

Sermon: The Search

October 4, 2025

Opening Monologue

Greetings to you in Jesus' Name! Welcome to the AVC APP whether you're new or a longtime participant; our goal is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and draw you closer in your relationship with Him. Well, this week I was awakened to the Holy Spirit's still small voice in the middle of the night. Has that ever happened to you? My mind was off to the races... and I was like (God I am trying to sleep- excuse you) LOL! I actually had to grab my phone and start to take notes. (For Sunday's Sermon) I reminded the Lord what day it was but that didn't do any good. Given this...we are going to skip a week in our current sermon series. (Gifted Together- Unleashing Heavens Team).

The Title of this Week's Sermon is: "The Search." Humanity is and always has been searching for something... beyond us, for us? It seems like no one is ever satisfied. Even NASA and other well-known and funded people are fixated on Mars; a planet 200 million miles away- go figure. People in the Bible very early on were told by God to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 9:1). That worked for a bit until the people said... wait, this is a good place... let's build a tower to the heavens and make a name for ourselves. (Genesis 11)

Why were they not content with life ... and why did they think they needed to be someone else? The fact is... life is a search (NF describes it well in his song, "The Search" check it out- Link/https://youtu.be/H0BXMUdyIKA?si=rt3x_1WcjsbDs-ty).

As he says in his lyrics: "I have been searching, I have been learning... I hate to lose sight, but life gets blurry and it hurts. See we've all got something trapped inside that we tried to suffocate hoping it dies. Then out of nowhere like the evil surprise it comes to us with the millions of lies. The search begins so enjoy the trip"

Behind our search comes all the emotions- I feel empty, I am angry, I feel lost, I am confused, I'm anxious, why am I here? It's the search...

it's the longing to be satisfied... for our souls to feel joy, love and fulfillment. Listen, it's a natural thing for us all to search, but the reality is we all are longing for salvation. Salvation literally means: To save, to deliver, to heal or make whole. Who doesn't want that?

In my Sermon Sunday we are going to dive deeper into this topic and understand that it's Jesus who brings our search to an end. His name means Salvation. I invite you to come in person or listen online if you must. I promise you this... Jesus can transform your life- don't wait or hesitate. (2)

In Christ,
Rev. Brad Standfest

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "The Search" Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Texts

John 3:1-8

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203%3A1-8&version=NIV>

John 3:16-17

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203%3A16-17&version=NIV>

The Search: Finding Wholeness in the One Whose Name is Salvation

From the dawn of creation, humanity has been on a relentless quest—a search for something greater, something beyond ourselves, something to fill the aching void within. This search is woven into the fabric of our existence, etched into the pages of Scripture, and echoed in the cries of every human heart. As we open God's Word, we see this

longing unfold in Genesis, where humanity, fresh from the cleansing waters of the flood, was given a divine mandate: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1). God’s command was clear—spread out, flourish, and reflect His image across the world. Yet, in a plain called Shinar, humanity paused, gathered, and chose a different path. “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves” (Genesis 11:4).

Why? Why did they feel the need to make a name for themselves? Why were they not content to live as God’s image-bearers, created with purpose, hope, and a future (Jeremiah 29:11)? Their story reveals a timeless truth: humanity is searching, often blindly, for significance, identity, and salvation. We see it in the Tower of Babel, where pride and self-reliance led to confusion and division. We see it in our world today, where the pursuit of fame, wealth, or self-made identities leaves us empty, anxious, and lost. And we see it in the raw, honest words of Nathan Feuerstein, known as NF, whose music captures the universal cry of a searching soul.

NF, born in Gladwin, Michigan, in 1991, knows the pain of a broken world. Raised in a fractured home, scarred by abuse and the tragic loss of his mother to an overdose, NF battled depression, isolation, and a sense of disconnection. Yet, through his music, he gives voice to the human struggle: “I’ve been searching... I’m looking for the map to hope, have you seen it?” In his song *The Search*, he speaks of the emotions that haunt us—emptiness, anger, confusion, and a hole in the heart that nothing in this world seems to fill. “We’ve all got something trapped inside that we try to suffocate, hoping it dies,” he raps, describing the lies that hover over us, whispering that we are not enough, that we must become someone else to find meaning.

This is the human condition—a restless search for salvation, though many don’t even know what they’re seeking. The word “salvation” means to save, to deliver, to rescue, to heal, to make whole. Who doesn’t long for that? Who doesn’t crave rescue from anxiety, healing from brokenness, or wholeness in a fragmented world? The tragedy is that, like the people of Babel, we often try to fix ourselves. We self-medicate to numb the pain. We chase fleeting pleasures to escape loneliness. We redefine ourselves in hopes of finding happiness. But these are towers of our own making, destined to crumble under the weight of our need.

Yet, there is a name that embodies all we seek. A name that means salvation, deliverance, healing, and wholeness. That name is Jesus. Scripture declares, “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus is not a myth, a legend, or a distant figure of history. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16), the One who was crucified, buried, and rose again on the third day, defeating death to offer us a second chance at life (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). He alone can fill the hole in our hearts, satisfy the longing in our souls, and give us the abundant life we were created for (John 10:10).

