

John Ch 3 1-15 Nicodemus

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again a little to the section we read, John 3 and verses 1 to 15. 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, and so on. So down to, and says, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Very interesting if we were to do a study on the conversations that Jesus has, the conversations recorded in the Bible for us.

Because one of the wonderful things about Jesus' conversations is that he knows exactly where people are at. And he goes, as it were, straight to the heart of the matter.

In the next chapter, as he deals with the woman at the well, he is talking about living water. That's not where Nicodemus is.

[1 : 12] Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews. And so Jesus is having to deal with Nicodemus in one of the most fundamental aspects of the whole of the Christian faith.

Because here is a man, a good man, an upright man, a man of great learning, and yet he lacked the basic fundamental knowledge of what it is to be a real believer.

And that's how Jesus, it's wonderful how he just goes right in to the heart of the matter, and he's able to penetrate into where people actually are.

And it's a great privilege for us to be able to enter into this conversation, and indeed, what is probably regarded as the most important conversation recorded for us in the Bible.

Because in here we have the greatest teaching in the Bible on the new birth, and highlighting to us the importance of it.

[2 : 15] There are many important things in life. There are many things that we say we must do. I'm sure all of us here say, well, you know, I must do such and such this week.

I must go to such and such a place. These are priorities that we have. We've set them in our mind. They're things we've got to do. However important these things are, and maybe none of it is as important as this, because this affects not only how we are here, it affects our future.

It affects our eternal destiny. So that's why Jesus emphasizes the importance of you must be born again.

And this is not an option. It's not something a person can take or leave. Well, people do, but the consequences of leaving are so far-reaching that it's an eternal decision to leave this aside.

It was J.C. Ryle who said this conversation, talking about here, and he says, a person may be ignorant about many things in the religious life and yet be saved, but to be ignorant of matters that are handled in this chapter is to be on the broad road that leads to destruction.

[3 : 43] So here's this man, Nicodemus, who came to see Jesus at night. And I suppose we often ask the question, why was it at night that he came? Well, I suppose there's a couple of reasons, and the obvious one is that he would like to get some time to be alone with Jesus.

He was a man who wanted an uninterrupted conversation with Jesus, and he knew just during the day how busy Jesus was. Wherever Jesus went, there were crowds, so he went at night so that he could get a time to be alone with Jesus.

Again, it's suggested he came at night under the cover of darkness so that he wouldn't be seen coming, seen by others. Now, I think we all often tend to think that Nicodemus, as he came here, that he came sort of on his own.

It was his own initiative. It was his own desire because he was somebody who was really concerned, maybe about his salvation. Now, I'm not in any way knocking that, and I believe that that is true, or he wouldn't have come to Jesus.

But I tend to think that he came, yes, on his own, but he came almost as a representative of others. Because we've got to remember that amongst the Pharisees, not all of them were opposed to Jesus.

[5 : 06] The vast majority were, but not all of them. It tells us that further on in John's Gospel, that there were quite a number of the Pharisees who believed in Jesus, but they didn't want to publicly confess him because they would have been excommunicated.

They would have been put out of the synagogue. And they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. So Nicodemus wasn't on his own in thinking, this is a teacher come from God.

Because the reason that we're saying that is just the very language. Nicodemus, he came to Jesus. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God.

If he had come purely and simply on his own, on his own initiative, without any conversation, say, to any of the other Pharisees, he would have said, I know that you are a teacher come from God.

But he's saying, we know. So in all probability, Nicodemus, yes, he's gone because he wants to. But I also think he would have been speaking to some of the other Pharisees and say, you know, I'm going to go along and see Jesus.

[6 : 16] And they'd say, oh, that's good. Because as we said, there were some of the Pharisees who did believe in him. And so we find here that Jesus meets, or Nicodemus comes in to meet with Jesus.

And he comes under the cover of darkness. And again, there's a strong possibility that it was a windy night, a stormy night like last night. I don't know.

But there's a strong possibility. And the only reason that we suggest that it might be is how Jesus was always using illustrations of what was happening at the time.

For instance, when he was speaking to the man that he had cured of the blindness, he spoke about the light. He used the illustration of light, that he was a light.

Speaking to the woman about the refreshing power that he is, he used the illustration of water, because he was at a well.

[7 : 20] Remember when he was out in the fields, he used the illustration of the flowers. And he was always where he was using illustrations. So there's a strong possibility that that night, as Nicodemus came, it was a dark night, and maybe it was a stormy night.

Maybe he chose his night well, thinking there won't be people out and about tonight. So he came to Jesus, because Jesus uses the illustration of the wind in verse 8.

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear it sound. You can almost hear Jesus saying, you can not win, Nicodemus. Again, to a certain extent, we're speculating, but I don't think it's out of the realms of possibility, because, as I say, Jesus was always using situations that arose.

Now, as we know, this man, Nicodemus, he was a real high flyer in society. He would have been a mature man. He was a leader within the Jewish ruling council.

It would mean that he was a man of means. He would have been a wealthy man, and certainly a very mature man, and a very clever man, because he probably, as a ruler, as a teacher, he would have today, he would have the equivalent of his master's, and PhD, and various things like that.

