日期:2/26/2012

經文:約翰福音2:23-3:15

題目:耶穌你是誰?

主旨:相信耶穌是進天國的唯一途徑。

引言:

在我準備講道的過程中,講道的題目往往是最後決定的,那大概是到禮拜四或是禮拜五。這一個星期的禮拜四早上,我決定講道的題目—耶穌你是誰?早上,我就拿給辦公室說這是這個禮拜天所講道的題目,然后到下午四點鐘進辦公室時,看一下所準備的問刊,首先看到的是詩班所唱的歌是《耶穌是歌》。那我就在辦公室說有沒有搞錯,因為我是怕他們不知從哪裡得之我講道的題目,把詩歌的題目帶進來,那我問的是耶穌你是誰,詩班唱的歌是耶穌你是歌,那我就在想詩班已經給大家一個答案,那我還講干什麼呢,直接聽你們唱就行啦。這往往在我們在准備講道的過程中,有時感覺到神裡是蠻幽默的,因為他們從來沒有問我,講道的題目是什麼,也沒事先給我任何的警告。呵呵·····這些是講道之前的趣聞。

今天早上,一個姊妹給我說:最近和一朋友談話,以前她的那個朋友經常來教會來信主,最近那個朋友和她說,我仍然相信有創造天地的神,但是這一位耶穌是不是神的兒子,我現在已經不能相信,不能接受了。我相信大家都遇到這一問題或這樣的一句話,我可以相信宇宙有這樣一位創造萬物的神,但我不接受耶穌就是那樣的一位神。因為自從耶穌降生以來,他是誰?這一個問題一直都存在這個世界上。在這一本《約翰福音》書裡,這個作者他在寫書的時候,他很清楚他寫下這本書的目的。他說我將這些事,包括耶穌所行的神蹟,所做的事和教導,是為了叫你們信耶穌是基督,是神的兒子,並且因著他的兒子得生命。這個作者非常清楚他的目的就是希望你們知道耶穌是誰,並且讓你知道了他是誰,怎樣處理你所知道的?就是要你相信他,你相信他就有生命(這裡的生命就是指永生)。

在我們前一禮拜講的是耶穌所行的第一神蹟,就是把水變成了酒,然后在約翰福音的第二 章, 如這經文所說:耶穌不信任他們,因為他知道所有的人,也不需要誰指証人是怎樣的,因 為他知道所有人心裡想的是什麼。我們在這裡所注意的是約翰說耶穌知道所有的人,耶穌也知道 人的心裡想的什麼。以這個做了一個引言,約翰接下來就在《約翰福音》裡帶出耶穌和三個人的 相遇,和他們的對話,你要記住耶穌知道所有的人,也知道所有人心裡想的是什麼。然后約翰就 特別記載了耶穌和三個人的相遇和他們的對話。一個是我們今天要的尼哥底母,第二是撒馬利亞 婦人,是我們下個星期要看的,第三位就是一位長官。非常的清楚說耶穌知道所有的人,也知道 所有人心裡想的是什麼。然后第三章的第一節有個法利賽人尼哥底母是猶太人的長官,設立一個 處境,耶穌知道所有的人,也知道所有人心裡想的是什麼,想看小說一樣,有一人是尼哥底母, 是猶太人的長官。我稍微的來看一下這個故事,尼哥底母在夜間來見耶穌,有很多的聯想就是尼 哥底母有罪不敢白天來找耶穌,我們不要過分把我們的關聯讀進去。在約翰福音的第一章,耶穌 就是那光,來到這個世界,世界是黑暗的,而世界卻不接受這光。然後在約翰福音後面記載,也 都是提到耶穌是光,世界是黑暗的,跟隨耶穌得人都將在在光裡走。所以在整本的約翰裡,講黑 暗與光對照,黑暗與光的沖突和矛盾。看到這時,如果你將你讀小說的那種聯想帶進來,你所看 到的是一個非常美的故事,有沖突有解決,就像所有的電影和小說對我們的吸引力,特別是韓 劇,有矛盾有解決。約翰就向小說,把矛盾沖突帶出來。耶穌有三次說我實實在在告訴你,有三 個矛盾,然後有三個處理。