Commentary on Main Scriptures

Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)

The most common interpretations of the offense of the builders of the Tower of Babel are pride and disobedience. Both of these have significant drawbacks. (1) Perhaps the builders were proud, but the elements in the text that purportedly indicate their pride are more ambiguous than usually admitted. The main piece of evidence is that in verse 4, they desired to make a name for themselves. Undoubtedly, such desires often lead to sinful behavior, but they also can be quite legitimately pursued. In the Old Testament and in the ancient world, one could make a name by establishing something that would outlive them, such as famous exploits and enduring monuments. But so does a family. In a royal inscription Warad-Sin recounts his restoration of a temple: “I put there forever my royal name. In order to make praise of me for the future I deposited a foundation inscription.”

The point is that it is a natural human desire to leave one’s mark and to be remembered after death. That is in part the attractiveness of God’s offer to Abram, for he promised to make a name for him (12:2). Making a name may be driven by pride, but it does not have to be. Other commentators have argued that the builders appear to be self-absorbed: “Let us ... let us ... let us.” But before we castigate them for this, we have to ask what alternative wording was available to them. What are they supposed to say, “Let God make bricks”? Their choice of words cannot in this context be used against them—they simply are using common speech forms.

(2) The second major option is disobedience. The argument goes this way: God commanded the human race to fill the earth (1:28; 9:1, 7), but these people are afraid of scattering (11:4). Consequently they disobey the command and build this city and tower. Further proof of this is found in the punishment, where God does indeed scatter them. Briefly, I see two problems with this interpretation:

1. When God told them to fill the earth, he was giving a blessing, not a command. It was a privilege, not an obligation, and could therefore not be disobeyed.

2. The means of filling the earth indicated in Genesis 1 and 9 was not by scattering, but by reproducing. The earth is no fuller when people spread out. The only way filling can be disobeyed is by refusing to be fruitful and multiply, and the text is clear that they are doing quite well in that regard.

We must then offer another explanation for the people being scattered. Why are they afraid of being scattered? What is forcing them to scatter? Why does God scatter them? First, I do not think that it is a bad thing that they do not want to be scattered. Families do not enjoy being torn apart. Even in our mobile society today it is sometimes a hard move for children to settle across the country from their roots and their families. It is natural for communities to desire not to scatter.

NICODEMUS VISITS JESUS AT NIGHT / John 3:1-17

It would be difficult to find any other portion of Scripture as well known as John 3:16 or any other statement of Scripture more applied than “You must be born again” (v. 7, NKJV). When Jesus revealed the necessity of the new birth to Nicodemus, he exposed mankind’s ultimate hope.

This evening interview is the first of a series of individual encounters between Jesus and persons who fit the description given at the end of chapter 2—those who approached Jesus with an inadequate faith. Nicodemus (vv. 1-15), the Samaritan woman (4:1-42), and the nobleman from Capernaum (4:43-54) illustrate a certain view of who Jesus was and what he could do. But meeting Jesus face to face changed their views. It also changed their lives.

Wherever Jesus went, changes occurred. He challenged systems, powers, and individuals. He helped people see that they couldn't see. He invited men and women to follow him as if he expected them to drop everything and do just that. To our surprise (not his) many of them did follow. The invitation to transformation is still open. If we are listening, we can hear it in the darkness as did Nicodemus. Or it comes to us at noon, when we, like the woman at the well, are slipping through life, desperate to avoid any more troubles than we have already gotten ourselves into. Or it comes to us with shattering directness in the face of death or suffering around us, as the nobleman discovered. When the invitation comes, trust Jesus and follow him.

3:1 There was a man. Each of the next segments of the Gospel revolve around Jesus and one other person. From his collection of Jesus' memorable conversations, John chose several to highlight the character of the Lord.

Though John seems to shift from the summary description of Jesus as the center of interest in Jerusalem to the interview with Nicodemus, there is a connection between 2:23–25 and 3:1. Nicodemus is spotlighted as a person who was either a typical example of someone to whom Jesus could not entrust himself (2:24) or he was an exception to the rule—a person to whom Jesus could entrust himself. Both these possibilities have been defended. But, in the end, neither is as important as the clearer indication of John's immediate purpose: to illustrate the truth that Jesus "knew what was in everyone" (NRSV). Jesus did not endorse every gesture of belief in himself, but he did nurture those with weak faith. Because Jesus knew what was in every person, he knew exactly when to confront Nicodemus. His knowledge of us is just as intimate.

Of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. Nicodemus was one of the Pharisees—the most strict, conservative, and traditional Jewish sect of those times. The Jewish religious leaders were divided into several groups. Two of the most prominent groups were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees separated themselves from anything non-Jewish and

carefully followed both the Old Testament laws and the oral traditions handed down through the centuries. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were the elite priestly class who freely mixed their political agenda with the power they wielded as religious leaders. John the Baptist criticized the Pharisees for being legalistic and hypocritical, following the letter of the law while ignoring its true intent. Jesus' cleansing of the temple was a direct affront to the power of the Sadducees, who profited from the marketing of religion.