[8 : 43] He was one of the elite, one of the top guys of his time. And Jesus speaks to him in a way that really shook him, because despite all that he was, and all his privileges, and all his learning, and all his teaching, Jesus met him and said, you must be born again.

Now, there are some people who think that it's almost within the church that there are some people you'd say, I don't read, well, we don't, but it's almost like there are people who are so upright, and they are so, they're such fine people, there's such a quality and dignity about them, that you say to yourself, well, I think they must be Christians.

And even if you speak to them, and they have no knowledge of the way of salvation, you still somehow say, well, they're so fine, and they're so correct, and they're so upright, and they're so morally good, and they must be, or they must be nearly Christians.

Well, it's to that type of passion, because that's what Nicodemus was. You couldn't have found a more upright, better man in the land than this man, Nicodemus.

And yet Jesus says to him, Nicodemus, you must be born again. And that, you can see Nicodemus is completely confused.

[10 : 20] It's quite funny in a sense. Nicodemus is a teacher of the Jews. He's a really learned man. And he came that night to have a conversation with another teacher.

That's what he thought the night was going to be about. One teacher discussing things with another teacher. Nicodemus wanted to find out more about Jesus.

And he wanted, as one teacher to another, to have this conversation. He wasn't expecting to be challenged and hit right into his very being to kind of work out that you can almost imagine Nicodemus saying, I know nothing.

I thought I knew everything, or I thought I knew most things. I now discover that really, I don't know anything. And that's a challenge to every single one of us.

Because, you know, we can grow up in the church and we can have a wonderful Christian heritage. We can have great Christian parents and come of a great Christian stock and can be really fine people at every level.

[11 : 32] And yet, missing this one thing, that we're not born again. Now, don't get me wrong, having a Christian heritage is a great blessing.

Because it sets you, as it were, on a better footing. It gives you a greater understanding of what is needed. And it is also leaving you in the place where you have been prayed for.

And oh, we can't put a price on what that is. To be somebody who has been prayed for. But unless we actually, personally, ourselves, take Jesus as our Savior, we cannot see the kingdom of God.

That's what Jesus is saying here. And of course, this must have really hit home and hard into Nicodemus.

And I think it's one of the things that a lot of people find or take umbrage with regard to the gospel is the fact that they are being told that they are not good enough.

[12 : 43] You know, there's an offense in the gospel. That's one of the things that people hate about the Christian faith. There are a lot of people who will say, well, you know, okay, they admit that Christ was a wonderful teacher and he lived an exemplary life.

A lot of people who aren't Christians and have no time for the Christian faith, they accept that Christ, they believe Jesus was a historic figure and that he lived an exemplary life and he taught some great things.

That's as far as they'll go. And they'll accept that. But one of the things that they absolutely hate is the fact that the Bible tells us that in and of ourselves we have nothing that will make us right before God.

God cannot accept us just the way we are. And that really hits into human pride. It's like a blow into the stomach.

You know, if you've got a really hard blow that would cause you to double up, well, that's kind of how it comes spiritually. It's like a hammer blow into the solar plexus that would cause you to double up because it's this kind of, makes you realize you are not right before God.

[14 : 01] And what makes it even worse is that we don't have within us the resources to make us right before God. Because the new birth is not just an addition to what is already there.

It's not like we rearrange our lives. Lots of people, I'm sure all of us at different times have tried to rearrange our lives, have tried to do things differently.

You know how at New Year people make resolutions to say, well, I'm going to do this or I'm not going to do that. And we try and rearrange our lives. You sometimes go into a person's house, you're familiar, you've often been in the house, you go into the room and you say, oh, everything's changed.

They've changed everything around in the room. Well, the new birth is not like that. It's not simply that we take what's already there and change it around.

It's not something we do ourselves. It's something that God does within us. It is where the divine seed, as it were, comes in, regeneration, comes into our heart, where God gives.

[15 : 11] And that's the difficult thing that we have. We have to understand that the new birth is accepting and receiving what God has done, what God has given to us. And so, here is Nicodemus and he's really at a loss.

He's not understanding what Jesus is saying. And Jesus is saying to us, you know, this new birth, it's radical, it's transforming. And it changes a person's outlook, changes a person's desire, a person's goals, a person's purposes.

It's not that we still involve ourselves in life as we always did. We're still at the same jobs. We're still interacting with the same people, still live in the same home, and we enjoy life and involve ourselves in life as we always did.

But, there's a difference. We see life from the perspective of the kingdom. The things of the kingdom have become important to us.

We've started to love the Lord and the things that are the Lord's. His house, His people, His day, His word, His cause, His glory becomes something that we pray about.

[16 : 32] Before you're a believer, you never think about praying, Lord, help me to do this for your glory. But when you become a believer, that's kind of what you're doing.

you realize that ultimately it's about Him. Lord, help me to live for you. The non-believer doesn't pray that.

Non-believer may pray about many things, but they're not praying that their life will be about the Lord. Because out with Christ, our life is so often, and even as Christians, it's a great problem as self.

Self is always a problem within our life. But there's new perspectives. That's why it's radical. It's not a rearranging of what was there before. It is transforming completely.

