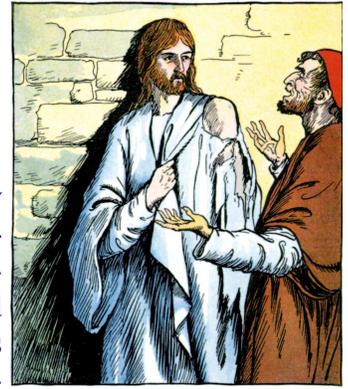


Nick At Night Sees The Light

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, but he left a child of the day!

By Ben Godwin



Much is made of the fact that Nicodemus “*came to Jesus by night.*” In my opinion it is “much ado about nothing.” In the three times Nicodemus is mentioned by name in Scripture (Jn. 3:1-2; 7:50; 19:39), all three allude to his clandestine meeting with Jesus. Unfortunately, this single detail has been distorted into a unfair stigma to an otherwise honorable man. The traditional view assumes that Nicodemus was so concerned about protecting his reputation that he met secretly with Jesus at night when he wouldn’t be seen associating with the controversial Nazarene. But branding him a coward is akin to the unfair label that is attached to “doubting Thomas.” How many times did Jesus rebuke the other disciples for their unbelief and yet are any other them dubbed “doubting Peter” or “doubting John?” No! It’s simply a matter of perception. Let’s make three observations about Nicodemus that give us a glimpse into his true nature:

1. His Curiosity—He Sought Out Jesus.

Give Nicodemus credit, after all, *he* was the one who sought out Jesus not vice versa. Can we honestly say that we are actively, aggressively seeking after God? Or are we passively waiting for Him to initiate contact with us? Nicodemus discovered first hand that God “*is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*” (Heb. 11:6) Perhaps Nicodemus came to Jesus by night for a very practical reason—they were both busy during the day! Jesus was occupied preaching and ministering to needy people while Nicodemus had demanding duties as a Pharisee in the Sanhedrin Court. Maybe it was the most convenient time for them to have a decent conversation without being interrupted by the crowds that flocked to Jesus’ signs and fed on His sayings. Could it be that Nicodemus had such a hunger for truth that he couldn’t wait until the next morning, he had to talk to Jesus *that* night? Whatever the reason(s) he came to Jesus by night, he had a life-changing encounter and left a child of the day.

Despite Nicodemus’ social status as a “ruler of the Jews,” Jesus didn’t sugarcoat the truth—“*ye must be born again.*” Here was a doctor of Moses’ Law who knew everything there was to know about Judaism. He knew all *about* God and religion, but he didn’t *know* God personally through His Son Jesus. Nicodemus was no doubt wealthy, intelligent, respected, well educated and one of the most religious people in Israel, but still desperately in need of the new birth.

• Innocent Blood

Here we learn that our social, economic, educational, ethnic and religious pedigree is meaningless when it comes to right-standing with God. The circumstances surrounding our first birth are totally irrelevant. What matters is that we are truly born again! Keeping the tenants of any religion cannot make us righteous. Only faith in Jesus Christ renders a person a recipient of eternal life (Jn. 3:3, 5, 16-18). If being religious was a free ticket to heaven, Nicodemus would have been the ideal candidate. But Jesus didn’t congratulate him on being a model citizen, a faithful husband, a loving father or a noble Pharisee. Jesus told this extremely religious man, not some rank sinner, “*Ye must be born again.*” With all of the trappings of religion Nicodemus was still missing something—a vibrant relationship with the Savior.

The new birth is absolutely essential because it is a supernatural act of God whereby we are made new creatures. It is not a superhuman act of man (Jn. 1:12-14, 2 Cor. 5:17, Ti. 3:5). Interestingly, Nicodemus’ name means “innocent blood.” This is significant because during his after-dark rendezvous with Christ, he

learned that the new birth results from faith in the “innocent blood” of Jesus (Jn. 3:14-15). In the Words of Bible commentator Herbert Lockyer, “the new birth is not an improvement of the old nature but the impartation of a new nature.” When regeneration (new birth) occurs in a person’s life, this inward transformation will manifest itself in outward expressions. At a political rally years ago a speaker was touting the supposed superiority of communism. In his speech he predicted, “communism will put a new coat on every man.” A Christian in the audience shouted out, “maybe so, but Christ will put a new man in every coat!” This truth prompted Paul to write, “*if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*” (2 Cor. 5:17)

