

Nicodemus and Jesus

Video

John 3:1-21

Nicodemus was Jerusalem's most outstanding Bible teacher and a member of the Jewish Ruling Council. Only the High Priest gained more recognition in the capital city than Nicodemus. Yet, despite all his learning and privileges, he did not know God. He knew about God, but he did not know him. And as we listen to Jesus the Evangelist engage this man in conversation the darkness in his soul quickly becomes apparent.

The story is found in John 3 and three features of the conversation are worth noting. First, the Master Evangelist reveals to Nicodemus the reality of his need. The story begins with Jesus saying to him that those who are outside the kingdom of God cannot understand the things concerning the kingdom. And what does Nicodemus say in response to this: "I cannot understand what you're saying!"

Nicodemus' inability to grasp what Jesus was saying was indicative of his fallen heart. Spiritual things are not grasped because of superior intelligence, because we are able to grasp some proposition of Ludwig Wittgenstein. "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Until we come to realize the gravity of our condition - that by nature we are all outside of the kingdom of God, we can make no progress toward redressing this problem.

Second, Nicodemus is told of the remedy that lies wholly outside of any ability of his. He must be "born again" (John 3:3, 7). He must be born from above (to employ a more literal translation). Nicodemus took the allusion to birth literally, ask how exactly he could enter again into his mother's womb and be born! But Nicodemus is still thinking in terms of something he can achieve. Think of the "wind," Jesus says to him. "You cannot command it to come; all you can do is to feel it when it blows. The new birth is like that! You cannot command it to occur by something you do; you must resign yourself to doing nothing and let God do this work in you." The solution to our native darkness is God's ability to transform us. All we can do is cry for mercy and ask to change us, cleanse us (the allusion to being born "of water and the Spirit" in verse 5 is probably a reference to Ezekiel 36 which speaks of washing and cleansing).

Third, Nicodemus is told to put his trust entirely in Jesus Christ. Since Nicodemus is a Bible teacher, Jesus alludes to an incident in the time of Moses when the Israelites were cured from venomous snake bites by simply looking at bronze replica of the serpent that was hoisted into the air. The point is that Jesus, too, will be "lifted up" - first on a cross, and then into the clouds in the course of his ascension to the Father's right hand. We

enter the kingdom by recognizing who Jesus is - the Son of God, and "look" to him in faith:

There is life for a look at the Crucified One,
There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, sinner, look unto Him and be saved,
Unto Him Who was nailed to the tree.
(Amelia M. Hull)

All the incentive we need to believe that this is indeed so comes from what is perhaps the best known verse in the Bible, one which is found in the course of this conversation: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God loves the lost, gives the best, and asks the least!

There is evidence that Nicodemus did receive mercy. He came on this occasion "by night" for fear of the Jews, but at the end of the Gospel openly purchases the necessary spices for the anointing of Jesus' body (John 19:39). The Master Evangelist had done his work. He had brought a Bible teacher into the kingdom of God! - See more at:
<http://www.reformation21.org/articles/nicodemus-when-knowing-the-bible-isnt-enough.php#sthash.LFdgBpub.dpuf>

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