



## Theme: Jesus Loves People THIS Much

### *"Is This All There Is?"*

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, June 20-21, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

#### Weekly Memory Verse:

*<sup>5</sup> Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit." – John 3:5*

#### SLIDE Jesus Loves People THIS Much:

##### *Is This All There Is?*

Today we conclude this series of sermons looking at how Jesus loved people and **the kind of people that he loved**. By looking at some of these beautiful stories we find in the gospels **we can find ourselves** and see how it is God meets us during times and spaces in our lives where there is brokenness and hurt. Jesus began his public ministry by proclaiming that he had come to **release the captive and to heal the broken** and reached **the lost**. He wanted to let people know that they were made by God to be loved by God which is why we talk about that almost every week. Yes, Jesus came to give his life and **during his life he showed us** what it looked like to **sacrificially love** people.

So far in this series we have learned about Mary Magdala who was possessed by his seven demons and who Jesus heals. Those demons may

have been an addiction, and she may have been a prostitute, but what we know is that Jesus met her right where she was and offered her a new life, inviting her to follow him as one of his disciples. Next, we met a leper that was an outcast and had to walk around shouting that he was unclean. Jesus doesn't run away but walks right into his illness to heal and restore and allow this person back into the community so they no longer are alone.

We then learned about the woman at the well who was seen as less than because she had been married and divorced five times and was living with someone and yet Jesus offered her living water, and she became the first preacher of the gospel. Jesus connected with people who were seen as notorious sinners and we're called "scum" by the religious leaders. He was willing to eat with those tax collectors and meet them at the table where everyone is invited, giving us a foretaste of his sacrifice on the cross that would embarrass all of us to the table with the bread and the cup which offered salvation and forgiveness. Last week Wade did a great job talking about how Jesus loves us enough to gather us together which is why he called a group of disciples and he said, "where two or three are gathered, I am there."

Each of these powerful stories are meant to remind us of how Jesus loves us and that he loves us more than we can imagine or even receive at times in our lives because of other messages we have been given. One might think that with all these stories that Jesus was mad at the religious leaders that made every one of these persons feel excluded and outcast. That would be a mistake because the last person we're going to look at today is where Jesus has his second longest conversation in the gospels. The longest conversation we learned happened in John four with the Samaritan woman at the well, but in John three he has a lengthy conversation at night with a religious leader, a pharisee, known as Nicodemus.

During this series we have been using clips of the first season of the chosen, a theatrical and dramatic presentation of the life of Jesus which

adds depth and richness and is not exactly what you will read in the scriptures but captures I think the heart of Jesus and the people that he loves. In the story we're looking at today it's clear that Jesus loves religious people and that many times our religion can keep us from experiencing a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Let's meet Nicodemus as he meets Jesus after watching him perform some miracles and preaching to the crowds.

**VIDEO      Nicodemus Chosen 1** (You may need to lighten up the video.)

I love this interaction and how they portray it in the film because it captures the struggle that is going on within Nicodemus. In just a few more verses we'll hear the words that are some that are war at football games and placed on posters so you can see them from John 3:16. This interaction is meant to set up that passage in many ways because it takes some faith and rethinking to understand what it means to be born of water and the spirit. Nicodemus is like many of us and that he has grown up seeking that religion is about rules and getting things just right so that we are presentable and acceptable to God. But there comes a time in our lives where we realize that those pat answers don't work anymore and we need something deeper.

Jesus came to show our relationship to those of us who think we have religion all figured out. I met recently with someone who had grown up in the church and had been a leader in the church and then left for 40 years. They have returned to church because they came to a funeral here and they asked me a question that I think is at the heart of what Nicodemus is asking when he meets with Jesus. I think it's a question that many of us ask if we're honest and it's the title of the message today.

**SLIDE      Is This All There Is?**

Is what we see and can measure all there is to life? Is it just things or words on a page or is there more than just following the rules and getting our religious practice perfect? Most of us learn at some point in our lives that religion doesn't fit into a box and faith goes deeper which

is why Jesus came and he met with people like Nicodemus. Jesus loved him enough to meet him where he was, and he loved him enough not to leave him there in that spot with a faith that was becoming empty.

Nicodemus is wrestling with something that each one of us must wrestle with which is about ultimate meaning and the big questions of life. Unfortunately, in today's world, the research is clear that many of us are uncomfortable with these open-ended questions like Jesus was asking Nicodemus late at night.

