

A Journey of Faith

“After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews” (John 19:38–40).

Nicodemus, like Joseph of Arimathea, was a member of the Sanhedrin council. His name was not brought up in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, but John mentioned him three times in his record (John 3:1–15; 7:43–52; 19:38–42). Luke wrote that Joseph did not consent to the plan and action of the council in their devious plot to orchestrate Jesus’ crucifixion (Luke 23:50, 51); we assume that the same comment could have been made concerning Nicodemus.

Both men had become secret believers in Christ, but neither of them made their faith public until the death and burial of Jesus. It is obvious that these men at some point developed a germinal faith in Jesus that grew in quietness and strength until it came into the open, risking everything upon its actions.

Due to the fact that we have more information about Nicodemus than Joseph, we can follow rather closely his journey of faith. To some extent, we all have made or are making a similar journey in our faith.

When we first see Nicodemus, he possesses a seeking faith. He seeks out a personal interview with Jesus. He must have risked his reputation as a ruler of the Jews when he made the arrangement to talk with Jesus. For this reason, he chose to come to Him under the cover of darkness. Even though he came stealthily, he came with the spirit of inquiry and integrity. Perhaps hearing Jesus earlier had awakened in him a desire to know and understand His message and presence. He had recognized the ring of truth in what Jesus had been saying and in what He had been doing.

John wrote of Nicodemus: “Now 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 have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him’” (John 3:1, 2). The miracles of Jesus had provided credentials for Nicodemus that he could not deny. Propelled by them, he came to find out more. During their nighttime discussion, Jesus talked at length with him about the kingdom of God—the essentiality of entering it, how he would enter it, and the nature of it. “Christ must have seen good soil in that man’s heart to have scattered there so much of the good seed.”¹ His heart went out that night to Jesus even though his faith may not have been as big as a mustard seed and had a lot of growing to do.

Jesus told him that he would have to be born again: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God”; “I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5). It would be some time before Nicodemus’ faith would bring him to that birth, but, at least—we can say by implication—through the teachings he received that night, his faith had begun its journey to maturity.

We see, secondly, Nicodemus with a growing faith. Later, in his spiritual development, he sees through the machinations of the other council

¹William Hanna, *Our Lord’s Life on Earth* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1882), 574.

members to reject Jesus and His word. When the Pharisees ridiculed those who had failed to arrest Jesus, Nicodemus, with a courage no doubt born of faith, said, "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" (John 7:51). The Pharisees quickly countered, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee" (John 7:52). These caustic words ended the argument and Nicodemus seems to have slipped into silence. It is reasonable to believe that in the ensuing days leading up to the cross, he was continuing to think his way through the profound implications of the truth that Jesus had been sent of God. His faith found growth even in the midst of serious controversy.

We see Nicodemus, thirdly, with a working faith. The man who had first come to Jesus in the nighttime now comes out to assist with the body of Jesus in broad daylight. He had come to believe and his faith was strong enough to work. His secret faith now blossomed into a vibrant faith of love and tenderness toward Jesus.

John wrote: "Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews" (John 19:39, 40). Nicodemus brought out his myrrh and aloes while Joseph was getting permission to bury Jesus' body. These spices must have been in a compact roll or in the form of dry aromatic powder. They crumbled them or sprinkled them between the folds of the linen that was wound around His body. The intention would have been to cover the whole body with the scented mixture. A hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes would have been sufficient to cover the totality of the body. All of this would have been done quickly. No embalming of the body

was possible; just a quick wrapping of the body was all that time would allow. The long roll of clean white linen brought by Joseph formed a shroud around the body. The rich spices were placed in large handfuls between the folds of the linen. The cloth also provided a hood that enveloped the thorn-scarred head, or else a separate linen turban was encircled about it.

One truth clearly stands out: To touch a dead body would render a Jew unclean (Numbers 19:11), and this was the eve of the Paschal Sabbath, when no Jew wanted to become defiled by touching a dead body (John 19:31). However, this thought did not bother Joseph and Nicodemus, noted council members, who would have looked toward and led in the great Passover feast.

Joseph and Nicodemus had waited a long time to make their faith known to others. However, they displayed their faith and dared to act upon it at a time when expressing it required them to enter into the reproach that Jesus bore for us. When they came to assist Jesus, they came with more faith and love than Jesus' close disciples and apostles seemed to possess at this time. They had come to carry out the last service that His human body would receive or require from the hands of others. Anyone who loves Jesus appreciates, applauds, and admires what they did.

Eddie Cloer



Jesus was first presented frankincense and myrrh by the wise men from the east in honor of His birth and at the last was covered with myrrh and aloes in honor of His death.

He who had once ridden on a colt upon which no other man had ever sat (Luke 19:30) was buried in a tomb in which no other man had ever been laid (Luke 23:53).