

John 3:1-21 -The night visitor: Nicodemus

The character Nicodemus appears 3 times in John's Gospel we first meet him as a reluctant admirer of Jesus, we last see him with more bravery than the disciples.

In a way Jesus is drawing Nicodemus in and over the course of John's Gospel we see Nicodemus take a Journey from darkness to light.

There is a great doctrine called the doctrine of Irresistible Grace that I believe in. It claims that no one who experiences the grace of God [or love of God] can ever reject Christ. This is perhaps the challenge and personal experience of Nicodemus.

Anyone can hear or see or reason, but only if the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes can you know and believe. Once you know and believe you Begin to Love God Back and love his people. Loving is no longer done out of Duty to a command but it is done out of a natural desire.

John 3:16 has become the most famous verse perhaps of all, but strangely it is not the main point of this passage.

I suspect if you asked John or Jesus or even Nicodemus what they thought was the key point they would reply

"You must be born again to enter the Kingdom of God"

The record of this event in John is either a summary or sample of what is said – because it is unlikely Nicodemus only spent 1 minute with Jesus. The original conversation was most likely in Aramaic – John is writing in Greek.

Nico = victory, or champion & Demas = people

Interesting that his name and his role were one and the same, he is the representative of the world into which Jesus has been sent.

*John 1:3 All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*

*1:4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*

**1:5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. [Taken hold of it] [comprehended it]**

**A man came to Jesus by night – Nicodemus is a representative of the Darkness. He has not comprehended Jesus and yet he is drawn to him. Like a Moth to a flame.**

Nicodemus admits that some of the Pharisees can see that Jesus is from GOD, [by using Logic]

Jesus has done things that only God could do

Now John has just told us that Jesus didn't like people assessing him this way – man ability to judge righteously is flawed- sin, total depravity.

*John 2:23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.*

*2:24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people*

*2:25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*

Seeing that Jesus is God is not the same thing as living like Jesus is God.

Presumably the visit at night was prompted by not wanting to be associated with some of the things Jesus said.

*Jesus seems to get away with it, maybe he is right, but [says Nicodemus] I don't want anyone to know this is what I'm thinking until I meet with this guy myself, secretly.*

Stop and think: Is it wrong to be curious about Jesus, but worried about what other people think?

Possibly but Jesus never challenges Nicodemus on this point.

All of us ultimately come to Jesus from the darkness- or else we don't see the need for Jesus at all.

**"You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary."**

**Jonathan Edwards**

There is no right way to seek God if you don't know him- no set method- there is no step by step guide- all you have is hope and/or need.

The Greek says "Born again" but it can also be interpreted "Born from above"

Obviously in Aramaic Jesus said “born again” as Nicodemus asks about what Jesus means by Born again in his illustration as opposed to born from above. But John’s use of the term is inspired because from our point of view. We can see we are reborn from God.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that only those born again can see the kingdom of God [logic alone cannot get you there]

Nicodemus immediately reverts back to using Logical questions. He cannot comprehend what Jesus means by rebirth. He does not yet comprehend that he is in effect spiritually dead, without it.

Jesus reiterates his position and explains what he means [Revelation of the Holy Spirit]. This is not just being given information, but rather being given life.

**The wind metaphor implies that no one can tell who is or isn’t born of the Spirit- but God chooses.**

Believing comes by being Born again

*"Faith in the living God and his Son Jesus Christ is always the result of the new birth, and can never exist except in the regenerate. Whoever has faith is a saved man."*

**C.H. Spurgeon**

## Water & Spirit

*Ezekiel 36:25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.*

*36:26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*

*36:27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

Water is cleansing and no doubt it has a link to baptism, but the baptism of John was repentance, Some Pharisees thought they were sinless and therefore did not need to repent.

Today society has made a lot of sinful practices acceptable, no one is suppose to feel guilty [unless they rape or murder or emit too many hydro-carbons] consequently a lot of very sinful people don’t see the need to repent for their disobedience.

