

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, August 1, 2010 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Series: Portraits of Jesus
Jesus: The Teacher - John 3:1-21

Introduction: Who is Jesus to you? That question has been asked of men and women ever since Jesus lived, died, and rose again. Many people down through the years have tried to describe Jesus. If you listen to some religious scholars and authors, you may find those who portray Christ as a political revolutionary, a magician, a charismatic, a rabbi, a Jewish cynic, a reformed or anti Pharisee, a prophet and an itinerate evangelist.

Philip Yancy cites former Miami Dolphin lineman Norm Evans who described Jesus this way: *“If he were alive today I would picture a six-foot-six inch 260 pound defensive tackle...He’d be the toughest guy who ever played the game.”* He quotes former Yankees pitcher Fritz Peterson as saying, *“I firmly believe that if Jesus Christ was sliding into second base, he would knock the second baseman into left field to break up the double play. Christ might not throw a spitball, but he would play hard within the rules.”* (Yancy, Philip, “The Jesus I Never Knew” pg. 19).

It’s amazing how some people’s imaginations can go crazy sometimes – even when describing Jesus. But it wasn’t that way for the Apostle John. John was a man who not only knew Jesus as his Savior; he actually knew Him and spent a great deal of time with Him as a living, breathing human being. John was one of Jesus’ disciples, and a close one at that! He, along with Peter and his brother James were privileged to be with Jesus during some of His most intense moments. If there was ever anyone who really had a grasp on who Jesus was and what he was about, it would be John.

We’ve been looking for the past two weeks at the Gospel of John and in particular, at some of the ways John portrays Jesus. We saw that John described Jesus as the Word of God in chapter 1, and the Son of Man in chapter 2. This morning, we’ll look in John 3, where John portrays Jesus as the Teacher.

If there was one word that would adequately describe Jesus’ earthly ministry, it would be teacher. Jesus was a teacher in everything He said and everything He did. Jesus came to teach us how to come out of the darkness of sin and death, and come into His light and life. Jesus came to teach us how to live life abundantly and eternally. In our text today, He gets the opportunity to teach a teacher these principles, and He does just that!

Jesus had an opportunity to teach a man named Nicodemus - a well respected and successful man - a man who had money, power, and position, but a man who lacked the most important thing – he lacked a personal relationship with Jesus Christ – the one thing that would guarantee him success in eternity.

Jesus is still teaching that lesson today for there may be some here today who like Nicodemus. You may be successful in your career – in your social life and in your family life. You may be well respected and well liked, but you come here today lacking in that one area that will ensure your success in eternity – a personal relationship with Christ.

Nobody ever taught like Jesus so, let’s join Jesus, The Teacher in His classroom as He teaches the truth about salvation. First, I want us to hear:

1. The Conversation (READ John 3:1-13)

The conversation is between Jesus and a Pharisee named Nicodemus, probably a member of the Sanhedrin whose responsibility it was to make judgments and decisions that affected the Jewish religion.

But as a Pharisee, he was also bound to the strictest of religious and ethical standards. Now the Pharisees are often portrayed in the Scriptures as hypocritical and legalistic. But not all Pharisees were that way. Some actually did their best to live holy lives. It appears that Nicodemus was of these.

One thing is for sure, Nicodemus’ approach to Jesus indicates that He was sincere in his search for the truth. Here was a man who came to Jesus at night, not out of fear, but because he was desperately searching for peace.

In this conversation, Nicodemus addressed Jesus with respect. He calls Jesus *“Rabbi,”* which means teacher, and appears to hold Jesus in high regard. In fact, Nicodemus understood that Jesus had been sent from God to the world. At least it seems He a vague understanding of just who Jesus really is.

But Nicodemus’s shortfall is that he comes to Jesus with human reasoning. He’s heard of and perhaps even

seen some of the miracles Jesus has performed, but he stops short in his understanding of just who Jesus really is. To Nicodemus, Jesus was just a teacher, or a prophet whom God has sent.

This is always the problem with religion! It stops short in its approach to Jesus Christ. Religion will teach you that Jesus might be necessary, but you have to add things to it such as baptism, confirmation, church membership, communion, or any of a thousand other things. In a religious system, faith in Jesus is never enough. But let me set the record straight: If your religion stops short of receiving Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation, then you have no salvation! It's Jesus, plus nothing, minus nothing. It's Jesus and Jesus alone that saves the soul from sin.

Let me illustrate: If the CIA wanted you to be an agent in China, you would be trained to talk, act, look, and think Chinese. You would have to learn the Chinese language so that you could speak it fluently. You would learn to duplicate their mannerisms. You might even undergo plastic surgery and have your face changed so that you would look Chinese. Then you could enter Communist China as one of them. As far as anyone in China is concerned, you are Chinese. But would you be Chinese? No, not if you didn't have Chinese parents. Nothing you can do will change your race.

It's the same way spiritually. You may talk like a Christian, join a church, sing hymns, and pray prayers like a Christian, but, none of these things will make you a Christian. You were born sinful and you have a sin nature. Nothing you can do outwardly can change this fact. Just as you would have to have been born of Chinese parents to be Chinese, so you need a new birth spiritually to become a Christian.

But back to the conversation - notice that Jesus gets right to the need of Nicodemus's heart. Jesus tells Nicodemus that his religion isn't sufficient to save his soul - that he must experience something called the "*New Birth*."

Being the Divine Teacher, Jesus used a common analogy to illustrate His thought. Birth is a universal experience. Everyone has been through it. But, there is something different about this "*new birth*." This refers to something that only comes from God and can only be obtained God's way.

