

Text: John 3:1-15

Title: "Good Isn't Good Enough"

Introduction: Last week we talked about how in life, we've all had defining moments. Defining moments are those moments when we gain a new truth. Before that moment we had for some reason missed this truth, whether it was because we were just too busy with life and we never took the time to listen or study or realize that whatever it was is a truth that we need to live by. Maybe it was a truth that we knew at one point and forgot.

Maybe these defining moments came when we were trying to ignore a truth thinking that if I just ignore it, it will go away. And so we convince ourselves of a false truth and tell ourselves that if we believe it long enough, our false truth will become truth and the real truth will disappear. It's not rational, but it's us!

We ignore truth in our relationships. We ignore truths when it comes to our children or our parents. We ignore truths when it comes to our health. We don't want to know that our boyfriend/girlfriend is really this way or that way. We don't want to admit that our children are not perfect. We think that if we don't go to the doctor and he/she doesn't tell us that we are sick, it will go away.

So often we ignore truths, because if we allow those things to be truth, we will have to admit that we were wrong. Moreover, if we admit certain things are truth, it will alter our plan for our lives. "If I can keep ignoring that truth, I can continue on the path that I have set for *myself* in the area of career, family, finances, etc. If I admit that it is the truth, I will have to change *my* plans for *myself*!"

Anytime we ignore the truth about ourselves or our life situations, it sends us to bad places / aims us in bad directions... Ignoring the truth causes executives at large companies to give each other huge bonuses while the company is going bankrupt. Ignoring the truth causes individuals to get caught up in relationships with people and those relationships never go anywhere good...

Well, in this worship series we are discovering that the same holds true with our faith. It's really hard to be a follower of Christ (Know God, Love People, Serve the World = "a deeply committed Christian") if we don't know God for Who God *really* is! Most of us at some point or another or around some belief or another have decided that we want to know God for who *we* want God to be. Well, that doesn't work. Just like other areas of our lives, if we are not working with how things really are (Truth), we are usually headed in bad directions.

Let's Pray!

At this time I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will see our Scripture for today and on the other you will find a brief outline with fill-in-the-blanks. This will help us follow our learning for today and get us ready for the entire series ... "Squint". When you get home refrigerate this and keep learning from it this week. For those of you who are listening on-line or IPODing, you too can download the outline from our website and fill in the blanks as well. We are glad you are with us.

Last week we discussed that although ignorance is bliss, it's not an excuse. We need to know Who God is really and the teachings of God. Why?

For every "mistruth" that we believe in there is a corresponding consequence.

That's what we are doing with this worship series... Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to live in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."* John 8:12

During this worship series, "SQUINT", we are inviting you to stand in that light, "Squint" if you need to, but stay there and hear the truths of Jesus. Jesus truly wants us to fly, but we can't in this life or the next if we don't KNOW God for Who God REALLY IS! We have to stop inventing our own beliefs about God and start listening to Who He really is and Who God is calling us to be!

Jesus came into a world of darkness in the 1st Century, and he came so that the people would not be confused any longer about God. Jesus came (one reason) to show the people of Israel Who God really was. Jesus let the people know that God did not want to be distant or a mystery or confusing. God wanted for those people and for us, to fly ... to not have to keep going through all the stuff that caused the people pain and suffering and difficulty. Jesus came that we would not have to be confused about who God is and be making up our own version of God to live by.

So, today, we are going to follow Jesus to a meeting where he brings a truth that is going to hurt deeply the person he is telling. He is going to share a truth that is unheard of ... this is NEW NEWS! This is going to be a staggering blow for the man that Jesus speaks with and it might be for some of us here today. Here it is: Jesus says, essentially, "I have some Good News and some bad news and it's the same news ... Good people do not make it into heaven ... Good people do not necessarily have the promise of eternal life ... Good people do not have an entrance into the Kingdom of God."