Nicodemus was also a member of the Jewish ruling council. Although the Romans controlled Israel politically, the Jews were given some authority over religious and minor civil disputes. The Jewish ruling body was the council (sometimes called the Sanhedrin) made up of seventy-one of Israel's religious leaders. They functioned in a way similar to the Supreme Court in the United States, handling civil and religious issues. Thus Nicodemus was a very prominent figure in Israel, representing the "cream" of the nation; in fact, Jesus called him "a teacher of Israel" (3:10 NRSV).

3:2 He came to Jesus. What motivated Nicodemus to come to Jesus? Very likely Nicodemus was both impressed and curious about Jesus and chose to form his opinions about him from firsthand conversation. Most Pharisees were intensely jealous of Jesus because he undermined their authority, challenged their views, and threatened their tenuous position under Roman rule. But Nicodemus tracked down Jesus and met him personally. It is even possible that their conversation was witnessed by both Jesus' disciples and students of the Jewish leader.

AT LEAST HE CAME

The meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus was not by accident. Nicodemus did not stumble over Jesus, but sought him out. He made it a point to find and be with Jesus. Often we are guilty of allowing our relationship with God to degenerate into occasional chance meetings where God has had to seek us out. Do we only turn to Christ in crises, finding little place or time for him in our daily lives? How often at night, when the hustle of the day settles down, do we think of Jesus in the silence and seek him out in prayer?

At night. Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus by night? It is possible

that he did not want to be seen with Jesus in broad daylight because he feared reproach from his fellow Pharisees (who did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah). But it may not have been fear that brought Nicodemus at night; it is also possible that he chose a time when he could talk alone and at length with the popular teacher who was often surrounded by people.

NECESSITY OF A SEARCHING HEART

Nicodemus was searching, and he believed that Jesus had some answers. A learned teacher himself, he came to Jesus to be taught. No matter how intelligent and well-educated we are, we must come to Jesus with an open mind and heart so he can teach us the truth about God. A searching heart is marked by several characteristics:

- Humility in seeking and admitting personal need.
- Perseverance in overcoming obstacles that may keep us from finding and following Christ.
- Insight in recognizing that the gospel message relates to our lives.
- Willingness to submit to the lordship of Christ.
- Obedience in going beyond mental assent to active dependence on God's promises and guidance.

“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God.” Nicodemus respectfully addressed Jesus as a teacher (a rabbi) who had come from God. While true, the title reveals Nicodemus's limited understanding of Jesus. He was far more than just another rabbi. Yet Nicodemus's complimentary start gives us little idea of what he intended to ask Jesus. It is to his credit that he at least understood that Jesus came from God, as opposed to many of his fellow Pharisees who attributed Jesus' power to Satan (Matthew 9:34). Instead, Nicodemus identified Jesus' miracles as a revelation of God's power.

QUESTIONS/ANSWERS

It is quite common to find people treating spiritual questions as if asking them was a perfectly valid pursuit, even if they had no real hope of getting an answer. That kind of treadmill leads to despair. If we

are not serious about answers, questions—even hard questions—are a waste of time.

We don't know exactly what questions Nicodemus planned to ask Jesus, but we do know he went to the right source. If all we want to do is ask questions, any ear will do. But if we are hungry for answers, God will be our source. He has provided his Word, his presence, and the freedom of prayer to place any question before him. Others who have brought their questions and quests to God can also provide valuable help to us. Jesus wants to be more than just an item of discussion. He has answers for the heart and soul.

Nicodemus's expression indicates that he saw himself representing a significant number of Jews (thus his use of *we*), the people over whom he was a leader and teacher. But no sooner did Nicodemus get this compliment out than Jesus responded with a statement that must have rocked the Pharisee back on his heels. With one stroke Jesus reversed the flow of discussion from his identity as a God-sent teacher to the crucial question of the destiny of each person. Jesus made it clear that his own qualifications were not up for debate, but that Nicodemus ought to be concerned about where he stood before God.

3:3 “No one can see the kingdom of God.” Jesus' words are unmistakable: No one—that is, not the Jews, not the pious Pharisees or Sadducees. No one who is relying on his or her own merits can see the kingdom of God.

Although the Bible does not explicitly state what the kingdom of God is, Jesus made it very clear what it isn't: “My kingdom is not from this world” (18:36 NRSV). God's kingdom is the sphere of God's rule in heaven and on earth. The Old Testament does not use the term kingdom of God, but it clearly refers to the kingship of God. When the last of the judges, Samuel, was an old man, the people of Israel decided they wanted a new form of government. They approached Samuel with the demand that he appoint a king. God's response to Samuel about this request is instructive: “And the Lord told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king’” (1 Samuel 8:7 NIV). This tension between the recognized or rejected kingship of God and its final resolution cannot be missed in the Old Testament (see also

Exodus 15:18; Psalm 93:1; 103:19; Isaiah 9:6–7; Daniel 2:44).

