

**The Power of Your Story**  
**Do You Have the Right Story?**  
**John 3:1-18**

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**Introduction:** Last Sunday, I shared with you about “The Power of Your Story.” I want to emphasize to us that when it comes to the story of God’s activity in our lives, we need to tell our stories, and others need to hear our stories. Our stories are testaments of God’s power. Our stories are continuing to be written, and if we are Christians, our stories are perfect pictures of the Gospel.

For the next 10 weeks, I want to attempt to take us on a little journey through the New Testament to show us the power of our stories—that is the power of God’s activity in our lives. We are going to consider 10 different stories of people telling their story. I have been led to begin in John 3. John 3:16 is the most familiar passage in the Bible. Let’s quote it together in the way that you probably first heard it.

**John 3:16 (KJV)** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

As important as this one verse is, I want you to be reminded of the context in which this truth is expressed. For that, we need to consider the story of Nicodemus’ conversation with Jesus. It is an important story in understanding the necessity of making sure that we have the right story when it comes to Jesus.

**Nicodemus—A Man with a Partial Story (John 3:1-2)**

There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>This man came to Him at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him.”

This tells us what we know about Nicodemus at this point in his story. He is a religious man—a Pharisee, which describes a particular sect of the Jews. He was a leader among that group. He has had some conversations about Jesus, most likely with other Pharisees, noted by the “we.” Nicodemus comes at night to visit Jesus. This, no doubt, expresses that he is trying to hide the fact that he is interested in finding more about Jesus. As I think about Nicodemus, I think about several things that are related to us.

- **Everybody has a story!**

Somebody is going to be tempted to say, “I don’t know if I have a story.” Sure you do!

- **This story often includes...**

- **Some religious heritage**—Even if you have “no religious” heritage that is your religious heritage.

- **Some right knowledge**—Nicodemus had some right answers. But here is the big thing—Some right knowledge or even a lot of right knowledge is not a replacement for a personal relationship with Christ.

- **This kind of story is not enough!**

### **Jesus—A Messiah with Two Perfect Stories (John 3:3-15)**

<sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, “I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

<sup>4</sup> “But how can anyone be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked Him. “Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?”

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “I assure you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

<sup>9</sup> “How can these things be?” asked Nicodemus.

<sup>10</sup> “Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things?” Jesus replied. <sup>11</sup> “I assure you: We speak what We know and We testify to what We have seen, but you do not accept Our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about things that happen on earth and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about things of heaven? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended from heaven—the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.

Jesus takes Nicodemus’ opening statement and gets to the real issue. Notice that Jesus does not really deal with the issue. Some of you have questions about God, but God wants you to know that the most important question is the issue of His kingdom. To get at this, Jesus gives first an analogy and then points to an event in Jewish history.

The Analogy of the New Birth—First, Jesus uses the analogy of being born again. I believe that there are a couple of reasons why Jesus chose this particular analogy. First, it is the idea of birth that speaks to “miracle.” Second, the idea of birth communicates well the manner in which we become Christians. God does the work.

The Reminder of the Serpent in the Wilderness—Then, Jesus points to a familiar story in Jewish history that is recorded in Numbers 21. During the days of Israel wandering around in the wilderness, the people began to complain about the lack of food and water. “Why have you led us from Egypt out into this wilderness to die? We are tired of this wretched food!” God struck them with a plague of snakes. They repented, and Moses interceded. God instructed Moses to mount an image of a snake on a pole, and anyone who had been bitten could look at the snake and be healed.

One story is new and one story is old, but they both make the same point. Salvation is not about us; it is about God. He provides the way.

- **Everybody's story is different, yet the same!**

Our stories are going to be different in background, experiences, knowledge, but we all must come to a point of decision about Christ. We must have this new birth. We must have this experience with Jesus. If not, we do not have the right story.

Similarly, everyone who chooses not to follow Christ is one who rejects Christ. Those stories of rejection may be different, and yet they are the same.

### **John 3:16—A Timeless Message from this Story**

<sup>16</sup> “For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. <sup>18</sup> Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.

Nicodemus comes at night. He hears Jesus. We don't really know Nicodemus' response. Or do we?

We see Nicodemus appear twice more in John.

John 7:40-52<sup>40</sup> When some from the crowd heard these words, they said, “This really is the Prophet!”

<sup>41</sup> Others said, “This is the Messiah!” But some said, “Surely the Messiah doesn't come from Galilee, does He? <sup>42</sup> Doesn't the Scripture say that the Messiah comes from David's offspring and from the town of Bethlehem, where David once lived?” <sup>43</sup> So a division occurred among the crowd because of Him.

<sup>44</sup> Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

<sup>45</sup> Then the temple police came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why haven't you brought Him?”

<sup>46</sup> The police answered, “No man ever spoke like this!”

<sup>47</sup> Then the Pharisees responded to them: “Are you fooled too? <sup>48</sup> Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed in Him? <sup>49</sup> But this crowd, which doesn't know the law, is accursed!”

<sup>50</sup> Nicodemus—the one who came to Him previously, being one of them—said to them, <sup>51</sup> “Our law doesn't judge a man before it hears from him and knows what he's doing, does it?”

<sup>52</sup> “You aren't from Galilee too, are you?” they replied. “Investigate and you will see that no prophet arises from Galilee.”

Then, John 19:38-42<sup>38</sup> After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus—but secretly because of his fear of the Jews—asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus' body. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and took His body away. <sup>39</sup> Nicodemus (who had previously come to Him at night) also came,

bringing a mixture of about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. <sup>40</sup> Then they took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the aromatic spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews. <sup>41</sup> There was a garden in the place where He was crucified. A new tomb was in the garden; no one had yet been placed in it. <sup>42</sup> They placed Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation and since the tomb was nearby.

- **Everybody's story is deeply personal, yet must be decisively public.**

I am going to call you today to make your story publicly known.