

## Wednesday with the Word @ Wheat Street Baptist Church

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*"We are a church in the heart of Atlanta with Atlanta in our heart"*  
*John 3:16—17*

**We do real ministry, that makes a real difference, in the lives of real people!**

### **Our Vision Statement:**

We exist to develop mature disciples of Jesus Christ who make a real difference in the world by actively seeking the love, justice, freedom, liberation and peace of God.

## I Got A Question Jesus!

### **John 3:1**

There was a man named Nicodemus who was a Pharisee and a Jewish leader.

The Pharisees: Religious leaders, more concerned with behavior than conversion. They were obsessed with ritual, law, tradition, power, adverse to change. They were prosecutors of Jesus. They were the worst critics of Jesus. They were critics. Always critical, always complaining, always questioning what Jesus was doing. They were always confused about what God was doing. Focused on the trivial, temporal and not the eternal. Was more concerned about the ways things were done over who was helped by the larger ministry activity of Jesus. They were more concerned about how the sabbath had been observed than they were with who could be helped by observing the sabbath in new ways. They plotted the death of Jesus over breaking the tradition of the sabbath. Jesus' strongest words of condemnation were aimed at the Pharisees.

Do you know in any person or groups of people in churches today who act like or represent the Pharisees?

How did Jesus typically respond to the Pharisees?

How should you / we respond to the Pharisees of today (if we know any)?

Now the interesting thing about this story is Nicodemus is the exception that proved the rule. Nicodemus is a Pharisee but he comes to seeking Jesus. When we say he is the exception that proves the rule we are saying the rule was that Pharisees didn't come to be converted or seek sincere answers from Jesus. Normally they came on attack mode.

They normally came not seeking understanding but rather seeking to argue, disagree with Jesus and prove their point.

Also we see in this text that Nicodemus wasn't accompanied by his fellow Pharisees, he comes by himself. The group wasn't with him. When the group gets together they go after Jesus. When Nicodemus comes by himself he comes seeking Jesus.

When you observe Pharisees ask this question:

1. Are they coming seeking Jesus or are coming after Jesus?
2. Are they sincerely seeking understanding or are they creating confusion, doubt and fighting the ways and moves of God?

Note: We have also make sure we aren't the Pharisees ourselves!!

1. How are you seeking to get closer to Jesus?
2. What conversations are you having with Jesus?
3. What conversations do you need to have with Jesus?
4. How do you make time to take your sincere questions to God?
5. What questions do you have for God?
6. It is OK to take sincere questions to God.
7. You need to talk to God at night, in the midnights of your life. Don't turn on God and don't turn away from God at midnight. Turn to God and God will turn / shed light on your situation! God will help you get through what you don't understand when you take questions to God. God honors your questions.

### **John 3:1-2**

There was a man named Nicodemus who was a Pharisee and a Jewish leader.

**2** One night he went to Jesus and said, "Sir, we know that God has sent you to teach us. You could not work these miracles, unless God were with you."

Nicodemus comes to Jesus.

Nicodemus recognizes who Jesus is by the work of his ministry.

People will come to the church and seek to be a part of the church not by the preaching and singing that we do but rather when they see us doing what we are

preaching and singing about. We are known by our fruit, our ministry, our love in action. That is what grows a real church. There are ministry that swell who don't do real ministry but I would contend that what we see in these cases is unhealthy growth. A real church is a church that:

1. Does real ministry
2. That makes a real difference
3. In the lives of real people
4. Key question for any church: Are we making a real difference, in the lives of real people by doing ministry that helps people get through this thing called life?

Nicodemus saw the work and he saw that the worked lined up with the teaching. So we see two things that are central here that brought Nicodemus to Jesus, he had heard the teachings and he had witnessed the ministry.

### **John 3:3**

Jesus replied, "I tell you for certain that you must be born from above before you can see God's kingdom!"

Persons who aren't born again, aren't saved are spiritually incapable of fully comprehending what God is doing. The key problem the Pharisees had then and today is salvation. If you aren't in a salvific relationship with Christ you can't grow in Christ and have a deeper relationship and understanding of what God is doing in the church, the world, and in your life. The central work of the church is developing mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

### **Romans 10:9-10**

**9** So you will be saved, if you honestly say (confess), "Jesus is Lord," and if you believe with all your heart that God raised him from death. **10** God will accept you and save you, if you truly believe this and tell it to others.

Coming to faith is also about sharing your faith. Faith is an action word. Faith is about believing and acting. Saved folk believe in God, believe God and act on that belief. They act on what they believe not on what they see. They are empowered to see with the spiritual eye as to what God is doing and what God will do even when it looks like the exact opposite in the physical. They are able to wait on God. They know that what God promised God will do.

Are you saved?

Do you openly share your faith with others and invite them to give their lives to Christ and the work of the ministry of God in the world through the church?

### **John 3:4-8**

**4** Nicodemus asked, “How can a grown man ever be born a second time?”

**5** Jesus answered:

I tell you for certain that before you can get into God’s kingdom, you must be born not only by water, but by the Spirit. **6** Humans give life to their children. Yet only God’s Spirit can change you into a child of God. **7** Don’t be surprised when I say that you must be born from above. **8** Only God’s Spirit gives new life. The Spirit is like the wind that blows wherever it wants to. You can hear the wind, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going.