The Kingdom of God

To enter you must confess and repent of sin. (Matthew 4:17)

Those persecuted for the faith will receive rewards there. (Matthew 5:10–12)

Not all who talk about it belong there. (Matthew 7:21)

Small beginning but great results (Matthew 13:31–32)

Worldwide impact (Matthew 13:33)

Priceless value (Matthew 13:44–46)

Cannot judge who will be in it (Matthew 13:47–49)

Good news to all (Luke 4:43)

Equally available to all (Luke 10:21)

Must be the believer's top priority (Luke 12:31)

The door is now open to all, but one day it will close. (Luke 13:22–30)

To enter you must be born again. (John 3:3)

So, what could Jesus expect Nicodemus to know about the kingdom? From the Scriptures he would know that the kingdom would be ruled by God, it would eventually be restored on earth, and it would incorporate God's people. Jesus revealed to this devout Pharisee that the kingdom would come to the whole world (3:16), not just the Jews, and that Nicodemus wouldn't be a part of it unless he was personally born again (3:5). This was a revolutionary concept: the kingdom is personal, not national or ethnic, and its entrance requirements are repentance and spiritual rebirth. Jesus later taught that God's kingdom has already begun in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21). It will be fully realized when Jesus returns again to judge the world and abolish evil

forever (Revelation 21-22).

During Jesus' earthly ministry, the kingdom of God was present with him (Luke 17:21). To "see" the kingdom of God means, in part, to have a special perception or insight concerning God's absolute control. But a sense of belonging, or citizenship, is also included. The "seeing" is not simply for purposes of examination; it represents participation. Part of this picture is clarified by the description of vital faith in Hebrews: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth" (Hebrews 11:13 NIV). The image here is of people, stranded in a foreign land, whose citizenship is elsewhere. Paul wrote, "Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:12-14 NIV). To "see," then, is to be a citizen without yet being able to exercise all the rights and privileges of that citizenship. Nicodemus was being taught that Israel was a chosen people to be a vehicle of God's message to the world, not to be the only beneficiaries of that relationship.

IN OR OUT

Just as earthly citizenship is a right of birth or is granted to a person, so citizenship in the kingdom of God is a right of new birth. A person can take steps toward citizenship in the kingdom, but one's actual position is either in or out. Jesus told one perceptive man, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). Evidently, a person can approach yet still not "see" or be part of the kingdom of God. We need to prayerfully consider before God the exact location of our citizenship. If we have not been born again into God's kingdom and submitted to his rule in our lives, we cannot assume that we are citizens.

"Without being born from above." The Greek word translated here as "from above" can also be rendered "again." It seems that Jesus was speaking of a birth "from above" because he later used the analogy of the wind (coming from some unknown [heavenly] source)

to illustrate spiritual rebirth (see 3:7–8). But Nicodemus clearly thought that Jesus was speaking of a second physical birth.

3:4 “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” English translations of Jesus’ statement tend to put the conditional clause (“without being born from above”) after the primary clause (“No one can see the kingdom of God”), but they are reversed in Greek. Nicodemus either stopped listening after Jesus’ opening phrase, or he chose to address the first curious statement he heard. These questions that focused solely on birth—whether spoken sincerely or sarcastically—show that Nicodemus did not perceive the spiritual intent of Jesus’ words. He saw only the literal meaning and questioned its absurdity. But with all his learning he should have understood that God can and will give spiritual rebirth. The prophets had spoken about this spiritual regeneration (see Ezekiel 36:25–27; see also Jeremiah 31:31–34; Joel 2:28–32).

STARTING OVER

Most people, at one time or another, wish they could start life over again. But second thoughts usually bring us to the conclusion that another trip through life would involve just as many opportunities for mistakes as the first time. Nicodemus saw only complications and impossibilities in Jesus’ challenge. But Jesus later made the point in discussing the possibility of salvation with his disciples that “with man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27 NIV). The only way a person can really start over in life is by being born from above—“born again” by receiving God’s eternal life and the regenerating Holy Spirit. Starting over may be naturally impossible; but Jesus makes it a supernatural possibility.

3:5 “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” This statement has perplexed and divided commentators for many centuries. Some traditions have taught that the water denotes physical birth (referring to the “water” of amniotic fluid or even semen) and Spirit to spiritual birth—in which case Jesus would be saying that a person has to have two births: one physical and the second, spiritual. This view builds upon the preceding

context when Nicodemus referred to physical birth. It also points to the parallel Jesus makes in verse 6: “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (NIV). According to this position, Jesus would have been granting the Pharisee’s point in order to highlight the nature of the second birth as spiritual. Two strengths of this interpretation are that it avoids making the physical act of water baptism a necessity and that it avoids bringing almost a “third birth” idea into the discussion. If water doesn’t refer to natural birth, say its defenders, then Jesus seems to be saying that a person must be born of their parents, born of water, and born of the Spirit.

Several weaknesses undermine this view: (1) the Greek grammatical construction does not separate water and Spirit—together they replace the single expression *anōthen* (“again” or “from above” in verse 3); (2) there is no evidence that water was specifically connected with physical birth in Jesus’ and Nicodemus’s cultural context; and (3) it would be reasonable to expect that if Jesus was explaining water and Spirit as separate terms in verse 6, he could have said, “Water gives birth to water and spirit gives birth to spirit.” This interpretation turns out to be based on better motives than reasons. The concerns over making this verse say more than is true about the nature and place of water baptism are valid, but not best served by this approach.

