

I'm excited about studying arguably the most well-known verse in all of Scripture. If you're here this morning, without Jesus Christ, I hope you don't leave that way. I hope you find out what life is all about, and that you move accordingly in your relationship with him. Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank you so much for your son. We just marvel at the tremendous love that you have for us and what you've shown us through him. Oh, God, how we thank you for Jesus Christ, and for eternal life. I pray for this group of people. I pray that you will give them an ear to hear and that your spirit will anoint their ear, so that they can hear your truths. I pray that you will anoint my tongue so that the words that you would have us to hear go out this morning. I acknowledge that we're in a familiar portion of Scripture, and if your spirit doesn't speak, then we won't get anything out of it. I pray that you will make it fresh and new for each of us in Jesus name. Amen.

*John 3:1-2* Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. (2) 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."

I mentioned last week that every reference to Nicodemus' visit notes that he came at night. In part, this is a reference to the character and the nature of the Jewish race at this point in time. It was night for them. We see the same thing in John chapter 13:27. See what it says about Judas Iscariot:

*John 13:27-30* As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, (28) but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. (29) Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. (30) As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

"And it was night" describes that it was never darker than when the Lord of all creation was about to be betrayed.

The same thing occurs here with Nicodemus. He is a teacher of Israel but doesn't even know what's going on.

*John 3:3-9* In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." (4) "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" (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. (6) Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (7) You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' (8) 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." (9) "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

It's hard for us to grasp how revolutionary this was for Nicodemus. Nicodemus had lived his entire life, giving, making offerings, prayers, and sacrifices, eating certain kinds of food and shunning other kinds of food, and following rules. They had holy days and non-holy days, high days, and low days. His whole life was made up of following rituals. Then Christ comes along and tells him that these are just shadows of the truth. They're not the real thing. Jesus says to him, *you must be born again*. This was more than Nicodemus could grasp.

I've talked to people in various religions, such as Mormonism, Roman Catholicism, and others. It's really hard for them to just shake off what they have learned over their entire life and turn to Jesus Christ. The only way they can understand is when the Holy Spirit of God comes to them. Christianity is not following a bunch of rules, although many churches today teach that if you're going to be a Christian, you must do this, and you don't do that. Perhaps you've been raised that way. Christianity is not a set of rules and regulations. Christianity is a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

The main thing Nicodemus could not understand was Galatians 2:20.

*Galatians 2:20-21 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (21) I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"*

If you're thinking, If I can just live good enough, God will accept me. If that is true, then Christ died for nothing, because if we could live good enough, then that's the route we should take.

When we started this church, we felt like there were two things that God was trying to get through to us. One was how big God is. We can't imagine how big God is, He knows the thought you're going to have 10 years, three days, and two seconds from this very moment. He's big. The second thing is that his grace is all sufficient. Much of Christian society today is made up of people who are seeing how close to sinning they can get but not quite sin. Or how many rules do I need to follow? I've told you about the man who said, *"You know, I don't have to tithe this year, because the price of cattle has dropped so much. I've just lost tons of money."* But he hadn't sold a cow, so he really hadn't lost any cash. But since they weren't worth as much as they had been, that gave him an excuse not to tithe. When you think like that, my friend, I want you to know that God isn't interested in your tithe. He's interested in your heart, and if it's all messed up, I want to encourage you to live by faith.

*Habakkuk 2:4 "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright— but the righteous will live by his faith—*

*Romans 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a*

*righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."*

*Galatians 3:11* Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

*Hebrews 10:37-39* For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. (38) But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." (39) But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

If you're going to **really** live, you have to live by faith. Tremendous activities were accomplished by the saints of old and also saints of today. Nicodemus had no idea what that meant. It was something beyond him. It was out of his grasp.

*John 3:12* I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things,

When Jesus said, *I've spoken to you ...*, He was referring to Nicodemus and his fellow Pharisees. He's using Nicodemus as a representation of the Jewish race.

Jesus is contrasting earthly things with heavenly things – things that are presently beyond our comprehension.

Look at what Jesus said to Pilate about the kingdom of heaven:

*John 18:36* Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

The Kingdom of this earth and the kingdom of heaven are two different things. Jesus used earthly terms to talk to Nicodemus about heavenly things. He says that the new birth (believing in Jesus Christ) is like being born again. He uses the wind (v7) to represent the Holy Spirit, and how the Holy Spirit works in people's lives. We see the evidence of the Holy Spirit, but we can't see him. Jesus is trying to get Nicodemus to understand these things.

