

(Do not show a title slide until later in the lesson.)

Nicodemus

Main Point: We must each be born again.

Key Verse: *You should not be surprised when I say, "You must all be born again."* - John 2:11

Props: A captain's hat, or life jacket

BACKGROUND/REVIEW



Ask: Who can tell me what the word Emmanuel means? **Say:** Emmanuel means "God with us." (Matthew 1:23) This was the perfect name for Jesus, because He always was and always will be God, yet He put on a human body so He could come to be with us. People could see Him, touch Him, talk to Him, and listen to Him. We looked at Jesus as a child, and last week we saw Him when He was grown up. He performed His first miracle when he turned six huge jars of water into wine. Jesus did this miracle *quietly* because it was not yet God's perfect time for everyone to find out who Jesus was. But soon after this quiet miracle, Jesus started to do miracles where everyone could see them. Jesus taught in the synagogues, and news about Him traveled throughout the entire area (Luke 4:14-15). The Bible says, "Many people saw the miraculous signs He was doing. And they believed in His name." (John 2:23b) Some people believed in Him and some did not, but one thing is for sure - people were definitely taking notice of Him.



A VISITOR IN THE NIGHT (John 3:1-20)

Ask: Who brought their Bible with them today? **Say:** I LOVE seeing you with your Bibles. Now, I am about to say something I hardly ever say. For the next few minutes, do not open your Bibles! Okay, all Bibles closed. **Ask:** Who can recite John 3:16, without looking it up? **Teacher:** Call on a student to stand and say the verse. Thank your volunteer. **Say:** John 3:16 is probably the most famous verse in the Bible. People put it on billboards, and they hold it up at ball games. It is a great verse about God's love for us and how we can be made right with Him if we put our trust in Jesus. Now I have another question. **Ask:** Again, without looking, who can tell me what Bible story John 3:16 is from? **Say:** It is from the story of Nicodemus.



PPT Title

Nicodemus

Nicodemus was a Jewish religious leader. He belonged to a group called the Pharisees. These men were experts in God's law. They felt very strongly that the Jewish people should follow the law, and not become like the non-Jewish people around them. This would seem to be good, but they had become proud in their hearts. They were proud that they were God's chosen people, they were proud that they knew so much about God's law. They became so proud of their rule-following that they added lots of rules to God's word. The Pharisees mistakenly believed that God was pleased with them because of all their rules (Matthew 5:20). They judged people by how well they followed all the rules, and they did not have love or mercy in their hearts (Matthew 23:4, 23).



Because the Pharisees were experts in God's word, they knew that God had promised to send the Messiah. But sadly, they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They expected the Messiah to come in a royal robe, not in swaddling clothes. They thought the Messiah would come and tell them that God already accepted them. And, they enjoyed the power they had as leaders. They did not want to bow down to a carpenter's son. Let's see what the Bible says about the Pharisee named Nicodemus. Open your Bibles to John 3:1, and read along. If you have a "red letter edition," then the words that Jesus spoke will be in red ink.

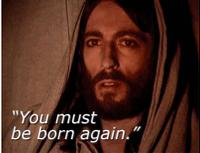


There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus. He was one of the Jewish rulers. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. We know that God is with You. If He weren't, You couldn't do the miraculous signs You are doing." - John 3:1-2

Ask: When did Nicodemus come to see Jesus? *At night.* Who can guess why he came at night? *Perhaps so that no one would see him.* **Say:** Nicodemus was well-known, and he belonged to the group of men who spoke out against Jesus. Nicodemus did not want the other Pharisees to find out that he went to see Jesus. This may seem cowardly, but Nicodemus was risking his reputation by going to see Jesus, an untrained teacher from Galilee. It took a great deal of courage for Nicodemus to go at all!

Nicodemus knew there was something special about Jesus, and he wanted to find out more. Nicodemus probably thought a long time about what to say to Jesus. He started by calling Jesus "Rabbi," which is the Jewish word for Teacher. Then he admitted that Jesus must have come from God.

The Bible tells us that Jesus can read the hearts of men (Matthew 9:4, 12:25). Jesus knew why Nicodemus had come, and He spoke to his deepest need.



Jesus replied, "What I'm about to tell you is true. No one can see God's kingdom without being born again." - John 3:3

Nicodemus' deepest need was to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus told him he must be "born again." The original words used for "born again" can be stated "born from above" (Strong's concordance). Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus meant by this.

"How can I be born when I am old?" Nicodemus asked. "I can't go back inside my mother! I can't be born a second time!"

