

**Disrupting Religion**  
**Part 5**  
**Disrupting Theology**  
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Well Good Morning Church!

Happy Post Canada Day! I assume you all were the ones who got to sleep in this morning after the fireworks went late into the evening. I was in bed by about 10:30 so I missed most of the festivities. But my children slept in this morning because they stayed up late to watch them.

If you have your Bible please turn to John Chapter 3. We will be looking there in a moment. I just want to touch on one of the announcements you just heard. We are going to be doing our annual lake baptism. I would encourage you to come out. It is a great time as a church family to gather together to celebrate some fellowship over food and then also to witness how Christ has been at work in people's lives bringing new life to them, and their taking that step of baptism.

It will be a great time as a church family.

Before we look at John Chapter 3 I want to share a little story with you. It is a fictional tale but it leads well into what we are going to be looking at this morning.

There was a perfect man who met a perfect woman. And after a perfect courtship they had a perfect wedding. Their life together of course was perfect. And on one snowy stormy Christmas Eve this perfect couple was driving along down the road when they noticed someone at the roadside in obvious distress.

Being the perfect couple they stopped to help and there stood Santa Claus with a huge bundle of toys. Not wanting to disappoint any children on the eve of Christmas, the perfect couple loaded Santa and his toys into their vehicle.

Soon they were driving along delivering the toys. Unfortunately the driving conditions deteriorated and the perfect couple and Santa Claus had an accident. And only one of them survived the accident. Who was the survivor?

Well the answer of course is the perfect woman because we all know there is no such thing as Santa Claus or the perfect man. (Did I get that right, honey?)

Now I know what all the men are thinking in the room. "Well if there is no perfect man and there's no Santa Claus, the perfect woman must have been the one driving because she got in an accident."

Today we are going to be looking at someone who, their whole life was pursuing perfection only to have his theology completely disrupted by Jesus.

To set the context of John Chapter 3, the Word of the Lord has come to John the Baptist. He is out in the desert wilderness baptizing. He is still doing it. He has been doing it for about a year's time at the point we hit John Chapter 3.

Jesus has called five disciples to follow Him. He has revealed His glory to them at a wedding in Cana by turning water into wine. And Jesus has just come to Jerusalem with His first five followers and He has disrupted the temple system.

He walked into Jerusalem and overturned the table of the moneylenders. He drove out those who were selling animals in the court of the Gentiles. (We looked at that three weeks ago.)

And Jesus has created a huge commotion within Jerusalem. And we are told in John Chapter 2 that Jesus is conducting miraculous signs in Jerusalem. We don't know what they are but we are told at the conclusion of John Chapter 2 that many saw the miraculous signs Jesus was doing and believed in Him.

But Jesus would not entrust Himself to man because He knows what is in a man.

And we pick it up in John Chapter 3 where one of those people comes to Jesus in the evening. We read in Verse 1:

“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 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.’

“‘How can this be?’ Nicodemus asked.

“‘You are Israel’s teacher,’ said Jesus, ‘and do you not understand these things?’

“ ‘Very truly I tell you, 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 wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

“‘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.

“ ‘Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

“‘This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

“‘Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

“‘But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.’”

We’ll stop there.

I really only have one purpose this morning and it is this: if you don’t know Jesus, if you are exploring this whole religion thing, that you would leave here today having a crystal clear understanding of who He is, why He came and what He has done for you.

If you are here this morning and you are a believer, I pray that you are refreshed by who He is, what He has done and the impact that has had on your life.

And we are going to look at how Nicodemus went from curiosity to confusion to conviction.

Now in order to appreciate who has just walked into the room to visit Jesus by night, we need to understand the culture and the education system of New Testament times.

Because when Nicodemus stepped into the room, I guarantee you that the first five followers of Jesus were a little awestruck when he walked into the room.

A theological heavyweight has just stepped into the room to talk with Jesus after He has disrupted the whole temple system. And we know that he is a member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, who were the leaders of the people.