And so Nicodemus had to learn all about this. And he's saying, birth. So Jesus is saying, you know, it's a new birth. And I think when Jesus is talking here about, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

[17 : 39] And when you read that, you cannot but think about Ezekiel, where it tells us back in chapter 36 in Ezekiel, I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean.

And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit. I will put within you and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful and obey my rules.

That's in the Old Testament. And that is just exactly what the new birth is. A lot of people wonder, why are Christians so passionate about telling others about Jesus?

Why is there this evangelistic concern in the heart of a Christian? Well, it's simply when you come yourself to know Jesus as your Savior, you want others to have what you have.

It's not that you're trying to brainwash people. It's not about scoring points. It's not about saying, oh, here's another one added to the church. No, it's because you have a love for people's souls.

[18 : 50] You want people to come to know Jesus. That is why you pray and you continue to pray for those you love, that they'll come to know Jesus. And so, Nicodemus is here and he's questioning all about what is this new birth?

Well, when we think and Jesus, of course, is using the illustration of an actual birth. When a baby is born into this world, the one person really that plays no part in it is the baby that is born.

It is a mother who has all the trauma and all the pain and all the work. The baby, as it were, hasn't really taken any part in the life that is being brought about from conception onwards into its growth and into its being born into this world.

And in a sense, that's what Jesus is saying here. Salvation, you don't have any part in it other than to receive it. And Jesus, in a sense, is like, it's like Jesus, in a sense, is like the mother who is involved with all the trauma and all the pain and all the turmoil and all the sorrow.

Jesus said, is there any sorrow like unto my sorrow? He was the one who had to go through everything, endure everything, in order that we might have life.

[20 : 25] And this is what Nicodemus had to learn. It is a great lesson. It's all already been done. And so, Jesus then highlights, and time is going, the great example of that it's just faith.

It's just looking. It's not the doing. Nicodemus would have ticked every box that could possibly be ticked as an upright, morally good citizen and good Pharisee.

Jesus said, it's by faith, looking. And he uses the illustration of what happened in the wilderness and of how Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. You remember that time when the Israelites were grumbling before God and it was, you remember how they were always trying the patience of God.

And God sent poisonous serpents in. And these serpents were stinging and killing. A lot of people died. And they came to Moses and they said, we've sinned against God.

And God said to Moses, take bronze and make a serpent out of that bronze and put it on a pole and put it right up high in the camp and that anybody who was stung by that serpent will look at that pole and look at the bronze serpent on the pole and they will be healed.

[21 : 49] Now there might have been some within the camp of Israel would say when they were stung, there's no point looking at the pole. Looking at a pole isn't going to help. I need some. Well, they wouldn't have antibiotics in these days but whatever sort of things that they would try and put on if they got bitten by a serpent or how they would try and deal with it.

Some people might try and apply their logic and say, that's stupid. Why just look at a bronze serpent on a pole? But this was God's provision.

God, of course, was teaching the great lesson which was that it's by looking. And of course, this was all a shadow and prefiguring Jesus Christ.

It was a lesson pointing to Jesus. And it's the same today. I'm sure there's a lot of people when we say all you have to do in order to be spiritually healed is look to the risen Savior and you will be healed and people will say, no, there's got to be more than that.

Just as they would have said in the camp, there's got to be more than that. But everybody in the camp who was bitten and looked to the bronze serpent was healed. And similarly today, everybody who has been and we've all been bitten by the sting of sin, the only cure is to look to Jesus who has also been lifted up just as the serpent was in the wilderness.

[23 : 18] And you know what I love about this whole story is that when we come to the end and Jesus is on the cross, who came forward to take down the body of Jesus.

Two men. One was Joseph of Arimathea, the other was this man Nicodemus. And Nicodemus is involved in the taking down of the body of Jesus.

He would remember that night three years ago, right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. I, if I be lifted up, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must I be lifted up.

And Nicodemus looking on Jesus. He had come to put his trust in Jesus. He had seen the risen Jesus.

Well, he had seen Jesus lifted up. I believe that Nicodemus would have been one. Jesus revealed himself to many others besides the immediate disciples.

[24 : 32] He revealed himself to many other of his people. And I believe he would have revealed himself as a risen saviour to Nicodemus. I do not believe for one moment that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus didn't see the risen Christ in his time when he was reappearing and making himself known to his people after the resurrection.

But here's the man who comes under the cover of darkness. Hope nobody seen me going to Jesus.

Three years later, when Peter and James and John and all the other disciples, well John of course went home with Jesus' mother, but all the other disciples are in hiding behind locked doors, Nicodemus comes out of the shadows.

I'm taking Jesus. Joseph and I, we love Jesus. Amazing, isn't it? This is the way God works. And I hope today that if you are still in the shadows spiritually, that you'll come out of them and that you'll take this Jesus, that you'll hold on to this Jesus.

The Father hid his face from Jesus so that Jesus may shine his face upon you in love. won't you today turn to Jesus who's done it all and say, Lord, come into my heart.

[25 : 58] Help me to receive you. Let us pray. Lord our God, we again give thanks to you.