**GRAPHIC            The Meaning of Your Life: Finding Purpose in an Age of Anxiety.**

I referred to this book about a month ago, but I just finished reading the entire thing and was fascinated by several things that I think connect to each one of us in today's world. I would like to do an entire series of sermons on this book by Arthur brooks who is a social scientist and one of the world's leading authorities on human happiness. He is a professor at the Harvard Kennedy School and at Harvard Business School and an internationally acclaimed public speaker. His previous books have been translated into dozens of languages and include three bestsellers. This most recent book he wrote after coming back to academia as a professor at Harvard after having been gone for 20 years from the college world. He returned to find 70% of students on depression or anxiety medication and notes this in the opening pages of his book.

*I saw the crisis on campus, but that was just where it was most obvious and visible to me. Depression, anxiety, loneliness, fear, and anger were cropping up everywhere, especially among young adults. Pretty soon, everyone was talking about a mental health crisis. According to the American Psychological Association, the percentage of American adolescents with symptoms of major depression nearly tripled from 2005 to 2019, while anxiety almost doubled. The percentage of American adults of all ages who are not too happy about their lives had more than doubled from 2000 to*

*2023. Women were hit especially hard: 45% of female Americans between ages 12 and 26 had received a formal diagnosis of anxiety or depression the 2024 from 2004 until 2024, the percentage of women 30 and under who said their mental health was “excellent” plummeted, from 48% to 15%.*

*What the data shows--and what everyone has seen with our own eyes--is what we social scientists call a psychogenic epidemic, a phenomenon that causes tremendous suffering but has no organic cause, meaning the onset is social or psychological, not biological.*

What's clear from all the data is that many people are asking the same kinds of questions that Nicodemus asked in wondering what the purpose of life is all about and how we might find meaning. Jesus is going to point Nicodemus in a direction that Brooks points out in his book. I mentioned this a few weeks ago after I had begun reading this book and he talks about the most recent research that looks at the activity on the left and the right side of our brains and how each side does something different for us. It used to be that science stipulated that the right side was the creative side and the left side was the more practical or mechanical side, but recent research has found it's more complicated than this. Doctor Brooks refer to this book that I read about a decade ago by Ian McGilchrist called ***The Master and His Emissary - The divided brain and the making of the western world.***

### **GRAPHIC            The Master and His Emissary**

Doctor McGilchrist found in his research that it's not just that the right and the left side do different things and that we are dominated by one side or the other based on our personality, but that we need both sides to be functioning in order for us to not only do logical thinking but to direct how we want to live in the world.

### **GRAPHIC            Left Brain Right Brain**

Yes, the left side is the more logical, sequential, rational, analytical, objective, that looks at parts and deals with complicated problems. And

the right side is more random, intuitive, holistic, synthesizing, suggestive, and looks at the whole. That word “whole” is an important one because it is the same idea as the Hebrew word Shalom or peace, which means wholeness. It is about bringing together and making sense of the world when things are complex.

What they have found in the research is that it's not about us being a left-brained person or a right-brained person. The reality is that we need both sides to not only function but to be able to deal with both complicated and complex issues in our lives. We are supposed to engage the right side of our brain to consider big questions of meaning but then task the left side of our brain to solve the little problems that can help us understand that meaning more clearly. The right side of our brain controls the organs on the left side of our body: the heart, spleen, stomach and pancreas – all which make up the gut, which is where ancient civilization believed the soul lived. The left side of our brain controls the right side of our body which has the liver and gall bladder which clean out toxins.

Another way to think about this is that the right side of our brain helps us sit with ambiguity and mysterious questions like the meaning of life, as well as deal with the complex realities of relationships. It is also the right side of our brain which we use to make meaning of suffering and to figure out those big questions in life.

Here's why this is important and how it connects with the high levels of anxiety and depression in today's world. The constant use of technology and digital decision making is pushing people to use the left side of their brain and to ignore the right side of the brain. We think we can solve every complicated problem with artificial intelligence or technology and it means that we no longer wrestle with the big questions which are more complex and so we see not only underutilized but underdeveloped right side of the brain. This is affecting both young people and older people as they've done research around dementia and found that when we stopped using the right side of our brain to think

about big issues, we end up lopsided.

Here's what this means for us as people of faith, and humans in general. AI answers every question instantly, but sometimes it doesn't feel like God answers at all! That gap becomes a huge Challenge for us as we seek instant gratification, and we depend on AI to give us all the answers. Yes, technology can help us solve complicated problems, but they don't have the answer to the complex problems like if there is a God and how we navigate difficult relationships and what it means when we suffer, which we inevitably do as humans.

