

# Special Messages of 2016

## Jesus Isn't Looking for a Few Good Men

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning men. It is awesome to be with you today. I'm so excited about the opportunity to get a chance to teach this morning and excited about the passage that we're going to be looking at, mainly because it applies to me so much. You guys are going to either benefit from that or suffer through that; I'm not sure which. I want to just tell you real briefly a quick story about some of what God's doing through Man in the Mirror. As you know, we now have 90 plus men around the country that are working with churches to help them reach and disciple men. We're hearing some amazing stories from their work. We recently got a testimony from one of our field staff.

He said, "Today I met with my third church since we did the training at the end of April. It was great to sense their hopeful attitude towards the future of their men and the church. There have been a lot of icebergs in their church and they feel like the captains of the Titanic." I don't know if any of you have ever felt that way. "They are headlong into their Father's Day Baseball Game Event and will launch a new men's study with those who attend at the completion of this study. They're leading right into their fall cycle of ministry using the principles that we taught." I quote, "We are very grateful for you helping us out. We have hope for our men now."

This is the testimony that we're receiving from churches all across the country as we begin to help them implement these principles that help them move men into life and life discipleships. Thanks to those of you who are praying for us, who are partnering with us. It's such a blessing. I would let you know that we are facing a cash flow crunch right now. We need about \$275,000 in the next month to get back on track. We are praying that the Lord would open some doors to us. The reality is there are probably 10,000 men who are going to be watching this video and if only a few hundred of you responded to that need then we would be in great shape. I ask you to pray and if the Lord leads you in that direction we would love to have you partner with us. I could tell you this, it's going to be a leveraged investment that is going to make a tremendous difference in the lives of men all across the country. We think about the marriages, we think about the children, and that's what it's about, it's about changed lives.

We're going to get started today and we're going to do it by having a little competition. I know it's early in the morning and some of these tables have less people than others, you're just going to need to step up. You're really going to need to step up, you got to be like 8 guys today. Oh no, you got a partner. Here's what we're going to do, I'm going to put some letters up on the screen and at your table you're going to try to find as many words as you can using any or all of the letters in this words that I'm going to put up on the screen. Okay? I'm putting up 9 letters or 7 letters, whatever it is, you can have 2 that are words, you can have 3 that are words.

Now I would encourage you, don't yell them out. Okay, because the table right next to you is going to hear what you're saying. Somebody needs to get a pen, somebody needs to get a paper, they need to be

the scribe, and you need to lean down, you need to whisper to them these words. All right, we're going to give you 60 seconds. At the end of 60 seconds we're going to see which table has the most words. Here we go. There's the phrase: "good man". How many words can you form using the letters that you see in "good man"? Okay, you ready? Set, go. They can be 2 letter words, 3 letter words, 5 letter words. 30 seconds. 15 seconds. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, pencils down. Pencils down. Okay, count them up. Count them up, see how many you came up with. All right, how many tables got more than 5? Raise your hand if you got more than 5. Okay, how many tables got 10 or more, 10 or more? Okay, awesome. How many tables got 15 or more? Whoa. All right, how many did you get? 17. 16. We have a winner.

Stand up and take a bow, stand up and take a bow, that's all you get. You just get to stand up and take a bow, this is it, this is your reward. Yeah, nice flourish to it. Thank you. All right, give these guys a hand. How many words do you think there are total? You want to hear their words? All right, read them quickly. Oh, you didn't write them down? Oh, that is disappointing. You got to write them down. Okay, man this is a tough crowd. Now they want to win back here because they have them written down. How many words total do you think there are that you can make? 47. 47 words. Did anybody see "among"? Among is in there, go about "goon"? Got goon, okay, good. All right so 47 different words you can make from that.

