

"Saved through Him" – John 3:1-17 – February 16-17, 2008 – Lent 2 – Pastor Scott Hirsig

- All glory to our Lord Jesus – we owe you everything in faith we look to you.

I greet you with, grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit who lives within us as believers, and empowering us

Over the last century we have seen numerous technological advances. Living have conditions improved, there are labor saving devices, medical advancements, dreaded diseases have treatments, some like smallpox, polio, black plaque are controlled or illuminated. Now we are beginning to map and manipulate our very genes that govern the body, holding promise for continued medical advances. Who just a few years ago heard of the internet, or cell phone, zip drives, I pods, and the list continues. There is the feeling given enough time science and technology will eventually solve mankind's remaining problems. But no matter how much time and no matter how much our knowledge grows, sin remains. In proverbs 20, it says, **"Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"** (Proverbs 20:9 KJV) None of us can make ourselves clean nor can we wipe out the sin of the past, once thought, once spoken, once done, it can not be taken back and undone. Man is also under the judgment from a just God. For God to be just He must punish sin, Psalm 7 says, **"God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day."** (Psalm 7:11 NIV) Mankind greatest problem, sin, which also results in death, and the judgment of God against all who sin, is answered in our lesson from John 3 and the remedy is given. We would do well to pay attention. We are looking at that in a message entitled from the words of our lesson, **"Saved through Him"**

Our lesson opens with Nicodemus a Pharisee, and a ruler. He would have been a member of the Sanhedrin as a ruler, 71 individuals that were the highest court, including the high priest. Already by this time there was hostility against Jesus, and Nicodemus comes at night for privacy and secrecy. He is impressed with Jesus, concluding from the unmistakable power of Jesus that he must be from God, but he does not see Jesus as God. The Jews reasoned that God would never be a man, he is too holy. Jesus though, is not interested in discussing this and answering his questions, and cuts right to Nicodemus problem, saying, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."** (John 1:5 ESV) This and the rest of the discussion shocks Nicodemus. The kingdom requires a new birth, and is something one undergoes, not something you produce on your own. Nicodemus and his fellow Jews were actively trying to reach the kingdom on their own. Paul wrote about this in chapter 10, of Romans, saying of his fellow Jews,

"¹ Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." (Romans 10:1-4 NIV)

This was Nicodemus, and his fellow Jews, working to save themselves. In our epistle lesson today, Paul addresses that problem, and quotes the Old Testament for the answer saying, **"...Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."** (Romans 4:3 ESV) Salvation has always been the same. Salvation is of faith, believing or trusting God who saves, being spiritually born and made a new creation. Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians, **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"** (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV) Born again, and now a new creation. It is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of anything we can do to accomplish this spiritual new birth, anymore then we could complete our physical birth. **"...no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit."** (1 Corinthians 12:3 NIV) Paul wrote in 1st Corinthians. The Holy Spirit brings this new birth through the channel of faith, being saved through Him by the grace of God, as a gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8-9) Jesus in prayer to the Father, says, **"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."** John 17:3 (NIV) Knowing Jesus personally, in a relationship, coming to Him for life.

For most of us salvation goes back to a time when we were baptized as infants. You may say, how can a little baby believe, they do not have the cognitive ability, their brain is not developed enough. That again is human reason speaking and not the revealed word of God. You need only go to the example of John the Baptist in his mother's womb to see the ability of not only infants, but the unborn. Elizabeth was pregnant with John the Baptist, and Mary was pregnant with Jesus, and it says, **"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."** Luke 1:41 (NIV) Being filled with the Holy Spirit indicates that Elizabeth was a believer, and undoubtedly so was John. Even if John was not saved in the womb, he still is aware of what is happening at that very young age. Elizabeth further says to Mary, **"As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."** Luke 1:44 (NIV) We also know from Luke 1 verse 15, about John the Baptist, **"for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth."** Luke 1:15 (NIV) So the salvation of John goes back to birth, when he was an infant. John in the womb is aware of what is happening and is even given the gift of faith. It is God who works the miracle of faith, and He is certainly not limited to individuals that are able to express that faith. From the first time I can remember, I knew that there was a God, that that goes back to baptism as the Holy Spirit creates faith. The challenge for us who know Christ, having been baptized, is for faith to grow. That is why it is so important you are here, your faith grows when you hear and read the word, and commune, so you reach the end of life like Paul with faith. (2 Timothy 4:7) There is more blessings with more faith, but your salvation is not based on how much faith, Jesus is faithful, but that you have faith and are trusting Him. You are Saved through Him.

There are some like the example of Nicodemus in our lesson that come to faith later in life, in childhood, or as an adult, and then as was the case with believers in the New Testament, they are brought to baptism. But that is an independent of those baptized as infants. As far back as we have records, which goes back to the 2nd century, the church baptized infants, this changed for some churches during the time of Martin Luther. The words of Jesus, **"Go and baptize all nations..."** (Matthew 28:18-20), which certainly would include infants. God works the miracle of faith. I hope and pray that you have come to Christ and received the miracle of new life that he brings, the new birth, being born again, and the infants and children you know have been brought to God for baptism, they so need faith.

As for Nicodemus, it does not seem in our lesson that He comes to faith, he leaves wondering. But we do have clues later in the gospels. It is Nicodemus who defends Jesus before the Sanhedrin, (John 7:50-51) and who provides spices for the body of Jesus and accompanies Joseph of Armathea, publicly identifying with Jesus. (John 19:38-39) He demonstrates his new found faith and risks his own life. May we all learn from Him and be bold in our testimony and living out the gospel. Here is Nicodemus a new believer that stands up by example to his fellow Pharisees and Sadducees, defend Jesus, and caring for His body after crucifixion. God will give you opportunities in your life to testify as well. After salvation, we are equipped,

Peter testifies,

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." (2 Peter 1:3 NIV)

and Paul in Titus and Ephesians,

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus 2:14 KJV) and in Ephesians, **"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."** (Eph. 2:10 NIV)

We are a people zealous of good works created in Christ Jesus having been given everything we need for life and godliness, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus. God loves us, gave his only Son for us, we are saved through Him (John 3:16-17)

May you know that faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit and that we are saved through Jesus and now He lives through us you as you serve Him by serving others and living the life He has called you to live.

In His name we pray. AMEN May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN