

## LESSON 9 NICODEMUS

John 3 will be the text for our study. This lesson is filled with interesting information about Jesus and about the impact of the Messiah on even the rulers of His day.

Let's learn first a little about Nicodemus and his place in Jesus' life on earth. His name means, "victorious" or "conqueror of the people." That is not significant to our story, but the fact that he was a Pharisee is.

There were about 6,000 Pharisees in the first century. They were thought to be highly religious because they knew the Law of Moses. You may remember from our preliminary lesson on the various rulers of the Jews that they made up rules about the law. They bound laws on the people that were not actual laws.

Nicodemus seems to have been a very sincere Pharisee, wanting to know more about Jesus and His teachings. He was, however, probably afraid to be seen by other Pharisees, so he came to Jesus at night. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus would have been called "rabbi" or "master" or "teacher," but he addressed Jesus as "rabbi," showing his respect for Jesus. His concerns brought him to the Lord in private, possibly needing more from Him than he had heard in Jesus' daily teachings.

Nicodemus immediately identified Jesus as a teacher from God. He said in verse 2, "we know," so other of the Pharisees must have talked about Jesus' teachings and had to admit that He was from God. He also acknowledges that he has seen Jesus' miracles or signs.

Jesus did not respond to what Nicodemus had admitted, but rather made a bold statement that got Nicodemus' attention. He said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Imagine how you would feel if, upon meeting this famous teacher, the first thing He said to you was that you had to be born again. Nicodemus thought what many would have thought. "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

Jesus then gives Nicodemus an explanation. He must be born of water and the Spirit or he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is not talking about a natural, physical birth; He is contrasting it with a spiritual birth.

Verse eight has given some people some difficulty. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” This verse is simply telling us that we see and hear the wind. We see the results of the wind, but we don’t know the details of why and how it works. The same is true with the Spirit. We know some things about the Spirit. We can see results of the Spirit’s working in us, but to completely explain it is difficult. It is enough to know that the Spirit is there and working in us.

Nicodemus may have been a little frustrated by this point. He asked Jesus how these things could be. Jesus scolded him a little by asking him if he was a teacher of Israel. As a Pharisee, a teacher of the Jewish law, he should know about such things. He tells Nicodemus plainly that the Jewish rulers are not accepting of the things He is teaching. Remember that much of what Jesus taught had been prophesied.

Jesus then told Nicodemus that He, Jesus, would be “lifted up”; and He compared it to Moses putting the serpent on the pole in the wilderness for the Jewish people to look on and be healed (Numbers 21). This looking on the serpent was a test of the faith of the Jews. Jesus’ being lifted up would be a test as well.

Verse 16 has been called the “golden text of the Bible” or the “little Bible.” It has also been called, the “Bible in miniature.” It is called this because many people go to this text to show that all one has to do is believe to be saved. Let’s look at the text carefully. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Jesus gives Nicodemus an inside view of God’s love for mankind. God loved man so much that He was willing to send His only Son. He doesn’t want man to perish, to die spiritually. He wants everyone to have eternal life with Him and the Son and the Spirit. In order to have that man must believe. If he never believes in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, all hope is lost. But man must act on that faith by being born again. In baptism, the human spirit is reborn. Being baptized without a change of heart (repentance) will not save a person from being lost. Having faith without being born again (baptized) will not save a person from being lost.

Remember that in verse five, Jesus has already told Nicodemus that he must be born of “water and the Spirit.” It takes both. Now Jesus lets Nicodemus know that he is going to have to acknowledge Jesus openly as the Son of God. The part of man that is changed is the invisible part. The outside of the body still looks like it did before baptism, but the heart or the spirit is changed.

Verse 17 gives God’s purpose for sending Jesus into the world. It was not to condemn the world. The world was already condemned because of the sin of Adam and Eve. Jesus was sent to teach and establish His kingdom, the church. Salvation comes about through Jesus and only through Him.

Verse 18 shows that without belief in Jesus, man is condemned because of his lack of obedience. The believer is not condemned because he will be obedient.

We see many examples of obedient faith in the book of Acts. Acts 2 shows us the response of the people when Peter and the apostles preached the first gospel sermon. They responded immediately upon believing that they were responsible for the death of Jesus. They wanted to know what to do to be saved. Peter told them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Later as the church began to grow, it is said, “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). This is the kind of belief (obedient faith) Jesus is talking about in John 3. It is acting on what one believes.

We don’t know if Nicodemus accepted or rejected what Jesus said, but we see him again in John 7 as he defends Jesus’ rights to the other Pharisees. There was obviously dissension among the Pharisees and chief priests as to what to do about Jesus.

We see Nicodemus again in John 19:39 when he brought myrrh and aloe to anoint the body of Jesus after His death. There is no mention of him after that.

#### **FOR DISCUSSION: WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THE LESSON?**

1. What do you believe Nicodemus was searching for when he came to Jesus?
2. How would the information Nicodemus received change the way he felt as the Pharisees and others continued to condemn Jesus?

3. What do you suppose Nicodemus did with the teaching he receive from Jesus?
4. How can we use this story to share the gospel with others?
5. Can we be as direct with those with whom we want to share the truth as Jesus was with Nicodemus?