Jesus answered, "What I'm about to tell you is true. No one can enter God's kingdom without being born through water and the Holy Spirit. People give birth to people. But the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised when I say, 'You must all be born again.' - John 3:3-7

Jesus made it clear that He was talking not about a physical birth, like a baby being born. He was talking about a spiritual rebirth. This is **getting a new life from God.**

One of God's prophets, Ezekiel, had once talked about water and spirit. Nicodemus would have known this. Through Ezekiel, God spoke to His people when they had sinned against Him. God said that one day He would wash away the filth of their sin with water. Then God said He would put His Spirit inside of them to guide their hearts to do what is right. Water was a **symbol** for the forgiveness of sin (John 13:8-11), and the Spirit would give them a new abundant life (John 6:63, Romans 8:11). Jesus also made it clear that this new birth could not come from Nicodemus' efforts, but **it could only come from God** (John 3:6).

Note to Teacher: "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. - Ezekiel 36:25-27 NLT



Say: His entire life, Nicodemus had been trained to believe that he could **earn** God's approval by following a list of rules. It was very difficult for him to understand that this new life was **given** by God. Again he asked Jesus, "How can this be?" (John 3:9)

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus. "Don't you understand these things?" - John 3:10

Additional teaching for older students: Jesus assured Nicodemus that He had full authority to speak about the kingdom of God, because He had come from heaven (John 3:11-13). He called Himself the "Son of Man," which was a name for the Messiah that the Jews had been waiting for (John 3:13, Daniel 7:13).

In John 3:14, Jesus reminded Nicodemus of the time when the Jewish people were attacked by poisonous snakes in the desert as a punishment for their complaining against God (Numbers 21:4-9). In His mercy, God provided a way for His people to be saved from the deadly snake bites. God told Moses to make a bronze statue of a snake and hold it up high. Everyone who looked at the snake would NOT die. All they had to do was trust God enough to look, and they would be saved. There was no other way to be saved. Jesus told Nicodemus that in the same way, He would soon be lifted up. Believing in Him would be the only way for people to be saved from the punishment of their sin.



Then Jesus explained it in the most crystal clear way:

PPT Verse

God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son. Anyone who believes in Him will not die but will have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world. He sent his Son to save the world through Him. Anyone who believes in Him is not judged. But anyone who does not believe is judged already. He has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. - John 3:16-18

Everyone is guilty of sinning against God. The Bible says that the punishment for our sin is to be separated from God and punished forever. This applies to EVERYONE (Romans 5:12). But Jesus had great news for Nicodemus, and for all people. Jesus told Nicodemus that EVERYONE who believes in Him will be SAVED from the punishment they deserve, and they will no longer be separated from God.

Here is another way to look at it. **Teacher:** Call on about 8 volunteers. Have them come to the front and stand as a group. **Say:** Let's say this group of people is shipwrecked on a desert island. There is no water to drink and no food to eat. **Ask:** What would happen to these people with no food and no water? *They would die.* Don't miss this point: They are all going to die unless they are rescued. But, there is great news! One day a rescue boat comes to the island. Call on another volunteer to "drive" a rescue boat to the group, wearing the captain's hat or life jacket. The boat is big enough for all the people on the island. **Ask:** Now, in order to be saved by the boat, what does each person need to do? *They need to believe the boat will take them to safety, and they MUST get on the boat.* There is only ONE way to be rescued. Each person is free to choose whether or not to get on the rescue boat. Instruct all but two volunteers to "get on the boat," and have them take a few steps away from the "island." Point to the remaining students on the island, and **Say:** These people decided not to get on the boat. Everyone (point to all the students who started out on the island) who was stranded on the island was destined to die. Then a rescue boat came. Those who chose to get on the boat were saved. And those who did not get on the boat will die. Thank your volunteers.



Optional presentation, without volunteers: Picture a group of people who are shipwrecked, and stranded on a desert island. There is no water to drink and no food to eat. **Ask:** What would happen to the people with no food and no water? *They would die.* Don't miss this point: They are all going to die unless they are rescued. But, there is great news! One day a rescue boat comes to the island. The boat is big enough for all the stranded people. **Ask:** In order to be saved by the boat, what does each person need to do? *They need to believe the boat will take them to safety, and they MUST get on the boat.* **Say:** There is only ONE way to be rescued. Each person is free to choose whether or not to get on the rescue boat. Some people may decide not to get on the boat. Everyone on the island was destined to die. But a rescue boat came. Those who chose to get on the boat will be saved. And those who did not get on the boat will die.

Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus the best news ever told. Nicodemus could be free from all of the rules that he followed. He could be given new life by the Creator of the universe, if only he would place his trust in God's Son who was standing right in front of him.

Jesus ended His conversation with Nicodemus with one more illustration. He said:



Here is the judgment. Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light. They loved darkness because what they did was evil. Everyone who does evil things hates the light. They will not come into the light. They are afraid that what they do will be seen. But anyone who lives by the truth comes into the light. He does this so that it will be easy to see that what he has done is with God's help. - John 3:19-21



Did you ever get a scab on your knee, and your mom told you not to touch it, or it would get infected? What if I had a scab on my leg, and even though I knew better, I picked at it and it became infected? Once I know that the infection is there, I have two choices. I can either go to the doctor to have it cleaned out, or I can wear long pants to cover it up and pretend it isn't there. After all, it is really gross to look at, and I don't want to admit what I did. **Ask:** What's the problem with covering it up? *The infection would spread and would make you really, really sick.* **Say:** If I cover up my problem, I still have the problem and it will get much worse.

Our sin is very much like that infection. Jesus said He is the Light of the world (John 8:12). When He enters our lives, He shines light on our sin. When we see our sin problem, we either choose to go to Jesus to take our sin away, or we cover it up by turning away from Jesus.

Application: Like Nicodemus, many people believe that Jesus was a great teacher, and a good man. But we must believe more than that. We must first believe that Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us. Jesus fulfills every promise God ever made in His word about the Messiah that He would send.

Then, just like each person on the island had to choose whether or not to get on the rescue boat, **each person MUST decide whether or not to believe in Jesus.** Our natural state is that we are guilty of sin and will receive punishment. God sent Jesus as our rescue plan. If you put your trust in Him, you will be saved! Your sin will be forgiven and you will receive His Spirit inside of you. When you receive this new life, you are born again.

PPT Key Verse

Key Verse: *You should not be surprised when I say, "You must all be born again." - John 2:11*

PPT Main Point

Main Point: We must each be born again.

Note to Teacher: (On criticizing Nicodemus for coming to Jesus under cover of night) It is, at any rate, altogether rash to speak of the manner of his first approach to Christ as most commentators have done. We can scarcely realize the difficulties which he had to overcome. It must have been a mighty power of conviction, to break down prejudice so far as to lead this old Sanhedrist to acknowledge a Galilean, untrained in the Schools, as a Teacher come from God, and to repair to Him for direction on, perhaps, the most delicate and important point in Jewish theology. But, even so, we cannot wonder that he should have wished to shroud his first visit in the utmost possible secrecy. It was a most compromising step for a Sanhedrist to take. With that first bold purgation of the Temple a deadly feud between Jesus and the Jewish authorities had begun, of which the sequel could not be doubtful. It was involved in that first encounter in the Temple, and it needed not the experience and wisdom of an aged Sanhedrist to forecast the end. Nevertheless, Nicodemus came.

Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Chapter 6, 1883

Additional Note to Teacher: We are not told of Nicodemus' reaction to his interview with Christ. Did he believe? Did he receive new life? If he did believe, he did it secretly. In John 7:48-49b, the Pharisees (in the presence of Nicodemus) said, "*Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No!*" Evidence that he may have believed secretly comes in the following verses: *Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?"* (John 7:50-51) Nicodemus did not defend Jesus, but suggested that Jesus should at least have the opportunity to defend himself.

Further proof that Nicodemus probably came to place his trust in Jesus comes after our Lord's death on the cross.

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. - John 19:38-40 NIV

Nicodemus was in the company of Joseph, a secret disciple of Christ. Logically, we can infer that these men would have talked about Jesus and probably held the same view of Him. They may have even met secretly before Jesus' death to discuss His teachings, or perhaps it was only after Jesus' death on the cross that Nicodemus fully believed. Nicodemus would have been privy to the mock trial, knowing Jesus was completely innocent. Maybe then Nicodemus saw that Jesus did not come for personal gain, but to give His life as a ransom for many. Jesus had fulfilled Scripture by becoming the sacrifice for mankind. Either way, it would seem that by this time, Nicodemus was willing to forsake his reputation, and even his position as a Pharisee by caring for Jesus' body. After all, the Pharisees had demanded the death of Jesus on the grounds of blasphemy. In their eyes, a blasphemer would not deserve a proper Jewish burial.