

More Like Jesus Part 3

Belief That Saves

John 3:1-21, 12:44-50

Memory Verses: John 3:14-15

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

I heard a story recently about a Seminary president who put some money in the Salvation Army kettle at Christmas. After putting in a few coins the female bell ringer asked the man if he knew who Jesus was. He answered, “of course I do, I am the president of a seminary.” The bell ringer responded by asking another question, “do you know what it means to be born again?” Again, the man answered, “ma'am, I told you I'm a seminary president, I know everything there is to know about Jesus.” Without skipping a beat, the woman said, “I didn't ask if you knew about Jesus, I asked if you knew what it means to be born again in Christ?” The seminary president, finally fed up with this woman, stormed off without answering the question.

This story illustrates the fact that many religious elite are filled with pride over their religious knowledge. Their degrees and books are held up as trophies declaring their spiritual prominence. But as **Matthew 7:21-23** says, not every prominent Christian leader is actually saved.

Over the past two weeks we've been looking at the life of Jesus. His baptism, his temptation, and his mission of preaching the Gospel in the area of Galilee, only to be rejected and persecuted. We've seen how these parts of Jesus' life give us examples of how to live the best Christian life. In every situation we must be More Like Jesus.

Today we are going to be looking at one of the greatest conversations, if not the greatest conversation that Jesus ever had. And instead of having to try to read between the lines of how this applies to us, we will see exactly what we are being called to do. You see, today we will be reading the most popular verse in the entire Bible and the context surrounding it. That verse is John 3:16. And the man Jesus was speaking to was Nicodemus. Nicodemus was one of the highest of the religious elite. He was a pharisee on the council at Jerusalem and had the respect of all of the people. In his time He would have been akin to a seminary president. He had watched Jesus heal people. He had heard his messages and seen how the people followed him. He no doubt was curious. But instead of resting on his religious status, thinking he had reached the pinnacle piety ... he made it a point to dig deeper. Unlike the seminary president who besmirched the woman with the salvation army kettle, Nicodemus retains a measure of teachability.

Look at **John 3:1-2**. Nicodemus comes to Christ, at night. This is

an unsanctioned meeting. Nicodemus doesn't want anyone, especially the council, to know that he is giving this Jesus an audience. He is outside the graces of his peers. And we see that Nicodemus concedes somethings about Jesus. He calls him Rabbi, which means teacher. He is giving him the dignity of putting him within his own religious system. He is not calling him a heretic. And he admits that he must be a teacher from God because no one could do the things he does unless from God. He legitimizes his teachings and his miracles; you are a teacher of God and a miracle worker from God. But, he falls short here of calling him the Christ. At this point, Nicodemus is not a believer. And so, Jesus himself shares the Gospel message with him as to persuade him to be saved.

Today I want us to look closely at what Jesus says. If we are called to share the Gospel, shouldn't we take note of how Jesus shared the Gospel? It's a shame, but I don't think most of us take into account all that Christ says here to Nicodemus when we share the Gospel these days. In fact I think we leave out a major part. Repent. It's easy to tell people that if they come to Christ they will be transformed, receive peace, joy, and one day Heaven. It's even easy to tell them that all they have to do is merely believe that Jesus died and raised from the grave for their sins. But what is not easy is to tell them that real belief demands real repentance... and so we often leave that part out. As we look at what Jesus says here in the book of John I want us to recognize something truly vital. **To Believe In Jesus, means to Be Living For Jesus.**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to recognize here is... **To Be More Like Jesus We Must Be Bold In Our Presentation of the Gospel.** If find it very interesting that even after Nicodemus gracefully and methodically approaches Jesus with pleasantries; tiptoeing into what could be a very contentious conversation, Jesus quickly dispenses with the small talk and gets right to the point; Nico, you're lost and need to be born again. Why does Jesus start his presentation this way? Perhaps we don't see the small talk in this story. Perhaps it was there, but John just didn't feel compelled to tell us that part. Or perhaps because Jesus simply wants us to recognize that this is a very serious matter. This isn't meant to be light hearted. This is a matter of spiritual life and spiritual death. This isn't a time for games.