That's why Jesus said to Nicodemus, "*unless, one is born again... (3)*". The word "*unless*" is an imperative. It literally means that we have no other choice when it comes to salvation. There are no short cuts, no alternate routes, no "*Plan B*." We either come God's way or we don't experience His salvation. Acts 4:12 says, "*And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*" It's Jesus or nothing!

But Nicodemus didn't get it. He couldn't understand the things of God even when they were explained in simple terms. He thought that Jesus was referring to returning to his mother's womb - Something that would be impossible.

Many people just don't get it when it comes to the plan of salvation because they think in human terms, which makes no sense. God's plan can only be spiritually discerned and unless the God's Holy Spirit awakens the mind to the truth of God's plan, then there can be no understanding of salvation. That is why Jesus said in John 6:65 that "*People can't come to me unless the Father brings them to me.*"

So Jesus then proceeds to explain the manner of this "*new birth*." He said that two things must happen in order to enter the Kingdom of God - You've got to be born of water and the Spirit.

Now there has been some debate as to what the water here refers to. Some say Jesus is referring to water baptism. But this is not possible because if baptism was necessary for salvation, then it would add works to grace, and that is not biblical.

Some say it refers to the natural birth. This sounds reasonable, but think about it! If a man is never born, then there would be no need for salvation would there?

I believe that water here refers to the Word of God who is Jesus. I believe this was one reason John was careful to lay down that foundation of Jesus as the Word in chapter one. For what is it that makes the heart of the sinner come alive to the truth of God? What is it that makes a person aware of his or her need for Christ? What brings about conviction of sin? What makes faith in God possible? It's the Word of God. Rom. 10:17 says, "*Faith comes from listening to this message of good news - the good news about Christ.*" That is why Gospel preaching is so necessary. It's all about Jesus!

But there's a second necessity for entering the Kingdom of God - being born of the Spirit. When the sinner turns to Jesus for salvation, what makes us a part of Christ? What changes us from a lost sinner to a saved sinner?

It's God's Holy Spirit. And it's this same Spirit who baptizes the sinner into the body of Christ and gives him eternal life. 1 Cor. 12:13 says, "...we have all been baptized into Christ's body by one Spirit..."

Then in vs. 6, Jesus makes a distinction between a physical birth - a human life being born, and a spiritual birth - a new life being born. Paul explains this concept in 2 Cor. 5:17. He says "*that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!*" He literally becomes a "*New Creation*" in the Lord Jesus. A new creation that is fully fitted for Heaven.

In vs. 8-13, Jesus explains that the Spirit's movements are like that of the wind, He is invisible and cannot be predicted, but when He passes by, He touches people in unmistakable ways!

Like the skeletons in the valley of the dry bones, when the wind of God moved over those dead bones, they came alive! This is what happens to the dead sinner. The Holy Spirit comes by and awakens him to the truths of God's Word, then he is drawn to Jesus. When the sinner responds in faith, he is saved and given the new birth from God. How? I don't know. Like Jesus said, "...you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit" (8). But Nicodemus was still in the dark. In vs. 9, he asked, "*What do you mean?*" He was totally bumfuzzled!

2. The Commentary (READ 14-17)

In an effort to clear the mud for this confused man, Jesus goes on to explain things a little more deeply. Knowing that Nicodemus is steeped in the Old Testament Scriptures, He uses an event from Israel's history (Num. 21:4-10) to illustrate His teaching. Here, Israel is in the wilderness and they are grumbling to Moses about the lack of food and water. In response, God sends poisonous snakes into the camp and many of the people are bitten. Moses intercedes for the people and God tells him to make a snake from brass, and hang it on a pole. Then whoever is bitten and looks at the snake will live. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that as the snake of old was lifted up, so must Jesus. And whoever would look up to Him in faith believing, will also be saved.

You see, everyone has been bitten by the snake of sin. People are dying, with no hope on their own. But the good news is that whoever looks at the crucified Jesus in faith will live.

Then, in the simplest of terms, Jesus explained to Nicodemus, God's plan of salvation. In John 3:16, Jesus tells Nicodemus that God's love for man was so great that He willing gave up His only Son to die that sinners might be saved and have eternal life. Of course, he was referring to Himself, and the death He would suffer.

It was a simple plan of salvation. Jesus tells Nicodemus that the key to receiving salvation is as simple as believing. He didn't need to follow a rigid set of rules and regulations. There was no need for volumes of laws and traditions to learn. Rites and rituals would not be necessary in order to gain entrance into God's kingdom. Religion makes it impossible for men to be saved. But Jesus makes it so simple that little children, old people, smart people and not-so-smart people can be saved by the grace of God.

I mean, how much simpler could God have made it? He's already done all the work. He's already paid price and torn down all the barriers. All He asks us to do is come to Him and believe Him. Paul said it this way, "...Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved..." Acts 16:31. After 2,000 years, nothing has changed! Sinners are still saved by simply believing in Jesus and coming to Him by faith.

Conclusion: Of all the things Jesus taught, His lesson on salvation stands at the center. All His other great lessons revolve around these truths –

1. God loves you
2. Jesus can save you, and because of that,
3. You can have eternal life. It's not hard. It's not that deep. It's a simple lesson that many people have heard and believed – even small children. Yet it is so profound, many people stumble over it and never grasp its truth. Don't be one of those. Hear the call of God today as he sits with you right there in your pew. Hear Him as He says to you, "*You must be born again.*" Obey Him as He says, "*Believe in me. Trust me, and I'll forgive your sins and give you an eternal home in heaven.*"