What's going on in heaven today is far more exciting than what's happening here on earth. We are not the center of the universe. I don't know whether you're shocked at that or not. (When you were a teenager, you might have thought the universe was centered on you, but it wasn't). Theologians in the old days believed that the sun and all the planets revolved around the earth. When scientists finally disputed that theory, the theologians said the scientists were heretics. Of course, we know they were just making it up that the Bible that said that. Heaven is the center of the universe - where God is. More activity is going on there than possibly could be going on here.

I often think about *Revelation 3:8* *I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*

The word for *little* is mikros in the Greek from which we get micron, a unit of measure that is one millionth of a meter. Wow, that is small! I wonder how much power we might have when we get to heaven?

Where are we in this? How should we be living? Listen again to what he says in Revelation 3:8: *I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.* We definitely have an open door in this country today. We have the freedom to share Christ wherever and whenever because we have a micron of power and have kept God's word. That's what we're doing here this morning.

Christ saw things heavenly. And Nicodemus saw things earthly.

For example, in Luke 10, the 70 ambassadors come back, after having been sent out with special powers to heal, cast out demons and raise the dead. They were overjoyed with their experiences.

*Luke 10:17 (NASB95) The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."*

Jesus' response seems out of place when he says in verse 20: *Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

But look at what he said in the preceding verses:

*Luke 10:18-19 And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. (19) Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.*

Jesus was a perfect man and could see things that we don't see. There are earthly things and there are heavenly things. I wonder how out of tune we are as people. That's a question that I don't have the answer to.

Job is a perfect example that there is another world that we can't see. (I believe the secondary topic in the book of Job is that there are things that's unknown to us.)

*Job 1:6-7 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. (7) The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."*

Have you ever thought about Satan roaming around, going through Arkansas, and heading out to California? (He must have stayed in California for a long time! I'm sorry to any Californians listening, I'm just joking.) But have you thought about him just roaming around? (That's why we say Arkansas is God's country. He didn't stay here very long.)

*Job 1:8-10 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." (9) "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. (10) "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land.*

Do you ever think about the fact that God actually looks and blesses what you do? There's another world besides the world we can see.

Remember the ant farms where two pieces of glass were spaced apart with a thin layer of soil or sand sandwiched between, and a space on top where ants could search for food? The ants would make tunnels in the soil, and just work away oblivious that anyone was watching them. As far as they were concerned, they were all that existed. I often think about how we as people are like ants in one of those glass houses, just working away like there's nothing else going on. Then there's the movie Men in Black, where a bunch of people were living in a locker. That's where their world was, inside a locker. A guy sees them and says it's cruel to make people live in a locker, we should let them out and let them know there's a big world out here. Then another person arrives and says: "Show him Bill." Bill goes over and he unlocks and opens a larger door and there is a bunch of people outside looking at them!. There's a little bit of truth in that. There is a big world going happening that you and I know very little about. There are earthly things, and there are heavenly things.

*John 3:14-15 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, (15) that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*

Jesus is referring to *Numbers 21:4-9 They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; (5) they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" (6) Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. (7) The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. (8) The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." (9) So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.*

God didn't tell Moses to give everybody some tools to catch and kill the snakes. He didn't say, *"put a picture of something else on a pole."* He said I want you to put the symbol of the very thing that is attacking the people on a pole. The snake bitten Israelites deserved to die and would have had not God provided a way for them to be healed. If they look up to the bronze serpent they would live, if they didn't, they died. Looking at the serpent was an act of faith.

This is a typology or a foreshadow of Jesus Christ going to the cross. The reason the snake serpent was made of bronze is because brass and bronze in the Bible speak of judgment. That snake represented the judgment that would come on Jesus Christ for our sins. He who knew no sin became sin. Think about the most heinous thing you can think of, perhaps a child molester. To me, that's the most unforgivable sin that could be. The truth is, Christ hung on the cross as a child molester, to pay the sins for every child molester who would ever live. The cross, the pain of the cross was not what man inflicted on Jesus Christ, it was what God the Father inflicted on Jesus Christ, when He became sin for you, and for me.