*I'm beautiful in my way*

*'Cause God makes no mistakes*

*I'm on the right track, baby I was born this way*

Many Christians promote this universal acceptance of God for anyone and downplay the need for people to live holy lives.

Jesus is saying the complete opposite, if you stay born this way, you won’t see the kingdom of God. **YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN.**

Many Christians promote the universal acceptance of God for anyone and downplay the need for people to live holy lives.

On the other hand some Christians focus heavily on some sins [especially the sexual ones] and neglect other sins entirely [especially the financial ones].

In many ways these types of arrogance make us like the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were not all completely anti-Jesus. Their reaction was typical of any one. Some of them [like Nicodemus] found Jesus attractive others found Jesus repulsive. The important thing is not their reaction but that Jesus came to challenge their ideas. Jesus encounters with Pharisees are so important, because there is a danger for any follower of Christ to become like a Pharisee; a heart of stone.

Christ teaches us that the law matters because there is a principle of God behind the law, breaking the law hurts us and our relationship with God.

The Pharisees believed the Law mattered because keeping it pleased God. [This is their great mistake and it is alive in many Christian hearts today] Did you hear Beth’s testimony last week- you can’t please God, by doing anything.

Jesus is saying these laws are meant to show you God's heart and your desire for them is meant to come from a desire to know God more.

The Pharisees could not comprehend this.

Obedience is not suppose to be manipulative [or Godipulative], we don't do it to make God happy with us; we do it because we trust that what God says is best. Therefore obedience and belief are the same thing; trusting in God. There are certainly times when people who trust God make mistakes but...if you do not know that you should trust God, you are not born again- it is that simple. The preacher Charles Price was asked the question by a young man "If I become a Christian do I have to treat my girl friend differently?"

He replied "no; when you become a Christian you will want to treat her differently."

Giving money is the same; you don't give to keep God happy, you obey God in this area because you have the Generosity of Christ within you. And you give up some of your selfish desires to sacrifice and live a bit more simply- to benefit others.

We don't force people to change their behaviour to join our church; we know that if they are really part of God's church their behaviour will change. This is what regeneration is about- exposing people to God's word and letting the Holy Spirit change them.

You know what the problem of the modern church is; we don't want to expose people to the whole truth, we think it will offend them. So we come up with programmes that soften the truth and try to change people without the need for the work of the Holy Spirit.

We do exactly what the Pharisees were guilty of- marketing God as the best choice. When what we should be doing is working with God so that he can draw his people to himself. We don't believe God wants to replace people's hearts with new ones, so we try and appeal to stony hearts.

It startles Nicodemus that Jesus implies that all this should be obvious to someone who knew the History of Israel. Joel 2 speaks of the Holy Spirit poured out and the remnant being called and saved. God Loved and saved Israel in the Old Testament many times, but not all people in Israel were loved and saved by him.

Some of Abraham and Isaacs descendants he hated

*Malachi 1:2 "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob*

*Mal 1:3 but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert."*

When Jesus says WE who is he talking about?

The prophets and John the Baptists and himself

When Jesus says "you do not receive our testimony." who is he talking about?

People with hard hearts

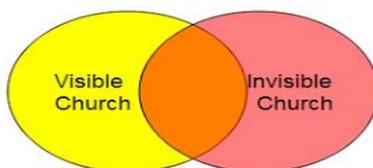


Fig. 1. Augustine's visible and invisible churches. The visible church is the set of professing believers. The invisible church is the set of those who have been redeemed.

Not all Israel was actually the Israel of God, some were redeemed and some were destroyed.

Augustine picks up on this in his concept of the invisible Church.

Not everyone in who we see in church is born again, and perhaps some who are Gods people are not yet coming to church.

## Snake held up

Being held up for all to look upon is quite different than meeting with God late at night when nobody sees.

