





An Evening Visit

John 3:1-21

Life of Jesus

This was at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus had been baptized by John, performed his first miracle of turning the water into wine, and then cleansed the temple of those who were buying and selling.

Discuss:

After the temple event, the Jews came to Jesus and asked him what authority he had to do the things he did.

An event is being held at the temple, and a marketplace is set for people to do business. Someone that may or not be familiar to the people at the event comes in, tears everything down, and tells the people to leave.

People are wondering, Who is this? Who told him he could do this?

Did someone tell him he could take charge?

Did someone tell him to shut everything down?

Then, on the feast day at Passover, many people believed in Jesus when they saw the miracles he did (John 2:23).

Cleansing the temple was a very overt, very bold move on the part of Jesus. Immediately afterwards, the Jews came to Jesus. They asked him for a sign to show them he had the authority to act as he did.

Soon afterwards, one of the Pharisees named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night.

Who was Nicodemus?

He was a Pharisee.

Pharisees were a sect, or group of Jews who were highly respected for their religious beliefs and practices.

The Pharisees were seen by others as experts for their knowledge of the scriptures, and they held great influence among the common people. From a biblical context they were seen as those who were seeking distinction and praise by observing rituals such as ceremonial washings, fasting, prayers, and giving of alms to the poor. The gospels view them as insincere in their holiness, but they were very proud of their own good works. The Pharisees believed in a Messiah, and in accountability for individual deeds.

The Pharisees were highly educated, and they knew the Old Testament scriptures and passages very well. They interpreted the Old Testament laws and other writings very strictly and held others to their interpretations and practices. They held places of influence in the community, and although they did not perform priestly duties, they did influence temple rituals and practices. They were able to make decisions to put someone "out of the synagogue," which is essentially casting them out of the community of the Jews.

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews, which meant he was an elite religious leader with authority. He was well-known; as a person who held leadership among the Jews, he would have been recognized by the people. They would have looked up to him and highly respected him. Because of his leadership position, most likely he was an older man.



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Nicodemus was a scholar of the law, and the Old Testament.

He would have been respected, of privileged status. He was most likely wealthy as we can see at Jesus' crucifixion.

He would have been a very devout religious man who prayed multiple times a day.

He had a place in the council of the Pharisees as we see later in Jesus' ministry.

Why did he come to Jesus at night?

It seems very likely that he came at night to visit secretly. He was curious about Jesus and his ministry. It could be that he was embarrassed to be seen associating with Jesus, or he was simply trying to avoid persecution from his fellow Pharisees.

We see in John 2:20 that the Jews already came to Jesus asking him where he got the authority to perform the temple cleansing. We can guess that the Pharisees probably held a council meeting about what he had done.

It seems that regardless of what has been said about Jesus, or already decided by the other Pharisees, Nicodemus wants to talk to Jesus personally, and he doesn't seem to want other people to know, so he comes at night.

Nicodemus said to Jesus,

We know that you are a teacher from God, because no one can do these miracles that you do except God is with him.

Now, we know for certain they have been talking about Jesus. The Pharisees have noticed him. They saw his bold statement he made about the temple, but now he is also healing people and performing many miracles.

There are a couple of ways of looking at what is happening here.

It is possible that Nicodemus is genuinely curious. He really wants to know what is going on but he's afraid of his own reputation so he comes to Jesus at night looking for some answers.

Another possibility is that this could be a political move. Nicodemus could see that Jesus is already gaining influence among the common people. Perhaps Nicodemus comes at night as a representative of the ruling Pharisees.

Jesus already knows the Pharisees disagree with him.

But Nicodemus could be thinking, you have something, we have something, let's work together on this; let's talk. We are also told later in the gospel of John that the Pharisees were concerned about Jesus because they felt like he was a threat to their political position with Rome (John 11:47-48). This could have been an attempt to gain favor with Jesus early in his ministry.

Jesus does not even respond to Nicodemus' comment, nor does he take it as a compliment. Jesus is not impressed or intimidated by Nicodemus and his position of authority. He completely disregards it and seems to completely change the subject.

Jesus says, Truly I say to you, unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.



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Discuss:

Do you think Nicodemus thought he was already in the kingdom of God?

Nicodemus is a very religious person. He is very moral.

Is Jesus trying to tell him that he has it all wrong?

Nicodemus responds, How can a man be born again? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?

We can look at this as Nicodemus speaking foolishly, but it seems he's actually quite an intelligent man. It is more likely that he is possibly speaking sarcastically. Nicodemus says, What are you saying? I must become a baby again?

This could have been quite offensive to Nicodemus. He's educated, he's been teaching the Bible his whole life, and he's a person of influence. It would seem his life is quite a success. It is often harder for people who have a good life and everything they want to see their need for God. But Jesus is telling him that everything he thinks he knows about God and his kingdom is wrong. He needs to start over.

Again, Jesus completely ignores Nicodemus' comment. Jesus rephrases his earlier comment.

Jesus says, Unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Discuss:

What does this mean?

When Jesus says "born of water" it seems to be referring to the physical birth of a baby born from its mother's womb.

But this is not enough. You must have a new Spirit. This new Spirit is the only way you can enter, or even see, the kingdom of God.

This is something that should at least sound familiar to Nicodemus.

What is Jesus talking about?

God created man in his likeness, in his image. Man was designed to represent God on the earth (Genesis 1:26).

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, it changed everything. Their children were born in their likeness, not God's (Genesis 5:3).

Every person born into the world after the fall of man was born into sin (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Jesus says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit."

God knew that in order to save mankind, he had to offer them new life. The Old Testament prophesied that God would give them a new heart and put a new spirit in you (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-28). This new Spirit was his Spirit, the personal presence of God.



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Jesus compared wind to the Spirit. We cannot see the wind. Jesus said, The wind blows, and you hear the sound but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. He said it is the same with the Spirit; meaning you cannot see the Spirit, but you know it is there and you see the effects of it.

The only way that God can communicate and have a relationship with man is through the Spirit.

God is a spiritual being, and we have to relate to him on a spiritual level (John 4:24). He had to give us his spirit so we could communicate with him.

Nicodemus did not understand. He said, How can this be?

Jesus said, Are you a master of Israel, and you do not know these things?

Is Jesus saying that he is studied but the way he has interpreted is false?

Then Jesus goes on speaking.

He asks Nicodemus if he doesn't believe earthly things, how will he believe the heavenly things?

Jesus says that he is the only one who came down here from heaven. He's basically telling Nicodemus that he knows, because he has been there.

Jesus goes on to prophesy of his death.

He goes back to a familiar story that Nicodemus would have known.

He says that as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man (Jesus) must be lifted up.

He was speaking of a time when the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness. The people were complaining and the Lord sent serpents among the people and many of them died. Then the people repented, and asked the Lord to take the serpents away. The Lord told Moses to make a serpent out of brass and put it on a pole. When the people that had been bitten looked at the serpent, they would live.

Jesus was saying that he would be lifted up on the cross, and then,

"Whoever believes on him would not perish, but have eternal life," (John 3:15-17).

Jesus said that God did not send his son to condemn the world, but to save it.

We do not know how Nicodemus responded to Jesus.

But, we can find two other times in scripture that Nicodemus is mentioned, and it seems very likely that he came to believe in Jesus.

The Pharisees were holding a council meeting and were upset that no one had arrested Jesus.

Nicodemus was at this meeting, and he defended Jesus (John 7:45-53).

After Jesus was crucified, Nicodemus was one of the people who came to the tomb when they buried the body. Nicodemus brought a 100 pound mixture of very expensive spices and aloes to anoint the body of Jesus.

He was one of the people who helped wrap the body of Christ with linen and spices.

Jesus in the Story



Mankind was originally made by God to be His representatives here on earth. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, sin entered the world. God's perfect man was now flawed, and every man after him was born into sin (Romans 5:12).

God gave the Israelites a set of laws to follow in an attempt to keep them separate and preserve them until Jesus came into the world to complete God's plan of salvation. His whole plan was to have a relationship with his people, but sin kept dominating people, and they were completely unable to follow the laws given to the people by God through Moses. Again and again, the people sinned against God (Romans 3:20).

The only way for God to have a relationship with humans was for God to give them a way to be redeemed from sin once and for all. Jesus was the only way. He had to come as a human, and be the perfect human, to save humanity from their sins. Then people would be able to receive His righteousness, not their own, which could never be good enough.

They had to have the righteousness of Jesus to completely redeem them from sin (Romans 3:22; 4:5).

When Jesus was lifted up on the cross, sin was nailed to the cross (Galatians 2:20).

Our old man died with Christ, and we have risen with him (Colossians 3:1).

Because the old sinful man was crucified, we are now able to receive a new heart and a new Spirit, God's spirit. And God is able to finally have a relationship with his people because he is able to fellowship with them through the Spirit (Romans 5:1; Colossians 2:13-15).

Without this Spirit, there is no way to enter the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is here. When you accept Jesus, you are in the kingdom. You are seated with Christ (Ephesians 2:6).

But it is a spiritual realm, and without the Spirit of God living within you, you are not able to see the kingdom of heaven (Romans 8:6-9; Ephesians 3:12).

Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

5. An Evening Visit

1. Who was Nicodemus?
2. What did Jesus say a person has to do to see the kingdom of God?
3. Why did God send his son into the world? (John 3:17)
4. Who are those that are condemned and why? (John 3:18)

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

6. Everything I've Ever Done

1. Why was the lady surprised that Jesus talked to her?
2. What water did Jesus tell the lady he had?
3. Who did the lady go tell about Jesus and what did she say?

John 4:23

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

7. The Nobleman's Son

Read Hebrews 11:6

1. According to this verse, what do we have to do to please God?
2. What do we have to do to come to God?
3. Who does God reward?

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

8. Waiting for the Water

Read Romans 6

1. We are _____ to sin (v.2)
2. What should we not let rule in our bodies? (v.12)
3. We are not under what? (v.14-15)
4. What are we under instead? (v.14-15)
5. If you obey something, what do you become to the thing you obey? (v.16)

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

