Second Sunday of Lent

March 8, 2020

John 3:1-17 Series A

Curiosity Saves the Soul Of Nicodemus

 Grace, mercy, and peace to you in Jesus Amen. A lot has happened since last week in the life and ministry of Jesus. Last week you heard how Jesus and the devil spared for three rounds in their 15 round title and championship fight with everything on the line. You heard how Jesus conquered the devil in the wilderness. Since then, Jesus has called his disciples. Jesus has preached multiple sermons and brought multitudes of people to faith. Each person that Jesus has healed. Each person Jesus has brought to faith is one more blow that the devil has taken. The power of the Triune God conquers the devil.

So, before we get into the text and the teaching for today, let's ponder the issue of curiosity for a moment? Has there ever been something you have been curious about? Has there ever been a time when you were so curious about something it consumed you? Your every waking moment. Something you just had to learn or find out about whatever your curiosity was killing you? Have you ever heard the saying? "Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back?"

Well, that is precisely the case for Nicodemus. His curiosity is killing him. Or more accurately, his curiosity is convicting him. The satisfaction of that curiosity will ultimately save him. Nicodemus is beyond just a little curious. His curiosity is keeping him up at night. Now there is also some fear that goes along with Nic's interest. So, he uses both his curiosity and his anxiety to get the answers he needs. Nic is a Pharisee; that is, he is a teacher of the law. He is an Old Testament professor at one of the prominent seminaries. Nic knows the Old Testament forwards and backward. He has a tremendous amount of head knowledge about the Old Testament. We would say he knows it like the back of his hand. Yet there is still some fear and somethings he doesn't quite understand. Thankfully, he is not paralyzed by his fear. He knows that if he is found out publicly, he could lose his position as a Pharisee, as a professor of the Old Testament Scriptures. He stands to lose everything financially, socially, and publicly if this conversation gets out to his peers. Yet he also knows he has to get to the bottom the issue he has. He has to get the answers to his burning questions. So, as the Holy Spirit continues to work on Nic, he develops a plan. He responds to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Nic comes to Jesus by night. This way, he can have a private and long conversation with Jesus. Something that would not be possible during the daytime hours with all of the crowds flocking and following Jesus' every move. Therefore Nic' comes to Jesus under cover of darkness. At this point, despite Nic's vast knowledge, he is still spiritually in the dark. Yet he knows he is missing something. The something that Nic' is missing is the answer to his curiosity. The curiosity that he is filled with by the Holy Spirit. The answer to his burning question is what brings him back, as the saying goes. Instead, it brings him to life as the famous saying implies.

Nic knows that Jesus has come from God. Listen to his words as we eavesdrop on their conversation. "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him. That's great finally we have some recognition from the Pharisees that Jesus has come from God. So, what! Even the demons know who Jesus is! Yet the demons refuse to respond with an admission of faith in Jesus.

Now comes Jesus' response, which gets to the heart of Nic's issue. His salvation! Nic does not quite understand yet that he needs to come to faith in Jesus. Nic has been trained to think all these years that his head knowledge is sufficient. Well, Jesus is about to blow Nic's world and superficial understanding to smithereens. Let's have a listen in the next part of the conversation.

Jesus says, "I tell you the truth; no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

 Nicodemus demonstrates his lack of spiritual knowledge based upon his response. Nic' responds with a flesh-based answer. "How can a man be born again?" Nic has no concept of flesh and spirit worlds. This seems like an oxymoron. Surely someone with his knowledge and stature regarding the Old Testament should understand that the two worlds exist. How could Nic have missed it all these years? We don't know how he has missed it, but he did.

 Jesus, the Master teacher, breaks this down for Nic with theses words. "I tell you the truth no one can enter the kingdom of God – UNLESS - he is born of water and the spirit," Jesus explains further about the spirit, and still, Nic doesn't quite get it.

You can almost hear Jesus' frustration and annoyance with Nicodemus mounting. As Jesus says to Nic', "You are Israel's teacher, and you do not understand these things?

Now the in-depth teaching and lecture begin. It begins at verse 10 and goes all the way to the end of the chapter, which is verse 21.

Many people, even non-Christians, know John 3:16, so say it with me. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes shall not perish but have eternal life." If you can share this verse with each person you meet than you God can use you as his chosen instrument to bring others to faith. Great now let's back up to verses 14 and 15 which tells us why he gave his one and only son. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15**that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." Now let's hear verse 17, which confirms these two verses, "**17**For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." Share verse 17 with verse 16, and you have summarized the entire Gospel message.

 This passage does not tell us that Nicodemus accepted Jesus teaching. However, we know that he did base upon independent historical records and other scriptures which indicate that Nicodemus accompanies Joseph of Arimathea to take down the body of Jesus and prepare it for burial. Therefore, the curiosity of Nicodemus indeed saved his soul. It saved him because he listened and responded to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. However, his faith did not stop there. We also know that Nic stood in opposition to the kangaroo court that wrongly convicted Jesus and sentenced him to death. He stood for what was right along with Joseph of Arimathea. He was willing to give up his status and position for his faith and his salvation. What has God prompted you to do to put your faith into action during this season of Lent? Is there something he has made you curious about? Is there something he is prompting you to change in your faith journey with Him? How is God challenging you to grow in this season of Lent? What curiosity has he placed on your heart? Perhaps its something more than giving up meat on Fridays or chocolate? Maybe God wants more or your time and attention. Maybe he wants you to be more curious about His Holy Word? Let the curiosity of the Holy Spirit, which dwells within you, stretch you, and take you to new levels of understanding of Jesus. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus until the day of his return. Amen.