The serpent lifted up foreshadows the cross lifting up Christ.

God uses a cursed animal to save his people from the curse of the animal.

Likewise God places the curse of sin on Jesus to save us from the curse of sin

Whoever believes has life

Because he believes ---- NO!

But because he has been BORN AGAIN

Do you have life simply by believing in Jesus? NO, Believing in Jesus is proof of life, proof that you have been Born again.

Evangelism is not giving people the ultimatum to follow Jesus or burn, but it is exposing people to Jesus story [from the bible and in our lives].

We lift Jesus up like the serpent and those who look to him will live, but it is not our job to turn people's heads.

The light exposes the difference between the lovers of wickedness and the lovers of truth

God didn't send Jesus to condemn the world, because it is already condemned- Jesus purpose is to save the world.

Not everyone in the world though... just the born again, Spirit led, light loving believers, who see Jesus as their KING.

John 3:16 is the most over used verse in the bible. But John himself explains what it means.

If you think it means any one can be born again by simply believing you are mistaken- the context does not allow for it being born again precedes belief.

Nicodemus believed Jesus was from God, but his belief was not enough, saving faith comes after regeneration

*1 John 4:9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.*

*4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

*4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

*4:12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*

*4:13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*

*4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.*

For John the world is not the animals the plants and the trees but the mindset of the People of the world [and often their philosophies].

Love Saves us and Love proves we are believers

The Love of God at work in us changes us from Enemies of God to friends [it pays the price for sin]. It also changes our relationship with one another.

The love of God abiding in us, the Holy Spirit at work within us, and being Born again and regeneration are all the same thing.

Believing in Jesus, Loving GOD, and showing love to others are the evidence of this thing.

"We [followers of Christ] living" is the same as "the world being saved".

You cannot be saved simply by being in the world. This is not the meaning of John 3:16.

Abiding in the love of God saves us

## Final thoughts

This sermon has been quite critical of Nicodemus but it is very important to realise that unlike many of his colleagues he came to meet with and listen to Jesus.

I have no doubt that Jesus word sank deep into Nicodemus' heart.

Nicodemus stands up against the Sanhedrin in defence of Jesus right to a fair trial in John 7:50 and at the crucifixion seeing Jesus Raised up on that cross above the Ground he must have remembered the image of the serpent raised up before the Israelites to save them. Perhaps this is why at the darkest hour of Johns Gospel, Nicodemus [the Pharisee] the man who came to Jesus at night is the one who brings the burial spices for Jesus. When the disciples have scattered to the four winds, the wind of the Spirit has moved this man to take care of the Body of Christ. No longer is he afraid of what others will say, in fact he and Joseph of Arimathea are the only men, who appear to not be afraid at this point in the story.

So what type of Pharisee are you? We all have legalism in us – but are you prepared to accept that and change or do you resent me for implying you have a problem. Often those who think they have it all worked out are the furthest away from God.

## Appendix to sermon: Key components of the Gospel

- The **Kingdom** of God is arriving.
- Restoration and **Deliverance** from devils, sin, death, hell and sickness suffering and injustice.
- The **Peace** of God- Atonement for your sin, Jesus died in your place. You are no longer an enemy but a friend of God.
- **Adoption:** Becoming a child of God
- The transformational work of **the Holy Spirit** in your life; the Resurrection = New life and purpose in Christ. Ambassadors of the King.
- **Hope:** The promise that Jesus will return. The Kingdom fulfilled. New Heaven and Earth.

I have put this up to remind us that these are the components of the Gospel as contained within the Gospels themselves.

If you are preaching a Gospel that is light on any of the first five points – you are not preaching the Gospel at all. You can however say you are preaching part of the gospel. But the whole Gospel must include at least the first five points.

John 3:16 is part of the Gospel. It is not [as many believe] the summary of the Gospel. As we will see it is not even the main point Jesus is trying to make when he speaks to Nicodemus in the story where this verse occurs.

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