



Nicodemus Meets Jesus

FAMILIES IN TRUTH

John 3:1-20



Nicodemus was perhaps the most respected leader in all of Israel. What was he doing sneaking around in darkness? He was being drawn to a young teacher who was unlike anyone he had ever heard. Nicodemus had to see Jesus face to face. He needed answers. Who was this Jesus, really? A teacher, a prophet, or could He be the Messiah?

Day #1: Pharisees

There was a group of Jewish religious leaders called the Pharisees. These men were experts in God's law. This would seem to be good, but they had become proud in their hearts. They were proud that they were part of God's chosen people, and they were proud that they knew more about God's law. They became so proud of their rule following that they added many of their own rules to God's word.

Jesus had this to say about these men:

+ *You ignore God's commands in order to follow your own teaching. And you are nothing but show-offs! Isaiah the prophet was right when he wrote that God had said, "All of you praise Me with your words, but you never really think about Me. It is useless for you to worship Me, when you teach rules made up by humans." - Matthew 15:6b-9 CEV*

Jesus said they had forgotten God's commands, and only held on to their own rules (Mark 7:8). These men did not have love or mercy toward their fellow man. In fact, they looked down on other people.

As a group, these men did not believe in Jesus. They did not want to listen to what He had to say about the truth of God's word. But there was one Pharisee who was a little different. We will look at him tomorrow.

***** We must be sure not to add any of our own rules to God's word. We cannot tell others to dress a certain way or do certain things to be accepted by God. Jesus said all of God's law could be summed up this way:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36-40).

Our heart-attitude is what is most important to God (Matthew 15:17-20).

Day #2: Nic at Night

Have you ever been in a crowd that had a different opinion than you? Was it hard to stand up and tell your true feelings? This was just how Nicodemus felt. He knew there was something special about Jesus, but his "crowd", the Pharisees, were very outspoken against Jesus.

Nicodemus wanted to know more about Jesus. He wanted to speak to Him face to face. Afraid of what others might think if he was seen with Jesus, Nicodemus went to visit Jesus under the cover of darkness.

+ *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*

It may seem cowardly for Nicodemus to have come in secret. 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 called Jesus, "Rabbi," which is the Jewish word for teacher. Jesus had not been trained by famous teachers as the Pharisees had. Nicodemus was showing respect to Jesus by calling Him Teacher. He also told Jesus that he knew God had sent Him. Clearly, Nicodemus saw something the other Pharisees were not willing to see.

Jesus did not scold His visitor for coming during the night. Instead, Jesus spoke words of LIFE to Nicodemus. This Pharisee came to Jesus weakly, but at least He came. Jesus will never turn away anyone who comes to Him.

***** Nicodemus was part of the most important crowd of his day. Being in this group made it very difficult for him to come to Jesus. Today, we might compare this to being in the "popular crowd" at school. Think about the people you hang around with. Are these true friends who encourage you to follow Jesus, or do you have to hide your faith when you are around them? If your answer is that you have to hide your faith, discuss the reasons you want to be in this group. The Bible says that what God thinks is SO much more important than what people think (Matthew 10:28). Do not strive to gain acceptance from people. Instead, seek to glorify God.

Day #3: Born Again

The Bible tells us that Jesus knows the hearts of men (Matthew 9:4, 12:25). Jesus knew why Nicodemus had come; He knew the question that was on Nicodemus' mind.

Day #3 continued:



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," or "born from above." 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." - John 3:4-6

Jesus was not talking about a physical birth, like a baby being born. He was talking about a spiritual rebirth.

Nicodemus was an expert in God's word (John 3:10). He knew the Old Testament very well. In the Old Testament prophesy of Ezekiel, God spoke of the time when **He would save His people**. He said He would sprinkle clean **water** on them. This was a symbol for forgiving their sin. And He said He would put His **Spirit** within them to give them new life (Ezekiel 36:24-27).

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that He had come to fulfill God's promise spoken in Ezekiel. Through Jesus, his sins could be washed away, and God would give him new life.



The new life Jesus offered to Nicodemus, He also offers to every man, woman, and child. Being born again comes when you place your trust in Jesus. When Jesus died, His blood took away your sin. He wants you to receive His gift of new life. Once you are born again, God will fill you with His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). You will be His forever, and you will have eternal life in heaven.

Day #4: List of Rules

Many people believe they can do good things to earn God's love and acceptance. These people have a list in their minds of things that they think will please God. Nicodemus was one of these people. Throughout his entire life, Nicodemus had been trained to believe that he had to **earn** God's approval by following rule, after rule, after rule. In truth, even Nicodemus' best effort was not good enough for God who is perfect (Isaiah 64:6). It was very difficult for Nicodemus to understand that the new life Jesus offered was **a gift given by God** (John 3:9).



Jesus said: 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

Day #4 continued:

Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus the best news ever told. Nicodemus could be free from all of the rules that he followed. He could take his man-made list of rules, and tear it up! His sins could be washed away, and the Creator of the universe would give him new life, if only he would place his trust in God's Son who was standing right in front of him.



There is **NOTHING we** can do to earn God's approval. The incredible truth is that **Jesus** did all that was necessary to make us right with God. All we do is believe in Him!

Many Christians are so used to hearing John 3:16 that they can forget what the words mean. Read John 3:16, in the Amplified Bible version:

For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He [even] gave up His only begotten (unique) Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts in, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish (come to destruction, be lost) but have eternal (everlasting) life.

How would you explain this verse to a friend?

Day #5: Secret Disciple?

Well, did Nicodemus believe? Did he ever receive the new life that Jesus offered?

The Bible does not tell us whether Nicodemus put his trust in Jesus that day. If he did believe, he did it secretly. Many days after Nicodemus met with Jesus in the night, the other Pharisees proclaimed that **NO** Pharisee believed in Jesus (John 7:48-49). Nicodemus remained silent at that comment.

However, Nicodemus did speak up to say that Jesus should not be arrested without having the chance to defend Himself (John 7:50-51).

Our biggest clue about Nicodemus' belief comes after Jesus died on the cross. Nicodemus and another man, Joseph of Arimathea, came to bury Jesus. These two men cared for Jesus' body, and gave Him a proper Jewish burial. While we are still not told how Nicodemus felt about Jesus, the Bible says this about Joseph:



Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. - John 19:38b

We can guess that this was probably just how Nicodemus felt: a disciple who was afraid to tell his peers. It seems that Nicodemus must have believed that Jesus was the Messiah in order to do the kind act of burying Him. Still, we are not told for certain. He never confessed publicly that Jesus was his Lord.



We look for clues about whether or not Nicodemus was a true follower of Jesus. We say, "Maybe he was," or, "I think he probably was." Shouldn't it be much more clear than this? What if someone asked the question about you? Would they have to dig for clues, or would the answer be obvious? Live your life in such a way that there is no question that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ!