

Nicodemus

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[0:00] Now, I'm not very good at standing still, so I'm not going to stand still over here. I shall wander around and I hope that that's okay and that you can still see me.

Well, in that passage, we heard Jesus talking to Nicodemus. And as we heard right at the beginning, he's a Pharisee.

He's a member of the Jewish council. He should not be seen speaking to Jesus. And so, he comes at night.

He hides in the darkness. Coming to speak with Jesus was him living a bit dangerously, really. But curiosity about Jesus had got the better of him.

He calls Jesus Rabbi. He recognizes that Jesus is a teacher. As many others did at that time who had heard him, heard his teaching as he taught remarkable things with remarkable stories in remarkable ways.

[1:07] But because he's also seen the things that Jesus has done, he wants to know more. He's recognizing that God is here amongst them in a new way.

And he wants to understand. And Jesus challenges him to come into the light, to be born again, to come out of the shadows and into the light.

There's loads of references in the Bible about light. It's one of those things you'll read of over and over again. Right there, right at the beginning in Genesis. Let there be light.

And in the New Testament, we hear lots of images, lots of words about light. John's gospel speaks about the light shining in the darkness and the light that gives life to everyone.

Paul talks about a kingdom of light. And Peter talks of the followers of Jesus as being called into God's light.

[2:17] Moving from a place of darkness. Moving into God's light. With God's understanding. With God's spirit. Being born again. Jesus, of course, also used light to talk about himself, didn't he?

He said, I am the light of the world. And just as he did with Nicodemus, he tells his followers to be light and to reflect his light.

The light of life that gives life to all people. And of course, the same is true with us. When we recognize Jesus as for who he is, when we grab hold of his hand and recognize who he is and all he did for us, and we step into that light, we too can be born again.

The Son of God. He challenges Nicodemus and he challenges us to step out into that light. So what?

What does that look like? What does it mean for us to live as disciples in the light? First of all, of course, we need to be seen.

[3:37] I think we might have a slide that, there we go, we need to be seen. I'm sure you'll recognize those as sparklers. And there's a story told of a little girl who was shivering her way along the main street one winter's evening.

And she saw a church with the lights pouring out and she could hear music. And as she was cold, she went into the church to warm herself for a little while.

And as she listened to the preacher, she heard him say, I am the light of the world. So at the end of the service, as she was coming out and the preacher was stood at the door, as preachers often do. And she said, did you say that you were the light of the world? No, said the preacher. Jesus is the light of the world.

Those of us that believe in him are like little lights. And the little girl looked at him for a moment and said, Well, I wish you'd come down here and shine in my alley because it's cold and it's dark down there.

[4:47] I think it packs quite a punch, that story about how we be God's light, where we go, how we show, how we be God's people in the world, reminding us that we need to live out the faith that we proclaim.

And yes, that can be a little overwhelming to think that day by day, minute by minute, we're living out as God's disciples. It can be hugely challenging.

Because I don't know about you, but not long after I've had my breakfast, I kind of mess up. Living each and every day is hard work, isn't it? And what if we mess up and someone sees us?

Have you ever had anyone say to you, I thought you were a Christian? Anyone ever had that said to them? I know I have.

Maybe sometimes if I get a bit impatient at the supermarket or I'm sitting in a traffic jam, I'm not very good at sitting in traffic. Particularly if two lorries are driving side by side, you know, one in the inside lane and one in the middle lane and neither's overtaking the other, I get quite frustrated.

[6:04] There's a whole list of things that I could tell you about times when I am not always patient and struggle sometimes to live as a disciple.

But when I was younger, can we have the next picture? I had one of these. In fact, I still got it in my drawer upstairs, in the bedroom upstairs.

Has anyone ever had one of these? A what would Jesus do bracelet to remind us to do what Jesus would do. So if we're having a, you know, what on earth do I do?

Well, what would Jesus do? To remind us to live out the life that he has called to us. Although, to be honest, what would Jesus do on the M5 sometimes?

Sometimes it's hard, isn't it? Yes, people watch us. Of course they watch us. They wait quite excited about the fact that we might actually make a mistake and then they can pull us up and say, ha ha, I thought you were a Christian.

[7:12] And it might mean that sometimes we feel that we better wait a while. We stay in the shadows for a little bit until we're better at being Christians.

You know, until we're perfect and we've got it all sussed. And then, when we're better, we can step out of the shadows because now we're better Christians than we were.

We're more proficient. We make fewer mistakes. But actually, the mistakes that we make are actually part and parcel of living as a light in God's world.

Because it's not about the mistake. It's about how you deal with the mistakes. We can never be perfect, which is quite good news for me.

Can never, ever be perfect. But that's okay. Because actually, when we go to one another and seek forgiveness, when we've hurt one another, when we've done what we shouldn't do and we come before God asking for forgiveness in need of his grace, people see that too.

[8:20] I thought you were a Christian and yes, I've done that wrong. But actually, I know that. And I've come before God to say sorry and to hear about and to receive his grace.

We don't have to wait until we're perfect Christians. Thank heavens, literally, for that.

We need to step out of the shadows, trusting in God's grace for what he calls us to do. I always think of God's grace as a kind of safety net.

It's there for us. It catches us if we fall. We can draw strength on him, from him, once again. His grace holds us and keeps us as we come to him.

And that's good news, isn't it? And so as Christians, we need to be seen warts and all because those warts and how we deal with them are key to showing others what it means to walk in the light of God.