AI is quietly training us to expect immediate, confident answers. But that's not how the Christian life or following Jesus works. When we place that expectation next to the actual Christian life, we are going to struggle. We pray, and sometimes nothing comes back for years. We wrestle with a Bible passage, and it stays unclear or doesn't give us the instant answer we want. We ask God a real question in a real season of suffering, and the silence is so loud it hurts. I did an experiment this week just for fun and asked several AI applications what the meaning of suffering was. This was the answer I got from most of them.

**SLIDE**      **“Suffering is the conscious endurance of physical, mental, or emotional pain, distress, or hardship. Unlike simple physical pain, it encompasses the overall negative psychological, existential, or affective state caused by those experiences.”**

Duh! Tell me something I don't know? What no piece of technology can tell us is what to do with our suffering and how it is that we might find meaning from it. Suffering is complex and we need to engage the right side of our brain if we're going to make meaning answer the big questions of life about God and the kind of questions that Nicodemus was asking and the questions that were given to him by Jesus.

One of the reasons I say often to you that I can't give you faith and you can't have my faith is because those deeper questions of life are ones that we need to wrestle with and we can only do that when we allow the

right side of our brain to pause and to reflect on what those things mean. Unfortunately, what often happens is we want answers quickly, but the truth is that complex problems are very rarely solved quickly. The powerful part about Nicodemus and his story is that he meets Jesus at night, and Jesus just asks him questions.

Let me remind you of the powerful words that were part of the scene that you just saw that we found in John 3. This first verse is our memory verse for the week so let's say it together out loud.

### **BIBLE**

**<sup>5</sup> Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.**

### **BIBLE**

**<sup>6</sup> Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. <sup>7</sup> So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."**

**<sup>9</sup> "How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.**

I love his very practical question. How are these things possible? I love this image of the wind and the reminder that while we can explain it a little bit in today's world, you and I both know that the weather forecast is not the most dependable thing in the world that shows up on your phone! Sometimes it's right and sometimes it's wrong. The right side of our brain helps us live with that ambiguity and that mystery as we realize we don't have the answer to every single problem. The beautiful thing about this story of Jesus and Nicodemus is that it shows us that God meets us in the midst of the questions and we don't have to have it all figured out.

The problem for many of us and the reason we often get stuck and find ourselves dealing with anxiety or depression is that we are

uncomfortable with the uncertainty. We know there must be more to life than what we can see or understand but we are not sure where to find it. Dr. Brooks, in his research, found 7 tasks that people use to find meaning. While we don't have time to investigate each of them, which is why I think we might do a sermon series on this later in the year, I do want us to look at the 1st few of them together because they tie directly into our story of Nicodemus. Here's the entire list

**SLIDE** (Have these fly in one at a time.)

- 1. Interrupt the Doom Loop**
- 2. Ask Three Big Questions**
- 3. Give Your Heart Away**
- 4. Transcend Yourself**
- 5. Look for Your Calling**
- 6. Surround Yourself with Beauty**
- 7. Don't Waste Your Suffering**

As you can tell from this list, we could easily do an entire sermon on each one of these because they all are found in the scriptures, but let's start with the first few today as I believe they can help us begin to find meaning and purpose as they tie into our story.

**SLIDE** **Interrupt the Doom Loop**

**GRAPHIC** **Doom Loop**

Arthur Brooks describes the doom loop with this diagram where we want to avoid technical work and not be bored and in doing so, we turn to technology and our left brain goes on, and our right brain turns off. We have a crisis of meaning which develops as we don't use the right side of our brain enough and that leads to depression and anxiety and the inability to focus. Eventually we become numb with addictive technology. Pornography, gambling, and social media have all become addictions in today's world for many people.

The doom loop is often today what we call doom scrolling, where

we stay up all night scrolling through our phone because we don't like the idea of not having answers or being bored. Have you ever experienced that inability to get off your phone or off the screen or stop watching your favorite show? What we know from all kinds of research today is that our technology has developed an addictive component to it where we get a hit of dopamine to our brain when we read about something that excites us or agitates us. We revel in other people's embarrassment or pain, and we are just glad it's not our own.

**SLIDE                    Adopt the Spirit of Rebellion**

The first step in breaking the doom loop is to adopt the spirit of rebellion against culture that is harming you. This is exactly what Nicodemus does by coming to Jesus at night because all the things he has been taught and all the ways he thought he was pleasing God he now sees as empty. He rebels by going to see the very person that the religious institution of his day didn't like. We need that same spirit of rebellion, recognizing that the first step of raking any addiction is to acknowledge it and in religious language repent, which means to turn around and go in a new direction. Brooks gives several specific examples of things they found in their research That can help us interrupt the doom loop.