So when he steps into the room, certainly the disciples, who just came from fishing, because they are fishermen by trade, are probably a little intimidated when Nicodemus steps into the room.

There were three levels of schooling for Jewish boys and girls in New Testament times. The first level was Beth Sefer. At the age of 5 through 10 you would go to synagogue each day, Monday through Friday, just like our school system, and you would be taught the Scriptures. You would be taken through the first five books of the Law – Genesis through Deuteronomy.

And during that time you would commit to memory the first five books of Moses, the Books of the Law, because you are a covenant people and you need to know God's law. You need to know God's covenant so that you can be in obedience to it because you are born into this Old Testament covenant.

So Nicodemus, when he was 5 through 10 years old went to the local synagogue and was taught by the rabbis. Now if you displayed a certain level of acumen for the Scriptures, if you displayed that you were a little bit keener than the other kids in Sunday school, you were invited to the next level of schooling, which was called Beth Talmud. Beth Talmud lasted till you were about 14.

Now most kids at the age of 10 memorized the first 5 books of the Bible but then they went off and were taught the family trade and continued their learning through life with their parents, but they weren't invited into Beth Talmud.

But for those who were, they were taught the rest of the Old Testament, Genesis through Malachi.

And if you got through that level of schooling, eventually if you wanted to continue, you could meet with the rabbi, and what he would do is just drill you with questions to see if you had a commanding knowledge of the Old Testament covenant.

And if you had a commanding knowledge of Genesis through Malachi, the rabbi would utter two words to you that showed you were accepted into the next layer of education called Beth Midrash. And those two words were, "Follow me."

If a rabbi said that to you, they believed that you had what it takes to become a rabbi.

And so Nicodemus has been through these three levels of schooling. Nicodemus certainly has devoted his life to the study of God's Word in the Old Testament. Nicodemus has a devout life. He is a member of the Jewish ruling council.

And we can assume; it is pretty safe to assume that Nicodemus probably served as a scribe at one point in his training.

Scribes were those who would copy out the Old Testament books of the Bible.

My grandfather was a missionary for 50 years in Chile. And one time when we were doing a Bible study together he told me that he had written out the Bible.

Has anybody in here written out the Bible? I didn't think so. He had written out the Bible. Now he had read it many times and his desire in writing it would be so that he could memorize more and more of it.

And so he wrote the whole Bible out. It took him about 6 years. He told me that 10 years ago and I was pretty amazed. I thought, "That's a good practice. I'm going to start writing out the Bible."

So for the last 10 years I have been writing out the Bible. And I am at Genesis Chapter 2. I wrote one chapter and my hand was so cramped up because we use so much typing now I didn't even have the muscles.

And I thought if I copy out the whole Bible I am going to have like Popeye forearms.

So when Nicodemus walks into the room, I am sure that the disciples have a tremendous respect for who stepped into the room.

We are also told that not only is he a member of the Jewish ruling council, but he is a man of the Pharisees.

And in order to appreciate what is at the heart of a Pharisee's theology, we again need to understand the culture and times that this is written.

The Pharisee movement began in between the Old and New Testament when the Greeks invaded the nation of Israel and started to conquer the land. A group of Jewish people saw that Greek culture was influencing their Jewish culture and they distanced themselves from the Greek culture and devoted themselves to the study of Scripture. Not a bad thing, is it?

And they believed that their purity was rooted in the Old Testament law. And so they had numerous dietary restrictions and rules to ensure their obedience to the Old Testament laws. In fact beyond Genesis through Malachi, the Old Testament, they had 6200 pages of rules to govern their lives. And they followed them religiously.

And so Nicodemus represents our best efforts to please God. He is devout and has observed a strict life of obedience. He is our best expression of a religious life.

But there is one major problem when our life is rooted in religion. And when I say the word religion, what I am referring to is our best efforts to win God's approval. It is a righteousness that is rooted in our own best efforts that I am referring to.