The entire Gospel message can be compressed and expressed in an eight word nutshell—“*Born once, die twice; born twice, die once.*” If we are only born of our biological parents, we will face physical death and what the Bible calls the second (spiritual) death (Rev. 20:12-14). But, if we are born naturally and then born again of the Spirit, we will only experience physical death should Jesus tarry. This reality prompted one author to write, “*Better never to have been born, than never to have been born again.*”

2. His Courage—He Stood Up For Jesus.

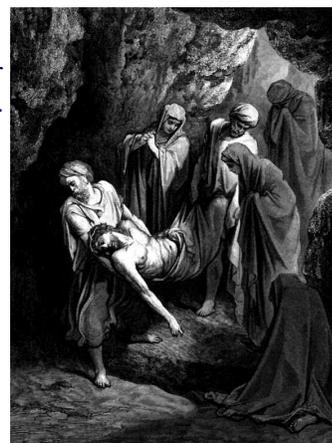
That Nicodemus had great admiration and respect for Jesus is evident by the way he addressed Him, “*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*” (Jn. 3:2) The term *Rabbi* means “master or my master” and is an official title of honor. Pharisees didn’t just go around calling people “Rabbi” to flatter them. And he wasn’t the only Jewish ruler to consider Jesus a Godsend. Notice he said, “*we know that thou art a teacher come from God...*” Jesus earned this title by His educational and teaching credentials, not just by virtue of being the Son of God. Remember He confounded the doctors in the Temple at His bar mitzvah when he was twelve. Further proof of this might be indicated by Jesus’ custom of reading the scrolls in the synagogue in Nazareth (Lk. 4:16-17). Although raised as a carpenter’s son, he was not ignorant or illiterate. To the contrary, He astonished people with His teaching ability, knowledge and oratory skills.

So when a debate broke out about whether Jesus was a prophet or not, Nicodemus couldn’t resist the opportunity to rush to His defense. You need to read John 7:45-52 to understand the full context, but here is verse 50-51, “*Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?*” The point is that we cannot remain neutral on our opinion of Jesus. Eventually, we will either courageously stand up for Him or, like Peter, when the heat is on, we will wilt and cowardly deny Him. Just as cream rises to the top when milk is churned, even so when the pressures of life churn a believer, their faith will rise to the occasion. Love is like a cough—It’s hard to hide! And even if Nicodemus initially came to Jesus by night to avoid detection, later he could no longer conceal his loyalty to Jesus. Now he was clearly a vocal convert of the Christ, even among his peers.

3. His Compassion—He served Jesus.

Ironically, when Jesus was crucified, his closest disciples hid in fear for their own lives (except for John and a few faithful women), while other “secret disciples” came out of the woodwork.

“And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave ...And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.” (Jn. 19:38-40)



Here we have two obviously wealthy “secret disciples” come out of the closet to do a generous and compassionate service for Jesus—they embalmed and buried Jesus in Joseph’s virgin tomb, thus fulfilling prophecy (Is. 53:9). You see, it is impossible to be a secret disciple for long because, as William Barclay put it, “either the discipleship kills the secrecy, or the secrecy kills the discipleship.” With all the strange people coming out of the proverbial closet these days, we need true disciples to go into their closet (their prayer closet) so they can come out with a renewed boldness to serve Christ and impact society. True compassion will motivate us to action.

- **The Cream Or The Crumbs?**

While Nicodemus is to be commended for helping to embalm and bury Jesus, Herbert Lockyer observes that, “Mary gave her spices to Jesus while He was alive.” In effect, Mary’s one pound of ointment (Jn. 13:3) far outweighed the 100 pounds of spices used by Nicodemus on Jesus because a dead body cannot appreciate the attention it’s given. Whoever said, “better late than never” misses the point. He opened his wallet after Jesus was dead, wishing he’d done more to support His ministry while He was still alive. Too often people give to God out of a belated sense of regret. When they hit bottom or realize death is near, they make generous donations or try to redeem themselves with a few final good works. Here we glean another valuable lesson from the nocturnal Nicodemus: we should daily and devotedly give God the cream of our lives lest we are forced to belatedly and regretfully give God the crumbs of our lives. Incidentally, I can’t help but wonder if Nicodemus was among the 120 in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost (Ac. 1:14-15). It wouldn’t surprise me a bit if he was. He may have come to Jesus by night initially but, after that life-changing encounter, he was transformed into a child of the day!

Note: This article was adopted from a message Ben preaches with the same title—*Nick At Night Sees The Light*.

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