

Having A Personal Relationship With Jesus

I preach this morning in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So today is the second Sunday in Lent, the second Sunday in which we continue our journey with Jesus that will eventually lead us to a bloody cross on Good Friday and an empty tomb on Easter Sunday. Now, our journey began on Ash Wednesday as we heard a humbling reminder and a sobering reality, that “to dust you have come and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). Our journey led us to face our temptations. For as long as we live in this life, as long as we live in this sin-infested, broken world, the devil is roaring like a lion looking for someone to devour. And he begins to tempt us by putting a little bit of truth with a whole lot of falsity and we fall into its trap. Our journey then led us from there last Thursday to a place of intimacy with God, a place of being still and knowing that God is the Lord. For like Joshua, we stand in the confidence of the Lord. Like Joshua, we are bold and strong in the Lord. And today, our journey leads us to understanding the greatest relationship that you will ever have in your life. And that is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Having a personal relationship with God is the most important relationship you will ever have in your entire life. And when you understand this truth, it will transform every part of your being. It will change your life. For the God who sent Jesus Christ into this world is the God who wants to have a relationship with you. He wants to know you. He wants you to know Him. And He wants to envelop you in His love, so that you live your life into the eternal dwelling of God, the Holy Spirit, that is leading you to salvation in His name. Having a personal relationship with God is the most important relationship you will ever have in your life.

So today I want to answer a question: How do I have a relationship with God? And to answer that question, let's turn to God's Word and hear what He has to say. So, I invite you to open up your bulletins and to follow along for we'll be going through our lesson in some detail. It's John, Chapter 3, we begin in verse 1.

“Now, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 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.’ In reply, Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’”

Having a relationship with God is first recognizing that birth into this world is birth into sin, and birth into sin is birth into death. Having a personal relationship with the God who created you is first recognizing that being born into this world, you are born into sin. And being born into sin, you are born into death.

You see, Nicodemus was a Jewish ruling council member, he was a representative of the Sanhedrin. And he comes to Jesus at night and he says to Jesus in verse 2, “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.” Nicodemus is a Jewish ruling council member. He is a representative of the same body that would eventually hand Jesus over to arrest him and to crucify him. Nicodemus is not yet at the place of recognizing that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus is the Messiah, but he does recognize that he is a teacher who has come from God. And to that confession, Jesus makes a statement of truth. He says, “I tell you the truth...” and when Jesus says that our ears perk up and listen. He says to him, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3).

To be born again is to be born from above, to be born from heaven. But before you can be born from above, before you can be born from heaven, before you can be born from God, you must first recognize the reality of your condition. For your earthly nature is dead in its sin, wicked in all of its ways, evil in all of its practices. You have turned your back on the Lord, your God. You have gone astray. You have done life the way in which you desire to do life. You have turned your back on the Lord who created you. And you have used your neighbor, not to love them, but to leverage them, to leverage the blessings of

God against them so as to receive for yourself, so as to puff up your own self and get what you want out of them.

You see, Jesus begins by saying, "No one can see the kingdom of God until he is born again" (John 3:3). Which means we first have to recognize that birth into this world is birth into sin.

And having a personal relationship with God starts there, but it does not end there. It goes on to acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, leading you to repent and to confess of your sin, verse 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. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." 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.'"

Having a personal relationship with God is acknowledging the work of the Holy Spirit in your life by repenting and confessing your sin. Nicodemus seems to be confused. He is the teacher of Israel. He is the leader of the representative body of the Sanhedrin, and yet he doesn't understand. For he says to Jesus in verse 4, "How can a man be born when he is old? I mean this is ludicrous, Jesus! How is a man to be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" (*expansion my own*)

Nicodemus is confused. He does not yet fully understand that the God who stands in his midst, the God who is speaking to him, who is in the presence of the Holy Spirit leading Nicodemus to that place of confession. Though right now he doesn't fully understand who he is, at the end of his journey we'll see him come back to take Jesus down from that hanging cross, that bloody cross, with Joseph of Aramathea, to pay his last respects, the journey of his devotion to Christ. But here and now, the Holy Spirit is working. Here and now, the Holy Spirit is calling.

You see, Nicodemus would have known John the Baptist. When Jesus said, "You can not enter the kingdom of God unless you are born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5), Nicodemus would have known what water meant because John the Baptist was baptizing in the River Jordan and John the Baptist baptized with water for repentance of sin. And John the Baptist, when the Pharisees of which Nicodemus belonged came to him, he said, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath of God? Keep fruit with your repentance. Repent, and produce fruit out of the overflow of your repentant heart" (Matt. 3:7-8). He says, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But there is one to come who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11).

For Nicodemus, as a Jew, to hear that Jesus said, "You cannot enter the kingdom of God until you are born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5), he would associate water with repentance and keeping fruit with repentance - confessing your sin. But being born of the Spirit is to acknowledge the presence of God that is working in your life to draw you to Jesus. Because, you see, having a personal relationship with God is an acknowledgement that God is at work, calling you to repent, calling you to confess your sins.

And having a personal relationship with God is putting your trust and your confidence in the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, verse 10, "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 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. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 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, so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life." For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

You see, having a personal relationship with God is placing your trust, placing your confidence, in the death, and the burial, and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's not putting your trust in yourself. It's not putting your confidence in your flesh. It's putting your trust and your confidence in Jesus.

I heard a story of a family that was going on vacation and the husband was driving. And they came across this warning sign that said, "Warning: Road Closed." Well, the husband, as all husbands do, decided they were going to go around this warning sign and go on their way. They would make good time and things would be fine. Well, the husband was really confident and started to drive on past the warning sign, but his smile of confidence quickly turned into a humble sweat when he looked ahead and saw a washed out bridge. He looked over to his wife. "That's what I thought. We've been through this before. I know we should have turned back," she said. And the husband, with reluctance, turned the car around. They retraced their steps and went back to the original warning sign only to be greeted with these large letters: "Welcome Back, Genius!"

You see, our confidence is only as strong as the object in which we place it. Who do you put your trust in today? Who is your confidence? My prayer for you today is that you would make a declaration of faith - "I believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord." Check out this video. [video]

Having a relationship with God is the most important relationship you will ever have in your entire life. Do you know Jesus Christ today? Do you know of the great and the everlasting love that God has for you? He loves you so much that he gave his one and only Son to die for you, that you might live in Him now and forevermore. This is the God whose love is available today for you.

Having a personal relationship with God is first recognizing that birth into sin is birth into death. It is acknowledging the work of the Holy Spirit, leading you to repent and to confess your sins. And having a personal relationship with God is

putting your trust, putting your confidence, in the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So put your trust in Him. Put your confidence in Him and you shall live.

Amen