Now, we are backing up a bit in John. Last week we were in Chapter 8. This week we are in Chapter 3. Early in Jesus' ministry he had performed his first miracle in Cana (near Nazareth) by turning water into wine at a wedding celebration. Soon after that, according to John, it was time for the Passover celebration. Jewish people migrated to Jerusalem for the Passover. Jesus went to Jerusalem with His disciples for the event.

While he was in Jerusalem, Jesus must have been doing more miracles, although John does not specify what was done. Our Scripture starts at the beginning of Chapter 3:

READ JOHN 3:1-15 NOW!

So, Jesus meets with Nicodemus after dark somewhere there in or around Jerusalem.

I. Nick at Night

A. Now, the first thing we need to do is make sure we all understand who Nicodemus was and in order to do that, we have to know what the religious and political landscape was in the 1st Century...

1. Rome was in power. They had conquered Israel/Palestine as part of the Roman Empire. Now, Rome had conquered a lot of territory, so instead of spreading their own men thin and asking them to guard all of these countries, the Romans started recruiting the locals to help keep the peace.
2. The main body of men that worked between Rome and Israel were the religious leaders of the day... they were called the High Council or the Sanhedrin.

3. The Sanhedrin / High Council / Pharisees worked with the Roman Governor over their territory. That Governor's job was always on the line. That Roman Governor could lose his job if he allowed any sort of riot or uprising from the natives of his territory.
 4. So, said Roman Governor would pay the Jewish political leadership (the Sanhedrin) really well to help keep peace in his territory. That means that Nicodemus was well paid to keep peace.
 5. The Pharisee's job was to play mediator between the Romans and the Jewish people. Of course the Jewish people trusted the Pharisees as well educated people and their religious leaders.
 6. For Rome, the Pharisees were political leaders. For Jewish nation, they were religious leaders. And they were well paid for both!
- B. Please note then the risk that Nicodemus, a well-respected Pharisee who was a member of the Sanhedrin, took when he set up a meeting with Jesus. The last thing that Nicodemus wants is some new religious leader (Jesus) causing an uprising and Rome finding out about it. There was money at stake, there was power at stake, and their position was at stake. If Jesus caused the people to change their beliefs about God and rise up against the Pharisees; Nicodemus and all their friends lose their power, money and position.
1. At that time in history, the Pharisees had the Romans happy with them and the Jews happy with them.
 2. Let's not do anything or allow anything to happen that will mess up our present gig.
- C. Now, Nicodemus makes an appointment with Jesus and meets him at night. We're not sure if there is any significance to him coming at night, we just know that's what happened. Maybe Nick just wanted to talk to Jesus without all the crowds around...
- D. Listen to how Nick addresses Jesus: "Rabbi". That was a sign of respect. Jesus must have said something or done something for Nicodemus to recognize Jesus as someone he needed to respect ... he goes on...
1. "...we know that God sent you to teach us." Nicodemus had some insight.
 2. "Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."
Jesus must have performed some miracles there in Jerusalem.
- E. Here's what Nicodemus knows ... maybe this is where you are. I think this is where many people are in the world when it comes to Jesus. "Jesus, I have heard you teach and heard about some miracles ... very interesting ... I saw what you did in the Temple ... sounded Godly. Conclusion: You are a good teacher. You are one who is very Godly ... kind of close to God ... sent by God, even."