Lets go verse by verse through this conversation starting in verse 3. In **John 3:3** Jesus tells him, you've come to see the kingdom of God restored, and you, like all humans have fallen short of God and are in need of salvation. You are lost. It can seem very blunt and bold to tell someone that they are lost, or might be lost. But, if someone is not convinced of their need for Christ how can you lead them to Christ? You can't. This is one of the biggest issues we face when trying to draw people to Christ in the south and in the Bible belt. So many have grown up “christian” their whole life.

They've gone to church since they can remember but they can all remember saying a prayer and being baptized. They may not have ever lived one day in the service of Christ or cared about the things of Christ at all, and are probably living in habitual sinfulness and rebellion to God... but you will never convince them that they need to be saved.

The same was probably true of Nicodemus who was a very religious man. He had made professions. He had done the religious things. And so Jesus gets even more blunt; you need to be born again. Your so bad that you can't salvage this life... you need a new one. Look at **John 3:4-6**. Nico, you can't be restored to the kingdom of God unless you are born again. In **vs4** we see that Nico wants to keep this on tangible terms, he's always followed the law. He isn't really inquiring about a physical rebirth... rather he is asking, "please give me something physical to do... give me a law to obey." But in **vs5** Jesus tells him this isn't about following the rules. You must become like a brand new person. The old you was born into human sinfulness. The new you will be born into God's righteousness. This is a transformation that cannot come from human doing but only from God's grace. Jesus continues in **vs6** by making it clear that being born again means complete spiritual transformation; mind and heart. You don't need to change your clothes, your body, etc... You simply need to change your way of thinking and change your desires for living. You see, Nicodemus had lived a lifetime of looking the part, and playing the part... but now he had to stop putting his trust in his ability and start putting it in God's ability. This can't be a one time ceremony and then you are good... no, this has to be a life change. **Born again isn't an event... it's a lifestyle.**

In **John 3:7-8**, Jesus can tell that Nico is obviously struggling to understand this concept of spiritual transformation and how to receive it and so Jesus makes it simple for him. He tells him, you must have faith. Jesus tells Nico that he's struggling with something simple, something that God has desired from us since the beginning of time; faith! He desired it from Noah when he told him to build a giant boat. He desired it from Abraham when he sent him to sacrifice Isaac. He desired it from Moses when he spoke to him from a burning bush. He desired it from Joshua when he told him to walk around the city of Jericho and blow trumpets and the walls would fall down. Now he desires it from you Nicodemus. It takes faith to believe that the wind is real even though you cannot see it. It takes faith to believe that God is real even though you can't see him. You can see the effects of the wind, and you can see the effects of God. So it is with everyone who is born again. You are born again by faith and you know it has happened because you can see the effects of it on your life. More on this in the next two points.

In **John 3:9-12** Jesus confronts Nico's unbelief. He says, you know the scriptures, how can you not know what this is? Jeremiah the

prophet said that there was coming a new covenant that would be written on men's souls and hearts. And, you can see the miracles that I accomplish; how could I do this if what I said was not true? This faith Jesus asks of us isn't a blind faith. It's a faith that makes sense. So have faith!

Christ has commissioned us to preach the Good news of the Kingdom of God and the Messiah who has come. The point being; we don't have time to play games. Yes we must build relationships, yes we must earn the right to be heard and have these conversations, but when the door is open and the opportunity presents itself... don't pull your punches. Tell them the truth. Tell them... **You are lost in your sin and through faith you must be spiritually transformed to the point that the effects are obvious.**
To Believe In Jesus, means to Be Living For Jesus.

