

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” ³ In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

⁴ “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” ⁵ Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

⁹ “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven —the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **This is the Gospel of our Lord.**

Dear Friends,

Curiosity killed the cat. At least that’s what people say when you’re asking questions they aren’t comfortable answering. Is curiosity a bad thing then? Not necessarily. Thanks to curious people we have many inventions that make our lives easier or even save lives. But curiosity can also be dangerous. Just think of how many explorers have died trying to satisfy their curiosity of what lay on the other side of the ocean or jungle or a curious toddler getting into something poisonous or dangerous.

Yes, **“It’s important that we exercise our curiosity correctly.”** That’s especially true in regard to spiritual matters. As we consider the story of Nicodemus, we’re going to learn that, **“The curiosity of unbelief questions God’s ways,”** while **“The curiosity of faith accepts God’s answers.”**

I. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling Jewish council called the Sanhedrin. That made him a man of power and authority. He was also a religious leader who had studied the Old Testament scriptures but he taught salvation by work-righteousness in spite of what scripture said.

He was also a curious man. He didn’t reject Jesus like his fellow Pharisees but wanted to learn more. Not wanting to commit one way or another, he came at night looking for answers.

Nicodemus knew Jesus was sent by God because of the miracles and signs, but Nicodemus did not recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah. He acknowledged as much with his statement, **“We know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”** But even before he could ask a question, Jesus already knew what was on his mind and gives him an answer, **“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”**

What a surprising statement for Nicodemus. His Jewish heritage wasn't going to save him, nor his good works, nor anything else he had been doing. Everything Nicodemus had been teaching and everything he believed had just been thrown out the window and he didn't understand. Why? Because, **“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”** (1 Corinthians 2:14). Nicodemus was an unbeliever and God's Word did make sense to him. But he doesn't get upset or indignant and walk away. He wants to understand what Jesus means – he came looking for answers. **“How can a man be born when he is old?”** Nicodemus asked. **“Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!”**

Jesus gets to the heart of the message. **“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”** We are all born sinful. We inherit original sin from our parents. Nicodemus thought he was a pretty good guy – that he was living the perfect life but Jesus cuts right to the heart by pointing out that he is no better than the worst of sinners. Only the Spirit can give him the new life he needs and that new life can come through the waters of baptism.

Nicodemus wanted to know “How” and Jesus told him, “Through the work of the Spirit.” It wasn't important that Nicodemus understand exactly how the Spirit works, just that he does. Scripture points to the work of the Spirit in a number of different ways: **“Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”** (Romans 10:17) or **“No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”** (1 Corinthians 12:3) and I could go on and on. Yet Nicodemus still did not understand – he still did not believe.

Sometimes we are like Nicodemus too. We don't believe certain portions of scripture because they just don't make sense to us and sometimes what that portion of scripture might be telling us goes against what we have believed or been doing for some time and we don't want to change our ways. Does that mean that scripture is wrong? No!

Sometimes our prayer should be the same as the request a man made to Jesus, **“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”** (Mark 9:24). We need the Holy Spirit working in our lives to help us believe and understand God's Word and the only way the Spirit can work is through the Word. As we dig into scripture God will provide us with answers – he will help us through our times of unbelief and weakness. He will help us to accept God's answers.

II. Jesus didn't give up on Nicodemus. When Nicodemus asked, **“How can this be?”** Jesus said, **“You are Israel's teacher and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people**

do not accept our testimony.” It’s as if Jesus was pointing Nicodemus back to the scriptures and telling him to pay attention to what he was reading, but also pointing him to the message of Jesus and John the Baptist. Here were two witnesses of the Gospel. His natural inclination as a judge in the Sanhedrin couldn’t let him ignore these witnesses. They spoke of repentance, faith and regeneration. The “earthly things,” accept it or reject it. There is no middle ground.

Then Jesus told him, **“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven —the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”** In essence he identified himself to Nicodemus as the Promised Messiah and pointed to a picture Nicodemus recognized – the bronze snake which Moses made at God’s command. Jesus was pointing ahead to when he would be crucified and everyone who looked to him for salvation would be saved. A better summary for Nicodemus was, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”**

God, who is just and perfect, can’t sweep sin under the carpet, but he loved the world so much that he sent his Son to redeem the world so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life in heaven. That is the whole reason Jesus came – to save the world. We know that the Spirit worked faith in Nicodemus’ heart and that he became a believer because he was there to take Jesus body down off of the cross and place it in a tomb. And to think that his devotion to Jesus all began with a little curiosity – the curiosity of an unbeliever that turned into the curiosity of a believer who accepts the truths found in God’s Word.

The fact that you are here this morning means that you have some level of curiosity about Jesus. Will that lead to the level of devotion Nicodemus showed towards Jesus? Will you one day gladly risk your reputation to be known as a follower of Christ? Will you spend your time and money to serve him?

That might be hard to imagine right now but it is what God wants. And it is what we’ll gladly give when we come to learn and appreciate who Jesus is: our Savior from sin and hell. You might still wrestle with God’s Word at times but keep listening to his answers, just as Nicodemus did. Take opportunities to attend a Bible Study and dig into the Word with your fellow Christians, and as you do, you will cherish Jesus as your Savior, more and more each day. Amen.