Now you might not immediately be obvious that there are that many words that could be formed from that. Doing this this early in the morning is a little bit cruel, I realize that. Some of you guys are like, "Look, I've had like 2 sips of coffee, why are we doing this?" It reminds me of having a pop quiz back in school. I used to hate pop quizzes. Especially when you weren't prepared, you were supposed to have read something or you were supposed to have studied something. The teacher gives you a hint, "Hey make sure you look over your worksheets" or whatever. The next day you walk in, "All right we're having a quiz." The worst feeling. Sometimes tests in life come that way, don't they? They're unexpected, they're not something that we're looking for.

Today this passage is a little bit like that for this man named Nicodemus. I want to look at John, chapter 3. We're going to kind of just walk through this text. If you want to keep your bibles open or your phone's screen on, or however you want to do it, we're going to kind of just walk through John, chapter 3. We're actually going to cover quite a bit this morning. We're not going to read it all right now, we'll read it as we go along. John chapter 3, beginning in verse 1. "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God for no one can do these things that you do unless God is with him.'"

Okay, so setting the stage here a little bit, here you have Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee, and we've talked about before here that the Pharisees kind of get a bad rap today because we see them through Jesus' eyes, but really these were the conservative religious leaders of the day. They were trying to do, most of them, the right thing. Jesus said, "You give a tenth of everything, even down to your spices." Their issue was not that somehow they were charlatans or hypocrites or something like that. They were trying to stand against the Romans, they were trying to preserve their religious heritage. Jesus' issue with them is something very different and we're going to see that as he talks to Nicodemus in this passage.

Nicodemus was a good guy. If he was here we would all like him. Okay? He would be our kind of person. He comes to Jesus at night and the first thing he does is he calls Jesus "teacher", he says "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher". It kind of gives us the perspective that Nicodemus has about Jesus. The

reality is it's the perspective that a lot of people bring to Jesus, it's the perspective a lot of us bring to Jesus.

I remember when I was in college I had met this young woman, who's now my wife. One summer I was at home in Atlanta at the time and she happened to have an uncle that just turned out that lived about 2 or 3 miles from my house and she was living with him for the summer. He didn't have any boys and I found out he had 2 daughters. I found out that he needed some trees cut down and cut up in his backyard, not big huge things but just some work that needed to be done with a chainsaw. I volunteered to go over and to ... Hey what better way to impress this girl than to help her uncle out?

I go over there with the chainsaw and I'm in college so I'm wearing shorts and all the things you're not supposed to do. I finish cutting 1 thing and I've got it up and I'm kind of cutting it into firewood size pieces or whatever. Finish with this one and I'm getting ready to walk to the other one and I take the chainsaw and I step like this and I feel something. I look down and I see on my knee, right beside my kneecap this white streak. The first thing that goes through my mind is ... If you remember when you were a kid and you were skateboarding, or riding your bike and you fell on the asphalt and you kind of got that scrape that was white. You know? I thought, "I cannot believe that I hit my knee with a chainsaw and the only thing it did was take that little layer of skin off. How is that even possible, I am so lucky, that is amazing."

I took the chainsaw and I found the off button to actually turn it off because I figured I might to at least check my knee. I'm turning it off and I put the chainsaw on the ground over here, walk over to the driveway so it's not in the dirt and I put it down. Then I look back at my leg and the whole bottom half of my leg is just red. I had not just scraped the top layer of skin off, that was all the fat and stuff underneath that I had seen when I looked down. You know, the actions when I thought that I had just scraped my leg, my heart rate was calm, I took my time turning off the chainsaw. I walked 3 or 4 steps, put it down casually onto the driveway thinking it wasn't that big a deal. It was very different when I looked down and saw what was really going on with my leg. All of the sudden I'm like, "oh my goodness. What do I do now?" I mean I'm trying to hold the flaps together and stop the bleeding and all kinds of stuff.

