

I. ME

- A. Welcome-Cards- Online
- B. Series- People who were nothing like Jesus loved being around him.
- C. He accepted them- **Accepted: No matter how different we are, I see you as a person worthy of Value and honor.**
- D. Crosscreek trying to be same
- E. One group of people has a hard time accepting that they are accepted by Jesus... let alone a church... **Skeptics**

II. WE

A. **Skeptic- A person inclined to question or doubt accepted opinions**

- 1. Willing to think for themselves
- B. But aren't we all skeptics?
 - 1. Me and Greek gods
 - 2. Whether or not Quinn has washed her hands
 - 3. Math is cool
 - 4. When it comes to God/Jesus we have skepticism too.
 - 5. Good an but God? Resurrected?
 - 6. It's only about faith? I'm accepted?
- C. Skeptics and the Church do not have a happy history.
 - 1. Middle Ages
 - 2. Your experience...
 - 3. Conform or leave
 - 4. Stop asking so many questions... you just have to believe harder.
 - 5. Often comes from someone who's own skepticism scares them.

- D. No wonder free-thinking skeptics don't think they are accepted by God
- E. But Skepticism is healthy... it's how you discover anything about your world/ yourself/ God
- F. The danger is... we often stay a skeptic and never arrive at an answer...
 - 1. Either we are afraid to ask questions for fear of where they will lead.
 - 2. Or we are more comfortable asking question after question and never actually reaching an answer.
 - 3. **The same fear that keeps us from asking questions is the same fear that keeps us from arriving at answers.**
- G. John- eye-witness tells as story near the beginning of Jesus' career about a certain skeptic.

III. GOD (John 3:1-17) (Background)

A. V. 1

B. Nicodemus

- 1. Pharisee- Teachers practiced and taught strict observance of Jewish laws.
- 2. Even added laws to make sure they didn't break laws.
- 3. If God liked anyone it was them.
- C. Nicodemus had risen through the ranks as an elite of the elite.
 - 1. Israel's authority on all things religious.
 - 2. Part of upper-class/ Rich/ Influential
 - 3. Member of Sanhedrin

D. Sanhedrin

- 1. Congress, Supreme Court, and Vatican all in one.
- 2. Represented the Jews before Rome
- 3. Allowed to govern on behalf of Caesar
- 4. Goal was to keep the peace

E. Background of passage

1. John the Baptist- Lamb of God
 2. Jesus gains followers
 3. Does some interesting things... Bartender at wedding
 4. Starts teaching
 - a. Unlike anyone else
 - b. Insightful / Funny
 - c. Most of all... Authority- "You have heard it said... but I say"
 5. Steps it up... starts healing people
 6. Whispers start growing that he claims he can forgive sin-reserved only for God.
 7. People start thinking maybe J the B was right... this is the messiah.
 8. That gets the attention of the Leadership.
- F. Things come to a head when Jesus clears the temple.
1. This man who claims authority to forgive sin, who is rumored might be the messiah, has caused a huge scene in the temple...
 2. "We need to check this out... we don't want to get Rome's attention unless this is really it..."
 3. So out goes Nicodemus
- G. Jesus is going to show us that **Acceptance gives skepticism an opportunity to find answers.**

IV. GOD (teaching)

A. V. 2

1. On his own or official visit? Don't know.
2. Night- Hard to talk to Jesus in the day
 - a. Probably didn't want to give Jesus legitimacy yet.
3. Rabbi-
 - a. You are obviously a good teacher, you've done amazing things...
4. Jesus interrupts him... in Jesus fashion

B. V. 3

1. A little weird... Nic hadn't asked him anything yet...
2. Jesus goes right to the real issue... Nic's real question... his personal question.
3. **Jesus accepts every skeptic as an individual**... no pat answers.
4. "This is all bigger and better than you think, Nic."
5. It's not about your laws and ceremonies, it's not about building a Jewish government/kingdom.
6. To be in God's kingdom... someone has to be born again... FROM ABOVE
7. Not born Jewish, not behavioral control or change...
8. Radical inner rebirth... a whole new life.
9. This crazy answer fits nowhere inside of Nic's framework... or understanding the world.

10. Understood tangible, measurable religion.... following rules, certain categories of people being in, etc.
- Jew + Law = Good
 - Gentile, rule breakers= bad

11. Totally confused by needing to be born from above.

C. V. 4

- “Not what I came here to talk about... but ok I’ll bite”

D. V. 5-7

- Jesus- “The truth lies outside of your framework”
- You can’t measure, categorize it, or control it
- Gives an example...

E. V. 8

- Nicodemus... Pre-science. Speaking in ways he can understand.
- You can’t control the wind, you can’t see it... but you know it’s there... bc you feel and see it’s effects.

3. Like stress.

- Same with how God works ...
- You can’t measure, categorize, chart the inner workings of God’s dealings with people.
- It has nothing to do with the outside. Or religious rules being checked off.
- Nic asks a legitimate and honest question.
- I think a question thinkers/skeptics still ask...

