

Sermons on Jesus:

Nicodemus

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Him 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." Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:1-5).

EVEN the man on the street knows and has ideas about Nicodemus. Jesus, truly, must be God! He made many men famous. Some use Nicodemus to get out of baptism; some use Nicodemus to get into baptism. We need honesty as we study Nicodemus. Never use Scripture or a biblical character vain gloriously. Read the text several times before making conclusions.

I. NICODEMUS

Facts, facts, facts. Men do judge by outward appearance. A man moves into your community who is rich and can be elder material. What a prize! An old widow moves in needing assistance. What a problem! We do judge by talents and successes and by what others can do for us. This is still wrong, wrong, wrong!

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. The Pharisees never had more than six thousand. Pharisaism was a strict religious order. Paul was a Pharisee.

Nicodemus was also a ruler of the Sanhedrin

which had seventy members. He was a master teacher like Gamaliel (John 3:10). Nicodemus had the credentials. What a catch! He was a member of "Who's Who" in Jerusalem.

He was rich and powerful. God can use talent, riches, and preparation. He was a Bible scholar. Jesus did not talk to him as He did with the woman at Jacob's well (John 4). Jesus acknowledged his Bible knowledge. He came impressed. He had done his homework. He knew about Jesus—His miracles and His teaching. He called Jesus "Rabbi." This points out a serendipity. Jesus had verified Himself. Israel could know! Palestine could have accepted Him! Jerusalem could have welcomed Him! Honesty claims Jesus. Nicodemus was "up front" with his own conclusions. The evidence was there.

Nicodemus came at night. He may have been cowardly, but he also could have been wise! He may have worried about his own reputation. But he equally may have been thoughtful about Jesus! Beware of judging. He did come! The rabbis thought the night was the best time to study. This beats being grabbed and yelled at in the foyer! It beats being spanked in a dismissal prayer! Be gentle with Nicodemus.

Nicodemus did come to Jesus. He represents bankrupt legalistic Israel. He wanted better. Nicodemus came early in the ministry of Jesus. You need to grasp the chronology. What a catch! Jesus could have used him. He could have become an apostle. Nicodemus did not sign up. God's ways are different from man's. God uses available men, not just the talented. God seeks hearts; men seek potential. Coach Bear Bryant

"In the year 1909, the Honorable Earl Balfour was lecturing at the University of Edinburgh on 'The Moral Values Which United Nations.' He had mentioned diplomatic contacts, commerce, common knowledge, common friendships. At the end there was applause and a question period. Then a Japanese student rose and asked, 'But, Mr. Balfour, what about Jesus Christ?' There was dead silence. Everybody felt the irony of the question as a foreign student from a far-off non-Christian land inquired of one of the great diplomatic leaders of the greatest Christian nation of that day, 'What about Jesus Christ?'"

said, "No football game was ever won on potential."

II. NEW BIRTH

The rabbis were of the original "Carnegie School." They used flattery and gave titles. Nicodemus did too. He also used the "editorial we."

Jesus shocks us as He hit Nicodemus "head-on." No small talk or commendations were engaged in. Nicodemus was not "led on." Jesus repeated three times, "You must be born again." This is baptism externally. Nicodemus understood that. The Pharisees rejected God in rejecting John's baptism (Luke 7:30). *Obey! Act!* Do not merely talk! The only kind of Christians are "born-again" Christians. The Jews proselyted Gentiles. There was prayer, sacrifice, and baptism. John the Baptist shocked Israel by demanding baptism also of the Jews! Before, it had been only to the Gentiles. In the judgment we all will need a "birth certificate."

There are other great Scriptures in John 3 with Nicodemus. One is about the Holy Spirit and the wind. Wind is not explained; it is obeyed. It is used. Read verses 11 and 12. Jesus demanded obedience. Moses and the brass serpent from Numbers 21 is another great passage here. John 3:16, another great text, comes with Nicodemus. Few connect this.

III. MORE ON NICODEMUS

Nicodemus is found at John 7:45-53. John's Gospel rescues Nicodemus. MML say nothing. John rescued Martha, Mary, and even the resur-

rection of Lazarus. But John omits John Mark! Inspiration baffles men!

This is another reason to believe in inspiration. This is not the way man does things. Nicodemus did object, but not strongly. With some, it does take time. You learn this with tenure in a local work. Allow men time. Do not pull fruit green. Do not force issues. Nicodemus was "sneered at" by his peers. They did miss out on the prophet from Galilee (Jonah). Nicodemus is slow but he is making progress.

Nicodemus is also mentioned in John 19. Jesus is crucified. Joseph of Arimathea "comes out of the closet." This caused Nicodemus to act also. Remember the twelve scattered like sheep without a shepherd. Sometimes it takes a disciple to influence a disciple. Joseph acted and Nicodemus acted.

He was generous. The amount of spices was generous. Nicodemus buried Jesus properly. We owe him a debt of thanks for that. He did it with his own two hands. Usually the rich and powerful pay others to serve. Can you imagine these "Two Big Shots" burying Jesus?! *Amazing!* What brought Joseph and Nicodemus out? *The cross of Christ!* They watched Jesus die! This is the gospel. The gospel still is God's power to save. Plant the cross "square-dab" in the middle of men's hearts. It will do its work.

CONCLUSION

Do you have your "birth certificate"? What happened to Nicodemus? Acts does not say. He drops out of Scripture. Your answer will judge you probably more than it does him.

—Charles B. Hodge, Jr.

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