

Reading the Bible for Deep Delight
First Methodist Church of Tulsa
Spring 2024

Through New Eyes – A new way of seeing the world.

What is a paradigm? Can you think of a couple of foundational truths about the way you see the world?

What are some of the assumptions you bring to the Bible when you read it?

As an exercise, let's look at John 14:1-7

John 14:1 "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

What assumptions do we bring to the text?

What would happen if one of those assumptions were overturned by the truth?

In what ways might you have to submit yourselves to a new paradigm?

In 2015, I had a chance to spend an hour on the phone with the guy who is my hero in the faith, Dennis Kinlaw. That was the first of two phone conversations and one in person visit I got with him before he died. In this first call we had he asked me if I knew what a paradigm was. It's a way of categorizing information. How we process things. Kinlaw said, "Everyone has in his head a paradigm he doesn't know it's there - it's given by the culture he's in. The only questions you can ask or think come out of the paradigm you don't even know you have."

So from the time you were born, you learned how to process information. You learned colors. You learned what animals are which. It's what scientists call a taxonomy, a *naming* of things. And where do we get that information? From our parents and teachers, sure, but it's also a cultural thing, as Kinlaw noted. An agreed upon way of seeing the world. You've probably heard other words for this like *worldview* and *meta-narrative*. As an aside, the core of our current divisions within the United States is that we don't have an agreed upon paradigm anymore. We have paradigms in competition with one another. I'm not going to wade too far into this, but the most glaring example is about gender and whether it's a biological reality or a social construct. Depending upon your paradigm, you have a different answer to that question.

Kinlaw's last statement was that "the only questions you can ask or think come out of the paradigm you don't even know you have."

What he's saying is that the way we view reality is shaped by something we don't pay much attention to. In Sandy Richter's video study *The Epic of Eden* she quotes another former seminary professor of mine, Darrell Whiteman, who says that "it is scarcely a fish who would discover water" in reference to culture. A fish moves in water but doesn't know it's in water. We move and live in a culture that we don't pay attention to most of the time, much less

realize that it's there. So, tonight, I'm asking you to pay attention to your assumptions because I want to help everyone of us see the world through new eyes. Through a God-revealed, biblical paradigm.

Turn with me to John 3, the first fifteen verses. They read like this:

John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

John 3:9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And 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.

I want you to notice a few things about paradigms here. Nicodemus had one. Jesus had one. Nicodemus watched Jesus do the things that he did and speak the things he said and said this: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” What are the assumptions that Nicodemus is making here?

1. Rabbi - He assumes that Jesus is a teacher.
2. No human can do signs (miracles) apart from God.

Those are good assumptions, but they are laden with something. They are laden with the worldview of a 1st century Pharisee. We don't have time to list all the things that Pharisees believed, but they had a spiritual cosmology. They believed in things like the resurrection, angels, and spirits unlike another major sect in Jerusalem. He believed that Jesus was a man empowered by God. That's a good start, but his paradigm stops his curiosity in a sense. He thinks he has all the facts and interprets them correctly. Look at how Jesus answers him, though. He doesn't say, “Oh Nicky, you're right on the money!” Instead, he turns the conversation and challenges Nicodemus' paradigm saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

If you're Nicodemus, the honest response to this is, “huh?” Which is what he did. Jesus, come on. How can a man be born a second time when he's a fully grown adult male. These folks have been around childbirth enough to know, as Nicodemus says, that a man cannot go back from whence he came. Jesus' response is that one must be born again *by the Spirit*. That's also a statement laden with worldview and paradigm. But, I think it speaks volumes about what's required of us to enter the kingdom of God and to become a person who sees the world differently than how we've been

indoctrinated to see it. The being born again model speaks volumes to us about how we become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). Think about a baby. Mine was born in 2004, almost 20 years ago. When she came into the world, she couldn't speak English, she didn't understand words, she couldn't walk, she couldn't feed herself, and she couldn't even see because it takes 2–3 months for a baby to recognize faces, much less a car or a tree or anything of the sort. So in childhood development, what happens? A baby learns to hear and distinguish sounds, she learns to see and distinguish objects and people, she learns to speak, how to walk, and how to feed herself until, eventually, she goes off to college. That's exactly the same kind of principle we see Jesus speaking to, here. Unless one is born by the Spirit and learns to see, hear, walk, feed, touch, etc., he cannot follow Jesus.

Nicodemus still doesn't understand. How can this be? Jesus says to him, your paradigm is worthless. "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" Jesus is telling Nicodemus, and us, about heavenly things. Things we'll never understand without...what? Without the Living God radically changing our understanding of life and the world, of relationships with people, and even God himself!

Last week, we spoke of the Bible as God's revelation, and it's important to note that it is an invitation to lay down our broken, sin-marred paradigms in order to take on a *real* paradigm that the Creator is giving us. I'll give you an example, again from Dennis Kinlaw. We treat the creation account, at times, like a science textbook. I'm not going to argue with anyone about young-earth creationism versus evolution or all that goes in between. But I would like to argue that when we go after Genesis 1–2 like that, we're doing what Ben Witherington used to call "putting the emphasis on the

wrong syllable.” The emphasis is a challenge to paradigm and worldview. The cultures and religions of the ancient near east were rife with stories about the gods being a part of the world, and people being bits of the gods. They believed they had to appease these gods in order to get a blessing. But Genesis 1–2 tells us that reality is profoundly different. First of all, there is a Creator God, one God, who is outside of creation. Who made the heavens and the earth and then made us *in his image* out of the dust of the ground, not out of his own divine material. That’s a shocking revelation to Sumerians and others in the ancient near east. How can that be? Well, you’ll never know unless you reject your paradigm and accept the reality that God has created. In Genesis 22, we see a familiar story of a god telling his subject that he needs to sacrifice his son for a blessing. Except that’s not what happened. You have God stopping this sacrifice and offering a blessing devoid of the kind of pagan worship Abraham was used to seeing. Abraham needed a paradigm shift, too!

And we see this again and again. The plagues of the Exodus were a direct confrontation with the worldview of the Egyptians. Each one targeted a different god and established YHWH as the one *true* God. **“In a polytheistic universe, you would see lots of power, but very little control. No one could predict with precision which force would hold sway at 4:30 pm next Tuesday. It is control, therefore—the precise, pinpointed application of power—that really gets Pharaoh’s attention. Precise control over the plagues, even more than their power, calls into question the intellectual foundations of paganism.”** LOCATION: 1098 When Elijah triumphed over the prophets of Baal, we jump in our minds to Psalm 121: I lift my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come from? Does it come from the hills like these pagan priests thought? Or does it come from the one who made those doggone hills? It’s a new way of seeing.

So now, when we come to the Bible, we have to have a God-born change in the fundamental way we see reality. You and I still need that because our impulse is to be our own god. We have to do our work. We have to control. Do we ever ask God what he wants? What he sees? Will you show me what you think, God? That's what it looks like to come to the Scriptures and read them the way God wants us to read them.

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