

## Encounters with Jesus: Nicodemus John 3:1-21

Over this series we have met a variety of people who have met Jesus and had their lives transformed. We first met the centurion a man of position and authority but far from religious, then we met the sick woman who was broken and desperate for help then last time we met Zacchaeus who was an outcast because he was a cheat and fraud. All of them had their lives changed as a result of meeting Jesus all of them acted in faith. Today we are meeting another man called Nicodemus.

Who is Nicodemus?

- He is a pharisee and a member of the ruling council
  - He was a serious man
    - Well taught, intelligent, wealthy, very moral, did 'good' things
    - If we brought him into the modern day he would be a bloke with a university degree that has led to a good job so he has no financial concerns. But also as a minimum it would be the kind of bloke who did good things for the people around him (put his neighbours bins out, help old ladies across the road) you know the kind of person I am talking about. On top of that maybe the kind of person who says God is real and goes to church every week and prays. A religious guy.
- Despite having all that Nicodemus was intrigued as to who Jesus was
  - But scared of his pharisee friends so comes to Jesus at night
- He had a serious question
  - A question we would all do well to ask.
    - How do I get to heaven?
- Nicodemus comes to Jesus and calls him Rabbi, and acknowledges he is a good teacher
  - A strange thing for a Pharisee to do because Jesus was an unknown to them he hadn't been trained in their schools or come up through their ranks
    - So why was Nicodemus acknowledging him as a good teacher?
- Nicodemus says lots of right things about Jesus
  - Calls him rabbi.
    - Jesus had followers
      - That's what a Rabbi is – a person with followers
  - Calls him teacher
    - Jesus certainly is a teacher
      - Jesus teaches a lot about life and how to live if for our best and Gods glory.

### **1) Jesus is more than a teacher**

- But Jesus is so much more than just a teacher and that is what he shows us here.
  - Jesus is in fact a saviour and wants his people to relate to him in a way that is more than just as a teacher.

- In life we all have different titles.
    - I have pastor, teacher, Mike, Michael when I am in trouble, husband, dad.
      - The way in which people at manor park who call me mike or pastor relate to me is very different to the way Isaac and Pippa relate to me as dad.
      - The same is true of Jesus.
        - He doesn't want us to just relate as teacher to student but in a much more intimate way as saved to saviour.
- One of Nicodemus problems is as a Pharisee and member of the ruling council is that his religion would have been very cerebral.
  - It was all about knowledge.
    - Jesus right at the start is pointing this out and challenging the very core of religion.
      - Jesus wants a relationship with his followers not just for people to understand who he is.
- So, if Nicodemus got it wrong how do we get it right? Well that's what the rest of this is about. Jesus makes an offer of new birth.

## 2) An offer of new birth

- You may have heard the term born again Christian before. In Christian circles it was a term used a lot in the 70s and 80s and its left behind some misconceptions. So lets look at what Jesus meant.
  - Well we are all born once – I hope that's something we can all agree on
    - At that point we are born as human beings. We are born of flesh as Jesus puts it. We are humans, created in the image of God but we have one big problem from birth and that is separation from God.
  - It's our second birth the one of water and spirit that deals with that issue.
  - To help us understand new birth I want to ask 5 questions.
    - Who is it for?
    - Where is it from?
    - What does it do?
    - How do you get it?
    - How can you tell?
- a. Who is it for?
- Nicodemus was a
    - member of the ruling council
      - A very high-status religious figure and wealthy to go with it.
      - He would have been a reasoned person not an emotionally driven person

- He was a Pharisee
  - His moral code would have been sorted but moral code with Jesus is not the answer.
- He was not a conservative crowd follower
  - He turns to Jesus who had no pedigree or credentials and respectfully calls him rabbi and wants to learn from him.
  - He does it at night because he knew it would have been frowned upon to meet with Jesus.
- Nicodemus is one of the most open-minded people you will find. Although he lives amongst the elite in his society, and on the outside appears to have life and religion sorted he humbly comes to Jesus at night with an open mind ready to hear new ideas.
  - So if Jesus turns to Nicodemus and says he need to be born again than it applies to all of us.
  - Being born again is for anyone who will come to Jesus with an open mind and heart. For people who will put their preconceptions and misconceptions to one side and examine who Jesus is again. It's for people who will put aside their wealthy, success, fame and authority and look to Jesus instead.
- Being born again does not simple mean that you need more morality or religion in you life, Nicodemus has plenty of that and Jesus says you need something different.
  - Jesus doesn't look at Nicodemus and say good work Nic you are doing a great job, you have learnt lots, you live well you have lots of money so you are most of the way to heaven you just need a helping hand for the rest.
    - Like you need some kind of vitamin pill to top up your diet.
  - Jesus says the opposite he says all that morality, religion and good works do nothing, you need to be born again.
    - That will be a challenge to those who hear this thinking they are good people, pleasing God.
    - No matter how good you are, how much you have life sorted you must be born again.
      - The flip side is true to that no matter how broken, how messed up you are you can be born again to.
    - No one enters the kingdom of God without being born again
    - We all need to be born again, so are you?