Rather than figure out how to get my knee here I just took a picture of it. I figured you guys are going to want to see my knee. Here it is, 30 years later. There's my scar in the middle of my knee, still there. It's unbelievable it didn't touch my kneecap or anything, it was amazing. The reality is at first I didn't think it was a big deal. When you don't think something is a big deal, then you handle it one way. You know, eventually I realized this was serious. Right, this was serious and it really needed to be taken care of. Then I handled it a whole different way.

The reality is that when Nicodemus was coming to Jesus, he didn't think it was all that big a deal. What he thought was, "I need a teacher, I need a Rabbi. I need somebody to give me some instruction." That's how he came to Jesus. The reality is that a lot of men come to Jesus in a very self sufficient kind of way. You know, "I'm doing all right with my life, even if the people around me may not agree with that. I'm happy with it. It'd be nice to kind of have Jesus in there too, you know because what could that hurt?"

Sometimes even as Christian men we get in this rut where we're sort of living out our life, we're kind of being nice to people, we're spending time with our wife, we're doing basically a good job at our workplace and Jesus is a nice thing to have as a part of our life, we're glad he's there but we're basically

coming to him not out of need and not out of desperation, but we're rather coming to him out of a position of self-sufficiency and perceived strength that, "Hey it's really all that bad."

That's what was going on with Nicodemus. The first thing that we see is that good men are drawn to Jesus. That's what happened with Nicodemus. He wanted Jesus to be a part of his life. You think about politicians, business leaders, all kinds of people kind of tack Jesus on to what they're doing. It's kind of like having Jesus in your crowd is a good thing, you want Jesus in your posse, it helps your reputation. We see that all around us. Of course that's not what Jesus is about.

Verse 4 is this incredible, abrupt, almost non sequitur, it doesn't follow from what Nicodemus has said. Nicodemus seems to be making this polite statement to Jesus, it seems to be a very praising Jesus. It doesn't seem to be mean or sarcastic or anything. Yet look what Jesus says to Nicodemus in verse 3. Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Now that does not seem to follow from what Nicodemus has said. What Jesus is doing is he is trying to demonstrate, and he's going to keep doing this through the end of the passage we're looking at today, that Nicodemus, the fundamental problem of Nicodemus is that he is coming to Jesus out of that self sufficient mindset. "I can handle this on my own. I can make it, I just need some help." Jesus says here in verse 3, "Unless you are born again".

Now he uses the phrase for literally being born again. We see this in verse 4. Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Nicodemus doesn't really think Jesus is saying that but he's trying to figure out what in the world is Jesus saying because he just literally said you have to be born again. Now we've heard that phrase "born again". We know being saved or becoming a Christian or having a relationship with God, but if you had never heard that phrase before, you would be thinking ... Jesus does this a lot in the book of John. He talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. He's willing to say things that really turn people's worlds upside down.

We have tamed Jesus a lot in our minds because we're coming at it from 2,000 years of history and interpretation and, "Well he really meant this. We take this with this in mind", and we smooth all this stuff out and we make it very tame and very safe and very comfortable. Jesus just told a dude that you got to get back in your mother's uterus and be born again. That's what he said to this guy when this guy told him that he was a great teacher. That doesn't seem like the words of a great teacher, it kind of seems like a crazy person.

Why is Jesus doing that? He's doing that because he knows he's got to disrupt Nicodemus' world view. He goes on in verse 5, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Probably being born of water and the spirit is a natural birth and a spiritual birth. Jesus is beginning to elaborate, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." He's telling Nicodemus, I'm not talking about a physical rebirth, I'm talking about a spiritual rebirth. "Do not marvel that I said to you", verse 7, "you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Just like the wind blows without us doing anything to cause it, without us understanding the source, knowing where it's going to end up, the Spirit brings rebirth in men's lives. Nicodemus at this point is befuddled, as you can imagine. How can this be? What is going on? Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?" Now I want you to see what's happening

here because Jesus begins an almost relentless attack on Nicodemus. It's hard for us to see it in English, but if you read John 3 and then you compare it to John 4 with the woman at the well, you will see an incredible difference in the way that Jesus deals with these people.

