15] He meets Nathaniel for the first time and he says something about the soul and the mind and the heart and the will of Nathaniel. And it is probably something that Nathaniel has been really maybe deeply praying about and deeply working on and as soon as he says it about, as soon as he says this about Nathaniel, Nathaniel says in a sense, like, how on earth do you know that about me?

And Jesus says, I saw you under the fig tree. And maybe that was a time when Nathaniel was maybe deep in prayer asking God to have less guile and hypocrisy in his life and more wholehearted pursuit of the truth.

Maybe that was what he was doing in that private moment under the fig tree. But Jesus says something that humanly speaking, physically speaking, there's no way that Jesus could possibly have seen Nathaniel.

And Nathaniel recognizes that if Jesus is able to do this miracle of sight, that it's in fact connected somehow or another to the miracle of Jesus piercing beneath the facade of Nathaniel and seen into Nathaniel's heart.

And because of the miracle of sight, Nathaniel recognizes that Jesus is one who can see into heart and he goes, you are the true teacher. You are the son of God.

[15 : 28] You are the king of Israel. You know, the son of God, one of the things that we'll see as we read the gospels is that often people speak of Jesus more than they know. And the word son of God is one of those words that it can have a double meaning.

And in some context it can just mean like the Messiah and in other contexts it can mean something ontological, something about the actual being. and Nathaniel maybe is just thinking of it as a messianic thing.

He doesn't realize that he says more than he knows, that he picks a word, a phrase, that speaks not only of Jesus being the Messiah but also of him being ontologically God's son. He could not possibly have made that leap but it's just funny how those things happen, this double meaning of this single word.

and so Jesus is able to see what cannot humanly be seen and that means he can see right into the heart of Nathaniel.

He can see into your heart and mine. He can see us when nobody else can see us. In fact, you know, one of the things which is so important for us to recognize as we come here to worship is that we are coming into the presence of the living God and we are coming into the presence of Jesus who is the Savior and his eyes have been upon you all week.

[16 : 46] His eyes are upon you right now and as he looks upon you and looks deep within you he only looks with eyes of love. He only looks with eyes of love and every time we come to worship, every time we come to be in the presence of Jesus we can come confident that God is not going to shame us but only desires to bring us healing by drawing us closer to himself.

Ultimately, he wants to bring you salvation and we can come expecting to meet with God and have God touch us and pray as you come here that your heart and that my heart that our hearts will be open to the presence and the touch of the God who loves us.

But then Jesus continues. I mean, Nathaniel has been blown away by this simple miracle that it's in a sense a miracle so insignificant that in the gospel John is not going to even in a sense spend any time reflecting upon it but in verse 50 Jesus answered and said to him because I said to you I saw you under the fig tree do you believe?

You will see greater things than these. And Jesus said to him and here we see this verily, verily. It's the first time it comes in John's gospel.

As David talked about a bit last week any time you see in this version I'm using it's most assuredly if you use the King James version of the Bible it's verily, verily it means amen, amen so be it, so be it.

[18 : 21] It means that something important is coming up so Jesus is trying to get our attention by speaking louder in capital letters or something and we should listen up because something important is about to be said and this is what he says verily, verily most assuredly I say to you hereafter you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man verily, verily I say to you hereafter you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man this this is that John has written his gospel in such

a way that this is in a sense the end of the introduction and in John chapter 2 the book is going to change we're going to be launched into a series of significant miracles of Jesus which John probes beyond the reality of the miracle to what the miracle points to about who Jesus is and who we as human beings are and who God is and what our need is and what we are called to do and then after that there is to be the long description of the last supper and Jesus with his disciples and then the crucifixion and John chapter 1 this is in a sense the end of the introduction and Jesus and John ends the end of the introduction with this statement of Jesus this true statement of Jesus verily verily and he says that there are two things that Nathaniel is going to see and the first thing he says he's going to see heaven opened and that is in a sense a coded way of Jesus saying

I have come to bring salvation heaven is closed to us as human beings and we are broken people we are fallen people we are people who fall short of the glory of God all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and heaven is far off God is far off and we are alienated and separate from him and we cannot open the gate of heaven ourselves we cannot reach up to God ourselves we cannot know God truly by ourselves none is righteous no not one and I have come to open heaven so that you can come in I have come from God to bring salvation I have come from God to do that which no human being can do by themselves or in and of themselves they are neither worthy of it nor do they have the power I have come to open heaven and secondly I have come and you will see the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man and we will look at what the son of man means more in the coming weeks it is Jesus title about himself but what we see here is that he has come to bring true knowledge of God he has come to bring so that in a sense the angels can ascend and descend that there is true knowledge that comes from God through Jesus to us human beings and that our true knowledge of God himself in a sense us going back up towards God that that can ascend and as there's the knowledge of God that descends and our heartfelt prayer and our conversation and our hearts and our minds and our longings and our yearnings and even our bodies being able to ascend through Jesus to God himself true words of God that descend and our true need to talk to God that can ascend

Jesus is the one who will bring revelation remember earlier on I said that at the heart of the difference in this continuing crisis that it faces the Anglican Church of Canada it's not over people who experience same-sex attraction I mean friends every single one of us here is sexually broken every single one of us here is in need of grace the crisis is over whether this statement of Jesus is true or not is it true or is it not is in fact Jesus the one who has come from God breaking into our human order to open the gate and the door of heaven so that we might enter in other words is he the one who brings a salvation from God that only God can offer and only God can bring and that we must receive or is salvation something that through our own effort our own cleverness our own definition our own power that we somehow achieve and create is

Jesus the one who brings true knowledge of God and the one that allows us to truly speak to God and communicate with God or is he just one who brings us some more metaphors some more similes some more allegories some more little pieces of the puzzle for us to put together ourselves Jesus says he is the one who has come to open heaven and to bring true revelation of God to us fallen human beings and this means that what he has come is not just something which is a curious fact that can be put in the news of the world or national inquire or people magazine oh by the way do you know that there's somebody who's come who can open heaven and bring revelation it's not just some idle fact to tickle our curiosity we are to come to him we are to come to him and since he comes from God and brings that which only God can do and that we are powerless in and of ourselves to do it means that the words of

Jesus come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your soul for my yoke is easy and my burden is light it means that we are come to Jesus to know salvation we are come to come to Jesus to know God and that when we come to Jesus he takes us upon him he takes us to himself and he places his yoke upon us so that we can be made whole and we can be made free and we can be fit for heaven let's bow our heads in prayer Jesus we thank and praise you that you are so patient with us and so loving we thank and praise you that we are all

[25 : 05] Nathaniels here and you see us as we walk and sleep and go about our 24-7 day and you see us perfectly and you see right into the depths of who we are perfectly and still you love us and still you desire us to come to yourself that you desire us to come to you to know you and to have your yoke upon us that you desire seeing us as we really are not to condemn us but to grant us true

rest for our souls Jesus we invite and give you permission to reach out even now in this place to reach out and touch us and draw us closer to yourself Jesus we invite and give you permission to pour out your Holy Spirit the very love and life and health and of God himself God himself pour out your Holy Spirit upon us draw us to yourself and through yourself bring us to the Father this we ask in your name alone

Jesus Amen