

**LIVES THAT REMIND US ABOUT GOD - Meeting Yourself In The Sacred Text Part twenty-one - Sunday, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024**  
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**NICODEMUS - The High Cost of Knowing the Truth About Jesus Christ**

- 1) **SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION** - Nicodemus is mentioned three times in the New Testament - only by John. He is not even on the radar screen of the synoptics. It was not accidental that Nicodemus came to Jesus. He was not only a *Pharisee, but a member of the Sanhedrin*, a group of seventy men who were "*rulers among the Jews*" (John 3:1). These men had the *responsibility* to keep an eye on all the religious developments in Israel and judge them by the strict standards of the Old Testament. *It was the duty of Nicodemus to check Jesus out*. There had been false Messianic movements before. Perhaps this might be another.
  
- 2) **JOHN 3:1-15** - Several important facts about Nicodemus come to light from this passage:

- a) ***He may lack total comprehension, but he isn't biased against Jesus.*** Most of his companions were - **John 7:47-52** - "The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? [48] Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? [49] But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." [50] Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, [51] "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" [52] They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

Obviously, the account of Nicodemus is very important to John's gospel account. John's gospel is all about ***belief*** - **John 20:31** - "....these are written so that you may believe that **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**"

But even when the evidence is compelling, belief is always a costly matter in this fallen world. Nicodemus is held up vividly by John as a model of the pressure ***not*** to believe. Even if the evidence is good it still ***costs*** to allow truth to hold sway in your mind.

Consider Nicodemus. There was great pressure on him to instantly reject Jesus ***before even hearing all the evidence.*** He certainly would have been looked down upon by his peers - the most influential religious body in the land. Perhaps that's why Nicodemus came to Jesus at night.

b) ***He takes the works and teaching of Jesus at face value.***

**"You are from God - 3:2** Others had seen the very same miracles and yet come to very different conclusions as to who Jesus was - **John 8:45, 48, 52** - **"But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me....[48]** The Jews answered him, **"Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" ....[52]** The Jews said to him, **"Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'"**

John means for us to behold the incredible power of personal ***bias***. Religion is frequently the cause of ***rejecting*** Christ. But there are other factors as well. These leaders aren't denying the ***power*** of Jesus. They've seen His mighty works. His power ***can't*** be denied so they choose the next best option for protecting their unbelief. They would rather attribute His power to the demonic than bow their knees.

c) ***He totally misunderstood the nature of regeneration.*** Then as now people confuse the distinction between ***religion*** and ***regeneration***. He still sees everything in terms of ***hearing teaching with the ears and working to keep it with the will***. He clearly sees Jesus as a ***Rabbi (3:2)*** who would instruct his followers into a better understanding of God.

Jesus states over and over that one must be ***born into right relationship with God*** rather than merely try to apply some better teaching. Notice the terms Jesus uses - "**born again**"(3), "**born of water and the Spirit**"(5), "**Born of the Spirit**"(8). These are all dramatic expressions to show both the ***nature and the magnitude of the change required in the heart and soul of Nicodemus***. There is a dimension here that can't be summoned merely by the human will.

Nicodemus is a very important example for church people for this very reason. He stands as a reminder of one who is ***moral*** and ***devoutly religious*** yet desperately in need of Jesus and His saving grace at Calvary. It is frequently the morality of people that keeps them from being born again. This moral pride may be the single deepest factor keeping people from eternal life.

- d) ***Jesus indicates that Nicodemus should have had at least some understanding of the nature of salvation*** - "Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"(3:10). His grasp may not have been as complete as ours, but the Old Testament ***did*** point to the redemptive work of Jesus.

Of particular importance would be passages like **Ezekiel 36:25, 27, 37:9**, where the words "***water***" and "***Spirit***" (the very terms Jesus picked up and used) are cited in an Old Testament regeneration context:

**Ezekiel 36:25-27 - “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. [26] And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”**

Notice all those references to a new heart and new spirit and God putting His Spirit (capitol “S”) in us. This is not Oprah religion. This had nothing to do with the unfolding power of the “*human spirit*.” This is divine regeneration through Jesus Christ, God the Son.

Jesus then refers to **Numbers 21:5-9 - “And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” [6] Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. [7] And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. [8] And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” [9] So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.”**

Notice the applied details of this story. They all point to the nature of the **atonement**. The people are bitten by **serpents**. Serpents are the problem. And the bronze serpent on the cross or pole is also the solution. This is such a powerful reminder of the Redeemer who would become sin for us. He bears the sting of God's wrath in our place. People had to look to **that** serpent to be saved.

Notice that Jesus very specifically relates this event to His death on the cross - **John 3:14-15** - **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, [15] that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”**

Without these verses we won't have a proper theological understanding of the most beloved text in the Bible - **John 3:16** - **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** This is very important to remember because it frames the setting for our next point:

- 3) **JOHN 7:45-52** - "The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" [46] The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" [47] The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? [48] Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? [49] But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." [50] Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, [51] "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" [52] They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

These verses are powerful testimony to the fact that ***there is no blindness like religious blindness***. Given what Jesus said ***about the way the Old Testament pointed to Himself*** these were the people who should have known the most - who should have been waiting for Jesus to come on the scene.

Today too, it is particularly easy for religious people to reject Jesus for religious reasons. Jesus predicted that His gospel would be hid from the wise and understanding of this world (**Matthew 11:25, Luke 10:21**). It must have been difficult for Nicodemus to speak up for Jesus even as much as he did. ***They immediately turned on him as well.***

- 4) **JOHN 19:38-42** - “After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. [39] Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. [40] So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. [41] Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. [42] So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.”

John mentions the last act of loyalty of two men who probably felt they had not done enough for Jesus while He was still alive - ***Nicodemus*** and ***Joseph of Arimathea***. That they had planned to do this together is plain from the fact that each brought the appropriate funeral preparations in keeping with the other.

**Luke 23:50-51** makes it clear that Joseph too was a member of the Sanhedrin - “**Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, [51] who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God.**” He had not involved himself in the decision to plot against Jesus. Had he abstained? We just don’t know.



So here we have two men about whom relatively little is known. ***They both sat together with the very group of men who arranged to put Jesus to death and held convictions that differed from the pack.*** They felt the loneliness and the helplessness that comes from being ***powerless to stop the decision of the majority.*** Remember them both when you feel outnumbered in your testimony for Jesus.