

Introduction:

- A few weeks ago, it was reported that a tourist had gone missing from an Icelandic bus tour, resulting in a frantic search involving more than 50 rescuers on foot and by air. It all started when, according to CBS News: *"The woman broke off from her tourist group and changed clothes ... When she returned to the bus in a different outfit, the rest of her tour group did not recognize her. Then when a description of the 'missing person' was offered - Asian, in dark clothing and speaks English well - the woman seemingly also did not recognize the description as of herself, so she began to assist the others in searching. ... Hours later, around 3 a.m. Sunday, the search party finally realized that, alas, the woman they were looking for was with them all along, and the search was called off. Chief of police in Hvalsvöllur Sveinn K. Rúnarsson told Iceland news that the woman simply didn't recognize the description of herself, and "had no idea that she was missing."*
- **APPLICATION:** Here is our problem; the Bible describes us as spiritually lost and separated from God, but we fail to recognize ourselves in the description. The result is that we have no idea that we're lost.
- Truth is, we humans are all a rather thick-headed lot who don't readily recognize ourselves in the description of a sinner in need of salvation. Only through the light of humility can our blind eyes finally see how desperate our situation really is. Once we finally see ourselves in the pages of Scripture, the search can be called off. One of God's lost sheep has been found and returned to the fold! ("Missing woman "finds herself" after intense search" by Casey Glynn, CBS News, 8/30/12.)
- Let me introduce you to another man in scripture who did not know he was lost, and who also was a little 'thick-headed.' His name is Nicodemus. Listen as I read this scripture and paint a picture for you.
- John 3:1-17

I. Surprised You're Lost?

- A. A number of years ago my family was in Colorado visiting Kelly's brother. He wanted to take us four wheeling in the mountains. He borrowed a friend's 4x4 and off we went. Someone asked as we pulled out of the driveway. Do you have a map? (This was before smart phones). You guessed it...several hours later we were lost in the Rocky Mountains. No one was more surprised than Kelly's brother who had done this before! He thought he knew the way.
 1. Just like our opening illustration: The young lady was surprised she was the one who was lost. Brad too was surprised he was lost.
 2. Most people are like Nicodemus is surprised to find out he is lost.
- B. Nicodemus' surprise.
 1. Nicodemus is a Jewish religious leader, a Pharisee. You would not think a religious person who is a religious leader of people would be lost but he was! Imagine his surprise to find out.

2. He comes to Jesus at night. He does not want all of his friends to know what he is doing. I believe he comes to Jesus out of a genuine desire to talk with him. But before he can delve into conversation, Jesus interrupts with two things that catch him off guard.
 - a) One, "*I tell you the truth*" this is a phrase used by Jews which means: "I am about to say something important. It is very important you pay attention!"
 - b) Second, if you are not born again you do not get into the Kingdom of God! You do not get access to the King of the Kingdom nor do you get any of the benefits of the Kingdom.
3. His surprise... "What? What do you mean?" He knew what it meant to be born from above. He was Jew! Now he is being told that without being born again he cant get into the Kingdom! He was thinking he was already in the Kingdom.
4. Then Jesus reminds him about Moses lifting up a serpent on a pole in the wilderness.
 - a) He was telling Nicodemus: "Israel sinned against God, and their sin brought poison into their lives. The bites made them sick and killed many of them. The bites of snakes damaged and destroyed their lives.
 - b) So also, the people of this world have sinned. They've chosen to live their lives their own way. And because they have chosen to rebel against God, they've suffered the bite of Satan, and his venom has damaged and destroyed the lives of millions.
- C. Our Surprise: that is our problem, we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
 1. Though we are alive we are called 'dead' without Christ!
 2. "*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.*" (Ro 3:23, NLT)
 3. "*For the wages of sin is death,*" (Romans 6:23, NLT) A wage is what you earn. It is what you deserve for what you have done.
 4. Paul in Eph 2:12 describes the person without Christ as separated from God, excluded from the Kingdom, without hope, without the promises of God, and without God in this world! Can you say, "YIKES!"
 5. And our sin has brought a painful venom into our lives that poisoned much of our existence. If that's the problem, is there a solution? Yes!!!

II. Surprised You Are Found!

- A. Jesus answer: "You must be born again!" vs 3, 7. This is the **WHY?** to Nicodemus question. "No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Only the Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.
 1. Water was what Nicodemus was familiar with.
 - a) It was the baptism of repentance. This is what gentiles did when they converted to Judaism. The repented, renounced all other religions were baptized and became Jewish. It did nothing for the heart
 - b) The Spirit is the only way a man gets born again.
 2. So Jesus is saying, "Nicodemus, you yourself must repent of your sins and renounce everything that you are basing your salvation on (good works/good person) and put

your faith in me. Only then will you be born again! It is a work of the Spirit and you can't explain how it happens. vs. 8. It is like the wind. You feel it. But you never know where it comes from or where it is going.