Nicodemus goes to all the trouble, here he is this high profile, prominent leader. We're going to see him later, he's going to have enough pull that he's going to be part of getting Jesus' body back to bury it. This is a guy who has got some significant connections and he goes out of his way at a risk to his reputation, at the risk to his standing. He goes out of his way to meet Jesus at night and Jesus doesn't let him get a word in edgewise. Nicodemus is finished talking. He said like 9 words or whatever. Jesus just hammers Nicodemus in this passage. Then you compare it to John chapter 4 with this woman at the well who has been with 7 men and is an outcast and is a Samaritan, the Jews aren't even supposed to relate to. Jesus is just like, Hey how are you doing? What's going on? How's your life? Tell me about that, what's that like?. It's a completely different approach and it's very interesting to think about why that is.

I believe it's because he knew what Nicodemus really needed and that was Nicodemus needed to have his world turned upside down. Jesus totally cuts him off and he basically slams him. You're the teacher and you don't understand this? How can you call yourself a teacher? "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony." The problem is you don't believe what I've been telling you Nicodemus. "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Jesus is laying out the whole deal here for Nicodemus. You remember the story during the Exodus when the snakes were biting the Israelites and Moses made a snake and lifted it up, and if they looked at the snake then they could be healed and protected from the poison? Jesus is saying the same thing has to happen with me. I've got to be lifted up. Of course we know that's going to happen on a cross where he's both lifted up as a sacrifice and lifted up to be glorified and looked at from us. Jesus is saying, listen do you think I'm a teacher? Well here's my teaching. Are you ready? The problem is you don't believe it. You don't believe it.

Then the famous verse, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." He lays out for Nicodemus here this whole gospel. Nicodemus is on this track that what I need is I need a teacher to give me some information. Jesus says, no you don't need a teacher, you need to believe, you need to be born again, you need to be transformed from the inside out. The problem is not just that you scraped a little layer of skin off your knee. The problem is that your whole leg is in danger of needing to be amputated and you need some deep, deep healing and transformation.

Nicodemus thinks he's going to learn from Jesus how to be a better person. Jesus says, no that's not what it's about. It's about abandoning yourself, being transformed as you worship me. The formal name for this is moralism, the idea that we are good because of what we do, that God accepts us because we're righteous. If we're honest, many of us have that kind of moralistic tendency. You feel better about yourself when you read your bible, when you pray, when you give money to the church, when you're nice to people, when you sacrifice for somebody, those, "Hey look at me. I'm doing it well." Right? Then if you mess up, if you get angry at somebody when you shouldn't, you go some few days without reading your bible, you realize you haven't even prayed about this situation, "Man I'm such a loser".

What's the standard? The standard is my performance, but that's not the gospel. The gospel is the standard is my faith and my love and my worship of Jesus Christ and then my obedience and my behavior flows out of that. We first look to Christ and that's what Jesus is trying to say here. Jesus destroys moralism and demands exclusive allegiance. Look at the rest of this passage. Actually, this is borderline mean what Jesus does to Nicodemus. I don't know if you can say Jesus was mean, I guess he needed to be mean so he was as close to it as you can get.

What has he said about Nicodemus? He's already said he didn't believe. Look at verse 18. "Whoever believes in Him is not condemned; but whoever does not believe is condemned already,". Well who doesn't believe? Nicodemus. By the way, Nicodemus, you're condemned already. You want some teaching? Here's some teaching for you. "Because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. This is the judgement, the Light has come into the world" ... Now when did Nicodemus come to see Jesus? When did he come to see Jesus? At night. Look at this, "This is the judgment, the Light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light." Look at what Jesus is doing to Nicodemus.

