

## Savior of the World

March 11, 2018

### John 3:14-21

14 And just 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. 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

The Scripture that I selected for today is the middle part of a conversation. Jesus is teaching a Pharisee named Nicodemus. His testimony is very powerful. The full dialogue is Johns 3:1-21. After the cleansing of the temple, which we covered last week, is this famous conversation with Nicodemus.

John chapter 3 verses 1-13 covers a lot of material. Nicodemus is a Pharisee. As you probably already know, the Pharisees had a strict observance of tradition and the law. Often at times they were in conflict with Jesus and John the Baptist too for that matter. The Scripture tells us that Nicodemus was a leader of the Jews. Nicodemus has some positive and negative aspects. The positive thing is that he seeks out Jesus. This is a very good thing something only a few people do. This is also the 1<sup>st</sup> step to discipleship. There is a lesson here on the potential of Nicodemus to be a disciple with a contemporary lesson being about those who seek Jesus but fail to be disciples.

The negative thing is that he hides it. He hides the fact that he is seeking Jesus. The Scripture tells us that he comes at night to talk with Jesus. This tells us something in itself. Why does he come at night? Is he too busy working in the day? No. Is it that the only time available to have a one on one conversation with Jesus is at night? No. He comes at night because of the secrecy. Nicodemus is afraid of the Jews. Actually, it was not the Jews (the people) that he was afraid of, it was the religious leaders.

There are some certain characteristics in how Nicodemus addresses Jesus. The first is that he addresses Jesus as "Rabbi." This means that he thinks of Jesus as a teacher. A Rabbi is a Jewish scholar or teacher. The second is that he acknowledges Jesus is a "teacher who has come from God." Now, this is affirmation of the Christ or Messiah. The third thing is that he says "we know." This has a significant meaning. It means that he did not come as an individual, he comes as a leader of a group of people - a community that shares this acknowledgment of Jesus being sent by God. This is in direct contrast to the Pharisees. So, Nicodemus and others know there is something special about Jesus. They do not yet fully believe but they recognize the power. However, for Jesus, believing based on witnessing the power isn't good enough. That's because such belief is not based on faith. It is like saying "I will believe it if I see it." Which means there is an underlying degree of doubt that demands proof.

Jesus responds with education - and it is highly significant. The significance of which is not revealed in modern translation. The Greek word used has a double meaning. It means from above and again. You are born from above and born again. It is not one or the other. It is both.

Modern translations read one or the other which distracts from what Jesus is actually saying. The famous dialogue of being born again has deeper level of meaning than most people understand. Nicodemus is oblivious. He protests that to be born again is physically impossible. And he is right. A grown man cannot go back into his mother's womb and be born a second time. He is correct on one level of understanding. However, he is in conflict with the understanding of being born from above. This shows the limits of Nicodemus who sees the power of Jesus but does not see the full extent of the divine nature of Jesus. He hears the testimony of Jesus but he does not fully understand. Being born from above is being born of the spirit. It is an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is a contrast to being born of the earth. It is a whole new realm of existence.

Today's Scripture is Jesus explaining the concept of being born from above and again. The Son of Man - that's Jesus - has to be lifted up. He has to be crucified for our salvation. It is all about God and the love of God. For God loves the world, that means God loves everybody. Contemporary America gets this wrong. Christians today interpret this as "God loves me" and that makes us happy and so we go out and witness saying things like "God loves you" and that makes us happy. But what we miss is that God loves the victims of oppression, the poor, the people in the third world countries. God loves them. God loves those that we neglect and mistreat. Verse 16 gets all the attention. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Verse 17 is just as important. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. God sends the Son to save the world. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the savior of the world.

The teaching is directed to Nicodemus because this is where Nicodemus is stuck. This is why Nicodemus chose to come at night. He recognized the power of Jesus and he recognized that God is the source, but he failed to recognize the most important thing is that Jesus is the Son of God. If he did, if he knew that, if he could grasp that, he would not come at night because he would know that he did not need to be afraid of the Pharisees, or the religious leaders, or anyone else for that matter.

The conflict of Nicodemus is a conflict of the self. You see, he comes to the light but he comes at night. He seeks the knowledge of Jesus but rejects it. He knows and understands the physical, he cannot go back into mother's womb, and be born a second time. But he does not know and understand the spiritual - being born from above - born of the spirit. His belief is limited to the miracles that he has witnessed. This means that he is not a believer. Nicodemus came to Jesus but he did not receive Jesus. To receive Jesus takes belief that Jesus is the Son of God. God loves the world so much that God gives the Son to the world. It is for those who believe; for those who receive the gift.

Jesus teaches that he has to be lifted up for salvation, eternal life, for those who believe because God loves everyone in the world. Believers have eternal life. Jesus came to save the world. But people love the darkness (evil) and hide their actions. This is exactly what Nicodemus did. Believers are not afraid to come to the light because they believe in the divine nature of Jesus.

The lesson Jesus is teaching Nicodemus is a lesson for us. To believe in Jesus as the Son of God. Which, by the way, is a gift from God. It's not just for me but for the world. When we are born from above everything is totally different. We have a new attitude, a new way of living, with no more complaints, and no petty issues. And we are not concerned with the opinions of others. Your loyalty and devotion is to the Divine. We stand at the foot of the cross because he

had to be lifted up so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. We stand with the Son of God, the crucified Savior of the world.