**SLIDE                    Respect Your Privacy**

Guard your privacy and begin to think for yourself, not always looking to social media or some other place for acceptance or for confirmation of your ideas. The world does not need to know what you had for dinner or what you did on your vacation. As a matter of fact, research continually shows that people who are constantly posting things on social media or checking what others have posted develop a much higher sense of anxiety and depression because they are constantly worried about what everybody else is doing and what everybody else thinks about what they are doing. I love that in the story of Jesus and Nicodemus that he comes to Jesus at night and it's not a

public spectacle or anyone else's business. I'm grateful that somebody recorded this story, but it didn't happen in a crowd where everyone could witness. It was an intimate conversation.

**SLIDE                    Digital Detox**

One way to do this is a digital detox where you make decisions not to take your phone to your bed with you or to leave it at the front door when you walk in, so it doesn't disturb conversations with family or others living in your home. You can create a phone hotel where digital devices are kept during meals. You might even try turning off your phone for an hour at a time or longer. I had one family share with me recently that they went on their first family trip and they collected all the phones and tablets as they drove in their car to Denver. It was excruciating at first because of all the complaining, but eventually they played some games as they traveled, and they noticed things out the window they would never have seen if they had had their faces buried in a screen. I know it's hard to believe, but families used to travel across the country for days at a time without a phone or a screen and we did want to kill each other by the end, but I remember those trips fondly, especially the time when we left my sister at the gas station on accident!

**SLIDE                    Get Bored the Right Way**

The reason for allowing boredom into your life is the effect it has on our brain, even if we don't like it in the moment. We will find that a funny thing happens when we start to take moments to be quiet and that is we can enjoy it. In the moments without a device our senses become attuned to the details around us and the tiny miracles we can see like spiders walking across the floor. Most of us can benefit from more empty time and blank space in our life which allow us to ponder questions of meaning. We can take a walk without headphones or workout without a podcast. We could do nothing while waiting in line. If that's too much of a boredom challenge then we could start by simply going to bed, turning off the lights, and lying there. We might like what happens because it's

in those moments, we can experience God and the right side of our brain begins to flourish.

## **SLIDE                      Ask Big Questions**

One of the other tasks that Arthur Brooks found in his research we can do to find meaning is to use that boredom to ask questions that are deep and meaningful. We see Nicodemus doing that with Jesus and it's one of those things that leads him to transformation and to a new kind of life. He discovers there is more to life than just the religious rules he has learned and that there is meant to be a relationship with the God who made him to love him. We are wired and designed to ask these big questions and to be in relationships where there is love because that is what can bring meaning to us. I remind you every week that your purpose is that you were made by God to be loved by God and that is easy to forget unless we are willing to ask questions and engage the right side of our brain and deal with complex realities of things like relationships.

In this story of Nicodemus, we find again Jesus asking him the same thing he asks of all who want to follow him and it often involves a question and a paradox that is mysterious. In Matthew 16 we find Jesus talking to his disciples about something profound when it comes to following him and what that means.

## **BIBLE**

**<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup> If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. <sup>26</sup> And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?**

These questions are only ones we can grapple with on the right side of our brain because they have to do with wholeness and complexity and mystery. These words of Jesus are meant to remind us that there is more

to life than just this reality that we experience but that instead we must let go of it so we can discover deep meaning and purpose beyond ourselves. That's why Jesus says it is better to give than to receive because that when we do that, we are changed and transformed. This idea leads into the final thing I want to talk about from Arthur Brooks' book because it again ties directly into the story of Nicodemus.

**SLIDE                    Give Your Heart Away**

**GRAPHIC                Love and Meaning Loop**

Dr. Brooks Has a great way of drawing this out with the meaning discovery loop of love. Notice that it takes risk and we sometimes fail and as a result we suffer. But then we learn and eventually we find success in love and meaning in life but only if we are willing to at first give our heart away. We live in a world that tells us the opposite of this and that if we do an online search, we can find love either in an AI relationship bot or in pornography or by swiping left or right. The only way to experience the love of another person or the love of God is to take a risk and be vulnerable. If we choose to believe in a loving God, then we must wrestle with the questions when that relationship seems to fail us and we must make meaning of suffering. But the story of Nicodemus reminds us that the risk is worth the reward.

