

God Loves Us Without Caution

John 3:1-17 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." ³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? ¹¹ "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. ¹² "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven. ¹⁴ "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Most of us are probably familiar with the fact that there are two types of people when it comes to swimming. There are those who tip toe in and those who run and dive in. I prefer to dive in often without looking. This who I ended up with a face full of sand about a month ago and about ten years ago a gash in my head.

Life tends to teach us caution. I remember canoeing with my dad once. When we saw some rapids ahead, he wanted to pull over and take a look from the land. We wanted to just go and take them as they came.

Life tends to teach us to be reasonable and cautious. And this is exactly how Nicodemus approaches Jesus. He approaches Jesus in what we might call a reasonable and cautious way. That might work well in cold lakes and river rapids but as we are going to see Jesus tells Nicodemus it does not work at all with the Kingdom of God. Either the Spirit pulls you completely or your stand on the outside staring with a perplexed look on your face.

“Unless you are born of water and the spirit you can not see the kingdom of God.” You cannot stick your toe in and test the waters when it comes to the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus was a high ranking, well respected Jewish leader. His career was going along quite well you might say. And from his perspective he had a lot to lose by openly associating with Christ, a position in the Sanhedrin, a name that was known and respected, money, probably other things as well. What did he have to gain from following Christ? What did Christ have to offer? Nicodemus considered it prudent to be cautious before throwing everything away on Christ.

Everything that Nicodemus does in our text is reasonable and cautious. I am just going to dip one toe in and see how the water is before I jump. That is Nicodemus' attitude. But Jesus reveals that truth that such an approach to God is not going to get us anywhere. It's all or nothing. It is a dive in or stay out situation.

Consider in opposition to Nicodemus the prophet Isaiah. Was he timid and cautious? No, but he stood in the glory of the power of God. He knew his sins. And nevertheless he took hold of the promise of God, your sins have been purged, and trusting that word he was bold. He was confident in God's grace. Here am I send me, send me.

Paul also spoke the word of God boldly and did not shrink back from the confessing Christ

Ephesians 6:19-20 ¹⁹ and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

But Nicodemus is not bold, he is timid and cautious, perhaps a good thing sometimes but not here.

John 3:2 "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

We?? Who is this we that Nicodemus speaks of? There is no one else except Jesus and Nicodemus. He certainly is not speaking about the other members of the Sanhedrin who hated Jesus. He is not talking about the other Pharisees who also hated Jesus. Perhaps he had a little group of people whom he discussed these things with but if so they didn't come. It was only Nicodemus.

To say "I" is a bold statement. You are placing yourself on a ledge alone. It is much more comforting to say we. In this way one might verbally surround yourself with others even if those others are mere figments of linguistics.

Even the content of what Nicodemus says is reasonable but timid and cautious. We know you are a teacher sent from God. It's reasonable for Nicodemus to start here but it is also worthless. To say Jesus is a good teacher is to say nothing.

Jesus miracles don't prove that he is a teacher, they prove that he is the very son of God. They prove that power of God is in their midst. They prove the glory and majesty of the kingdom. The kingdom has come upon you. Peter talked about this in our reading from Acts today.

It is reasonable and timid and cautious, and it is useless.

How does Jesus respond to this?

John 3:3 unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus does not at first understand what Jesus is talking about, but Jesus makes it perfectly clear a couple verses later:

John 3:5 unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus is talking about baptism. Baptism is the complete opposite of everything that Nicodemus says and does. Nicodemus comes to Christ as though they are equals and can discuss these things. In baptism we come before Jesus as sinners, like Isaiah, kneeling before his glory. Nicodemus comes to Jesus secretly at night. To be baptized Nicodemus would have had to come open in broad daylight. Nicodemus confessed nothing about Jesus but was only testing the waters. Baptism confess that Christ is the Son of God. Nicodemus says we, but in baptism we confess I am a sinner and I believe in Jesus Christ.

Jesus tells Nicodemus, "You know nothing. You know nothing because you are trying to come on your own terms. It is not going to work. Either the Spirit pulls you in completely or you stand out there with a confused look on your face. "

Only when by the power of the Spirit can we come before God. Only when the Spirit gives us knowledge can we stand and confess, "I believe in Jesus Christ."

We also prefer to come before God with a "WE." We come together on Sunday morning and together we confess that we are sinners. Now technically we say "I am altogether sinful" but since we are doing it together as a group the result is similar. We are partially hidden in the crowd. Now there is nothing wrong with it. It is a good and useful practice, but it is less than what it could be.

It is far less than Isaiah in our Old Testament reading who stood alone before the glory and majesty of God and with great boldness, trusting in God's mercy, confessed "I am a sinner." And in response to Isaiah's bold confession God does something even greater. He cleanses his sin with a burning coal.

There is great blessing in learning to stand alone and confess "I am a sinner." Scripture tells us to "confess our sins to one another." We ought to learn to confess to one another "I have sinned." Too often we try to hide in that "we" as well. I did this but you . . . Or we think just let it go they'll get past it eventually, instead of saying, "I messed up. I'm sorry."

We also confess our faith as a group. There are many who will gladly join in with the whole congregation and confess "I believe in God the Father," but who would never confess it standing alone in the midst of those who do not believe. Again we need to pray for the strength from the Spirit to stand and confess like Paul and Peter, I believe.

Are we going to come to God one toe at a time? Are we going to confess "we" are sinners or stand and confess I am sinner? Are we going to stand alone and confess I believe or hide in the crowd?

Jesus was by no means timid, or cautious or reasonable when he came to us. Jesus continues to point this out to Nicodemus.

John 3:16-17 ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

Is this what God did for us? Did he do what was reasonable? No he went way beyond that. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son." There is nothing reasonable about God's love for us it beyond reasonable.

Does God approach us cautiously. Well I'm going to give you a second chance if you prove you are worth it? Absolutely not. There is nothing cautious about God's love for us. He sticks a burning coal on the mouth of Isaiah. He allows his own Son to be crucified. He seeks us out when we stray and when we wander away. God is a consuming fire. He is not cautious in his love for us he is fervent even ferocious.

Did he give himself partially to us? No, He gave himself fully.

Did God try his best? No, he went beyond that. He gave himself completely even into death.

How much did God love us? This much that he gave his only begotten Son.

God's love for us is beyond reasonable and cautious. We pray O Lord that you would set our hearts on fire so that we would not hold back but burn with fervent love for you and in boldness confess Christ all the days of our lives.

Amen