I. 人是要憑証據來肯定天國的存在

如果沒有神的同在,你所行的神跡是沒有人能做的。我們可以猜測尼哥底母也可能代表一些人,一些人差他來到耶穌的面前,觀察一段時間了,現在來,但你到底是誰,看依你所做的,如果不是從神那裡來的,好像是從神那裡來的老師。但是除了這,還有沒有呢?你是不是一位先知,你是不是我們一直在說的彌賽亞呢?在這裡,裡克蒂姆想要做的是什麼呢,他想要通過和耶

穌的對話,他要設立一些條件,以便回去好報告。就像我們做研究的,如果你發明了一些藥品能 殺死癌細胞,但你又沒有想過他有可能殺死好的細胞呢,傷害我們的其他器官呢?如果它有副作 用,那我們要它干什麼呢?所以你要通過實驗去驗証。這就像尼哥底母后面的意思,因為耶穌他 知道所有人的心,他知道尼哥底母來了,說這句話后面是什麼意思。我們是不是也是如此呢?也 設立許許多多的條件來決定耶穌是誰。像尼哥底母一樣,與耶穌進行神學性的對話,通過這神學 性的對話來決定耶穌是誰。耶穌沒有陷入尼哥底母陷阱裡,沒有讓尼哥底母引導這一次對話,反 而他開始引領這一次的對話。在第三節裡 ,這裡說我實實在在告訴你們:人要不重生,就不能 見神的國。我們稍微停留在神的國這裡,神的國與天國是同義詞,可以互相交換的。這一個天國 有兩個成員,一個就是將來的事,就是人死后進入天國; 另一個目前成員就是任何神掌權的地方 就是神的國。如果神在我的生命裡掌管,我的生命就是神的國。在約翰福音裡,除了這裡,就很 少用神國和天國,通常用永生和生命(我們要注意的是生命和永生是一個意思)。尼哥底母來 了,為的就是要看見。他是想要看什麼呢,他是要看后再決定要不要相信耶穌,再決定他是誰? 耶穌說如果你要看見我知道我是誰的話,你就一定要重生——是從上面而生。如果你不是從上而 生的,你是看不見我的,你也看不見這天國的。要注意一下這個對照,尼哥底母來了為的是要看 見,還有什麼我們要看見的,才能看見神的國呢?耶穌說不不不,你要重生,從上面而生才能看 見神的國。我們是不是也是如此要看見更多的神跡,看見更多的証據,然后我們就知道耶穌是 誰,我們才能相信他呢?如果沒有重生,就算有更多的神跡你也看不見,在神跡后面的那一位 神,那一位的耶穌。

在我們讀福音書的時候,這一段經文告訴我們,沒有重生,就看不見任何神跡。神也行使 了許多神跡,使瞎子可以看得見,瘸腿的可以走路,使死的復活。但人並沒有因看見這些而相信 他,而看見越多的,對聖經越熟悉的那一個群體把耶穌釘在十字架上。我們再往前看,