Other traditions have taught that the water refers to baptism and the Spirit to spiritual regeneration—thus, Jesus would have been saying that a person must both be baptized and receive the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God. This view is at times influenced by the belief that the sacrament of baptism is itself a requirement for salvation.

A parallel view makes water refer to baptism but places the emphasis on teaching two steps of baptism; one by water, the other by the Spirit. For support, these views point to the larger context in John where John the Baptist and water baptism are mentioned just preceding the events in Cana and following this encounter with Nicodemus. They also rely on the tendency of previous generations of Christians to equate the mention of water with baptism. But in the first seven chapters of John, water appears in some way (naturally or symbolically) in each chapter. To associate water and baptism too closely makes baptism a higher priority than the Scriptures give it. Here, for instance, if Jesus was speaking of two completely separate acts, two baptisms, it is odd that the rest of the discussion between

Jesus and Nicodemus never again refers to the subject but revolves entirely around the work of God's Spirit.

Still other traditions have taught that Jesus' reference to water is not physical in either the sense of birth or baptism. The term water is simply another description of the Spirit—or the Spirit's activity of cleansing and life-giving action of the Spirit (see John 7:37–39).

3:6 “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” This is also written: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (NKJV). Human beings (the flesh) can produce only more human beings; this answers Nicodemus's question in verse 4. Only God, the divine Spirit, can give the believer spiritual life. At the same time God puts his Spirit into us, we are given a new regenerated human spirit. It is God's Spirit, not our effort, that makes us children of God (1:12). Jesus' description corrects human hopes that we might somehow inherit goodness from parents, or earn it by good behavior, church background, or correct associations. At some point we must be able to answer the question: Have I been born of the Spirit?

3:7 “You must be born from above.” Jesus' statement to Nicodemus that evening has been heralded to all the world ever since. Both Jew and Gentile have heard the divine mandate: You must be born again. Without the new birth, one cannot see or enter into the kingdom of God. In those words, millions have heard Jesus speaking directly to their hearts. Behind Jesus' challenge is his invitation to each of us—“You must be born again; allow me to do that for you.”

3:8 “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.” Perhaps at this moment in the evening a soft wind rustled the leaves outside the house or in the garden where they were talking. Jesus used the illustration of the wind to depict the effect of the Spirit in the person born of the Spirit. In Greek the same word (pneuma) can have several meanings: “spirit,” “wind,” and “breath.” God's Spirit, like the wind, has free movement and, like reviving breath, has power. Jesus used this illustration to show that the reality of the Spirit living in a person is evidenced by the effect of the Spirit on that person's life.

People can control neither the wind nor the movement of God's Spirit.

“So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” The image Jesus used describes the wonderful experience we can have of realizing that God actually moves in and through us by his Spirit. Just as we do not know the origin or the destination of the wind, we do not know or control the Spirit. What we do know are the effects of the wind and of the Spirit. Life in the Spirit is as radical and unexpected as being born of the Spirit.

The new life begotten by the Spirit of God is as mysterious as the wind. That Spirit, bearing the germ of a new life, rejoices to enter each open casement and to fill each vacuum, wherever one allows it.

F. B. Meyer

3:9-10 A teacher of Israel. In response to Nicodemus's continued question, Jesus called him a teacher of Israel and expressed amazement at his lack of understanding. Having such a position (perhaps as the “chakam” in the Sanhedrin), Nicodemus should have known what Jesus was talking about, for the new birth is not a topic foreign to the Hebrew Scriptures (see, for example, 1 Samuel 10:6; Isaiah 32:15; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:25-27; 37; Joel 2:28-29). Jesus' question must have exposed Nicodemus, who perhaps thought that he and Jesus were teachers who would discuss spiritual matters from an equal level of learning and understanding (see 3:2). This Jewish teacher of the Bible knew the Old Testament thoroughly, but he didn't understand what it said about the Messiah. Knowledge is not salvation (see 5:39 for Jesus' further indictment of those who have the Scriptures yet miss their primary purpose). People may know the Bible and even study it regularly, but unless they understand and respond to the God whom the Bible reveals and the salvation that he offers, the Scriptures will only be a priceless relic rather than a life-changing treasure.

3:11-12 “We speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen.” Commentators do not agree as to whom the pronoun we refers to. Most likely, it refers to all those prophets who have spoken to Israel (including John the Baptist [see 5:33] and Jesus

himself) and/or to Jesus and his Father.

“You people do not accept our testimony.” Israel (of which Nicodemus was a representative) did not receive the corporate testimony either from Jesus (speaking on behalf of the Father—hence, the plural our), or from the prophets.

“I have told you about earthly things.” Earthly things, such as the wind, can be “sensed”—that is, felt and heard. Jesus had spoken in an “earthly” analogy, and if Nicodemus could not understand that, how would he understand or believe when Jesus spoke to him of heavenly things. These are the truths that pertain to the heavenly realm and heavenly kingdom (for example, the more abstract theological topics such as the Trinity or Jesus’ coming glory).

