



You Must Be Born Again

John 3:1-21

1. Nicodemus Comes to Jesus at Night

Nicodemus had compelling credentials

John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

- ▼ *He was a religious legalist*
- ▼ *He was a religious loyalist*
- ▼ *He was a religious leader*

Nicodemus was curious but cautious

John 3:2 He came to Jesus at night

- ▼ *Was he alone in his secret curiosity?*
- ▼ *Was he afraid of his Sanhedrin comrades?*
- ▼ *Was he aware of his spiritual condition?*
- ▼ *Was he ashamed of his spiritual cravings?*

Nicodemus was confident and complimentary

John 3:2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

- ▼ *He was convinced by Jesus' authority and ability*
- ▼ *He was convinced of Jesus' authenticity*

Nicodemus was confronted with cataclysmic catastrophe

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

- ▼ *Jesus came to topple tradition and tell the truth*
- ▼ *Jesus came to reveal a radical and revolutionary rebirth*
- ▼ *Jesus came to lead as Lord – into a life of light and love and liberty*
- ▼ *Jesus came to hold out the hope of heaven for the hereafter*

Critical Conclusions

- 1) Religious rules and rituals and routines are not enough to save or to satisfy — we need a real and relevant relationship with God.
- 2) When we embrace Jesus, he brings more than reorganization or reprioritization — he brings radical revolution and rebirth.
- 3) Relationship with Jesus may begin in the dark, but it must move out into the daylight — so claim and confess Jesus unashamedly.
- 4) Rebirth results in a new Father, a new family, a new freedom, a new fortune, and a new future – so live this new life to the fullest.

John 3:1-21

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

³ In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

⁹ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Nicodemus' Credentials

1. Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

- ▶ The Pharisees were one of two primary religious/political parties (along with the Sadducees) mentioned in the New Testament who exerted sway during Jesus' day.
- ▶ The Pharisees believed in the scriptural authority of the Old Testament including the books of Moses, the books of history, the psalms, proverbs and prophets.
- ▶ The Pharisees believed in the future resurrection of the dead, both righteous and unrighteous, and believed in the existence and ministry of angels and spirits.
- ▶ Differentiated from Pharisees, Sadducees believed only the Law of Moses was scripturally authoritative, and they did not believe in the resurrection, angels or spirits.
- ▶ During the New Testament period, the Pharisees were the predominant party, though the Sadducees controlled the high priesthood.
- ▶ The Gospels and Acts paint the Pharisees as super-religious, exceedingly legalistic, unsympathetic toward the common man, often hypocritical with impure motives.
- ▶ Theologically, however, Jesus would have believed with and been aligned with the Pharisees.
- ▶ Many believers in the early church were Pharisees (Acts 15:5), and the Apostle Paul claimed affiliation with the Pharisees (Acts 23:6; Acts 26:5; Philippians 3:5).

2. Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

- ▶ The Jewish ruling council, or the Sanhedrin, consisted of the High Priest and 70 members; this body served as the religious supreme court for the Jewish nation.
- ▶ The Sanhedrin met and ruled at the permission of the Roman Empire; it was highly political and included members from both the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

3. Nicodemus was a rabbi.

- ▶ Jesus himself identified Nicodemus as a rabbi, or teacher, here in John 3:10: "You are Israel's teacher..."

Nicodemus' Christianity?

1. Nicodemus would later defend Jesus when the rulers discussed having Jesus arrested.

John 7:32 The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. — ⁴⁵ Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?" ⁴⁶ "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared. ⁴⁷ "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. ⁴⁸ "Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?" ⁴⁹ No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them." ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, ⁵¹ "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" ⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee." ⁵³ Then each went to his own home.

2. Nicodemus would participate in the burial of Jesus after the crucifixion.

John 19:38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

3. Nicodemus would continue to be mentioned in Christian tradition.

Beyond the Gospel of John, there is no biblical reference to Nicodemus. An apocryphal and pseudepigraphical work was written under his name in the 4th century, called *The Gospel of Nicodemus*. Nicodemus is venerated as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church and in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Jewish historian Josephus had a brother named Nicodemus ben Gorion, who was a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, but a positive identification is impossible.