II. 耶穌要人以從天而生為進天國的基礎。

耶穌說沒有重生,是沒有辦法看見神的國的。這一句話對裡克蒂姆來說是非常的陌生。更 奇怪的是,就希臘文化來說,從上面生是非常普遍的;聽見重生是沒有問題的,但是尼哥底母這 個猶太人,對聖經非常熟悉的,卻沒有辦法明白什麼是重生。在第四節裡,尼哥底母說人老了怎 麼能夠重生呢?他想到的重生是再一次進入母胎。耶穌說不不不,絕對不這樣。在第五節到第八 節就和他解釋了。我實實在在,這是第二個實實在在,人若不是從水和靈生的,就不能進神的 國。從肉身生的就是肉身,從靈生的就是靈。不要因我對你們說重生,你們就感到稀奇。風隨著 意思吹,你聽見風的響聲,卻不曉得從哪裡來的,往哪裡去。人從靈生的,也是如此。耶穌很淺 淡的說,一個人的重生是從上面來的,從上面生的用水和靈代表。然后在第七節所講的是在強調 重生的重要性。信息看過之后,我相信我們都很熟悉,這段信息我相信在約翰福音裡都不怎麼明 白。在這裡我首先很簡單的說一下,這裡講的水和靈不是我們現在所了解得洗禮。很多的時候, 我們理解的水和靈就是洗禮。所以我們要另外一方式來理解水和靈。今天再約禮堂領歌的弟兄, 他就提到《創世紀》,在創世紀裡,神吹了一口氣就使人有了生命,這一口氣就是靈。然后來到 新約聖經裡,在使徒行傳第二章,當教會成立的時候有風有火,靈就不一樣了,靈是新的一個開 始,所以重生是從水和靈來的,是一個新的生靈的產生。在以西結書裡,這是一段猶太人一定熟 悉的經文,一談到水和靈時,一定要看《以西結書》的第36章,我一定用清潔的水洒在你們身 上,你們就潔淨了。我必潔淨你們一切的污穢,使你們遠離所有的偶像,我必把心賜給你們,將 心靈放在你們裡面。又從你們肉體中除掉石心,賜給你們肉心。我必將我的靈放在你們裡面,是 你們順從我的律法,謹守遵行我的典章。這裡提到了水和靈,水的作用是象征著罪的被洗淨,罪 的被除掉,象征著悔改。靈是什麼,這裡說我要給你一個肉的心,原來的心變得剛硬了,所以我 要給你一個新的心,是透過這個靈,這個新的測試是什麼,就是你們順從神的律法,謹守遵行神 的話語。

在這裡看到一個很簡單的圖書,當水和靈在這裡運作時,又有了一個新的開始,新的開始 包括了悔改,包括了對神的話語的遵守。然后接下來在《以西結書》的第 37 章,以西結用了一 個更強烈的圖書,來比喻水和靈,和那一個個的工人。《以西結書》的37章是大家很熟悉的, 在以西結前面有一個的山谷,山谷滿山枯干的骨頭,當神的靈神的氣,被吹到那些骨頭上,那些 骨頭就接起來了,就生了筋生了肉,成了一個莫大的軍隊,所以36章和37章放在一起就成了一 個很強的圖案。當從神來的靈有了新的生命時,那一個的后果是很強的,是一個新的生命的改 變。裡克蒂姆沒辦法明白,對裡克蒂姆來說要進入神的國的話,他一定要看見某些東西,才能得 到永生。但耶穌在這裡和他說的正好是相反的,你要看見神的國,你要得到永生的生命,並不是 你是多好的人,也不在乎你對聖經多熟悉。完全相反,尼哥底母和法利賽人認為我越熟悉聖經, 我越看見神行的神跡,我越知道你是誰。耶穌講的剛好相反,你要知道我是誰?你要認識天國 嗎?那你必須從上面生一次。這一個生是你眼睛看不見的,用風來做例子,是一件很神秘的事, 像風一樣你看不見的,摸不著的,但你能感覺到他的存在。水和靈的生也是如此,你是看不見 的,但你感覺到他的功力,他的效應,那就是一個悔改的一個生命,一個順服神的一個生命。在 不少的喪事禮拜,我聽到說某某人是一個好人,總樂於幫助人,但沒能進入天堂,真是可惜。這 是不對的,你可能是全世界最好的一個人,你可能如一些慈善家,去捐錢,但如果你不是從上面 生的話,不是重生的話,你是不會看見神的國,也不能進神的國。

上個禮拜,與一個很久沒見的朋友談話。他和我說他去一個公開的教會,聽道,一個年長的長老說過這樣一句話,周恩來是中國人非常喜歡的總理,但他不在天堂。也就是說,不管你人有多好,人多喜歡你,這並不是你進入天堂的標志。他在北京工作很長時間,在那裡讀經禱告,現在人很多,大概有四五百人。有一個弟兄對他說,我真的想相信耶穌,但是我是做生意的,如果信了耶穌,就不能按照以前的模式做生意了。如果我改變以前的模式的話,我的生意在短期內就會全部停止。也就是說我信耶穌的話,不是單單承認我以前做錯了,而意味著將不能再做下去,他非常的清楚。耶穌在這裡是說,如果你要進神的國,無論是將來,就是現在要管理,你就要從現在與他建立關系,當他從上面生你的時候,他就成為了你的父,你就成為了他的孩子。

III. 相信耶穌是從天而生的起點

但這一切對尼哥底母說是太多了,所以尼哥底母在第9節說怎麼可能有這些事呢?怎麼可能水和靈將我再生一次呢?他沒有辦法明白。所以在第10節就聽到一些強烈的話語,你身為以色列的老師還不明白這些嗎?耶穌跟他說,你一來的時候稱為我為老師,你也是老師呀,你身為教導耶穌的這些話的老師,你怎麼就不明白呢?很重的一句話,難道你不明白嗎?

