

## **SERMON: A NIGHT OF MYSTERY**

### **John 3:1-16**

**(1) There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (2) The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with Him. (3) Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (4) Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? (5) Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again. (8) The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (9) Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be? (10) Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a teacher of Israel, and knoweth not these things? (11) Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. (12) If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? (13) And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is heaven. (14) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: (15) That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (16) 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.**

## **Introduction**

In a time when people are eagerly probing into the secrets of the universe, we still remain surrounded by one mystery after another. Apparently, the solution of one mystery only reveals the existence of countless others. Human behavior is still a mystery. We hear all the time the phrase “senseless violence.” In our clothes and in interior decoration, why do certain color combinations seem more beautiful than other color combinations? Why do certain sequences of musical tones sound more beautiful than other sequences of tones? The galaxies and the expansion of the universe are mysteries. The activity of subatomic particles is a mystery. This mystery has been given a fancy name: the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle.

There is an old hymn, entitled, *We Will Understand It Better Bye and Bye*. The late Mother Cora Kimble, whom I was honored to pastor in Mississippi, had a cute, yet profound response to it. She said, “We will understand it better bye and bye, but when we get to heaven, it really won’t matter. We will be so busy praising God, singing with the angels, and walking the streets of gold until we will not care anymore. After we see Jesus face-to-face, the answers to our earthly questions just won’t matter anymore.”

Even though I agree with Mother Kimble, yet, while we are here on this green earth, there is a part of us which will wonder about a whole lot of things. Life has many mysteries. There is the question of innocent suffering, the presence of evil, and many, many more questions.

Our text, which is familiar to most of us, speaks of a man, to whom Jesus was a mystery. His name was Nicodemus. He is identified as a man of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were distinguished by their orthodox creed and strict observance of the Jewish laws, especially the ceremonial parts. Nicodemus is further identified as a ruler of the Jews. This title is reserved for members of the Sanhedrin Council. The council of seventy-one members was the “elite of the elite.” It was composed of leading priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, and distinguished aristocrats. The Romans gave them considerable discretion over the day-to-day activities of Jewish life. The Romans considered the day-to-day affairs of the Jews to be petty and did not want to be bothered with such trivial matters. The council was allowed to have its own police force. However, the council was denied the right to exercise the death penalty. The Romans were afraid that they might give the death sentence to a Jew who was loyal to the empire.

We know why Bartimaeus and the ten lepers came to Jesus. We know why four friends tore off a roof top to bring a paralytic friend to Jesus, but why would a man of Nicodemus’s high social and moral stature need to come to Christ. The answer to this question or mystery is the first point of our sermon.

## **Exposition**

### **1. The Mystery Of Human Need.**

(Humans Have Spiritual Needs.)

(Food, Clothing, And Shelter Are Not Enough.)

(Money, Status, Popularity, And Power Are Not Enough.)

(There Is A Place In Our Being That Only God Can Adequately Fill.)

(Something Is Missing, But We Can't Put Our Finger On It.)

### **2. The Mystery Of New Life In Christ.**

(The New Birth Is Illustrated By The Wind Or Air.)

(The New Birth Is Incomprehensible To Human Reason.)

(It Is Not Irrational- It Is Extra-Rational.)

### **3. The Mystery Of God's Love.**

(It Is Offered To Undeserving Humans.)

(It Moves God To Sacrificial Acts.)

(It Imparts Unending, Abundant Life.)

### **4. The Mystery Of Praise And Worship.**

(God Gives Flawed Humans The Privilege Of Worshiping Him.)

(God Is All Sufficient-He Does Not Need Our Praise.)

(He Deserves Our Praise And Worship.)

(Our Best Efforts In The Arts Are Puny Praise When Compared To His Majesty and Power.)

(Our Puny Praise Becomes Powerful Praise, When It Reaches His Heavenly Throne.)

(When The Praises Go Up, The Blessing Come Down.)

### **Closing Thoughts**

Andre' Crouch and The Disciples put the mystery of God's love in one of their beautiful songs. I will quote just a little bit of it. (Don't want to violate copyright laws.)

"I don't know why Jesus loved me.  
I don't know why He cared.  
I don't know why He sacrificed His life.  
Oh, But I'm glad,  
So glad He did."

Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

### **End Notes**

1. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. John in his recording of the event made a point of the night time visit. Some suggest he came to Jesus at night because he desired to have a lengthy conversation with Christ and his own schedule or Christ's busy days would not have allowed enough time during the day. Others say it was because he did not want the Jewish leaders to know he was talking to this preacher from a hick town. This would have, in a sense, validated His ministry with the power structure. Others say he was sent by the Sanhedrin to check Jesus out and report back to them. This is the one I like. Still others say he came at night because something was burning on the inside and he felt deeply convicted. Thus, he felt the urgency to take that need to Christ, even if it were at night. He had held it in it long enough and could not wait until the next day. Whenever we come to Christ in the right spirit and with right motive it is a good time. There may have been better times in the past, but it is just that – the past. That time cannot be recaptured.

2. Please remember, John is a minimalist writer. We cannot add or subtract from God's written word. This conversation, the one with the woman at the well and others are only summaries or condensations of the full conversations. It may seem like John is jumping from thought to thought.

3. I got the phrase "puny praise" from the late Mother Cora Kimble. She would conclude her prayers with something like this: "Lord take my puny praise and make it rise up like my biscuits when I put baking soda in the flour. If you do this, Lord, my praise will rise

up and be fit for you when it reaches the heights of heaven. It will not be puny any more. It will be powerful and appropriate. Amen and Thank God!”

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