3:13-15 “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven.” This statement, following the last part of verse 12, tells us why Jesus was uniquely qualified to speak about heavenly matters. His authoritative message about heaven was based on personal experience. He came from heaven! It was the home he left on his mission to rescue us. No other man could claim the same.

The Son of Man is the term Jesus always used as his self-designation (1:51; see also Daniel 7:13; Matthew 26:64).

The words, who came from heaven (or, “who is in heaven,” NKJV) that end verse 13 in some translations, are not found in the earliest manuscripts. However, the words were known to several early church fathers and are included in later manuscripts. Moving the phrase to the margin in modern translations does require explanation because it is known by those familiar with the Authorized Version. There is a possibility that the statement was recorded by John and then excised by several early copyists because of its enigmatic meaning: that is, how could the Son of Man who was then and there on earth also be in heaven? But it is also difficult to place it in Jesus’ conversation. The phrase fits best as an early marginal reflection by a copyist, noting that the same Jesus who was claiming to have come from heaven was now back in heaven. Those who accept this phrase as original generally interpret it to be Jesus’ reference to his very present

connection with heaven. He was on earth, while at the same time one with the Father in heaven. While this is true, it does not help the flow of Jesus' conversation. It is difficult to understand what Jesus might have wanted Nicodemus to see.

“As Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.” The Son of Man came from heaven and became flesh in order to die—but his death would have special importance. That significance had been “taught” by God throughout the experiences of his chosen people. To illustrate this, Jesus compared his coming death to a story well known to Nicodemus, for it came from Jewish history.

According to Numbers 21:6–9, while the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God sent a plague of snakes to punish the people for their rebellious attitudes. But God also gave the remedy for the poisonous snakebites—he told Moses to erect a pole upon which he was to attach a bronze snake. Those bitten by the poisonous snakes could be healed by obeying God's command to look up at the elevated bronze snake and by believing that God would heal them. Their healing came when they looked upon this lifted-up, bronze snake.

Jesus used this incident to picture his coming salvation work on the cross. To be lifted up in Jesus' time—according to the usage in John (see 8:28; 12:32–34)—was a euphemism for death on the cross (the victim was literally lifted up above the earth); it also spoke of his subsequent glorification.

“Everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” In Numbers 21:6–9, the perishing Israelites looked upon the lifted-up snake and lived. Similarly, salvation happens when we look up to Jesus, believing he will save us. God has provided this way for us to be healed of sin's deadly bite. The Israelites were spared their lives; the believer in Jesus is spared eternal destruction and given eternal life.

THE REQUIRED RESPONSE

Three times in this context the idea of “believing in him” is used to

describe the required response by a person to Christ. The word translated “believe” comes from *pisteo* which means “faith” or “belief.” The way this word is used means more than mental assent. Rather, it has been paraphrased: to have a firm faith; to accept trustfully; to be fully convinced; to place confidence in; to wholeheartedly accept. There is a danger, however, in emphasizing only the idea of “belief,” since belief without an object is merely wishful thinking. The importance of a Christian’s belief is not in the believer, but in the one believed. A person may have a strong belief in a lie, but that faith will not change the lie to truth. Believers anchor their trust in Jesus Christ, who identified himself as truth (14:6). Does our faith depend on our ability to trust or does it rest on the trustworthiness of Jesus?

3:16 “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.” The entire gospel comes to a focus in this verse. God’s love is not just to a certain group of individuals—it is offered to the world.

God’s love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God’s actions defined the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships—when you love someone, you are willing to sacrifice dearly for that person. Sacrificial love expresses itself without assurance that the love will be returned in kind. The timing of that love was highlighted by Paul’s words, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8 NIV).

Sacrificial love is also practical in seeking ways to meet the needs of those who are loved. In God’s case, that love was infinitely practical, since it set out to rescue those who had no hope of rescuing themselves. God paid dearly to save us; He gave His only begotten Son, the highest price he could pay. The term translated “only begotten” (*monogene*) expresses Jesus’ unique value and position as God’s only Son. The salvation God offers freely was costly to him.

This offer is made to whoever believes. To “believe” is more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means putting our trust

and confidence in him that he alone can save us. It is to put Christ in charge of our present plans and eternal destiny. Believing is both trusting his words as reliable and relying on him for the power to change.

Jesus accepted our punishment and paid the price for our sins so that we would not perish. Perish does not mean physical death, for we all will eventually die. Here it refers to eternity apart from God. Those who believe will receive the alternative, the new life that Jesus bought for us—everlasting life with God.

THE CHOICE

John 3:16, along with the rest of the New Testament, assumes that apart from God's intervention, people perish (see Mark 4:38; Luke 13:3, 5; John 10:28; Romans 2:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Peter 3:9). The word adds a sense of hopelessness to the fact of dying—"to perish" is to come to a dead end. In this verse, escape from the tragic fate of perishing is promised to those who believe in God's Son. Instead of perishing, they will have "eternal life," or "life in the ageless age." Perishing is not an end to be desired, for it removes from the picture any vestige of what we could call life. But this verse makes it clear that those who refuse to choose Christ and the life he offers have chosen to perish. Eternal life awaits our decision.