然后接著耶穌就下去,講了一個舊約聖經的故事,一方面是解釋綜合他剛才所講的一切,另一方面也解釋了他和尼哥底母的一番對話。在14,15節,摩西在曠野怎麼樣把銅蛇舉起,人子也必照樣的被舉起來,使所有信他的人都得永生。以色列人有一個特色就是喜歡埋怨,這是他們出名的地方,他們在埃及非常痛苦,經常埋怨埃及的帝王。神把他們帶出埃及,帶出來之后他們就開始說怨言了,當他們來到紅海的邊緣時,后面有埃及的追兵,於是就在那裡埋怨,摩西不會不完?或者是埃及王把我們殺掉呢?他們埋怨:當進到曠野時,吃什麼?沒有東西吃,肚子內,就開始埋怨了,神好嗎?將嗎哪給你們,嗎哪是一些沒有味道的小餅,當然吃了沒有寒水了,就開始埋怨了,你想想,你可以用的方式你都用過了,去煎嗎哪,蒸嗎哪,將嗎你們又厭倦了,又開始埋怨了。你想想,你可以用的方式你都用過了,去煎嗎哪,蒸嗎哪,將麼樣的做法都做過了,沒有味道就是沒有味道,他們又開始埋怨了,神好嗎?怎麼沒有給我們內吃,然后又沒有水了喝呢?他們又在那埋怨,給他們嗎哪吃,他們說,以前在埃及時,有內吃,然后又沒有水了喝呢?他們又在那埋怨,給他們嗎哪吃,他們說,以前在埃及時,有不過來

怨,就是表示你對神的那種不相信。摩西非常的生氣,我把你們帶出來,你們是我的孩子。你們還在那埋怨,然后神就派條蛇進入他們的營地,把他們許多人都咬死了,然后他們意識到錯了,就跟摩西說,你去跟神說我們以后都聽耶和華的話。

好了,神說好了,摩西去做一條銅蛇,然后把銅蛇掛在架上,把它舉起來,然後把銅蛇對著那些被蛇咬的還沒死的人,一但他們看見銅蛇,就不會死了,慢慢的好起來。於是耶穌說: "我也會這樣高高的舉起來,我高舉不是為了讓人受苦受難,我高舉是為了要讓人看見我,然後相信我。"耶穌在這裡是說,得到永生,進入神的國,不是在乎你看到多少的神蹟,如果要得到一種神,進入神的國,你就必須要在上面被生一次,這是神的工作。然后當你在上面被生了之,你的眼睛就能看見,看見耶穌,知道耶穌是誰。當你看見他是誰了之後,正如他被高舉,你相信他,就得到了永生。不是我看見了,我就要相信了,而是他現在在人的心裡面,做了那個重生的工作。然后你我能看見,知道他是誰,相信他,最后得到永生,而且這一刻的開始是從上面來的。

結論

我們聽見了一些關於耶穌的事,你來這裡的時候,你還沒有信耶穌,你發現你的孩子見了耶穌時,你把他帶到教會,是因為你發現教會裡的人都蠻好的,所以你願意把孩子帶到教會,你就放心。但把他帶來之後呢,你就開始後悔了,因為他信了耶穌,而且信的很迷,怎麼辦呢?我當時不是為了要他迷我而要他來到教會的,後來你發現你的太太也信了耶穌,另外你送的孩子也信了耶穌,你送一個信一個,你想怎麼辦呢,還是你要好好看下這個基督教到底是什麼,來看看這位耶穌到底是什麼,你問了很多,所以你進了查經班,進了團契。你問了很多問題,我們的思維是,如果耶穌幫我找到一份好的工作,比現在的要好,如果他能在未來的三個月內給我一張綠卡,他靈了,我就相信他。