As we wrap up this series of sermons I want to go back to where we began with the story of Mary Magdala who had seven demons Jesus healed her from. In *The Chosen*, they imagined that she was called Lilith which means female demon, and that Nicodemus was the first person called to try to exercise that demon, but he failed. We find him remembering that failure and the healing of Mary as he continues his conversation with Jesus on a rooftop at night.

**VIDEO                Nicodemus Chosen 2 (Will need to be brightened up.)**

I love how they imagined this conversation going because it points to the need for Nicodemus to break the doom loop that was created by the religious rules he believed were so important. Jesus asks him to

follow and tells him to take his time, to be bored with the questions and to sit with them in the mystery. I especially appreciate those closing words where Nicodemus kisses the hand of Jesus and quotes a scripture because he is afraid that if he doesn't kiss the hand that he will be destroyed. That is a left-brain function where he is looking for an easy answer to conclude this interaction.

But Jesus invites him back to the right-brain as he invites him to be embraced and to experience the mystery of being loved. It's a beautiful moment as they embrace and my hope is that as we hear the story of Nicodemus and we wonder if this is all there is, what we can see and measure and know in the world, that we will remember to be countercultural and to push back against how the world says we find meaning with the quick fix or a digital solution. Maybe our first step is doing some sort of digital detox where we don't share everything online and we don't look at everyone else online but instead we look inside.

Maybe our first step is asking deeper questions and being OK with not having all the answers but instead living with a mystery of the creation and the creator. Maybe our first step is being OK with being bored and not turning to technology or some other thing to occupy our time or give us that hit of dopamine. Maybe we start using the meditation moments to have quiet time each day and we accept the invitation to give our heart away to a God who made us to love us, even when we experience hardship and suffering.

My prayer for each of us is that we would learn and grow as we take risks, as we fail, even as we suffer, knowing that we might learn and then find success and meaning in life in the arms of a savior who reaches out to us to embrace us, just as he did Nicodemus.

As we close in prayer we're going to do a Father's Day prayer that I have found meaningful in my life. We don't typically do sermons on fathers or mothers on those days, not because they're not important and we don't value those who step up to be parents, but because having

children is complex and being a parent is not only challenging but sometimes painful and sometimes there is suffering. Being a parent is in many ways the ultimate risk which leads to failure and suffering and learning, but also to meaning. Every one of us has either been apparent or we have parents and I invite you to find yourself in the words of this prayer and invite God in the mystery of what that means for you this day. Let's pray.

**SLIDE                      Prayer**

***God, we pray for fathers –  
fathers, up at night with newborns,  
fathers, bent under college debt,  
fathers who are good with one age in childhood  
but haven't a clue with the others.***

***We pray for those who want to be fathers,  
and those who wanted desperately, but it never happened.***

***We pray for godfathers and grieving fathers,  
foster fathers and adopting fathers, solo fathers, stepfathers, and  
fathers-in-law***

***We pray for teachers, pastors, coaches, and counselors, who act  
as father figures, and who mix a bit of what they know from  
fathering into care for all children in their care.***

***We pray for those living with their mistakes as fathers—  
one thoughtless remark that calls for self-forgiveness,  
or deep damage that needs repentant transforming.***

***We pray for those who miss their fathers because of death or  
distance, deep difference or disappearance.***

***And we pray for those who miss their children because of death  
or distance, deep difference or disappearance.***

***Be a parent to them, O God, on this day and all the days of the  
year.***

*We also pray for those who have been so hurt by men in relationship to them, that the noun "Father" wounds.*

*Heal them with time, cleansing anger, love, support, and people willing to alter words for the sake of kindness.*

*As we approach this day with so many knotted emotions, untangle them with fingers of tenderness, kind greetings, honest appreciation, understanding silence, and even silly greeting cards.  
Amen*

## **June 20-21 Order**

1. Countdown
2. Ryan welcomes people and invites them to stand in body or spirit.
3. Song – “This Is Amazing Grace”
4. Song – “It is Well”
5. Jeff welcomes and shares:
  - A. QR Code
  - B. Invites people to greet each other
6. Announcement Video (Woods and Worship Weekend)
7. Sermon Video Intro
8. Sermon
9. Med Moments
10. Offering (Kenya Trip – Put Slide in here on Sunday)
11. Song – “In Christ Alone”
12. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
13. Care Ministers
14. The Bridge
15. Prayer Quilt – 19-year-old Alex passed away last week. The quilt would be for Alex’s parents, Hope and Luke. Alex has a twin sibling, Avery, and a half sibling, Corbin. Alex was born with a rare genetic condition called Pitt Hopkins which impacted many areas of her life.
16. Kenya Commissioning (Saturday only)
17. Closing Prayer