

Bi132 The Gospels

Lesson Bi132-13 Nicodemus

Have you ever been curious about some new person in your town? Has your curiosity been so strong that you finally decided to get some answers for yourself? In this story a man in Jerusalem who was very powerful, politically and religiously, had a great curiosity concerning Jesus. He wanted to know the truth, so he decided to go directly to Jesus for the answers.

Jesus had traveled from Capernaum on his first ministry journey to Jerusalem when it was almost time for the Passover celebration. Many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name, but the religious leaders opposed him and watched for a way to accuse him. One man, named Nicodemus, wanted to talk to Jesus personally. He belonged to the group called ‘Pharisees’ and sat as a member of the Jewish ruling council. That body was known as the Sanhedrin and was made up of 71 chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law. Its members were very pious and were held in high regard by the Jewish religious community. This is the same high court that would later bring Christ to trial. They taught in the synagogues and paraded themselves as religious examples for the people. The Pharisees especially acted as self-appointed guardians of the Law of Moses and the Jewish traditions. They often publicly questioned and criticized Jesus and his disciples.

Because of his public role, Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Perhaps that was so he would not be seen or recognized by anyone, or perhaps because he wanted a long uninterrupted talk with Jesus. This would not have been possible with the people that usually crowded around this new teacher. He addressed Jesus with respect, saying, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” He was not bold enough to come right out and ask exactly who Jesus was.

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again, or in other words, born from above.”

Confused, Nicodemus got enough courage to ask, “How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of the water and of the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to human life, but the Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. No one should be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ Consider the wind, it blows wherever it wants. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:1-8).

Notice how Jesus deals with this man and his questions. Nicodemus affirms that Jesus must be from God. The miracles he has heard about and perhaps seen can have their source only in God Himself. Jesus immediately directs Nicodemus to his own need to be born again—to be born of the Spirit, and get into a right relationship with God. Nicodemus has expressed faith in the miracles, but that is not enough. He still does not get what Jesus is talking about.

Nicodemus did not understand that the kingdom of God Jesus referred to was God's present rule in a person's heart, as well as God's future kingdom. Jesus was speaking of the way the Holy Spirit renews a person's heart when they experience the new birth. God the Spirit moves sovereignly in the heart and life of any person who believes in Jesus. Nicodemus wanted to grasp what Jesus was telling him, so he inquired further, "How can this be?"

"You are Israel's teacher," answered Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, I and my disciples speak of what we know, and we testify of what we have seen, but still you religious leaders and scholars do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Moses lifted up the bronze snake in the wilderness to bring physical healing to people who had been bitten, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:9-15).

Jesus points out that just being a spiritual leader, religious, or well educated is not enough. And to answer Nicodemus, Jesus explains that he is able to perform the signs because he, the Son of Man, came from heaven.

Then Jesus reminds this scholar about a story from the life of Moses. The people of Israel were dying because of God's judgment on their disobedience. God instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Then whoever looked at it in faith would be healed. Jesus is pointing to his own future, when he would be lifted up on the cross for sin. He is explaining that belief in him is what is required to be 'born again.'

What follows in John's third chapter is perhaps the most well-known verse in the whole Bible. It contains the essential truths of the gospel: "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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him. 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" (John 3:16-18).

These truths are that God loves all people no matter who they are. This love made God send his one and only Son to the world for their greatest need, which is sin and separation from God. This beloved Son would be lifted up and would die on the cross for the sins of all humanity. Finally, everyone who believes in this Son and his work will receive eternal life. Jesus has come to save whosoever will believe in him, and not to condemn us before God. But whoever does not believe is condemned already.

At that point, Nicodemus had to make a personal decision to either reject or accept Jesus as Savior. He could no longer claim he was ignorant concerning who Jesus was. He could no longer try and save himself by his good works or knowledge. We know Nicodemus did decide to follow Jesus, because later in John's Gospel we are told he had become a follower of Christ.

This story is **important** because it shows that God does not show favoritism; anyone who believes in Jesus can be 'born again.'

The **main truth** of this story is that because of his great love, God sent Jesus into this world to die for the sins of whoever would believe and put their faith in him.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Why did Nicodemus come to speak to Jesus?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, "Nicodemus came to Jesus because he wanted to know who he was," you are correct.
2. What did Jesus say was required for a person to enter the kingdom of God?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said that Jesus told Nicodemus, "To enter the kingdom of God you must be born again, as a child of God," you are correct.
3. What was the compelling reason for God sending Jesus into the world?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, "the reason God sent Jesus into the world was because God loves all peoples and wants them to have eternal life," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn this story by memory so you can tell it to someone else, especially someone who needs to be born again. Memorize this verse from John 3:16: "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."