Nicodemus, you're ashamed. You got more concern about your reputation than you are about worshipping me. People love the darkness. Why do they love the darkness rather than the light? "Their works are evil." You think you're so good, Nicodemus, because you do all the things the law says? You think you're so good because you live up to some artificial standards that you create? No, your works are evil. "For everyone who does wicked things" ... Jesus doubles down. "For everyone who does wicked things hates the Light and does not come to the Light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the Light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

Jesus destroys moralism. He shows that there's no way that in our own strength, in our own effort, that somehow we can satisfy God and that we can be good enough to be real men, strong men, true men. It doesn't happen because we make it happen, that's not the gospel. You know the Big Idea for this morning is that **good men rely on their goodness; godly men rely on Jesus. Good men rely on their goodness; godly men rely on Jesus.**

I grew up in a wonderful Christian home, involved in some great churches when I was growing up, but the subtle message of sort of that southern, American, 1970's and 80's Christianity was be nice to people, say please and thank you, read your bible, pray, go to church, write your check, serve on a committee, do all that stuff, don't have your hair too long, don't get tattoos, don't cuss, don't smoke or chew tobacco. If you do all that, you're a good man, you're a good person. Okay, well if you followed me around you would see me talking to my wife, praying for my kids, texting my kids, basically at work being a nice person. I guess they would probably testify in the back, maybe you could ask them later. Hey, if that's what being a good man is all about, if that's what being a strong Christian is all about then who needs God? Right? I got that.

The scriptures say that man looks at the outward appearance and God looks at the heart. Think about what Jesus demands. Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength", not just some of your strength, not just your mind on Sundays, not just your heart when it's convenient for you to worship and you're not really doing anything at work. No, all of it. The first of the 10 commandments, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. You shall have no other gods before me." That exclusive worship, that's what God has made us for. He knows that we will only be fully alive when we have fully surrendered ourselves to him. We don't need a teacher, we need

a Savior. We don't need somebody to just kind of clean up a few things, we need somebody to knock down the house and rebuild it from the ground up.

The problem is that when we look at our own effort, and we make our own effort the standard, one of 2 things is going to happen. Number 1 is you're going to do what I often do, which is you're going to set some artificial standards of what it means to be a good Christian. You're going to meet those standards, and so what happens? "Look at me, pretty good." Now you're too smart to show that. I'm never going to admit that you're pretty good. You're going to say, "Oh I'm such a sinner, I'm a terrible man", but inside you know, pretty good. If you meet up to your standards you're going to feel pretty good about yourself.

Now what happens if you don't meet your standards? "I cannot believe I went to that website like that again. I am such a loser", or, "You know I said I was not going to yell at her again, and look at that. I've raised my voice and now she's all ... Why am I so stupid?" Right? You're going to feel so defeated and so dejected. Why? You can't live up to those standards that you have artificially created. The reality is that Jesus' standard is something that none of us can live up to. The whole point is we got to quit looking at our own navel and judging, "hey how am I doing? Am I good enough? Am I making all these things happen? Am I doing what I should be doing? Look at me. I'm terrible. I'm good", whatever. That's not Christianity. The gospel is we lift our eyes, we look to Christ and we say, "You're enough. I want to worship you today. I want to love you today. I want to see your power at work in my life today. I don't want to try to do this on my own."

That's what the gospel is all about. Jesus is consistently saying to us, there's nothing else. There's nowhere else to turn, there's nothing else you can look to. There's nothing that's going to satisfy. Quit going to those things. Stay with me, look to me. That's what Jesus was telling Nicodemus and that's what Jesus is saying to us. All of our life should be about turning away from self-reliance to God-reliance, moment by moment looking to Christ, asking the Holy Spirit to empower us, asking Christ to help us worship him above everything else and then experiencing that power that only he can give so that we can be guys who forgive people that most people would say never should be forgiven, who can love with patience and perseverance that is un-explainable, who can sacrifice for the good of others, who can put their ego behind them. How does that happen? The only way that happens is because Christ has given us the power to want him to receive the glory more than we receive it for ourselves.