One of the distinctives of John's Gospel is its awareness of the reader. John often includes reflective and explanatory statements that help us understand events more clearly. For instance, in 2:17 John explained the insight given to the disciples about Jesus' actions and words in the temple. Further on, in 2:23-24, John summarized Jesus' general ongoing relationship with people. As an eyewitness, John wanted us to know not only the facts of God's human visit to earth, but also the eventual lessons and conclusions that came to light from those facts.

With this characteristic of John's Gospel in mind, some commentators have concluded that Jesus' direct speaking stopped with 3:15, and that John added the following inspired words (3:16-21) by way of further explanation. Either way, no other verse in all the Bible so encapsulates

the basic message of the gospel: God so dearly loved all the people in the world that he gave his only Son so that we could have eternal life.

LIVING FOREVER DOESN'T SOUND SO GREAT ...

Some people are repulsed by the idea of eternal life because their lives are miserable with pain, hunger, poverty, or disappointment. But eternal life is not an extension of a person's mortal life; eternal life is God's life embodied in Christ given to all believers now as a guarantee that they will live forever. Not only will we be changed, almost everything else will also be changed (Revelation 21:1-4). In eternal life there is no death, sickness, enemy, evil, or sin. When we don't know Christ, we make choices as though this life is all we have. In reality, this life is just the introduction to eternity. Receive this new life by faith and begin to evaluate all that happens from an eternal perspective.

3:17-18 “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world.” Why condemn an already condemned world? All people are already under God's judgment because of sin—specifically the sin of not believing in God's Son (16:9). The only way to escape the condemnation is to believe in Jesus, the Son of God, because he came “that the world through Him might be saved.” He who believes in him is saved from God's judgment. And God wants people to believe: He is patient, “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9 NKJV).

When we consider ways to communicate the gospel, we should follow Jesus' example. We do not need to condemn unbelievers; they are condemned already. We must tell them about this condemnation, and then offer them the way of salvation—faith in Jesus Christ. When we share the gospel with others, our love must be like Jesus'—willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, (1) Logos Bible Program, Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, Guzik, David, Life Application Bible Commentary, Factbook Logos bible, Barton, Bruce B., and Philip Wesley Comfort. 1995, Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. [1] John H. Walton, Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 371-375. (2) “The Search” NF 2019,

Sermon Notes:

Today's sermon is not what I had planned today. We're stepping away from our current series, and we'll pick that back up next week... maybe. On Tuesday, I was awakened by the Holy Spirit, and He started speaking to me about today's sermon. I'm like, "Lord, this is not a good time!" LOL... I actually had to grab my phone and start taking notes. Anyone ever get woke up by God?

Before we dive in, here are the AVC Connections:

YouTube, App & Facebook/Website

Let's pray.

Sermon Title: The Search

Humanity is, and always has been, searching for something... beyond us, for us, to help us. It seems like no one is ever satisfied. After the earth was flooded, scripture says the people increased in great numbers—they multiplied into millions of people. God told the people this message:

Genesis 9:1 (NIV) "Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the whole earth.'"

Humanity listened to God and began to establish new cities and territories... until someone got a bright idea.

Here's my paraphrased version of what happened: Genesis 11:1-9 (NIV) "Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, 'Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.' But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to

do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.’ So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.”

Why were they not content with life? Why did they think they needed to be someone else? Make no mistake about it—these people were confused about life. They were searching. It’s like today, humanity is searching for something beyond this world. We’ve spent 50 billion dollars trying to get to Mars, a planet 200 million miles away!- why?

Let me tell you about a man who was searching, who grew up just a few hours north of here...

The Story of NF (Nate Feuerstein)

Nate Feuerstein, known as NF, was born in Gladwin, Michigan, in 1991. Nate was raised in a broken home after his parents divorced. His mother received custody until it was discovered that her boyfriend was abusing Nate and his sister. To further Nate’s pain, tragedy struck again—in 2009, his mother died from an overdose. Nate suffered with physical and mental health issues, which led to depression, isolation, and a sense of disconnection from the world. But NF rose above his pain by writing about his life through Christian hip-hop/rap music. He gained fame, and 14 of his albums earned him 14 platinum or gold plaques. One of his songs/albums is called “The Search.” In it, he describes his pain and his search for life’s answers. Nate gives all glory to his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for what he has accomplished. Today, I want to play NF’s song titled “The Search.” I realize this might not be your preferred genre of music...

[Play Song: The Search (2)]

Yeah, I know that’s fast, and you didn’t catch it all, but it’s about real and raw life! Let me recapture a few things NF said:

“How life... it’s alright... I have been dealing with some things like every human being. Something’s going on up in my house... I’ve been searching... I’ve been learning... I hate to lose sight, but life gets

blurry, and it hurts... It's a cold world out there... I am looking for the map to hope, have you seen it? See, we've all got something trapped inside that we try to suffocate, hoping it dies... Then it comes out of nowhere like an evil surprise, then it hovers over you, telling you millions of lies. The search begins, so enjoy the trip."

