TITLE: The Simplicity of Salvation

TEXT: John 3:1-8; Ro. 10:9; Zechariah 4:6: John 19:38-40

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about a semi- obscure character in the New Testament that most of us are familiar with. The man’s name was Nicodemus. Actually the Greek pronunciation of his name is Nic-o-da-mas and it means conqueror.

 Nicodemus was like a lot of people we find today, possible not much different from anyone of us.

 He appeared to be a good man. Probably tried to live a good life, tried to do what was right. He treated others well. He was probably a good family man, a good husband and father, and he was a religious man who most likely tried to live as God would have him to. He probably did his best to keep the commands of God and was in the synagogue every Sabbath.

 Yet we find even though he was a good man he was still a man who was searching for something more…..

We first run across Nicodemus in John Chapter 3….

**John 3:1 (NIV) 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."

**3 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."**

 As I said, Nicodemus was not a bad man, in fact he was a good man, but a man in search of something, of something more then what he had.

 His good life and even his religion did not fully satisfy a deeper need way down deep in his soul…..

So he went to Jesus, this prophet from Nazareth who had been roaming the Galilean countryside casting out demons, healing the sick and boldly proclaiming the message of the Kingdom of God.

 Notice the opening remark of Nicodemus when he first meets Jesus….

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."

 He asks, not a question, but simply makes a statement!

"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."

 But Jesus has a way to cut to the quick, to get right down to the brass tacks. To cut through all the pretense and get right to the heart of a matter…

3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

You see, this was the real question that was on Nicodemus’s heart. He may not even of fully realized it but when Jesus replied he knew that was why Nicodemus came to seek out this man of God, this one called Christ by His followers.

 Nicodemus didn’t argue or ask Jesus what in the world he was talking about, but he simply responded to Jesus reply as if he had indeed asked that very question …

 And In fact he did, not with his lips but with his heart…

 Jesus always looks at the heart; He always deals with the needs of the soul..

I believe it was a question that Nicodemus’s soul needed to hear the answer to.

 It is the same question that burns deep within the soul of all of us whether we realize it or not….How can I get it right with God, How can I fill this void that sin has caused in my life, how can I be a part of Gods Kingdom?

 Jesus didn’t go into a long sermon, give a long theological response, He simply gave the answer in its simplicity…

 Nicodemus, if you want to see the Kingdom of God you must be 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!"**

 Jesus response, you must be born again, puzzled Nicodemus. I don’t believe because of its perplexity, but I believe possibly because of its simplicity!

 I believe Nicodemus basically understood what Jesus was saying to him but it sounded too simple, not theological enough, especially for an educated man such as himself. After all he was a part of the ruling council of Jews, a member of the Sanhedrin.

 A man who had been brought up under the legalism of the law, that in order to please God you had to prove to Him that you were worthy of His acceptance by living up to the letter of Gods law.

 So Jesus goes on….

**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.'**

 Jesus will always work with us where we are at….

 And that is what He is doing with Nicodemus.

 You must be born of water and the Spirit!

 There are differing views as to what the water represents here.

 Some think that water here refers to the fluid that accompanies childbirth and speaks of our earthly birth.

 Others believe that it is referring to the baptism of John, the baptism of repentance, having a Godly sorrow for sin and a willingness to turn away from it, which is a prerequisite for salvation.

 Both can fit, however, I tend to agree with the second interpretation because repentance is necessary in order for a new spiritual birth to take place…..

 Jesus says, no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit!

 No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is repentant, sorry for his sin and because he is sorry for his sin, willing to turn from it, and then allowing the Holy Spirit to come into his heart.

 Jesus said: Flesh gives birth to flesh!

 Here Jesus is talking about the physical part of man.

Flesh:

**4561 sarx {sarx}**

**1) flesh (the soft substance of the living body, which covers the bones and is permeated with blood) of both man and beasts**

**2a) the body of a man**

**4) the flesh, denotes mere human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God**

 Flesh will give birth to flesh!

 You see, Nicodemus had come up in a culture that tried to justify themselves by works, by trying to live up to the letter of the law in order to be accepted by God.

 They tried to do it in the flesh! By their own wills, by their own power and might.

 It didn’t work because flesh will always give birth to flesh!

Example: You mate two donkeys you don’t get a stallion but you will get another donkey!

 You mate two rats and you won’t get a purebred poodle but you will get another rat!

 The same is true with us…. Put two human beings with a fallen sinful human nature together to have a child and you will get, not a perfect, sinless human being, but another human being with a fallen sinful nature!

 Flesh begets flesh!

Scripture assures us that our justification, our sanctification, our salvation is
**Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)** **6…. ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.**

Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit!

The word spirit here has a twofold definition….

**4151 pneuma {pnyoo'-mah}**

**1) a movement of air (a gentle blast of the wind, hence the wind itself**

**2) the spirit, i.e. the vital principal by which the body is animated**

**2a) the rational spirit, the power by which the human being feels, thinks, decides**

**2b) the soul**

**3b) a human soul that has left the body**

**3c2) the spiritual nature of Christ, higher than the highest angels and equal to God, the divine nature of Christ**

**4a3) the third person of the trinity, God the Holy Spirit**

The difference is distinguished in English translations by the use of capital letters whether it is speaking of the human spirit or the Spirit of God.