你有沒有看見,當我來看耶穌是誰的時候,我將我自己的條件都帶進來了。如果這個耶穌能達到我的標準的話,我會相信他。我要看到一個好像是我自己手造出來的那一個耶穌,我就相信。但是當你我來讀聖經的時候,我們所得到的是一個非常驚訝的一件事。今天這個故事,如果我們對這段聖經的認識是正確的話,是在這裡,耶穌說我不願意被任何人替我定位,我要做什麼就做什麼,然后你才會相信我。耶穌說沒有這一回事。他說你要來我這裡的話,是要按照我的議程、我的方向、我的指示來跟隨我。如果你我要真正的看見他、知道他是誰,我們首先要得到從天上來的那個再生,就是我們所知道的重生。只有當神將我重生的時候,才能真正知道他是誰。當我知道了他是誰,也就是約翰福音二十章說的,我就相信了他,相信他也就得到了永生。

今天下午我們有三位弟兄姊妹會接受洗禮,在教會裡經常會有人受洗,我心中的期望是每一次看到人受洗的時候,我們都要記住這一個洗禮,重新的肯定一個真理,就是這些人已經經歷了從上面的重生,看到了耶穌,相信了耶穌,信靠了他。洗禮就是印証在你裡面發生的事情,這水是浸也好,洒洗也好,都能夠使你重生的。只有上面的那位神能使你我得到重生、認識他,能夠得到神恩。你還記得耶穌在曠野講的銅蛇的故事嗎?任何被蛇咬的人看到銅蛇,被蛇咬的傷馬上就會痊愈。這條銅蛇一直存留在他們中間很長一段時間,可能有幾百年。最后呢?這個銅蛇成為他們所拜的偶像。當希希加做王的時候,下了個命令把這銅蛇毀掉。原來給生命的變成了偶像,就要把它燒掉。但是耶穌卻不一樣,當他被舉起時,就一直被高高的舉起,一直的能夠被人看到。他,就是神的兒子,因著相信他,就能夠得到永生。

Date: 02/26/2012

Text: John 2:25 – John 3:14

Title: Jesus, Who Are You? 耶穌, 你是誰?

Theme: Believing in Jesus is the only way to enter the kingdom of God.

Introduction:

I can believe in a God who created the heavens and the earth. However, I can't believe that Jesus is the son of God, is God himself. I think that many of us have encountered this statement, and some of us may still be puzzled by this: Jesus, who are you?

The author of the gospel of John clearly expressed his purpose in writing this book, John 20:31, "但把這些事記下來,是要你們信耶穌是基督,是一神的兒子,並且使你們信了,可以因他的名得生命。" John wrote so the readers would know who Jesus was and also what to do with this knowledge.

In John 2, we learned that after performing the first miracle, Jesus also taught and performed other miracles. In John 2:23-25, "耶穌在耶路撒冷過逾越節的時候,許多人看見他所行的神蹟,就信了他的名。24 耶穌卻不信任他們,因為他知道所有的人,25 也不需要誰指證人是怎樣的,因為他知道人心裡存的是甚麼." We want to notice that John wrote Jesus knew everyone and he knew what was in their hearts. With this introduction, there were three personal encounters in this book of John. First is Nicodemus, then the Samaritan woman and the official. John 3:1, "有一個法利賽人,名叫尼哥德慕,是猶太人的官長... 他夜間來到耶穌那裡..." Jesus knew what is in a man's heart, and now, a man...came to him." Like a story teller, John set the stage for what is to come. Jesus knew men, and one man, Nicodemus, came to him.

Let's first explore a little about the circumstance of this story. We may not want to read too much into the part that Nicodemus came at night, when it was dark. Yet it was good to bear in mind that in John 1, Jesus was introduced as the light came into the dark world. Later on in this gospel, Jesus was described as the light of the world. There was a constant contrast and conflicts between the light and

darkness. Like any movie or soap opera, there are always conflicts and resolutions and that's what keeps our attention and interest and we want to return day after day, or week after week.