When the Romans crucified a man, they had the theory, that if you got a man off his feet, you could defeat him in battle. The Romans didn't have guns or weapons of mass destruction so they fought hand to hand, and if you get a man off his feet, you could defeat him. When they put a man on the cross, his feet were off the ground, so he was defeated. Christ was there hanging defeated for you, and for me.

When the Israelites in the desert were bitten by a snake, they didn't have to go through all kinds of theology. They didn't have to know what the snake was made of. They didn't have to know anything. All they had to do was gaze at the snake and be saved. That is a picture of what you and I do when we believe in Jesus Christ. If we have to do something else to be saved, we're never going to make it.

*John 3:16 "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."*

When I was young and didn't know how to preach, I would go anywhere, where anyone would listen to me. (You wouldn't believe some of the places I've been.) I remember preaching in this one nondenominational church, and after the service was over, this little old lady shoved her way through the crowd. She said, *"Are you one of us or one of them?"* I asked, *"Ma'am, I don't know what you're talking about."* She replied, *"Do you believe that you can't lose your salvation after you're saved?"* I said, *"yes, ma'am. I do believe that."* *"Oh!"* she cranked up. Then Then I said, *"Ma'am, all I know is John 3:16,"* which I quoted. I continued by saying *"if you can lose your salvation in five years, it wasn't very eternal, was it?"* and I shot out the door. It's eternal life. That means you can't lose it in five years.

How much does God love you? The more you know about God, the more you learn how much he loves you. Forever be learning about how much he loves us. It's beyond our grasp. I can tell you that God loves you more than you can possibly imagine. Even after they get the national debt paid off you still will not know how much God loves you. He loves you so much that He gave His only Son for us.

I was talking to Kyle about not having to repent of your sins to be saved. He said, "*Jim, when I first heard that, it really grated me,*" because he came from a different point of view. He said, "*Really, if you could rephrase that a little bit, it might help.*" I'm sure he's right. You do have to repent of your sins. God is big on the repenting of sins, but it's after you're saved not before. You see, when you're dead in trespasses and sins, you can't do anything right. All you can do is cast an eye toward the snake that's been lifted up. (After that you should stay away from snakes.) The truth is there's a place for repentance. There is also a certain element of that when I turn from going this way to that way. I've not just turned my front side; I've also turned my backside. I want to be careful here, but I don't want to spend time thinking about your sins. I want to spend time thinking about the one who loves you. That's the issue. You turn to Christ. That is so simple.

Notice what else it says about why God sent Jesus.

*John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

You would think he would have come to condemn the world. He didn't. It was already condemned. He came to save the world.

*John 3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*

The condemnation of man is not how many sins they commit. The condemnation of man is not believing in Jesus Christ. Hitler is not more condemned to hell than your unsaved next-door neighbor, who may be a great person. Now Hitler's hell will be different than your next-door neighbor's, but they're both condemned to hell. It isn't about their sins. It is about not believing in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the issue of life and death, and for the believer, life.

*John 16:8-9 When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: (9) in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me;*

When the Holy Spirit came into the world, he didn't come to convict a man of his sins, (plural), but to convict him that he's a sinner. But what does he convict him of? He convicts him that he hasn't believed in the one and only Son of God.

I find it hard to believe that the world is going to die and go to hell because of something so simple. All you have to do is believe in Christ. It's all the world has to do.

Here's the reason that something so simple is passed by.

*John 3:19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*

To summarize, all I have to do is believe in Jesus Christ, that's all. Salvation is about believing in Christ. It's not about your ability. It's not about your knowledge. It's not about a ritual. It's about believing in Jesus Christ. It's so simple.

*1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

*1 Corinthians 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,*

*John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."*

That's it. Believe in Jesus Christ or suffer God's wrath forever. You also need to understand that eternal life is more than just living forever.

In fact, everyone is going to live forever. They're either going to live forever in heaven or they're going to live forever in hell, but they're going to exist forever.

Eternal life is a quality and a quantity. It is about living life to its fullest. It's about being designed by God to live a certain way and living it with all your mind now and forever.

*Ephesians 5:15-16 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, (16) making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.*

You have eternal life if you put your trust in Christ, therefore be very careful how you live today. Not as unwise but as wise.