b. Where is it from

- Jesus answers this in verse 5 when he says that you must be born of water and spirit.
  - At first glance it seems like two things but that's where the old testament helps us
    - If you go back to Ezekiel 36 where Ezekiel talks about the Spirit of God as water in a desert. Water in an arid place isn't just life giving but, in

a sense, it is life itself. So, Jesus is using water as a metaphor for the spirit.

- So, it is one thing expressed in two ways.
  - New birth comes through the power of the Holy Spirit.

c. What does it do?

- New birth is God implanting his power in us through his spirit to renew and regenerate our hearts.
  - Paul helps us to understand it in Titus 3:5-6
- Its through that power that God is at work removing evil and sin from our lives.
  - It is at work in Christians now and it's that power that changes and transforms lives today.
  - God takes our heart of stone and puts within us a heart of flesh.
- It changes our heart attitudes.
  - We daily hate sin more and more whilst loving God more and more
  - Our heart desires are reordered.
    - No longer is it fame, career, sex, money that drive us, but Gods love for us and his desires for our lives.
  - God's love for us becomes so real that all else can be counted as loss.
- New birth also changes our mind.
  - Before new birth there is a lot of the Bible that doesn't make sense.
    - But suddenly with the power of the Spirit within you through new birth they make sense.
    - The gospel is foolishness to those who don't believe.
- New birth also gives us a new identity
  - When a baby is born a new life is started with a new identity.
    - That's why Jesus used this metaphor
  - Look back just a couple of chapters to John 1:12-13
    - New birth brings the right to being a child of God and a child has an identity.
  - Our identity is changed from being rooted in this world to belonging in the kingdom of God.
    - In our current culture, more so than ever, our identity is what we choose to make of ourselves. We have to achieve our identity
    - But God say when you are born again you become a child of God and you gain an identity from me.
      - An identity that is received not achieved
      - It's an identity rooted in God's love for you
        - You become a loved, accepted, child of God that's your identity through new birth.

## d. How do you get it?

- New birth is a gift from God.
  - How much effort does a baby put in to being born? None
  - The same is true of our new birth. It does not happen through our good works but by the work of another. Jesus. Jesus is the one who did the hard work for our rebirth upon the cross.
    - Jesus dealt with our sin and wrong doing so that God could come close to us again.
- The Holy Spirit needs to work to open your heart to new life and to open your eyes to God.
- Then in response to that you have to repent and believe. But what does that mean?
  - Repentance means to be sorry for your sins but more than that you need to turn away from you sin and towards Jesus.
  - Believe in Jesus. Believe that Jesus died for your sins.
    - V16-21 make this clear. Let's just read them again.
      - Believe in Jesus and you will be given new birth.

## e. How can you tell

- Because your life will be changed
  - We're saved by faith alone, but not by faith which remains alone.
  - We're saved not by our works.
  - We're saved by faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone.
  - But if you really are saved, it always results in a changed life. Always.

So, what about Nicodemus after his conversation with Jesus?

Nicodemus pops up again in John in chapter 19. Nicodemus a man who was to scared to meet Jesus in day light for fear of being seen with him is now one of two people asking for the body of Jesus after Jesus had died on the cross. Remember it was the Pharisees and Jewish leaders who put Jesus there in the first place. We don't know for sure but that looks like a changed life to me.

If we encounter Jesus like so many other have our lives are transformed too. We change from running after the things of this world to seeking to serve God. When you understand the gospel that you were once a filthy sinner but have been cleaned by nothing of your own but by the mercy and grace of God you live life differently. You hate evil and love good. You hate sin and love God.

What can we learn from this.

## 3) We all need to believe

- Jesus makes it clear that there is only one way to heaven.
- It's through being born again through the Holy Spirit into new life.
- A life of repentance and belief.

Nicodemus had it all. Power, authority, money, intellect, knowledge. He would have gone to church every Sunday, home group every week, prayed every day but that is not enough. You

need to be re-born by the spirit. Don't fall into the trap of religion that makes you think you can earn salvation through good works. Instead today ask God to open your heart to understand the amazing simplicity of the gospel that it's all done for you through Jesus on the cross. Trust in him, repent and believe because it is in Christ alone that we can find new life.