So, in this encounter with Nicodemus there are three conflicts and 3 resolutions. First,

I. We want adequate evidences to confirm the existence of kingdom of God.

Nicodemus said to Jesus, "對他說: "拉比,我們知道你是從 神那裡來的教師,因為如果沒有 神同在,你所行的這些神蹟,就沒有人能行." We could speculate that Nicodemus could be sent by a group of people waiting for him to give a report. It appears that they have been observing him up till now. And the intent behind this statement is: who are you? You appear to be a teacher from God, but is there more? Are you a prophet, are you the Messiah? Nicodemus was trying to set up criteria so that he and his group could to do a more accurate assessment of who Jesus was. Its like doing a research. In order to know that this compound can really kill the breast cancer cells, we need to set up criteria. Besides killing the cancer cells, will it also kill the good cells? Will the nerve system or the lymph nodes also be killed. How about the liver and kidney functions? All those criteria have to be met before one draws any conclusion.

This was the assumption behind Nicodemus' statement. We have seen something and now we want to set up more criteria before we can conclude who you are. He wanted to engage in some theological discussion with Jesus. He wanted to lead this interaction.

However, Jesus' response must have caught him by surprise. Since Jesus knew men's hearts, He would not fall for this; he would not let Nicodemus lead the discussion. Instead, he would take the lead and bring the discussion to a spiritual level. Vs.3, "我實實在在告訴你,人若不重生,就不能見 神 的國 ." Kingdom of God is synonymous with kingdom of heaven. There are the present and future aspects of kingdom of God. The present aspect is about God's rule in one's heart. Then there is also the future aspect; that one day when we die we'll enter into that kingdom. In the book of John, the kingdom of God is seldom used; instead, eternal life is more common. So eternal life and the kingdom of God are synonymous. Nicodemus wanted to see more and then believe in Jesus' identity. Instead, Jesus'

response was: if you are to see and know who I am, you have to be born again. Without being 'born again' no one can see me or the kingdom of God. Miracles by itself cannot provide insight about God. Only a birth from above will enable a person to see and enter the kingdom of God.

Isn't this true with us? We want to see more miracles, more evidences, then we'll believe. However, without this rebirth, no matter how many signs we see, we will not be able to see the God behind the miracles. The gospel stories proved this to be true. Even after seeing more miracles and hearing more teaching from Jesus, people still would not believe him. It was those who were familiar with what he did that eventually put him on the cross. Now, let's move on.

II. Jesus wants us to be born again as the foundation for entering into the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus could not understand this thing about being born again. Vs.4, "尼哥德慕說: "人老了,怎能重生呢? 難道他能再進母腹生出來嗎?" Jesus then explained to him in vs.5-8, "耶穌回答: "我實實在在告訴你,人若不是從水和聖靈生的,就不能進一神的國。從肉身生的就是肉身,從靈生的就是靈。你不要因為我對你說'你們必須重生'而感到希奇。風隨意而吹,你聽見它的響聲,卻不知道它從哪裡來,往哪裡去;凡從聖靈生的,也是這樣." In essence, Jesus said that to be born again means to be born from above. To be born again is to be born of water and spirit. Vs.7 stresses the importance of born again. This is not an easy passage to interpret. We have to look at the origin of this 'water and spirit'.

Ezekiel 36: 25-27, "我必用潔淨的水灑在你們身上,你們就潔淨了;我必潔淨你們的一切污穢,使你們遠離所有可憎的像。"'我必把新心賜給你們,把新靈放在你們裡面我必從你們的肉體中除去石心,把肉心賜給你們。我必把我的靈放在你們裡面,使你們遵行我的律例,謹守遵行我的典章." This water symbolizes the washing away of sins. There is more to this. God will also give us a new spirit. When the spirit comes to us, it will replace my heart that has been hardened by sins, with a new heart, a soft heart. A heart that will obey God and walk in the right path. Later in chapter 37, Ezekiel used an even stronger image to explain the effect of this water and spirit. With the coming of

God's spirit, the dry bones in the valley will come to life. Therefore being born with water and spirit points to repentance and the transformation of life. Again, Nicodemus could not understand this. To him, seeing and entering the kingdom of God or receiving eternal life depends on how much good one does, how much one knows about God's laws. But Jesus said, no, not so. In order to enter the kingdom of God, one must be born of above. This is not visible to human eyes. It's like cannot see the wind but can feel its effect. We cannot see the water cleansing or the new heart, but we can see its effect in repentance and a life marked by obedient to God's words.

