

He was doing his job, or at least that was what he told himself. He was a man on a mission, to find out about this traveling preacher he had heard so much about. His name was Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Council. The man he was checking out was Jesus of Nazareth, an itinerant preacher that was getting everyone's attention and making the members of the Sanhedrin very nervous.

Nic had heard the stories, the accounts of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding, performing miracles, preaching to great crowds and selecting an inner circle of twelve to assist him with his work. Nic knew that stories could be exaggerated and that the truth could be stretched. Who was this Jesus? How much, if any of what he had heard was true? Nic went out one night to find out for himself.

If we are honest with ourselves, isn't that why we are here tonight? Didn't we come to find out more about Jesus? We've heard the stories, been told about the miracles, even seen pictures of large crowds who gather in the Mega-Churches to learn more about Jesus. We have our own ideas. But who is the real Jesus? That is our goal, to meet the real Jesus, during our Wednesday evenings together during Lent.

Nicodemus may have been a man on a mission the night he met Jesus, but Jesus whole life was a mission. He was driven by one purpose and one purpose only. Jesus told Nicodemus, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."** (John 3:16-17) Jesus came to save the people of the world. He put it another way when he said, **"For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."** (Luke 19:10 NLT)

A lot of people have a distorted view of Jesus. Some think of him as "Charlie Milk Toast," a man who was so kind and loving that he wouldn't confront anyone. That is certainly not true. Jesus' passion to fulfill his mission drove him throughout his life. When Jesus was tempted by Satan to compromise, to take the easy path to fame and power, he refused to give in. Jesus kept his focus on his mission and defeated the tempter with the power of God's Word. When the people wanted to force Jesus to become their king, he went off to a mountain by himself. (John 6:15) When Peter tried to stop Jesus from making the final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus told Peter to get behind him because he was working for Satan and not for God. (Matthew 16:23)

Some people think that Jesus was a victim of hatred or fate. Again, that is not the case. Jesus was not a victim. He didn't happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. His mission could only be fulfilled on the cross. Jesus said, **"No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it**

voluntarily.” (John 10:18 NLT) After Peter was the first to identify Jesus as the Christ, Jesus began to explain to the disciples that being the Promised Savior meant that He would suffer and die at the hands of the religious elite in Jerusalem. (Matthew 16:21) The crowd that came to arrest Jesus on the Mount of Olives was successful only because Jesus allowed himself to be arrested. When Jesus identified himself, the people in the crowd were literally knocked off their feet (John 18:6). They couldn't stop him from escaping if they wanted to. When one of the disciples drew a sword to defend him, Jesus said, **“Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly?”** (Matthew 26:53 NLT)

Nicodemus found out the truth about Jesus the night he came to meet him. Jesus wouldn't allow himself to be distracted by compliments. When Nic 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."** (John 3:2), Jesus didn't take the bait. Instead he confronted Nic with his greatest need and said, **"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."** (John 3:3) Then Jesus explained that the only way to be born again was by the water and the Spirit, by faith in the sacrifice that Jesus would fulfill on the cross.

Men on a mission don't let anything get in their way. Charles Goodyear spent five full years searching for a way to stabilize rubber. Thomas Edison spent years inventing the light bulb. Jonas Salk spent years developing the first polio vaccine. As important as these things are, they don't begin to compare with what Jesus did. Tires wear out, light bulbs burn out and vaccines need to be given by one generation to the next. But God's love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ lasts forever.

Even though Nicodemus went to find out about Jesus, he ended up finding out more about himself and his need for a Savior. Meeting Jesus changed Nic's life. When the members of the Sanhedrin wanted to condemn Jesus without giving him a chance to defend himself, Nic stood up for Jesus (John 7:31). After Jesus was crucified, Nicodemus helped Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus' body (John 19:39).

If you take a closer look at Jesus, you'll discover that He was a man on a mission. Like Nicodemus, you'll discover that Jesus' mission is for you. Jesus wouldn't let anyone or anything keep him from fulfilling His mission. His mission is complete when we believe in Him. Jesus said, **"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."** (Matthew 10:32) Jesus has given us a mission, too, and that is to seek Him and His kingdom. Then we can reach out to bring others in God's kingdom. After all, that is the ultimate mission. Amen.