1. Any chance Nicodemus just stated your case? Jesus was a good teacher. That's it!
 2. Ask people. Most people will tell you if you ask them about Jesus, that Jesus was probably from God, a good teacher, a moral compass...
 3. Nicodemus did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Nick did not realize that Jesus was God in human form. Neither does most of the world today.
- F. What we find out later in the Book of John is that Nicodemus was coming to Jesus to get some questions answered.
1. "When is God going to show up? When will this Messiah we've studied about finally come?"
 2. "When is God going to come and show off God's power and save Israel and defeat all her enemies, so we can be in charge again ... world power (like days of David and Solomon)!?"
 3. Nicodemus, understanding that Jesus must be a great teacher and man of God, might have some insight into when God was going to come back.
- G. Now, if you take a little time in your Scriptures, one of the characteristics of Jesus was that he often started answering questions before they were even asked. Kind of disturbing, but Jesus was always a step ahead ... he'd start telling a parable or a story or give a teaching that had to do with what the people in the room were THINKING, before they SAID IT out loud. Weird, but Jesus knew people!
- H. So, Nicodemus is there, not to change his beliefs about God, but to try to gain information to add to what he already believed. "Not going to change, just want to get a little better at what I already believe."
- I. Nicodemus doing his introduction ... "Hi, I'm Nick. I'm going to call you 'Rabbi' because I think you are a great teacher and you might be from God..."
1. And Jesus interrupts Nicodemus mid-sentence...
 2. Verse 3 = "Jesus replied, 'I tell you the ... (put on your sunglasses/welder's helmet, etc. It's about to get really bright, Nick!) ... truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.'"

II. Born Again

- A. Please know that this little Greek phrase "born again" can also be translated (and it is in John 9:11 and John 3:31) "born from above".
1. If you ever want to even SEE the Kingdom of God, you must be "born again!"
 2. Jesus is going right at what Nicodemus doesn't even know he needs to know ... Nick wants to see God's Kingdom in Israel and Jesus is telling him that he won't even see it, unless...
- B. Nick responds like you and I probably would have ... (v.4) "What? What are you talking about?" And knowing that Nick was a pretty smart guy, he is probably trying to figure it out knowing that Jesus

cannot possibly mean this literally (old man back into mother's womb).

- C. Jesus responds again. (v.5) "I assure you (tell you the truth), no one can enter (not only not see it) the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit."
1. Jesus goes on ... (v.6) "Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life."
 2. Do you get where Jesus is going here? Jesus is speaking to a prominent Jewish man. The Jews believed that because they were descendents of Abraham, they were in! They were automatically going to gain entrance into the Kingdom of God!
 3. Here's Jesus, a Jewish man himself; telling a Jewish religious leader that he will not gain entrance into the Kingdom of God ... Your physical birth doesn't matter when it comes to spiritual matters!
 4. If you are going to be right with God, you have to be "born from above"...
- D. This is the point where Nicodemus would say, "Okay, that's weird. I came here thinking you could help me find some answers about when God was coming here to straighten some things out, but obviously you're a little nuts and won't be able to help me. See Ya!"
- E. "I'm going back to what I know to be true. I'm going back to my system of doing things. I'm going back to what my Daddy taught me and my Mama taught me and what I learned my freshman year in college and what I learn on TV. Because what you are bringing Jesus is weird!"
1. But, Nicodemus doesn't. Nick does what I hope you will do: he pauses and realizes that life might not be just like he always thought ... I might not have life and death and stuff quite figured out yet.
 2. "Maybe I've been WRONG!" He pauses and stays and dwells and abides and listens to Jesus.
 3. Listen to his response in verse 9 = "How are these things possible?" Nick's not running or hiding ... he is sticking around Jesus and asking more questions.
 4. He's struggling, because this is not what he's known. He has known since he could know that he was headed to the Kingdom because he was Jewish... He knew that he needed to do good things to stay right with God.
- F. (SCALE) See, Nicodemus thought the way some of you might think ... some sort of "cosmic scale": As long as I do more good things than bad things, I'm okay. Some people do some really bad things; some do some medium bad things and then there's me.
1. If I do some bad things, I'm okay as long as I do more good things... We're good people, right?!??

2. As long as my good outweighs my bad, I'm okay with God!
 3. When we die, God is going to look at the scale and say, "Come on in! You've got more weight in the 'good' than the 'bad', so you're in!"
- G. Jesus was changing the whole thing. Jesus is taking away the scale and saying, "Nick, it doesn't matter who you are related to (Abraham) and it doesn't matter how good you are; the only way you will ever see or experience God's Kingdom is to be born again / born from above."
- H. This is different. This is not what we've believed. This is new. I'm not sure I want to think about it. I just want to be more good than I am bad ... that's easier and I can still be in control!

