

Sunday Morning Message

April 3, 2022

Nicodemus

The Gospel According to John

Text – John 3:1 - 21

Congregational Reading – John 3:1 - 21

Introduction

(Review on the Map, the geography of Jesus' travels this far in John's gospel, including Bethabara, Cana, Capernaum, and Jerusalem)



In the last message, we saw Jesus cleanse the temple in Jerusalem by purging it of those that were selling livestock and also those that were exchanging Roman money for temple money.

In chapter three, Jesus is still in Jerusalem where He enters into a discussion with a man with an open heart who is searching for the truth, and this man is unlike any that we have seen thus far in John's gospel.

I. Nicodemus' General Observations Regarding Jesus (vs. 1 – 2)

v. 1 - Nicodemus was “a man of the Pharisees.” The Pharisees were one of the two religious that made up the 70-member ruling body of elders in Judaism, which was known as the Sanhedrin. This ruling body would be responsible for bringing Jesus to Pilate for crucifixion approximately three years from this time. The Pharisees were very strict and legalistic regarding their interpretation of Law. They went well beyond the plain teaching of the Law and created hundreds of very narrow rules about what the people could and could not do. They did, however, believe that there would be a resurrection of the dead, and also in the existence of angels. The other group that were in the Sanhedrin was the Sadducees. They were more liberal than the Pharisees and rejected the notion of resurrection or the existence of angels.

The fact that Nicodemus was also “a ruler of the Jews” indicated that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. He was actually one of the rulers of Judaism.

v. 2 - You will notice from verse two that this man comes to Jesus by night. The Scripture is very specific regarding this because it is letting us know that this man is being very secretive about his searching for truth. The Pharisees are already very suspicious of Jesus and His followers, and they would become His bitter enemy. This man was being drawn toward faith in Christ, but he did not yet wish to risk his reputation, or threaten his position within the Sanhedrin. The man was somewhat ashamed of the Lord. He was a closet admirer or seeker of the Lord; but he was hungry, searching for truth. He knew that the Lord had something special about Him. He knew that the Lord was at least was from God, even if he wasn't yet ready to accept Him as God.

Notice that this man came to Jesus at an inconvenient time. We would rather do our ministering and soul winning from 9 – 5, but we never know when someone is going to need our help. Jesus was willing to give up His evening in order to help this man with his greatest need – salvation.

This man is coming to Jesus with an open heart, and is not speaking to Christ deceitfully as many of the other religious leaders do. He is truly searching.

Observations about Nicodemus:

1. He was religious but lost.
2. He was educated but lost.

3. He was wealthy but lost.

One of the statements that we made in a recent message regarding soul winning principles that we can learn from this passage was that we cannot assume that a person is saved just because of their religious background, their education, or their status in culture. Affluent people, and educated people are often harder to win than the poor.

We must not shy away from these people.

The apostles were “ignorant” men, but they were very powerful spiritually. The world took note of them and recognized that they “had been with Jesus”.

II. Jesus Specific Reply to Nicodemus Regarding the New Birth (vs. 3 – 12)

Jesus does not engage the man in small talk. Jesus was not impressed with the man’s position or his possessions. He did not fawn all over the man. He treated this prominent citizen just like he would treat anyone else.

Fundamentalist are sometimes afraid of powerful or popular people. They will either treat them as celebrities, or they will mistreat them as scoundrels. Both extremes are wrong. They are just people who need the Lord like every one else.

Jesus goes right to the man’s need. He needed a new birth. Jesus didn’t commend the man’s religious training. He didn’t try to find common ground with this man. He simply told the man straight out that he needed to be born-again; he needed to be saved.

Jesus cuts through all of the generalities and reveals what Nicodemus truly needed. Jesus did not want to have a religious debate with this man, he simply told him that he needed to be born again. This statement that Jesus made to Nicodemus is perhaps the one statement that has caused more controversy within the ranks of Christianity. What does it mean to be born again? Jesus makes is crystal clear that without the new birth, it is impossible to enter into the Kingdom of God. It is impossible to be saved; it is impossible to go to Heaven, without the new birth.

v. 4 – We see from Nicodemus reply that he was just as confused as we might have been regarding what it means to born again. Another soul winning principle that we learned from this passage is that we must listen very carefully to what people say, and be very observant to their actions, in order to determine where they are spiritually. Nicodemus’ answer indicated that he had no idea what Jesus meant regarding being born-again

Vs. 3 – 8 – Jesus explains to Nicodemus what it means to be saved, born-again, or born from above.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born of water and of the Spirit. Some believe that the water refers to physical birth. The “water breaks” when a person is born physically. Others think that the water refers to baptism, which cannot be true because the thief on the cross was never baptized, yet he was saved. Baptism is something that you do after that you are saved. It pictures salvation. I believe that the water refers to the Word of God. The Bible is sometimes referred to as being like water.

"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word," (Ephesians 5:26)

"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." (John 15:3)

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" (Titus 3:5)

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Peter 1:23)

The two things necessary for salvation are the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

Notice the illustration of the wind in v. 8

Vs. 9 – 12 tell us that education cannot save us, being born into a religious family cannot save us. Salvation is a personal and spiritual experience that can only come through personal faith in Christ.

III. Jesus Revelation Regarding the Necessity of Faith in Him (vs. 13 – 21)

Notice the deity of Christ is clearly taught in v. 13. Jesus claimed to have come down from Heaven. We saw this in chapter one:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-4, 14)

We will see it again throughout this gospel account:

"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." (John 6:32-33)

"I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:48-51)

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by." (John 8:56-59)

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." (John 10:27-30)

Vs. 14 – 15 – Jesus is referring here to the serpent in the wilderness.

"And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a

serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived." (Numbers 21:4-9)

Jesus would also be lifted up on a pole of sorts. And all we need to do is look to Him and put our faith in what He did for us on that cross. It is not about religion. It is about believing in Jesus.

Conclusion (vs. 16 – 21)

We need to put our faith in Christ.

We need to get to the place where we are sick and tired of our sin. We must wave the white flag of surrender and agree with God that we cannot possibly enter Heaven based upon our own works of righteousness, which are only really filthy rags anyway. We need to come to God through faith in what Jesus did for us on the Cross of Calvary.

We need to repent and believe the gospel. Repentance is a change of heart, mind, and attitude about who we are, about who Jesus is, and about how it is we get to Heaven.

Notice the references in vs. 19 – 21 about “deeds” and “doing.” This is not saying that a person needs to do in order to be saved, but it does point to the fact that we must get to the place where we are completely dissatisfied for our “doing” in order to get to the place where we are willing to put our faith in Him.

"Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." (Psalm 50:23)

Notice this verse is not saying that if you order your conversation aright that God will save you, but it does teach that if you try to get your heart and life right that God will show you how to be saved. People who are convicted of their sin, and know that their lives are a mess are perfect candidates for salvation. But, God has to bring you to the place where you know that you cannot save yourself, so that you will have nowhere else to turn but to Him.