The second thing that must be recognized when sharing the Gospel is... **To Be More Like Jesus We Must Preach The True Meaning Of The Word Believe.** Jesus tells Nico that he must have faith in order to be spiritually reborn into the kingdom of God. But, have faith in what exactly? We find the answer in **vs13**. At this point Jesus drops the bomb and just flat out tells Nico that he himself is the Messiah; "I am the one who came from Heaven, I am the son of man and the son of God." It is me who is standing right in front of you that you must place your faith in in order to be spiritually reborn in to the kingdom of God.

Okay.... But how? How does one put their faith in the Messiah... what does that mean, what does that look like? We find the answer in **vs14-17**. In **vs14** Jesus begins explaining to Nicodemus how he must believe in Him by sharing an OT story with him. You can find the account in **Numbers 21:4-9**. The people complain against God and Moses for the umpteenth time and so God sends snakes to bite the people and kill them. After recognizing that this was a plague from the Lord the people beg for forgiveness and mercy. God once again shows himself merciful and tells Moses to make a bronze serpent on a pole and when someone is bitten by the snakes if they look at the bronze serpent they will live.

Jesus, in **vs15** says that believing in me is the same thing! The Son of God must be raised up, not on a pole but on a cross, so that everyone who would look upon his death would be saved. And then in **vs16-17** He brings the whole thing together. Nicodemus, God loves everyone on the earth, right? Right. And in order to show his love and make a way of restoring mankind to the kingdom of God he gave the Messiah, me. Okay? Okay! He has given me, his one and only son, to die as the sacrificial lamb, so that who ever believes in me will not die a spiritual death but have eternal spiritual life. God sent me so that everyone could be saved.

Nico knows most of this stuff already. He no doubt knows of the breach man made with God when they sinned in the garden. Nico no doubt knows that God promised restoration through the coming Messiah. Nico

now knows that Isaiah was clearly speaking of the death of this messiah for the sins of mankind when he said that "by his stripes we are healed." Nico no doubt knows that eternal spiritual life in heaven, in Abraham's bosom, in paradise, in the kingdom of God, can only be found through this messiah. And now this messiah is standing before him and all Nico has to do is simply Believe in Him the same way the Israelites believed in the bronze snake to heal them. They have to look.

And here is the main point of the whole sermon. Here is where the rubber meets the road. This is where most people fall off the rails with the Gospel presentation. Do you see it? Believing isn't something you do simply with your mind or heart. Believing is something you must do with your body. You must make an action. You must act upon your belief. You must look! If the Israelites believed that the bronze snake could heal them then what did they have to do? They had to look. There were Millions of Israelites in the desert. You have to imagine they took up a huge footprint. It wasn't just a few people around a campfire where they all could easily see the bronze serpent. No, many of them probably had to walk miles to see the snake. Some probably had to be carried to see the snake. Some probably crawled on their knees dying of poison, but they knew that it was their last chance. If only they could see the snake they would be healed. Get this... **Jesus is the last chance and the only way you can be saved is to act upon your belief and look upon him.** Look upon his death on the cross, and recognize that it is sufficient to save you from your sins. Recognize this this morning. When we say the world believe, we aren't talking about some thought process in your head. The word Believe means to Be Living what you say you believe. **To Believe In Jesus, means to Be Living For Jesus.**

Lastly... in sharing the Gospel we must do this.... **To Be More Like Jesus We Must Expect Christians To Live Lives of Repentance.** Let's get real. What are our expectations of other Christians really? Don't we just really expect them to not curse so much and to maybe say a prayer before super or to maybe come to church every now and then. Isn't that the best we can expect of people who say they believe in Jesus? Doesn't that sound weak? Be honest, doesn't that sound pathetic? No, if we are a Christian, then we must be spiritually transformed and reborn into new people by believing in Jesus Christ's death as the all sufficient sacrifice for our sins. Believing isn't with our minds or hearts only, no it with our actions. We must be living out what we say we believe. Plain and simple. This truth becomes even clearer when we look at the last part. Look at **vs18-21**. Do you see the command to action? We have to stop loving darkness and we must learn to walk in the light. You may ask, well if belief demands action, what's that action? Simple; it's called repentance. **Repentance means to turn**

