

Pt 14 Nicodemus – John 3:1-10

A sermon series in the Gospel of John, by Pastor Byron Chesney at Porchlight Baptist Church www.pbcknox.com

John 3:1-10

- 1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
- 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.
- 3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
- 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?
- 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.
- 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
- 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.
- 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.
- 9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?
- 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

Chapter 3 of the Gospel of John, particularly verse 16, is perhaps the most widely known passage in all the Bible. We aren't going to get to verse 16 this morning but are looking at the man named in verse one, Nicodemus and find out how a man can truly be saved.

1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

Let's break this down and see who we are talking about.

First of all, it says he was a man of the Pharisees. We are all familiar with the Pharisees of the Bible, it was one the major religious groups in the days of Jesus.

There were four different Jewish sects in Jesus' day: the Pharisees, and the Sadducees, being the most dominant, and then there were the Essenes, and the Zealots. All these religious sects were Jewish, but they each had different beliefs and practices.

There was a man of the Pharisees...

The word Pharisee means "**to separate**." According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, there were around 6,000 Pharisees during the time of Jesus. They were from the middle class of citizens and had great influence over Jewish society. They were Rabbis who held strict to the Books of Moses (Torah), but they believed that God gave instructions orally at Mt. Sinai, and those "Oral Laws" were just as important as the laws written in the Books of Moses. They created literally hundreds of man made laws from the Oral Law in which they strictly enforced.

The Pharisees were very concerned about outward appearances and religious practices; however, they cared very little about Spiritual matters. They spent most of their time in the Synagogues and not the Temple.

The Pharisees hated Jesus, well, most of them did, and after he appeared on the scene they spent most of their time trying to find ways to get rid of him. Nicodemus was one of the exceptions.

...named Nicodemus:

The name Nicodemus is a Greek name and means "**victor over the people**." He is mentioned 3 times in the New Testament and all 3 times is in the Gospel of John:

John 3, John 7:50, John 19:39

...a ruler of the Jews:

Not only is Nicodemus a Pharisee, but he is also a "ruler of the Jews." This most likely means he was one of the 70 men who made up the Sanhedrin Council, which was the Supreme Court of the Jews. The word Sanhedrin means; "**assembly**" or "**council**". You won't find the word "**Sanhedrin**" in the Bible; however, we find references to "counsellors and rulers," both of which is most likely referring to that council. The Sanhedrin were comprised of Pharisees and Sadducees and were made up of prominent Jewish men such as doctors, wise men, priests, Levites, and elders. Nicodemus was one of these prominent men.

2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

If you remember the time before this, we studied in Chapter 2. I want us to read those verses again, so we have this in proper context:

John 2:23-25 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. 24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

We are not told what these miracles were that Jesus performed in Jerusalem because John doesn't say what they were. The only miracle that has been named in this Gospel so far is when He turned water into wine at the marriage in Cana but Nicodemus wasn't in Cana when that happened. That means he is one of those in Jerusalem that witnessed Jesus' miracles and is starting to believe in Him. So, he decided to pay Jesus a visit to try and learn more.

The same came to Jesus by night...

Notice Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. He didn't come during the day when lots of people would be around. We don't know why he chose to come at night but it's possible it could have been for two reasons:

1. Jesus was not out in the public ministering so Nicodemus wouldn't be interrupting him.
2. He may have wanted to keep his visit private and not have a bunch of people seeing him visit Jesus – especially his fellow Pharisees in which he would probably have gotten into trouble.

Some believe his coming to Jesus in the night is a picture of lost sinner in darkness searching for the light. I don't have a problem with that because I love studying Bible typology, but let's not read more into it than what God has said because we simply do not know the reason he came in the night.

and said unto him, Rabbi...

Rabbi was the word the Pharisees used to show respect and it means **Great teacher or Master**. Nicodemus is sincere in his greeting and not being deceitful the way most Pharisees were toward Jesus. He genuinely sees Jesus as a great teacher.

we know that thou art a teacher come from God...

It is interesting that Nicodemus says, "**we know**." Not, "**I know**." This means there were other of his kind who agreed that Jesus was a teacher come from God. No doubt the Pharisees were keeping a close eye on Jesus and listening and witnessing the things he was doing. While most were jealous and looking for ways to kill him, there were some that were receiving the message and their eyes were being opened to the truth for the first time. Nicodemus is one of those. He recognizes something in Jesus and believes he has been sent by God.