III. **Snake on a Pole**

- A. (v.14) Jesus goes on, "And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness..."
1. Now, Nicodemus is saying, "Okay, now I'm with you. This is a story from our Scriptures. Moses and the Hebrew people in the wilderness after Moses rescued the people from slavery in Egypt. Poisonous snakes invaded the camp where the people were and they were getting bit and dying from the poison..."
 2. Moses makes a bronze snake and attaches it to a pole and tells the people to look at it. If they look at the snake they will be healed and not die from the poison ... I know; kind of strange ... But, Nick knew that story.
- B. Jesus tells him that the Son of Man (Jesus) must be lifted up too. Only if people put their trust in Jesus will they experience eternal life in God's Kingdom!

IV. **Do vs. Done**

- A. Jesus tells Nicodemus that the days of the scale are over. The scale never worked. You cannot earn your way into heaven ... you cannot DO enough to get right with God! You don't get to heaven by being GOOD. You only get to heaven (put on your sunglasses) by believing in Me (Jesus)!
- B. This is completely new for Nicodemus. Check out the next things that Jesus says ... (v.16) "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."
- C. There's only one way ... believe in Jesus as God's Son (not just a good teacher).
- D. Some of you are sitting here today and thinking, "that is so narrow and what about this and what about that..." I can guarantee you that Nicodemus was doing the same thing, but he stayed there and listened to Jesus.

V. **The Result**

- A. I hope you will listen too. It doesn't make that much sense that we don't get to earn our way into heaven. It doesn't make the greatest sense that Jesus act of dying on a cross is the way that our sins are forgiven. How can this be that Jesus dying on a cross 2,000 years ago makes it possible for my sins that I did just yesterday or this morning can be forgiven?
- B. Okay, I get that. But, stay in that truth, dwell in that truth... and if you stay there in that Light of Jesus' Truth, eventually, "you will know the truth and the truth will set you free..."
- C. Over time, Nicodemus eyes adjusted.
1. John 7 = Nicodemus attempts to defend Jesus in a meeting of the Sanhedrin...shot down for asking for a fair trial for Jesus.
 2. John 19 = Nicodemus was with Joseph of Arimathea when he took Jesus body down from the cross and placed it in a tomb.
 3. Do you know why? Because Nicodemus stayed in the light of Jesus' Truth long enough to let his eyes adjust and realize that Jesus wasn't just a good teacher, but was God in human form ... the Son of God, the Messiah.
 4. And Nicodemus believed that he could not earn his way into heaven, but the only way to get there was to place his faith in Jesus Christ and believe in Him as Savior and Lord.
- D. Some of you are saying, "That's still not believable. I'm going back to my old system of good people to good things and get to go to a good heaven with a good god when they die." If that's your system, and you want to stick with it, would you do me a favor? You are smart people... would you take time to question your scale system?
1. How about what is 'good'? How much is 'good enough'? Where is the book that lists what is good compared to what is bad and which outweighs which?
 2. Would you at least ask, "Where is the god of this system and where is the historical basis that we plant it on? How do we know that this system works ... what precedent is set?"
 3. Again, what is the level of "good"? Is it Mother Theresa? Because then we are all in trouble...
 4. Just ask yourself, "If I really believe in the "Good Scale System", what do I really have that I can trust as TRUTH?"
- E. Then, would you seriously consider Jesus' system. The system of "you don't have to DO anything to earn entrance into the Kingdom ... it's already been DONE on the cross."
- F. Some of you are ready to seal the deal today. We're going to pray... no longer trusting in my family, money, job, my church attendance, my giving to charity, etc. Jesus I'm trusting in you as my Savior ... I want to be born again/from above... I need forgiveness –thanks for the cross, etc.

Let's Pray!