Let me give you some applications this morning. Number 1, in what parts of your life are you relying on your own abilities or your own goodness to make you good enough? Maybe in your marriage, maybe you are on autopilot. "Hey, you know I've been married almost 30 years, pretty much got it down. I know if you do this, this, this, she reacts this way. Avoid this, don't say that. Make sure you take care of this. Pretty easy." Well of course, everybody knows it's not easy. We can get it there. Maybe it's parenting, being a dad. Maybe it's in your work, you've gotten complacent. It's easy to kind of just do the bare minimum. You're on autopilot. Where do you need to abandon self-reliance and look to Jesus?

Number 2, have you become complacent looking at Jesus as something other than your absolute Lord? Maybe you see him as a teacher. Maybe you're looking for tips on how to have a more successful life, how to have a better marriage, how to be a better dad, how to have a stronger career. Maybe you see him as an example primarily. You've kind of said, "I need to love like Jesus loved", or "wow, look at how patient Jesus was." Maybe you think of him primarily as your friend. "It's nice to have Jesus in my corner. He's always there", but you're not really bowing down to him, you're not really surrendering to him as your absolute Lord saying, "Jesus, whatever you want, let your will be done and not mine." That's what Jesus demands from us.

Number 3, maybe you're worshipping multiple things and you're kind of okay with that. Maybe you're worshipping security, "Having enough in my 401K and having a safe car and good job and insurance and alarm system on my house. Everything seems to be okay. My kids are doing good. Grandkids are fine." You've elevated security to a co-god with Jesus. Maybe you worship your hobbies, could be college football, could be golf, could be hunting. A lot of men worship their hobbies. They elevate it to a level where they invest all kinds of time and energy and effort and it's fun. Has it gotten out of control? Sometimes we need to ask that question.

How about your marriage? A lot of men worship their marriage. Everything is about making my wife happy. If everything is about making your wife happy, this is a message for another day, but if everything is about making your wife happy in 20 years she's not going to be very happy because that's not what you were made for; you were made to be a man. You're not a man when you worship your marriage, you're a man when you worship Jesus.

How about your career? A lot of guys are really investing themselves in their workplace in a way that's out of control. Everything is about how much I can get out of this job or getting that next promotion or getting to a certain level. These things that we worship ... This text shows us that Jesus wants it all. Jesus wants it all. Maybe you're worshipping something other than him.

Number 4, if you know you're bad today, great. Great. Man you have got such an advantage this morning. You don't have the issue that Nicodemus does. Read John 4 and you will be amazed to see how Jesus treats this woman that knew she was bad. If you know you're bad today, come to Jesus. That's perfect. He wants desperate men who desperately need Him. He will transform your life from the inside out. Jesus accepts us, he changes us, but he doesn't allow us to continue to rely on ourselves. He's going to force us to turn our whole hearts towards him.

Let's pray. God we thank you so much for this message today. We thank you for this passage of scripture. Jesus this is a little bit different than we normally think about you, confronting Nicodemus with frankly pretty in your face kind of stuff. Lord I don't often allow you to do that, and yet I think I'm a lot like Nicodemus and I need it. Lord, I want to surrender myself today to say whatever you need to get in my face about, do it.

I would pray the same thing for these men that are here. If there are those who have been relying on themselves in any area of their life that you would root that out of their hearts, that they would not just see adding you on as some kind of convenient or nice addition to their lives; but rather they would radically surrender everything and put their whole hope and trust in you. For those who are here today that are feeling depressed, dejected, failures, Lord that know that they're desperate, I pray that they would turn to you. Lord, what a great place to be in if they were really surrender, if they were really abandon themselves. Would you do that in our hearts, Lord? Would you draw us to that place where we recognize that there is nothing else, nowhere else to turn, nowhere to run, but only you. We pray this in the strong name of Jesus, and for your glory, Amen.