

Known

How Would You Like To Be Known?

I substitute teach part-time and I have gone into hundreds of classrooms, not knowing the kids and them not having met me. Certainly they quickly evaluate me; assessing what sort of substitute teacher I am and the kind of person they have leading the class. I too try to figure out right away what each of the students is like, how I will deal with them and what I can expect from them. I want to know who the leaders are, how much I can trust each of them and the sort of students they are. I want to know the students, and they want to know me. Generally I am spot on with my original assessment of each of them and perhaps they figure out me quickly too. What I have discovered after hundreds of these first time encounters is that each child in the class is a singular person. They are never one of many, but each is one of one. Every student has a name, some I can pronounce just by seeing it on the roll sheet, others have names that I need help saying correctly. This is what each child in the class wants to see. Will I know his or her name? When they find out I do, invariably I see a smile slip across the face and more often than not, a desire to please me. What is the most frequently chosen word used when someone is asked to give a handwriting sample? It is that person's name. Here is our big idea for today. You are one of one and God knows you.

Today we turn to one of the most important chapters in the Bible. It describes a brief but crucial encounter between Jesus and a powerful and most likely influential Jewish leader. Our text begins before John 3 starts. **But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and 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 2: 24-3: 2 NIV) Let us start with Nicodemus's credentials. He was both a Pharisee as well as a member of the Jewish ruling council called the Sanhedrin. The Pharisees were the most religious of the Jews, well known for being sticklers about the law. But not all of them were hypocrites. Some, many perhaps, just wanted to do what was right and follow God perfectly. Nicodemus seems to have been that sort of Pharisee. He was also a member of the Sanhedrin. Only 70 men, of all the Jews in Israel were selected to this elite group. And what is more, very few Pharisees were a part of it as most Jews were not Pharisees. Nicodemus was an influential member of Jewish society, and he most certainly knew it. When he came to see Jesus, he came with prestige, a man who knew where he stood among the masses.

There is something you must notice and because the wording is so precise it is important you see it. At the end of chapter 2 Jesus we are told "knew all men". The Greek word is anthropos. Then in telling us about Nicodemus coming to Jesus, the exact same word is used, and it reports that there was a "man", anthropos, by the name of Nicodemus who came to see Jesus. The implication is that when Nicodemus showed up where Jesus was staying, Jesus knew what was in him, what his needs were and the sort of man he was. You do of course realize that Jesus knows what sort of person you are, that He is not mistaken in His evaluation of you. This was the case with Nicodemus. Jesus knew him fully as Nicodemus came through the door. That explains the fascinating way Jesus responded to Nicodemus which we will examine closely the next time. But for now, we must get this. Jesus was not confused at all about Nicodemus despite his impressive credentials because he knew the sort of man he was

Nicodemus addressed Jesus as Rabbi. This sounds respectful and maybe even generous on Nicodemus's part. Rabbi means teacher and Jesus certainly taught. But keep in mind that Nicodemus most certainly also was a Rabbi. It would be as if a pastor came up to Jesus and called Him pastor. Yes, Jesus did perform many of the duties pastors do but Jesus is far more than a pastor and much more than a Rabbi. What is astounding about the way Nicodemus addressed Jesus is that he put Jesus in the same realm spiritually as himself. They were peers in Nicodemus's mind. On equal standing in the kingdom of God and among God's people as it is nearly certain Nicodemus was a rabbi also, or he most likely would not have been in the Sanhedrin. That explains why Nicodemus was able to unabashedly evaluate Jesus' credentials and give him his seal of approval. Nicodemus told the Lord that he could see that Jesus was a Rabbi sent from God because of the signs He performed. It would be as if one of the foot soldiers in Alexander the Great's army came up to him and started their conversation by giving his approval of Alexander and letting him know that he felt Alexander should be the general of the Greek army. Or like a church goer who sometimes attended worship service walking up to Billy Graham and announcing that he thought Billy Graham had earned the right to preach at his little church. The arrogance found in many is astounding. Can you imagine an older fellow who does paint-by-numbers drawings going up to Rembrandt and critiquing the artist's work and then giving a vote of confidence

in him that he could some day be a good painter if he kept at it? Yes, Nicodemus saw the signs of Jesus and like the rest of the world, did not understand their true meaning. It is an absolutely crazy world where we live. Millions upon millions have and continue to evaluate Jesus and think they have the right to decide if He is God or not, Savior or not, Master or not. So many arrogantly approve or disapprove of Jesus as if they have some sort of official authority granted to them because of their expertise. What right do they think they have to give any kind of evaluation of Jesus, what He does or does not do, the quality His character or the value of His life? And yet it is done everywhere.

The text has a precise way of telling us about Nicodemus's visit to Jesus. Literally it states that he came in a "night kind of visit". What does that mean? He may well have come to see Jesus after dark, the reason being that he did not want anyone else to know he had gone. But grasping the book of John as we do and how he puts things, it seems evident that the Bible is telling us a great deal about Nicodemus. We use the term, "in the dark" to say exactly what is being stated about Nicodemus. Nicodemus was in the dark, but when he entered the house where Jesus was, he came "into the light". We see the opposite said of Judas Iscariot when he left to betray Jesus. There it is noted that he went into the night. To put it another way, Judas left the light and entered into darkness. Nicodemus was fully aware of his credentials and thought he knew what God was doing and how to evaluate what being a follower of His meant. But he was in fact completely in the dark. He did not know God or himself. How many are like Nicodemus? They think they have got everything together, they know what they know and yet they are out in the dark.

Jesus knew Nicodemus. And He knows you. In a sense, you are just one in a crowd of billions. Out of all the thousands in our city, you are merely one. Why should you expect Christ to take notice of you, to give a thought to you and what you face and how you think? It is funny, when someone might say that you are a speck in the universe, not a single soul sees it that way. You don't view yourself as just a speck and neither do I! Why is that? It is because you are made in the image of God and His child. Years ago, our young son slipped away from us in a large store, and I went searching for him. There were hundreds of people in that store but only one there had my absolute attention. The only one in the entire building that I cared about seeing was that little boy of mine. Jesus told some stories that show how He sees you. A woman lost a coin and although she had ninety-nine others, all she thought about was that one. A man had one hundred sheep but all he cared about was finding the one sheep who had wandered away. You are not a part of the crowd. You are the one and God knows you perfectly and loves you completely. Each person in this room is the one God wants as His beloved. Each one who watches is the one God chooses to love with all His heart. Oh, you may say that it seems like you are trivial, a speck if every person Christ has made is the one He loves. That is because you have not acquired God's ability to love you as if you are the only one in the universe. He can do that. We marvel at many of God's spectacular abilities and this may be the one I treasure most. God loves me with the force of one who has no one else to love but me. And you too must see that also about you. God loves you with the force of one who has no one else to love but you. Christ knows what is in a man, not men. The text is not plural men, but instead man. That is how the text reads precisely. It does not say men but rather a single, solitary soul because that is how God is with you. He knows you and He loves you. The mass of humanity does not distract the Lord from you. He is laser focused on you and He loves you. Once more here is our big idea. You are one of one and God knows you. Pray this week with the fervor of one with One.