And for many of the Pharisees, their strict observance to the Old Testament laws led to pride. Jesus confronts this in Luke Chapter 18 and Verse 10.

He tells a story about a Pharisee going up to Temple to pray with a tax collector. And He says this:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

“The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evil doers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector.

“‘I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’”

The problem with the Pharisees' theology is that their righteousness was rooted in themselves, which led to a religious pride that set into their hearts. It enabled them to take pride in their behavior and they looked down on others who didn't quite measure up to where they were at.

And that is the problem with the whole of the Old Covenant. The law was good but the results of trying to fulfill it were untenable to most or led to pride in others like the Pharisees.

And if we are not careful that Pharisee theology can even set into our own lives after we have experienced Christ. And certainly being part of a church culture, that yeast of the Pharisees, that teaching of the Pharisees, that heart of pride can settle into our own lives.

Dwayne mentioned last week how we can begin to look down on others thinking ourselves better than others, the pointing of the finger and malicious talk about *those* people, assuming that we are okay.

I remember a few years ago youth from Urban Promise were leaving a meeting that we were having in a church. And a pastor was meeting with some of the church kids in another room, and the youth who were leaving the church were being a bit loud and a bit disruptive.

And so the pastor came storming out. He was visibly upset about the kids who were being so loud and he said, “Can you keep it down? I am trying to teach these kids in here not to turn out like you kids.”

There was a bit of a plank in his own eye because he was calling out the behavior of these kids. And it was interesting as he said that; I look at two of the kids that were in that group of youth who were being a little rowdy as they left; two of them are missionaries today, one with Youth Unlimited, one with Urban Promise. They are sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with youth who are growing up in a difficult neighborhood.

And so maybe that pastor should have said, “I hope my kids turn out like you are going to be.”

But this religious pride can set into our lives. It is not unique to us; it existed in the early church. In the church in Corinth, different groups and factions within the church were boasting over one another and Paul writes to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 2[4]:7:

“For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?”

Paul is reminding the believer that all that you have – “the spiritual knowledge and understanding that you have, the righteousness that exists within your life, it was a free gift from Me, so really what are you going to boast about?”

Even the spiritual gifts that have been distributed to you, they reside from Him, so boasting should not be a part of our dialogue. But certainly when we stray into a religious mindset, we can settle into a pride that starts to creep into our own lives.

And Nicodemus represents the best of our efforts to be righteous. He has been in synagogue all his life. He is well respected and well behaved. And deep down in his theology he believes that his devoted life has earned him God’s favor.

Now the Word of the Lord has come to John the Baptist. He is out in the desert baptizing and his message that God had given him to speak was one of repentance, calling people back to confess their sins and be baptized.

And all of Jerusalem and Judea have been going out to be baptized out in the Jordan River where John the Baptist is doing this. But the only group who resisted him were the Pharisees, the religious leaders in Jerusalem. They went out to study what he was doing but there is no record of them confessing their sins and being baptized.

And so Nicodemus and the other religious leaders in Jerusalem are seeing what is happening in the desert, how people are confessing their sins, but the only group not flocking out to the desert to be baptized is them. They believe that others need to repent but that they don’t need to.

Pride is Nicodemus’ problem. And Jesus has come and disrupted temple but He is now about to disrupt Nicodemus’ theology. Jesus is about to address the problem at the heart of all world religions. He is about to answer the question, “How good is good enough? Can our righteous best efforts earn favor with the Holy God?”

And as Nicodemus comes to Jesus, Jesus cuts right to the heart of his theology. Nicodemus says, “We know You are from God because nobody could be doing the miraculous signs unless God were with Him.”

And Jesus’ response is, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

Jesus cuts right to the heart of Nicodemus' theology and Nicodemus moves from a curiosity as to who Jesus is to utter confusion because this highly respected, highly educated man starts to think to himself, "How exactly am I born again?"