from the way you are living currently and turn to a different way. Turn from your self centered sinful lifestyle and turn to Christ and his commands. In **vs18** we see that whoever does not believe is condemned. So what does disbelief look like? It looks like **vs19-20**. It looks like people, who instinctively love darkness because by their nature their works are evil. Hopefully you get it, we are not born good... quite the opposite. We are selfish self centered people and will almost always, in the end, look out for our own self interest. Not only do we love the dark and evil things, but we hate the light and good things. But in **vs21** we see that whoever is truly saved they will come into the light so that their belief will be validated by their works. Belief takes action to prove said belief. It validates it. Those who believe walk in the light. Those who don't walk in darkness.

Does that mean we must be good to be saved? Nope.. you can't be good enough to be saved. But what it does mean is that if you are saved and you truly believe in Jesus Christ then your life will look like it. It means that repentance will be obvious. If you look at someone who claims to be a Christian, and you can't see the obvious signs of belief and repentance in their life... there is something seriously wrong there.

John 12:44-50 is a parallel passage to this one. In case Jesus didn't make it clear in John 3 he says it again here. In **vs46** Jesus is the light... and he's come not just so that you would believe with your mind, but that in your belief you would flee the darkness. Anyone who still lives in darkness is rejecting the light. In **vs47** if you hear Jesus words and reject keeping them or refuse to live by them... Jesus doesn't judge you... whew.. right... not so fast, **vs48** God will judge you. And he will judge you and condemn you to hell in **vs49-50** based on how you keep the commandments of Jesus. Jesus is making it clear here. His commands to action are eternal life. **You can't receive eternal life without keeping the commandments of eternal life.** To believe means to be living what you say you believe. Repent and believe! **To Believe In Jesus, means to Be Living For Jesus**

Application

Jesus' words to Nicodemus here are the best presentation of the Gospel the world has ever known. These are words that must be adhered to and put into our arsenal. So are we getting it? The Gospel is not some timid ask, it is the most sobering thing you can ever talk to someone about. Thus, when the time presents itself, we must be bold in our presentation of it. We shouldn't skirt around the issue... we must make the case plain and simple. We tell them that they are lost, they are sinners in need of salvation and restoration to the kingdom of God. We tell them that unless they believe that Jesus is the Christ and that his death is the only thing sufficient to save us from our sins and spiritual death then they can't be saved. We tell them that to believe means not only to believe by faith with their minds and hearts, but also with their actions. The action of belief is repentance. They must

walk out of the darkness into the light.

Conclusion

If we fail to present the real Gospel, we will lead people into a false Gospel. One without salvation. One that looks good in church and sounds good on the year end salvation reports, but not one that will grant them eternal life. We must not sell a false bill of goods. To believe means to repent and turn to Christ. Those who do not turn from the darkness into the light are most likely not saved and they will be judged by God.

So was Jesus able to lead Nicodemus to salvation? Well we don't see Nico becoming a disciple. We don't see Nico traveling with the throngs of people that followed Jesus wherever he went. We don't see much of him at all after this conversation and that's a shame. It is probably an indicator that Nico didn't repent and turn to Christ immediately. Even Jesus won't force someone to be a believer. If Jesus didn't see converts in all he shared the Gospel with, you can also be okay when people reject your presentation too.

But a little later in [John 7:50-51](#), we see Nicodemus asking the other pharisees to withhold judgement on Christ until hearing his case. And then finally in [John 19:39-40](#), we see that Nicodemus brings a lot of burial aloes and products worth a lot of money and helps Joseph bury Jesus. This would be an act that he wouldn't be able to hide from the council. This was an act of faith... an act of repentance. This act shows us that Nicodemus finally did believe upon Jesus for salvation. In the end Nico showed that **To Believe In Jesus, means to Be Living For Jesus.**