In some funeral services I have heard words such as: so and so is a real nice person. He/she is very helpful to people around him. He is such a nice guy, everyone likes him so he must be in heaven now. Unfortunately, this is not so. You may be the nicest guy on this side of heaven, you may give 50% of your net worth to charity, but without being born from above, being born with water and spirit, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Last week a friend of mine shared with me what he heard in a sermon in church in BJ. An elderly elder in his sermon made this statement: we all liked Chou En Lai, but he is not in heaven.

The same friend also shared with me this story. A local businessman had been coming to the Bible study at his home for sometime. One day he expressed his desire to become a Christian. However, he raised a question. "if I become a Christian, then I can't continue the present business practice. That includes taking shortcut, 拉關係 and bribery. And if I discontinue these behavior, my business will come to a halt right away." He fully understood that believing in Jesus required repentance and following God's instructions.

Jesus is also saying that if we want to enter into God's kingdom in the future we need to establish a relationship with God now. As he gives us that new birth from above, he would become our father and we, his children.

III. Believing in Jesus is the starting point of being born again.

All this was too much for Nicodemus to understand, vs.9, "尼哥德慕說: "怎能有這事呢?" so in vs.10, we hear some very strong words from Jesus, "耶穌說, "你是以色列人的教師,還不明白這事嗎?我實實在在告訴你,我們知道的,才講論; 見過的,就作證,然而你們卻不接受我們的見證。我對你們講地上的事,你們尚且不信,如果講天上的事,怎能相信呢?除了那從天上降下來的人子(有些抄本作"除了那從天上降下來仍舊在天上的人子"),沒有人升過天。" Being a teacher of the law, how can you not understand this?

Jesus then moves on and uses an OT story to further explain and bring to a conclusion of this encounter with Nicodemus. Vs.14-15, "摩西在曠野怎樣把銅蛇舉起,人子也必照樣被舉起來,使所有信他的人都得永生。" When the Israelites were in the wilderness, they repeatedly complained to God about the hardship they experienced. They complained about the manna from heaven with no meat, they complained there was no water. Complaints were viewed as lacking trust in God. So God sent serpents into their camp and many died of the snakebites. They people then repented. God told Moses to made a snake out of bronze and raise it up in the wilderness. Whoever looked at this bronze snake will survive and be cured of the snakebite and live. Now, Jesus said that he is like that bronze snake and one day he'll be raised up and whoever believes in him will have eternal life.

Here He is saying that eternal life is not dependent on miracles. To receive eternal life, to enter God's kingdom, one will have to be born again. This is God's work in us. With this born again, our eyes will be clear and then we can see who Jesus is and believe in Him.

Conclusion:

Many of us are like Nicodemus, we have heard about Jesus either through reading or from people around us. We have family members that are Christians and their convictions and behaviors have perked our interest. We may start coming to church/fellowship groups and ask all kinds of questions. Often we say something like this: if Jesus will help me find a job, or if he will heal my husband or child's cancer, then I'll believe in him. We want to set certain criteria and when/if Jesus meets them, we'll believe. In other words, we want to see a Jesus that meets our standards so we can believe.

However, when we come to the scriptures, we are in for a surprise. Today's story tells us that Jesus refuses to be defined by us. Instead, he wants us to follow his agenda. If we are to really see him as he is, we are first to be born again. When He reborn us from above, we'll then see him as the son of God. And by believing in him, we'll have eternal life.

This afternoon we'll witness the baptism of 3 individuals. This act of baptism is to reinforce the truth that these individuals have been born from above and have come to believe in Jesus, the son of God.

Remember the bronze snake we heard earlier? Years after the wilderness experience, this bronze snake became an idol, an object of worship. So king Hezekiah ordered its destruction. But Jesus is more than the bronze snake. Jesus will last forever, for he is the Son of God, he is God.