

7. Jesus Talked with Nicodemus at Night

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the difference between knowledge and true faith. We saw that it is easy for people to believe in a miracle but not have true faith in their hearts. In this topic, we are going to see that Nicodemus came to talk to Jesus one night while Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover. Jesus explained to Nicodemus the meaning of true belief.

In John 3:1-3, we read, “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 are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” Nicodemus was one of the leading Pharisees in the city of Jerusalem. His influence was shown by the fact that he was a ruler of the Jews. The Jews had seventy rulers or leaders that were known as the Sanhedrin. That was the group of men who controlled many things in the lives of the Jews so each member of the Sanhedrin had a great influence.

As a leading Pharisee and ruler, Nicodemus knew that he needed to learn about Jesus and His teachings because He would be expected to know. However, because Jesus had cleansed the temple, many of the Jewish leaders were upset with Him because He had stopped their business, which they were carrying on in the temple for personal profit. As a result, Nicodemus chose to come and talk to Jesus at night. Nicodemus was much more open to learn from Jesus than most of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus recognized that Jesus was a teacher. He also recognized that Jesus had to come from God because he knew that it was impossible for Him to be doing the signs (miracles) that He was doing unless He had been given power by God to do those signs.

The Pharisees were very quick to teach the law of God and tell others that they had to keep every rule in the Old Testament. They had determined that there were six hundred and thirteen laws in the Old Testament and they were working to keep those laws in an effort to try and earn their way to heaven. As a result, Jesus knew that Nicodemus was trying to earn his way to heaven by keeping the law. Jesus immediately said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Here, we see that Jesus immediately made a statement that Nicodemus could not understand.

Nicodemus was like the rich young ruler or Paul and thought that he was keeping the entire law. In Luke 18, Jesus reminded the rich young ruler of the laws that cover the relationship of man to other people. The ruler said in Luke 18:21, “And he said, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth.’” Before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul had a similar attitude. He later described that attitude in Philippians 3:4-6 where we read, “Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” Here, we see that both men thought they were blameless. Nicodemus had the same attitude so Jesus told him he would not see the kingdom of God unless he was born

again. Nicodemus had no understanding of what it meant to be born again.

As a result, we read in John 3:4-8, “Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.” The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’” Nicodemus had no understanding of spiritual birth. That is why he asked a question about physical birth. He asked how he could experience a second physical birth when he was already an adult and already old. He asked if Jesus wanted him to return to the womb of his mother.

Jesus had asked Nicodemus a question that Jesus knew Nicodemus would not understand. Jesus knew that the question would give him the opportunity to explain to Nicodemus the difference between physical life and spiritual life. Jesus answered the question of Nicodemus with several statements to explain the difference between physical life and spiritual life. Jesus began by saying, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” “Born of water” speaks of physical birth. In contrast, to be “born of the Spirit” speaks about spiritual life. Romans 8:9 says, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” Once the Holy Spirit came to the Jews (Acts 2:1-4), Gentiles (Acts 10:44-45) and Old Testament saints (Acts 19:5-6), every Christian is born of the Spirit and receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. At the moment we place our faith in Jesus, we are born of the Spirit. Nicodemus could not understand this so Jesus explained further.

Jesus went on to explain, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” At the moment that our human parents conceived us, we were conceived as human flesh. As a result, when we were born about nine months later, we experienced a physical birth. Nicodemus could understand that physical birth. However, it was the spiritual birth that Nicodemus could not understand. At the moment of spiritual birth, Christ places the Holy Spirit in our human spirit and we experience spiritual birth. Ephesians 1:13-14 says, “In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” In these verses, we see that we received the Holy Spirit at the time we believed and that the Holy Spirit is the down payment and guarantee of our salvation until we enter heaven. That is why Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed both a physical birth and a spiritual birth.

Then, Jesus illustrated spiritual life to Nicodemus. Jesus said that the wind blows where it chooses. He told Nicodemus that we can even hear the sound of the wind. However, Jesus also told Nicodemus that he could not tell where the wind came from or where the wind was going. As a result, it was impossible for him to understand what it meant to be born of the Spirit. Nicodemus showed that Jesus was right by asking another question. John 3:9-13 says, “Nicodemus answered

and said to Him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.’” Nicodemus made it clear that he could not understand about spiritual life.

Jesus began to answer the question of Nicodemus and the completion of His answer will be in our next topic. Here, we see that Jesus asked Nicodemus if he was a teacher in Israel. He asked why he could not understand these things. A couple of years later, Jesus would explain to His disciples what the scribes and Pharisees were like. Matthew 15:14 says, “‘Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.’” Here, we see that Jesus told His disciples that the scribes and Pharisees were blind leaders of the blind. Nicodemus was a teacher; but at this point, he could not understand spiritual truth because he lacked spiritual life. Later, we will see that Nicodemus did follow Jesus and even helped to bury Him.

Jesus then said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.” Nicodemus spoke as a representative of the Jewish religious leaders and the entire nation back in verse 2. We see that in this statement Jesus also spoke for the Father and the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus and the other religious leaders should have understood because God spoke the same way in Genesis 1:26 which says, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’” We are made in the image of God because we have a body, a soul and a spirit. Nicodemus needed to know that the Spirit of God is the One who gives spiritual life.

Jesus told Nicodemus that if he did not believe when Jesus told him about earthly things that he would not believe if Jesus told him about heavenly things. Jesus said that no one on earth can ascend up into heaven and tell us what it is like in heaven. That question is asked in Proverbs 30:4 where we read, “Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, if you know?” A person cannot ascend into heaven in order to know God. That is why it was necessary for the Son of Man, who was already in heaven, to come down to this earth to tell us how to get to know God and how to have eternal life. We will see that Jesus explained that more fully to Nicodemus in our next topic.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain spiritual truth. That can only happen as they get to really know the One who came down from heaven to explain spiritual truth and give us the Holy Spirit to understand spiritual truth. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children grow in their understanding of Jesus.