3. A new life is needed because there's something wrong with the old life, or the life we were born into.
 - a) There's a misunderstanding in humanity that if we just stop doing some stuff, and start doing Christian stuff, then we'll be Christians. Kind of like cleaning up our act!
 - b) And while morality and ethical behavior are good, this isn't what Jesus is saying. He is saying you must be born of the Spirit. Jesus begins to show Nic how this happens!
- B. Jesus second answer, to our surprise and Nicodemus, of being lost, dead, separated from God is this: remember Moses and those snakes? Moses made a bronze serpent and when someone was bitten by a snake they could come and look at this bronze serpent on a pole and be healed. So, Jesus says:
 1. Jn 3:15 "*Everyone who believes in Him/me will have eternal life.*" This is the first time that "*eternal life*" is used in the Book of John. It means life eternal, or life that continues in the age that has no end. It stands opposite the thought, *eternal death*.
 2. There was only one way for the people to be healed. And what was it? How were the people healed? (Bronze Snake) That's right. Moses had to lift up a bronze snake so that everyone who looked on it could be healed. That was the only way anyone could be healed. It was the only way to life!
 3. This is what Jesus is telling us this morning: The ONLY way anyone is going to be healed of the poison in their lives caused by their own sinfulness; will be if they look to Jesus. To look to Him in faith believing. When faith is exercised one is born from above or born again. When that happens...

III. **Surprise! It's Your Birthday!**

- A. Give me a summary.
 1. Everyone has sinned. Therefore everyone is spiritually dead. They are separated from God...forever. That is a bad place to be. But Jesus says a spiritually dead person can be born again!
 2. The only way to be made alive is to put your faith in Jesus. Jesus became for us that serpent on a pole. Paul said, He who knew no sin became sin so that we who knew no righteousness could be made righteous.
 3. So I lift my eyes to Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith. I trust Him alone for my salvation. When I do that, I am born again by the Spirit of God! It is a work that God does in me because I trust Him to do that.
- B. You want to know what happened to Nicodemus?
 1. After this meeting with Jesus, Nicodemus went away. We really do not know what he went through...turmoil...doubts...what will people think?

2. The next time we see Nicodemus in the Gospel of John is when those of his own party, the Pharisees, wanted to condemn Jesus. It was Nicodemus who stood up for Him Jn 7:50-51. Nicodemus fearlessly stood up for justice on His behalf. We too must move beyond a mere admiration of Jesus to a public declaration of faith in Him.
 3. Third time we see Nicodemus, is at a time when the inner circle of disciples had all but one deserted Jesus. Nicodemus joined Joseph of Arimathea in bearing away the body of Jesus after the crucifixion Jn 19:38-42. These two disciples, together, were making public their adherence to Jesus, and all that He stands for. It is safe to conclude that Nicodemus is born again.
- C. Now back to you. If you have not made Jesus Lord of your life you are dead...spiritually dead, separated from God. You must be born again. You can't get into the Kingdom because your grandparents or parents go to church. You are responsible for your own decision to accept Christ. He died for you will you live for Him today?

Conclusion:

- How about you? Will you trust Jesus to save you today?
- Max Lucado told about a girl named Christina who lived in a small village in Brazil. She was bored. She felt like her strict parents had cheated her out of the joys of life. She longed for the excitement of the big city of Rio. One morning her mother went into her room and found Christina's bed empty and she knew immediately where her daughter had gone. Knowing the dangers of the big city, she quickly threw some clothes in a bag and headed for the bus station. But on her way, she stopped at a drug store, went into a photograph booth there and had several pictures taken of herself. When she reached Rio de Janeiro, she put up pictures of herself all over town. But she never found her daughter. Filled with sorrow, Christina's mother got back on the bus for home. Months later, Christina slowly walked down the hotel stairs. She'd been worn down by the life she'd been living. Her eyes were tired and filled with pain and fear. She longed to go back home to her mom and dad and the safety that gave. But she thought it was too late. They'd NEVER want her back. When she reached the bottom of the stairs she looked over at the lobby mirror... and then she looked again. For there on the mirror was a small picture of her mother. She walked across the room and took the photo off the mirror and written on the back were these words: "Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, and it doesn't matter. Please come home." And she did.
- Will you come home to Jesus this morning?