[9:24] But as disciples, we need to be seen and we need to be heard. We need to be light in a difficult and dark world, even when that is hard, even when that makes us unpopular.

There is no such thing as a secret disciple in a world, in a country where we are free to gather, where we are free to read our Bibles, where we are free to live out the faith that we proclaim.

Our faith is not private. It shouldn't be private. Personal, yes. but private, no. For our faith is what we live out in the everyday world.

Free to read our Bibles, free to step out of the shadows and into the light. And not for our own sake. We're not born again.

We don't receive God's Spirit. We don't step into that light for our own sake. And we do so for the sake of the world. Jesus says, come into the light so that others can see what God is doing.

[10 : 54] If we look at Matthew's gospel and he tells us of Jesus saying, let your light shine before others.

This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine. I'm sure some of you remember singing that at school. I certainly do. Let it shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to God in heaven.

A light that needs to be seen. A light that isn't hidden under a basket. Not so that people might think how amazing we are as Christians, but so they can glimpse through our words and through our actions.

So they can glimpse just for a moment that little bit of God's kingdom. the love and grace of God that is for all people. Now I remember at the turn of the millennium, does anyone remember the turn of the millennium?

It's 26 years ago. How can that be? It made me feel really old when I thought about it. But I can remember 26 years ago watching the television as we move not just into a new year but into a new millennium.

[12 : 18] And I remember it because Mike and I decided that we should wake up the children so that they saw this bit of history too. Because it was really important they could say they remember moving into the new millennium.

Well, Matt was only four so he doesn't really remember it at all. But I remember when we sat there, the four of us as the clock struck midnight and the new year and the new millennium rolled in beacons were lit across the UK and it was a really powerful moment.

And of course that happened again at the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebration. She lit the first of those beacons and beacons were lit right across the UK.

Really powerful moment marking a really important moment. Beacons burning brightly.

And to me it felt like a very hopeful sign. And that's what we are called to be. When the world seems hopeless we are called to be hope by burning brightly.

[13 : 39] Beacons of light and of hope. Blazing with the reflected light of God. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun so we are challenged to reflect the light of Jesus.

To shine unhampered without that fear of getting things wrong because we have God's grace to catch us without that embarrassment that we might feel.

That fear that actually someone might find us out. To shine not for our own glory but for the glory of God. And when I'm preparing a talk or a sermon or whatever you want to call it I always look at different translations of the Bible to see if they might help bring some new parts or a new ones that I'd not really picked up before.

And I read the message whilst I was looking at this and the Bible puts it this way you are here to be light bringing out the colours in God's world.

God is not a secret to be kept. I love that the bringing out of the colours in God's world. And they bring to mind that picture there of a prism that beam of light travelling through the prism and that's splitting into the beautiful colours of the rainbow.

[15 : 09] That's what we are called to be as light. And how do we do that? Well you might be familiar with the Micah challenge the prophet Micah talks about how we do that how we live as Christians and again I use the message version it says this God's already made it plain as to how to live and what to do what God is looking for in men and women is quite simple do what is fair and just to your neighbour be compassionate and loyal in your love don't take yourself too seriously take God seriously it's a challenge that isn't it a challenge to do what is just and fair compassionate and loyal to do what that little girl asked

I wish you could come down here and hang out in our alley because it's cold and it's dark down here welcoming the stranger feeding the hungry showing compassion speaking out against injustice crossing the barriers of race gender and class and all those decisive barriers that we put in place we can't proclaim faith unless we live it we need to shine not hide in the shadows like Nicodemus did to step out to know Jesus to seek his grace to be forgiven to be filled with his spirit to be born again there's a story told about

Saint Francis of Assisi a man who gave away everything he had to the poor who walked unarmed into a Muslim camp in the holy land in the hope of stopping a war who inspired millions of people to love and sacrifice for others a man who truly did step out of the shadows and reflected the incredible love of God a man who did that this is a story one day he and a brother monk entered a

small village to preach the gospel they began chatting with the villagers listening to their stories of hardship and poverty they helped them in the fields and in the stables until the day was nearly over and it was time to leave well Saint Francis companion was most concerned did we not come here to preach the gospel he asked Francis turned to his brother monk and said if these people have not heard the gospel today then reading the

Bible will not make any difference and so they went on their walk I was interested when we had our prayers earlier on and talked about how actually sometimes we are the answer to the prayers that we pray and I remember Sister Monica Joan from Call the Midwife any Call the Midwife fans in this morning yeah Sister Monica Joan said this sometimes the hands of the almighty are at the end of our own arms sometimes the prayers we pray we play a part in answering in doing in living in being light Jesus says those who do what is right come into the light so that others can see they are doing what God wants so I wonder wonder where you can be where you can bring

God's colours God's God's light God's love this week so let's pray Father we step out from the darkness and into the light you call us to do that you call us to live out the faith that we proclaim and we're sorry that so often we forget so we come to you with open hearts and open hands letting go of all the things that hold us back asking that you might show us once again your incredible grace and love that once again we might step out into the light and receive your grace your love and your spirit and we're just still for a moment for you alone know where your heart is with

[20 : 34] God are you ready to step out or to just step out once again are you ready to offer your heart to God you are a generous and almighty God and we offer our hearts and our lives to serve you give us the strength the courage the boldness the desire the audacity to be your people this week and in the days to come help us to be sensitive to your guiding touch that we might know where to speak where to be we thank you for Jesus help us to reflect the light that he gave might we be little lights burning so brightly for you amen may may!

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