Nicodemus is sincere. He is not asking questions trying to trip Jesus up, like the Pharisees normally do. Normally the Pharisees don’t care so much about how Jesus answers they are more concerned with making Jesus look stupid or trying to undermine what God has sent and called Jesus to do.

Nicodemus is sincere. He really wants to know. Jesus’ reply to him is Jesus’ reply to us.

If we are to know the things and ways of God we have open ourselves up to the move of the Spirit of God. God does not operate according to our ways, our timetable or our expectations. We are to be in tune with God and as the Spirit of God moves we are to follow. The rebirthing process is a process that opens us up in to growing up with God, growing up in God and doing things God’s way that is always counter cultural, transformative, new and ever changing. Jesus always comes to challenge tradition (in our life and in the church) that gets in the way of where God wants to take us and where God wants to grow us.

1. Where is God trying to grow you?
2. Where is God trying to take you?
3. What is God doing in your life to challenge you to grow up in Christ and be more like Christ?
4. Where is God challenging our church to grow and go?

### **John 3:9-10**

**9** “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

**10** Jesus replied:

How can you be a teacher of Israel and not know these things?

I love Jesus reply: How can you be a leader / teacher and not know this?

WHAT?

Even for the Pharisees there was the expectation that they should've known. And they should've known. They knew what was to happen yet when it happened they missed it. They knew the savior was to come but when he came and didn't look like what they expected or wanted they couldn't see it and they were unwilling to be "born again." They fought what they saw because it didn't meet their expectations.

What about us?

1. What is it we have asked God to do or are asking God to do but our request are so detailed and nuanced that when God sends the blessing we might miss it because it doesn't fit our preconceived idea of what we wanted?
- How can leaders of faith communities / churches not know?
- What should leaders of faith communities / churches know?
- What should the spiritual formation, spiritual maturity of faith leaders be like (what should be required of them spiritually)?

### **What is a mature Disciple of Jesus Christ?**

1. What do they do?
2. How do they live?
3. What do they see?
4. How do they sound?
5. What types of questions do they ask?
6. What should they know?
7. How should they serve?
8. What should motivate their actions?
9. Why should they serve?
10. How should they practice the spiritual disciplines (fasting, prayer, solitude, silence, meditation, study of God's word, reading God's word, actively engaged in worship, service and transformation, meditating on God's words, serving the least of these, development of the mind / renewing of the mind)?

### **Romans 12:1-8**

Dear friends, God is good. So I beg you to offer your bodies to him as a living sacrifice, pure and pleasing. That's the most sensible way to serve God. **2** Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.

**3** I realize how kind God has been to me, and so I tell each of you not to think you are better than you really are. Use good sense and measure yourself by the amount of faith that God has given you. **4** A body is made up of many parts, and each of them has its own use. **5** That's how it is with us. There are many of us, but we each are part of the body of Christ, as well as part of one another.

**6** God has also given each of us different gifts to use. If we can prophesy, we should do it according to the amount of faith we have. **7** If we can serve others, we should serve. If we can teach, we should teach. **8** If we can encourage others, we should encourage them. If we can give, we should be generous. If we are leaders, we should do our best. If we are good to others, we should do it cheerfully.

11. What should their faith journey look like?

12. What are the key five characteristics of Mature Disciples of Jesus Christ?

13. Are you a mature disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you growing in Christ? How bad do you want to grow in Christ?

### **John 3:9-12**

**9** "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

**10** Jesus replied:

How can you be a teacher of Israel and not know these things? **11** I tell you for certain that we know what we are talking about because we have seen it ourselves. ***But none of you will accept what we say.*** **12** If you *don't believe* when I talk to you about things on earth, how can you possibly *believe* if I talk to you about things in heaven?

Pharisees lack faith. They struggle to believe. People of faith, have faith and they believe the word(s) of God and they act on that word. "They walk by faith and their faith enhances their sight so that they can see what God is doing!"

### **John 3:13-18**

**13** No one has gone up to heaven except the Son of Man, who came down from there. **14** And the Son of Man must be lifted up, just as that metal snake was lifted up by Moses in the desert. **15** Then everyone who has faith in the Son of Man will have eternal life.

**16** God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. **17** God did not send his Son into the world to condemn its people. He sent him to save them! **18** No one who has faith in God's Son will be condemned. But everyone who doesn't have faith in him has already been condemned for not having faith in God's only Son.

God loved.

Love is an action word.

God loved; God acted.

God sent God's son into the world.

God sent God's son and God sends us into the world, not to condemn but to take a message of love and hope through word and deed.

We know we have responded to God's love when we love others and the motivation of our acts are based in love. Love compels us to embrace the move of God to do ministry that makes a real difference in the lives of real people. If what we are doing is not making a difference then we have to question if we love the people? **To love and not act is to not to love.**

God loved the people so much that God sent God's son to die!

What is God asking you to give up for the love of the people?

How is our love for God manifested and connected with our love for people?

What does the love of Pharisees look like?