

John 3:1–2

- 1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
- 2 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 signs that You do unless God is with him.”

“A Seeking Stranger”
John 3:1-3

INTRO:

In the last paragraph of **John 2**, we found ourselves confronted by a group of people who had faulty faith. Although they believed in Him, Jesus did not commit Himself to them. John closed his account by reminding us that the Lord doesn't need anyone to tell Him about people because He already knows what is in people. He knows their hearts.

We must remember this context because it leads directly into the passage we are going to study this morning. One of these people whose heart Jesus already knew was a man by the name of Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night.

- I. The Man Who Was Seeking (v. 1, 2)*
- II. The Answer He Sought (v. 3)*

I. The Man Who Was Seeking (v. 1, 2)

“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 signs that You do unless God is with him.’” (John 3:1–2)

A. Remember the chapter divisions are not original to the text nor are they inspired. The Apostle John moved from those with faulty faith to this one who was motivated by God to seek out the Lord Jesus.

1. John told us many things about this evening visitor. First, we learn that he was of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a theologically conservative sect. They believed the Old Testament was the Word of God. They also believed in the physical resurrection from the dead in contrast with the Sadducees who controlled the Temple. Being a Pharisee also meant that he had a great zeal for keeping the Law. We get a glimpse of what Pharisees believed about salvation from the confession of the Apostle Paul, a former Pharisee, in **Philippians 3:3-7**.

“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.”

2. Second, John told us his name was ***“Nicodemus.”*** Nicodemus is a Greek name, which would indicate a position of political power and influence.

3. Third, we are told he was ***“a ruler of the Jews.”*** This meant he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews under the Roman rulers. He was a recognized religious leader.

4. Fourth, if we skip down to **verse 10**, we find out that he was ***“the teacher of the Jews.”*** John 3:10 says,

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?’”

So, in addition to being a theological conservative, an influential man, a politically powerful person, and a religious leader, he was also a noted teacher of Biblical truth. With all of these “spiritual qualifications” going for him, he still lacked something.

B. He came to Jesus by night.

“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 signs that You do unless God is with him.’”

1. There are several reasons why he might have come by night. The two most likely are, first, because he was ***“the teacher of Israel”*** he had to be careful of who he identified with, and second, that he might have a time of uninterrupted conversation with Jesus.

2. Some ask why John includes such a detail in his account. Many see this as a way of underlining also the spiritual condition of Nicodemus' soul. It was covered with the night of sin and desperately seeking the light. While the reason John included this detail is debatable, the condition of Nicodemus' soul is not. Clearly, he was driven to come to Jesus because he sensed a real need in his own life.

C. In **verse 2**, Nicodemus begins the conversation, ***“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”*** He calls Him, ***“Rabbi.”***

1. Nicodemus acknowledged Jesus was a teacher Who has come from God. What Nicodemus thought about the identity of the Lord Jesus is up for debate. Some think that his identification of Jesus as a teacher has Messianic overtones. Other see this as much lower than the identification as a prophet or as Messiah.

2. It appears that Nicodemus was one of those in **John 2:23** who saw the miracles that He did in Jerusalem. Still, it is not clear what impact the witnessing of these signs had upon the man.

II. The Answer He Sought (v. 3)

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” (John 3:3)

A. The Lord's response to Nicodemus' greeting is arresting. The word ***“answer”*** implies there was a question asked. Yet, there isn't a recorded question. How do we solve this problem? The answer is indicated in the many passages like **Luke 7** where Jesus answered Simon the Pharisee's thoughts. This is exactly what we find here. Jesus answers the question Nicodemus' heart asked.

B. We are not sure exactly what this question was Nicodemus wanted answered. However, Jesus' reply indicated that it was related to how a person could be saved.

1. On the surface the Lord's statement here was abrupt.

“Unless a person is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The word translated ***“again”*** is a word that means either ***“from above”*** or ***“again.”***

2. There are two issues here. First, how did Nicodemus understand this term? Second, how did John the Apostle want us to understand it? Obviously, Nicodemus understood in the sense of being born a second time. However, later in this chapter (**3:31**) John uses the same word to mean ***“from above.”***

“He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.”

It is entirely possible that John is using this word so that it can be understood both ways.

3. The point Jesus made to Nicodemus was the way to be saved, the way to understand and enter into the heavenly kingdom is not through doing righteous deeds but through a miraculous worked of God in the heart and life.

C. We can be guilty of thinking evangelism is like sales. Evangelism is just getting someone to make a decision for Jesus Christ. However, salvation is much more than just a decision. Yes, we preach the Gospel to as many as will hear. Yes, we try to make the message about the Lord Jesus Christ as clear as we possibly can. Yet, unless God works in the heart, no one will be saved. He has to save and He alone.

D. Nicodemus had to understand this also. As the Apostle Paul wrote in **Titus 3:4-6** *“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”*

What about you and me?

Are you here this morning like Nicodemus?

You have a decent life, you may have a position of power and influence, or you may be even a down and outer, yet you recognize that something is missing in your life. It may be that God is at work in you.

If this is you, I have great news for you! You can receive the Lord Jesus today and get to know the One Whom to know is life eternal.

For those of us who have put our trust in Christ alone to save us, there is a second application here.

We need to recognize our message to the world around us is *“you must be born again!”*

It is not enough to do good or go to church. We need to be transformed by the living God through faith in His Son.

Ye Must be Born Again