Because Jesus said to him, when it says, "I tell you the truth," the actual Greek translation is, "Amen, Amen - truly, truly. What I am telling you, you can take to the bank."

Jesus is using a rabbi ploy to say, "What I am about to tell you is everything. You can bank on this as truth."

In fact He does it three times through His discourse, referring to what it means to be born again. So Jesus has said, "Amen, Amen, what I am about to tell you is everything - you must be born again."

And Nicodemus, because he is an expert theologian, is probably thinking back through all of the Old Testament books wondering where is born again, where is born again? I don't remember thinking of born again. And he is utterly confused. He starts to think to himself, "Well how exactly do I enter my mother's womb to be born again?"

Does anybody else find that humorous? Here you have a highly educated man who is thinking to himself, "Well how does this take place?"

He is looking with natural eyes.

And what exactly is Jesus talking about? What is Jesus actually saying to Nicodemus by this statement?

He is saying, "Hey, Nicodemus, the whole of the spiritual life; it's not about you becoming a better you. Christianity is not a behavior modification program. It's about a whole new creation.

Jesus is describing a whole new beginning, not a refinement of what is, not a remodelling; it is a whole new birth, a complete new creation.

The Bible describes this in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Remember Jesus is teaching this to someone who has observed all of the traditions of the elders, someone who has devoted his life to the study of the Word, someone who is devout, someone who tithed, someone who knows his Bible and is probably, from the outward appearance, a really, really upstanding good person.

And Jesus is stating in this passage the best of humanity's efforts to satisfy a holy God are completely defective and need a complete new birth, a complete new beginning. "You must be born again, Nicodemus."

The question I have for you this morning is, are you born again? Not, do you go to church and do you go to Sunday school and have you memorized the Bible, because Nicodemus, all those things were true of him as well.

But are you born again? Have you been born by the Spirit? Jesus explains to Nicodemus why he must be born again in Verse 6.

In Verse 6, it says,

“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”

“Nicodemus, you need to be born again because you have been trying really hard to modify your flesh but your flesh can only give birth to more flesh.”

We need a whole new creation, a whole new beginning. And no matter how hard you try to be really righteous, you will always fall short because the flesh can only give birth to more flesh.

This is something that the Galatian church struggled with. They began with the Spirit, they began with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but somewhere along the line in their lives they started to live out the Christian life according to the power of the flesh.

And the problem with that is the flesh can only give birth to more flesh.

What Jesus is saying is that “no matter how hard you try Nicodemus, you cannot modify the flesh. Nicodemus, I have come to offer you a whole new life, a whole new creation, and it is by the work of the Holy Spirit. That is what you are invited into, Nicodemus, to let go of your own righteousness and embrace one that comes from the Holy Spirit because He is holy.”

And Christianity is not about you becoming a better you; it is all about Christ and what He has done for you and wants to do within you.

And even as Christians we can slip into this place where we are trying to modify the flesh and realizing that it can only give birth to flesh.

All of this is a total deconstruction of Nicodemus’ theology. Jesus is saying, “All of your hard work, all your best efforts, all of your perceived self-righteousness that you have devoted your whole life to; it doesn’t measure up Nicodemus; you need to be born again.”

How hard would this be for Nicodemus to comprehend?

The heart of the Christian message is that God came down to do for us what we couldn’t do because of our flesh. And Nicodemus hears all this and he asks one question, but it is the most important question he has ever asked in his life.

In Verse 9 he hears about being born again, he hears that it is a work of the Spirit and he asks a question,

“How can this be?”

“How can this be? How can I enter into this new birth? How can I experience this new creation, this new life? How can I be born again?”

The rest of Jesus’ discourse answers that question.

But first in Verse 10 Jesus looks at Nicodemus and says to him,

“You are Israel’s teacher and you don’t understand these things?”

How do you think Nicodemus feels at this moment?

“You are the one that everybody is looking to and you don’t understand these things? You can’t even see or enter the kingdom of heaven unless this is true in your life. How are you going to lead others, Nicodemus?”

Jesus is really going to the heart of Nicodemus and He is essentially saying to him, “You are not even fit to teach or lead the people.”

He says, “We speak of what we know and still you do not believe us.”

And then in Verse 13 Jesus speaks absolute crystal clarity to Nicodemus about who He is. Remember Nicodemus is an expert theologian in the Old Testament books of the Bible and when Jesus in Verse 13 says,

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man,”

Nicodemus heard “The Son of Man” and he starts to run through his encyclopedia of Old Testament words and he remembers that Daniel the prophet in Babylon had a vision and in his vision he saw the Son of Man.

And so when Jesus says “the One who comes from heaven, the Son of Man,” what He is doing is triggering Nicodemus’ memory and making him remember Daniel 7:13 which says this:

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

“He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

What Jesus has just uttered to Nicodemus is, “Nicodemus, I know what I am talking about because I am the One who has come from heaven, the Son of Man. The very one that Daniel beheld in his vision stands before you, Nicodemus. Nicodemus, I am the Son of Man, I am the one Daniel saw, I am all authority, I am all power. I speak of heaven because that is where I came from. I am the source of all teaching, I am all truth. There is none but Me, Nicodemus.”

How do you think Nicodemus feels at this moment, to realize that the One you have been studying about your whole life is standing in front of you? The One who carries all authority, all power, all dominion for all time is the one addressing you.

Then Jesus speaks again in a language that Nicodemus would understand and answers his question, “How can this be, how can one be born again?”

And Jesus says in Verse 14,

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

“Nicodemus, you want eternal life? Well it will be just like the moment of Moses in the desert and the bronze serpent.”

Now I don’t assume that any of us have that commanding knowledge of Old Testament stories, but Nicodemus, who was an expert in the law, certainly would know what Jesus is talking about.

And in Numbers 21:4-9 it recalls the story of Moses who has led the nation of Israel out of Egypt. They are following God. He is leading them through the desert on to the Promised Land.

And God’s people, who have been led out of their bondage to slavery, are getting fed up with wandering through the desert. They were stubborn in their hearts and as God is leading them through this, they start to speak out against God and against Moses.

And they say, “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread. There is no water. And we detest this miserable food.”

(The food they are referring to is the manna that God provided for them in the desert.)

And as they grumble about Moses’ leadership and where God is leading them and they detest God’s provision, God sends venomous snakes among them and it starts to bite them and kill them.

And they realize they have sinned against God. They come to Moses in repentance, and Moses is told by the Lord to make a bronze serpent on a pole, stick the pole in the ground and anybody who is bitten and poisoned can look at the bronze serpent and they won’t die.

And so that's what happens in the Old Testament account. And Jesus has just told Nicodemus, "Nicodemus, it's going to be exactly like that. Just as the bronze serpent was lifted up, so the Son of Man must be lifted up so that all who look upon Him can be saved."

There are a number of parallels when you look at the story of Moses and the serpent, that as I studied that this week, some profound things emerge through that story of Moses.

But one of them that struck me is why is it that God instructs Moses to fashion a serpent as the source of salvation for people who have been bitten by a serpent? Because when we study the Scriptures, we realize that the serpent oftentimes refers to our enemy the devil.

And so why would God instruct Moses to make a serpent to be the very thing that we look at for our salvation in the Old Testament account when they were being bitten by snakes? And what does that have to do with the cross that Jesus is clearly referring to when He talks about the Son of Man being lifted up so that all who see Him can be forgiven and have eternal life?

What do these have to do with each other?

Can I suggest this: that that is the paradox of the cross? To the person who has received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we look at the cross and what we see is heaven's redemption. We see the Son of Man pouring out His life, pouring out His blood for the forgiveness of our sins. We see hope, grace, mercy and forgiveness when we look at the cross.

But when heaven looks at the cross, it sees wrath and condemnation. When heaven looks at the cross, it looks at God's punishment being poured out on sinful man, being poured out on His one and only Son.

The cross was an act where Satan and the powers and authorities that he got to put God to death on the cross. That is the paradox of the cross. It is a symbol of satanic condemnation, but at the same time of heavenly salvation and grace, just like the serpent in the desert during the time of Moses.

The cross represents the enemy's attempt to destroy the Creator, but it became the very place where the Creator triumphed over the enemy.

And Jesus says to Nicodemus, tells him this three years before He goes to the cross – I think He is planting a seed in Nicodemus. I think He is saying to Nicodemus - remember Nicodemus is part of the Jewish ruling council; he was there when Jesus was tried during the Passover festival, he was there when people were grumbling about God's provision from heaven, the Bread of Life that came down to satisfy our needs, he was there when they sentenced him to death. I think Jesus is planting a seed within Nicodemus that comes to bear fruit a few years later.

And Jesus says in John 3:16, probably the most popular verse in all of Scripture, that this was all part of God's plan. God is the One who initiated this.

“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.”

Verse 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.”

And Jesus says to him, this is all part of God’s plan. God so loved the world, His motivation was love; it wasn’t anger, it wasn’t wrath, it wasn’t judgement; His motivation was love for humanity who had strayed from Him.

That is what set His plan into motion.

And God did not send His Son to condemn the world but to save the world. “Nicodemus, this is why I have come, this is why I stand before you. I am God’s one and only Son and I have come to pour out My life for you.”

And so the question that faces Nicodemus is the question that all of humanity faces when it beholds the cross and Christ hanging on it.

The question before all people isn’t if you will try harder to be religious, because flesh just gives birth to flesh; the question before all people isn’t will you try harder, but will you believe in the salvation He has provided? And if you believe you will have eternal life.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. On the cross Jesus poured out His life for the forgiveness of your sins and my sins, for the forgiveness of Nicodemus’ pride that had gripped his heart so deeply.

Jesus has completely disrupted Nicodemus’ theology and Jesus has done it only to awaken him to what God has for him because what Jesus offers us is inside out transformation, a whole new creation, a whole new birth by the Holy Spirit. When we put our faith in who He is, what He has done for us on the cross, He comes and lives in us by His Holy Spirit. We are born again.

And His Holy Spirit, because it is holy, starts to transform our lives into holiness. He transforms us. He restores us. He does in us what we were powerless to do in ourselves.

Nicodemus, do you know what you need to do to earn God’s favor?

Put your faith in Jesus who did it all for you.

God has provided a means by which we can all be saved. But the great battle of our spiritual lives isn’t if we will try harder; it is will we believe in what He has provided, will we put our faith in His way of salvation?

That's the question that stands before anyone who doesn't know Him. Not will you be more religious, not will you try harder next time? But will you believe in what He has done for you?

And he who believes is not condemned but he who looks upon the Son and rejects Him stands condemned and remains under God's just punishment.

We don't know exactly what happened with Nicodemus. We're told that after He died on the cross, after Jesus died on the cross, that Joseph of Arimathea with the help of Nicodemus buried Him.

And that would have made him unclean at a very sanctified time, during Passover and the Feast of Unleavened bread, so he was willing to associate with Jesus and become unclean after His unjust death.

He was probably there during the trial. There is no record of him becoming a disciple. We don't know what happened to him.

But as I look at this text, Jesus cuts right to the heart of his religious pride and says to him, just like He does today, "It's not about your best efforts; it's about what I have done for you."

We're going to close with a hymn that just worships Jesus, who poured out His life on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for all that You have done for us. Thank You for such a great salvation that You have brought about. And Lord, we acknowledge that pride can set into our hearts. We can lose our way and try and live a religious life by our own best efforts. And maybe there are people here today who have tried religion, have tried the church thing, but always felt like they were coming up short. I pray that what You have done on our behalf becomes real in their experience today.

We thank You for such a great salvation that You have brought about by Your death, burial and resurrection and that we can be born again.