F. V. 9

1. How can this be?

- How is there a spiritual change that has nothing to do with keeping the law, religiousness, or being part of God’s chosen people?

G. V. 10

- Jesus- Think deeper... get out of your usual framework of usual answers and usual ways of thinking...
- You’re stuck in what you think things “have to be.”
- Keep digging...
- Trust me... there’s more than you know

H. V. 11-12

- We = probably Jesus and JB
- We’ve seen it...
- Nic- What do you mean?
- Jesus- I’ve tried to explain it to you in your way but this is bigger than that

I. V. 13

- Now things are getting crazy...
- Jesus is claiming to not just be SENT BY God but to have actually come down from heaven...
- He’s either nut job or he really is the ONE**
- Nic sticks around... I would have left as quickly as possible.
- Jesus gets to his main point... in terms Nicodemus can understand.

6. Jesus speaks to us in our own language.

- Uses Jewish history.

J. V. 14-15

1. Snake background

2. Wasn't a formula or behavioral program... had to trust
3. "I am the messiah... it's the same way"
4. "I'm offering better than you think... it's about trust."

K. V. 16-17

1. Not political/ military- savior
2. But forgiveness of sins
3. Not just for Jews- for everyone
4. Not measurable rules... but trust.
5. Not knowing everything, not having it all figured out in a systematic formula... simply trusting.
6. Not blind faith... but skepticism that has landed on an answer... Jesus.

7. Jesus said he is the key to eternal life.

L. Was Nicodemus convinced?

1. Not yet
2. Like most free-thinking skeptics he needed time to think through this new idea.
3. But he chewed on it and he watched and he kept searching...
4. He was willing to follow where his questions and their answers led...
5. This isn't the last we hear about him...

M. John 7:50-52

1. Pharisees want to arrest Jesus
2. Nicodemus steps in
3. Gets mocked... his friends don't seem as accepting of skepticism and free-thinking as Jesus was.
4. See him one more time...

N. John 19:38-42

1. Something profound had happened to Nic
2. He had thought through what this accepting man had said... and he saw something different.
3. He came to respect Jesus enough to be willing to be associated with him in his death.
4. But let's ask some more questions...

O. Nicodemus is named in this ancient account... why?

1. Writer's way of saying... "It's not just me saying this stuff... go ask him too."
2. Think about it... How did John get details of the conversation between the Pharisees?
3. And the details of how much the myrrh and aloes weighed?

4. Nicodemus.

5. The man who was skeptical about Jesus... who heard Jesus say he was the promised messiah... and then helped prepare his dead body (proof that Jesus wasn't who he said he was)...
6. Became one of the witnesses John used as proof of the accuracy of his story.
7. Why? He saw something that didn't fit within his boxes... Jesus died... but then the tomb was empty... and Jesus was resurrected.
8. Luke tells us over 500 saw Jesus after his resurrection... Nicodemus was most likely one.

V. YOU

- A. You might be, in your own way, asking the same questions as Nic...
 1. Obviously Jesus was a good teacher and must have done something amazing... but I'm not too sure about this being God thing... or this forgiveness of sins thing.
 2. It seems too easy... too simple... just trust? How does that change anything?
 3. Besides, people don't rise from the dead... when you're dead you're dead. How can this be?
 4. EXACTLY- That's the whole point!
 5. "But scientifically"—you might need a new framework!
 6. If there is a God... couldn't he pull that off?

7. We need a new framework

- B. I'm a Jesus-Follower. I know I'm told I'm new... but is trust really enough?
 1. I feel like I have to do more...
 2. Give me a list of rules so I can measure how I'm doing.
 3. You need a new framework.
- C. Skepticism is meant to lead to an answer.

D. Skeptical? Then...

E. Ask new questions...

1. Do some research... **list of books**
 2. Ask your friend about their experience
 3. Ask him to show you, in your way, that he's real.
- F. JF... Skeptical that trust is enough?
1. Ask new questions...
 2. How good is good enough?
 3. Which sins was Jesus' death not good enough for?
 4. At what point does eternal life end?

G. Choose to trust the answers you find.

- H. Why I am here.
1. Not enough just to accept what you've been told.

VI. WE

- A. Is it possible it's all true?
- B. What if there is a God who accepts you?
- C. What if trust really is enough?
- D. What if God isn't afraid or angry at your questions and skepticism
- E. What if you had the courage to ask the right questions and the courage to accept the answers you find
- F. Ask, Dig, Decide.
- G. **Skepticism can lead to truth worth trusting.**

QUESTIONS

- When you hear the word “skeptic,” what comes to mind?
- Re-read John 3:1-17. What stands out most to you about Nicodemus? Jesus?
- Jon said, “Jesus speaks to us in our own language.” How have you experienced this in your journey of faith or seen it in others’?
- What about your faith “framework” needs reworking or updating? What could you do over the next few weeks to pursue that? Who could walk alongside you in it?

List of Books

Can We Trust the Gospels?- Peter J. Williams

The Problem of God- Mark Clark

The Reason for God- Timothy Keller