

John 3:1-21
Advent 2
December 7 & 8, 2014

He comes to those in Darkness!

How many of you use text messaging? How good are you at it? I use it fairly often, but I would be the first one to acknowledge that I am slow. One of the things that makes me slower is that I don't know all the abbreviations that can be used for either words or phrases. I have learned a few of them, but there are many more that I don't know. Let's see if you know some:

BTW – *By the way*

TTYL – *Talk to You Later*

LOTI – *Laughing on the Inside*

SLAP – *Sounds Like A Plan*

HIG – *How's It Going*

BFF – *Best Friends Forever*

BRB – *Be Right Back*

PRW – *Parents are Watching*

LOL – *Laughing Out Loud*

Why do people use the short codes? At times, it is simply a practical thing. You can send a message quicker. There are times that you may not want someone to see exactly what you are sending. Therefore, if an abbreviation is used that you don't know, you may look at the message and see that it makes no sense at all. You ever get a message, and you have no idea what your child is trying to tell you in that message. Then you feel really dumb having to ask the question: *What do you mean?*

Do you like asking questions? Do you sometimes not ask a question because you think that all the people around you will think that you are really dumb if you ask the question? But if you are one and one with someone, you may ask the questions you have.

It was night, and a man named Nicodemus had many questions. Who is Nicodemus? We don't know much about him. There are only three events in which Nicodemus is mentioned in all of the Gospels. Here in our text. Later as the Sanhedrin was discussing what they should do about this Jesus. The last time Nicodemus appears in the Bible is Crucifixion, when he provides healing herbs and assists Joseph of Arimathea in preparing the body of Jesus for entombment.

We are told that he was a *Pharisee*. He was also a member of the ruling body of the Jews – The Sanhedrin. The Pharisees were mostly middle-class businessmen. They weren't priests. Over time, they had added thousands of rules to the rules that God had laid out in the first five books of the Bible. Yet, they had the support of the people. Why? I think, one reason is that they made everything black and white. Do this. Don't do this. Over time, many of them truly believed that they doing better than anybody else at pleasing God. Why wouldn't God be pleased with them?

The Pharisees only wanted to preserve the law of God. What may have started as a good thing, it became something that was taken too far. One example: A Jew could not spit on the ground on the Sabbath Day because it might make a hole in the ground – even if only a few hundreds of an inch. Digging a hole was considered as *work*. You couldn't work on the Sabbath.

But there was something that interested Nicodemus about Jesus. He needed to have a conversation with him. So, he seeks out Jesus. Why come at night? As a business man, he may have been busy during the day. The Pharisees, the Sadducees and other groups hated Jesus. Perhaps, Nicodemus was afraid to be seen with Jesus. Or did he have so many questions, that he simply wanted to speak uninterrupted to Jesus alone and get the answers for himself. Regardless of the reasons, he wanted to learn more. **“He came to Jesus and said: ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God.’”**

What is fascinating in this section, is how Jesus answers his questions. He could have laid out a whole timeline of God's promise in the Garden of Eden to that present moment. He could have gone step-by-step with Nicodemus. Yet, look at Jesus is going to teach this teacher, who is Nicodemus. He wants Nicodemus to stop thinking that he could do something to earn eternal life. That was the core belief of the Pharisees – Do this and you got a pretty good shot at getting to heaven.

The verse that is in the middle of this text is probably the most well-known verse in the bible. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** We know that we get to heaven through faith in Jesus. How do we get that faith? To answer that question, Jesus points Nicodemus to baptism. Baptism? What is this Baptism? Jesus needs to get Nicodemus to stop thinking in terms of *doing something* and look at what *God is going to do*. Human beings sin. Sin separates us from God. Therefore, I need to do something to fix this. Jesus says: YOU can't! It is all by God's grace given to you in the promises of God and through the waters of baptism.

Nicodemus is having trouble grasping this. **"How can a man be born when he is old?"** Jesus' response is: **"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."** In other words: *Trust me! I have come to bring light to a world that is so full of the darkness of sin. I have come to bring light to you, Nicodemus.*

Nicodemus had noticed the miracles of Jesus. But the miracles were nothing compared to the love that God showed this world by sending his Son. Nicodemus needed Jesus. He didn't need his works. He needed God's love. So, do we. I think that there is a little bit of Pharisee in every single one of us here today. We look at ourselves and think that we are pretty good people. Look at me everyone. I'm pretty good. I do all these good things. Jesus turns to us and says: *So...what.* Without God loving this world and taking sinners out of spiritual darkness and bringing them into the light of Jesus, we have nothing.

What effect does this conversation with Jesus have on Nicodemus? Later on he will try to defend Jesus as the Sanhedrin wants to arrest and kill him. Finally, he will ask for Jesus' body and prepare it for burial. Beyond that, Scripture is silent. But I can't imagine Nicodemus stopped there. He had been brought out of the darkness of sin and work righteousness to faith in Jesus. I'm sure he wanted to bring that good news to others. The Savior has come to rescue people from darkness. He would join with the hymn writer in saying:

He comes the captives to release, In Satan's prison held. The gates of brass before him burst; The iron fetters yield.

As we continue to prepare to welcome our Savior to this world at Christmas, may we give thanks he answers all questions that we have about eternal life. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** Amen.