The Human Search

Life is a search. Behind life's search are all the emotions and questions: Emotions & Questions

- I feel empty
- I am angry
- I feel lost
- I am confused
- There's a hole in my heart
- I'm anxious
- Why am I here?
- I don't have joy
- I'm not happy

Here's what happens: when all these emotions rush through our minds and we don't get answers, we try to fix things ourselves. Hear me:

- I'm so anxious, I'm going to self-medicate.
- I have so much tension and anger, I'm going to cut myself.
- I'm not happy with my life (my looks), I'm going to become a female. (I'm not making fun.)
- I'm so depressed, I'm going to hide in my room.

Listen—this world is searching for salvation, and people don't even know it!

What Does Salvation Mean?

It means to save, to deliver, to rescue, to heal, or to make whole. Who doesn't want that? Do you know whose name literally means "to save, deliver, rescue, heal, make whole"? JESUS!

The Story of Nicodemus

I want to close this morning by telling you the story of a very unlikely

person who was searching for the answers to life. His name was Nicodemus, and we find his story in the Bible in John 3. But before we go there, let me tell you about Nick:

Quote: “Nicodemus was a highly skilled scholar of his day. He had it made. He was treated like royalty, belonging to the highest religious group called the Pharisees... and not only that, he was selected to be on the Sanhedrin (the Supreme Court in our society). Yet with all his prestige and power, there was a hole in his soul.”

Let’s read about Nick’s encounter with Jesus: John 3:1-8

(NIV) “Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.’ Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.’ ‘How can someone be born when they are old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are 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.’”

John 3:16-17 (NIV)

“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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Closing Prayer

Devotional Reflections and Questions

The Search for Meaning and Salvation

Humanity has always been searching—for purpose, identity, and something to fill the void in our hearts. From the earliest pages of

Scripture, we see God's desire for us to live in His purpose, yet we often stray, seeking our own way. This devotional explores humanity's search for meaning, the story of Nicodemus, and the ultimate answer found in Jesus Christ. Through reflection and prayer, let's consider how God's plan leads us to true fulfillment.

God's Command and Humanity's Rebellion

Scripture Reading: Genesis 9:1, 11:1-9

Genesis 9:1 (NIV, 1984):

"Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.'"

Context: After the flood, God blessed Noah and his family, calling them to multiply and fill the earth with His glory as His image-bearers. Yet, in Genesis 11:1-9, the people settled in Shinar and built the Tower of Babel, seeking to "make a name for themselves" instead of following God's command. Their rebellion reflects humanity's tendency to search for significance apart from God.

Reflection Questions:

1. Why do you think humanity was not content with following God's command to "be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth"?

- Consider what might have driven the people to build the tower and seek their own glory.

2. Do you ever find yourself going astray when you pursue your own plans rather than consulting God?

- Reflect on a time when you tried to "make a name for yourself" or followed your own path. What was the result?

Application:

Take a moment to pray and ask God to reveal areas where you may be seeking your own way instead of His. Write down one step you can take to align your plans with His purpose.

Nicodemus' Search for Truth

Scripture Reading: John 3:1-8

Context: Nicodemus, a respected Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, had wealth, status, and religious knowledge, yet his soul was empty. Under the cover of night, he sought out Jesus, searching for answers beyond his religious traditions. Jesus spoke to the heart of his need, explaining that true life comes through being “born again” by the Spirit.

Reflection Questions:

1. Nicodemus was obviously searching for something beyond his religious beliefs. What do you think he was looking for?

- Consider what might have driven a man of his stature to seek out Jesus.

2. What do you think Jesus is plainly telling Nicodemus about his soul?

- Reflect on Jesus’ words about being “born again” (John 3:3-5). How do they address the deeper needs of the human heart?

Application:

Think about your own search for meaning. Are there areas in your life where you feel empty or unfulfilled, despite outward success? Journal about what you might be seeking and how Jesus might be the answer.

The Answer to Our Search

Scripture Reading: John 3:16-17

John 3:16-17 (NIV, 1984):

“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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Context: In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus reveals the heart of God’s plan: salvation through His Son. Jesus didn’t come to condemn us for our failed attempts to find meaning but to save, deliver, heal, and make us whole. His name, which means “God

saves,” is the answer to humanity’s deepest search.

Reflection Questions:

1. Did Jesus come into this world to condemn any of us? If not, what did He come to do?

- Reflect on John 3:17 and how it contrasts with the world’s view of judgment.

2. Have you asked Jesus Christ to forgive you of your sins and come into your life to be your Lord and Savior?

- If you have, how has this decision impacted your search for meaning? If you haven’t, what might be holding you back?

Application:

Spend time in prayer, asking Jesus to reveal Himself as the answer to your deepest needs. If you’ve never invited Him to be your Lord and Savior, consider doing so today. If you have, reflect on how His salvation has brought healing and wholeness to your life.

Closing Reflection

Humanity’s search for meaning—seen in the rebellion at Babel, the questions of Nicodemus, and the struggles of our own hearts—points to a universal need for salvation. Jesus, whose name means “to save, deliver, rescue, heal, and make whole,” is the answer to that search. As you’ve reflected on these Scriptures and questions, consider how God is calling you to trust Him more fully. Write down one way you can stop building “towers” of your own making and instead embrace the abundant life Jesus offers (John 10:10).