...for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

It's obvious that Nicodemus believes Jesus is sent by God because he has seen some of the miracles that he has performed. We know the Bible tells us that the Jews required a sign.

That's what they were looking for in Chapter 2 when he ran the money changers out of the Temple: **John 2:18** Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

Paul dealt with this same mindset several years after the death burial and resurrection of Christ and says in **1 Corinthians 1:22-24** For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

But the truth is, seeing miracles and gaining wisdom is not enough to be saved. To be truly saved one must have faith in Jesus Christ.

All Nicodemus has at this point, is a physical connection but not a Spiritual one. In Chapter 2 we read that Jesus did not commit himself to those who believed because of the miracles because he knew what was in man. He knows what is in Nicodemus and he's going to take the opportunity to really teach him about true faith.

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

This section of Scripture is the greatest in all the Bible concerning the new birth. You don't hear that preached about much anymore. Everyone wants to dwell on love and forgiveness and while that's great, without the new birth you cannot be saved.

Jesus answered and said unto him...

Notice that Nicodemus hasn't asked Jesus anything yet but it says, "Jesus answered." What does that mean? I think it's obvious that since Jesus knows what is in man, he knows exactly what is on Nicodemus' mind and the thoughts in his heart. He wants to know how he can see the kingdom of God.

Here a ruler of the Jews and teacher of the Jews doesn't know how he can be sure he is saved and have eternal life. He's followed all the laws, rules, and rituals, and taught others how to do so, yet he doesn't have any assurance.

It's not much different than a man or woman today who has been raised in Church, wore the right clothes, carried a King James Bible, filled his spot on the pew every time the Church doors were open, taught a Sunday School class and Vacation Bible school yet still doesn't have assurance of his salvation. And, just like Nicodemus, is frantic about what he needs to do to have eternal life and see Heaven.

Jesus answers the question that is on Nicodemus' mind: **Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**

Jesus starts out by saying "**Verily, verily.**" That word "**verily**" means "**In truth; in fact; with certainty.**" So these things Jesus is telling him is a matter of fact, the truth. It is entirely different than what he's been taught by the Pharisees and what he's teaching as a ruler of the Jews. It's got nothing to do with the Oral Law or what kind of clothes he wears, the rules he keeps, the tithes he gives, or the prayers he prays. None of that stuff will save him.

The truth is, Nicodemus, you must be born again, or you'll never see the kingdom of God. This really knocks him for a loop as we see in the next verse:

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

Again, Nicodemus is all physical and not spiritual. He's not even trying to think spiritually because he's never done that before. He knows nothing about faith, which the Bible says: **Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Nicodemus wants to see it, touch it, smell it. He needs something external to believe in, not internal.

Many today aren't saved because they are looking for something physical. Why do you think so many believe it takes their good works to be saved? Because that's something physical they can do. Many believe baptism is required to be saved because it is something physical. Many think they need to hear birds sing and fireworks go off because that's something physical. But salvation is not in any of those things. Salvation is not physical, it is spiritual. The only physical thing involved in salvation is when the Lord Jesus laid down on that cross and allowed them to nail his hands and feet. He did it all. We do absolutely nothing.

If it is up to us to perform some work or do something, then we are doomed to hell. That is why Jesus tells us we must be born again. No, Nicodemus, not physically, but spiritually. Jesus makes the analogy of being born because the one being born has absolutely nothing to do with the birth. A baby has not say in it and can do nothing about it. The same with the Christian. It's all of the Lord. You are born again through Jesus Christ. The new birth is only through Jesus and just like a baby, you have no power in it.

I want us to read Jesus' answer to him in the next 6 verses; however, we will have to revisit these verses next time so we can expound upon them but for this morning I want us to read it.

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

Three times in Jesus' answer back to Nicodemus he emphasizes the Spirit.

- Verse 5: "**born of water and of the Spirit**"
- Verse 6: "**born of the Spirit**"
- Verse 8: "**born of the Spirit**"

But Nicodemus still is not getting it. He is still trying to think physical and asks, "**How can these things be?**"

Jesus rebukes him for not understanding and asks him how can he, "**a master of Israel,**" and doesn't know these things?

May I say to you today that there are many so-called "masters or teachers" who only understand physical things and are far from the Spiritual. They are not spiritually discerned because the "faith" they have is not a genuine faith in Christ. They have faith in their talent or abilities or education but not in Christ.

The truth is, if you expect to have eternal life and see Heaven when you die, you must be born again!