 **but the Spirit** (Holy Spirit of God) **gives birth to spirit** (spirit of man)!

 In its simplicity, what Jesus was telling Nicodemus when He told him if he were to ever expect to see and be a part of the Kingdom of God that he must be born again was that this new birth, wasn’t something that he could do for himself by human effort, but that it could only happen by and through the Holy Spirit as Nicodemus came to God with a repentant heart and allowed the Holy Spirit of God to take up residence in his life! For him to allow the Holy Spirit to come into his heart and give life to his human spirit!

 **Jesus said: No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again!**

 When a Bible translator, working in Papua New Guinea, came to the words "born again" in John's Gospel, he asked his native CO-translator to think of a good way to express it. The native explained this custom:

 "Sometimes a person goes wrong and will not listen to anybody. We all get together in the village and place that person in the midst of us.

The elders talk to him for a long time. 'You have gone wrong!' they say. 'All your thoughts, intentions, and values are wrong. Now you have to become a baby again and start to relearn everything right.'"

 It was the answer that the translator was looking for. Today the words of John 3:3 in this Papua New Guinea language read "No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he becomes like a baby again and relearns everything from God's Word."

 Like Nicodemus, we often try to make salvation, the born again experience, more complicated than it really is.

 I can remember once sharing the Gospel with an inmate and I shared Romans 10:9 with him….

Roma 10:9 (NIV) That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

 He told me that that sounded too simple.

 It does sound too simple.

 But it is still true none the less.

 The question is---will we accept it in its simplicity or will we not?

 Did Nicodemus ever accept this simple truth for his own life?

 We don’t know for sure….But I think that Scripture gives us a clue that he might have….

 After Jesus was crucified we have this account from John 19….

 **John 19:38 (NIV) Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.**

**39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.**

**40 Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.**

 Had Nicodemus yielded to Jesus words “you must be born again” that night? Or was he maybe just a friend of Joseph that came along to help out a friend?

 We will never know for sure this side of eternity!

 But that really isn’t all that important . Whatever decision Nicodemus made his fate was sealed at his death.

 Whether that fate is Heaven or that fate is Hell.

 The important question for us this morning is: have we given our life to Christ? Have we been born again? Have we been made new in Jesus?

 Have we allowed the Holy Spirit of God to make us a new Creation where the old is gone and the new is come?

 Have we confessed with our mouth that Jesus is our Lord?

 Have we been saved by Gods amazing Grace?

 Or have we thought that it is too simple, there has to be a catch?

 One night in the late 1800’s Canon Hay Aitken preached to a large audience in Bristol, England, on the text, "You must be born again." There in the congregation was a brilliant young man named Horatio Bottomly. He listened intently. He heard the preacher at the end of the sermon call all who were there to trust in the grace of Christ and to commit their lives to Jesus Christ, and he knew the call was addressed to him too. He was deeply moved, but he said, "Not now, I'll run my own life." And he did.

 He made a fortune and a name for himself as the champion of the people's rights. He was a lawyer; he exposed swindlers and prosecuted criminals with great vigor.

 When Bottomly was 63 years of age, this one who had exposed the crimes of others was himself convicted of a crime and sentenced to seven years in prison.

 While he was there, another man visited him and asked to pray with him. Bottomly said that would be fine, and in the course of the conversation, the other man told his testimony. He said, "Yes, many years ago, I was in Bristol, and I heard a preacher, Canon Hay Aitken, preach on the text: You must be born again. I was so deeply moved that I committed my life to Christ, and ever since then, Christ has been my all in all."

 Bottomly was silent for some time, and then he said, "I, too, heard that searching message. I, too, was deeply moved. I knew my need of Christ, but I rejected him." And then he said remorsefully, "A life without God is a wasted life."

 I can testify to the truth of that statement as many of you can this morning also…

 A life without Christ is a wasted life.

 We may make a lot of money and even become rich and famous but find we still have that hole in our heart that leaves us yearning to find what will fill it.

 We may try to fill it with alcohol or drugs or sex or fame and fortune but find that none of these things do.

 That is because there is only one thing that will and that is the Holy Spirit of God that we receive the moment we accept Jesus as the Lord and savior of our life and then live for Him..

 This morning is it your desire to one day see and experience the Kingdom of God?

 To have the assurance that one day you will be with God in His glorious Kingdom?

 Then hear the words of Jesus this morning in the simplicity in which He spoke them…You must be born again!

 I believe we find a lot of Nicodemus’s within the world and even the Church today. People who are obviously searching but are unsure if they have actually found what their hearts are searching for

 As a Pastor I have performed many funerals. Some have been for people that I know have had a personal saving relationship with Christ---and for some, like Nicodemus, I have not been sure.

 It has been a lot easier doing the former rather than the latter.

 Have you been born again? Have you come to God with a repentant heart and asked him to forgive you of your sin and have invited Jesus to come and dwell within your heart to be the Lord and Savior of your life?

 Do you have the full assurance of the Kingdom of God in your life today? And are you living your life bearing witness to that fact.

 If you don’t there is no better time to come to have that assurance then now!