



Nicodemus

Message Notes, April 3, 2016

John 3:1-21

Nicodemus was a religious man. Not just a weekly “synagogue-goer,” but a Pharisee—a serious, dedicated scholar of the scriptures, keeper of the law, teacher of the Jewish people. He was a wealthy, prominent, religious icon—a member of the Sanhedrin (the top 70 Jewish leaders in Jerusalem). He was much the same kind of man as Saul (see Philippians 3:4b-6).

Nicodemus came to Jesus

- **At night.** This was a customary time for scholars or Rabbis to engage in theological conversation, but perhaps Nicodemus wanted to come quietly, secretly. It would not have been good for his public image to engage in mutual conversation with this controversial Rabbi Jesus.
- **With respect.** Maybe his addressing Jesus as “Rabbi” was a mocking jab (for Jesus was not officially credentialed as a Rabbi), but Nicodemus’ following remark indicates that this address was sincere: “We know you are a teacher who has come from God (because of the miracles you have done).”
- **With questions.** Perhaps he was simply curious or maybe he was even jealous of this “rural teacher’s” growing reputation among the people as one “who taught with authority and wisdom.”
- **Thirsty.** For something fresh, something deeper, something life-giving! His dutiful religiosity may have achieved for him respect and prominence, but it was running quite thin on the life and meaning side. His soul was longing for more and he wondered if this Jesus might have answers.

However Nicodemus came, Jesus received him. He was not condemning, but he did cut to the chase and went straight to the heart of the matter (for “Jesus knew what was in a man” (John 2:25). “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (v. 3).

This caught Nicodemus quite off-guard; he bumbled a confused, perhaps sarcastic response: “How can a man be born when he is old. Surely he can’t enter a second time into his mother’s womb” (v. 4). Perhaps Nicodemus felt the longing to be “born again,” to start afresh in his spiritual journey, but this seemed for him, one so long entrenched in religion, as impossible as a grown man re-entering the womb.

Jesus’ responded, in essence, “No, Nic, I am talking about a spiritual birth. The birth I am speaking of is done *by God*. It is a gift, it comes through the response of faith, through childlike dependence on God. It is not like the religious pattern you have known, whereby you elicit Yahweh’s response and blessing by your own law-keeping, religious efforts. Religion does not bring true life. Only God’s Spirit can fill your soul. You must be born again.”

- Of water (cleansing baptism through acknowledgment and repentance from sin)
- Of spirit (the Hebrew word here – “ruah” means *breath* – the same intimate breath God breathed into Adam to make him a living soul. The greek word here is “pneuma” meaning *wind* – Jesus stays with this expression as he describes the dynamic, uncontainable, life-giving “blowing” of God’s Spirit.



This sermon is really a message for church folks, in two *camps*:

1. People who have been involved in church and Christian activities (e.g., attending services, getting baptized, tithing, reading the Bible, etc. – all good, important things, but they not the “checklist” for being a Christian), but have never actually trusted in Jesus and asked Him to be their Lord. They have never been “born again.” They have *religion* but no genuine *relationship* with Christ.

For these: Hear the invitation of Jesus to be “born again” to a living faith and intimate relationship with Him whereby His Spirit dwells within, blowing dynamically like the wind, bringing transformation and life!

2. Those who *have* been born again, who know Jesus personally, who *have* been filled with His Spirit.

For these: Hear the invitation of Jesus to remember your first love. Rekindle your heart of trusting faith that ushered you into eternal life. Guard against the drift toward religious efforts and spiritual performance. Surrender anew to the dynamic “wind” of His Spirit, allowing Him to blow in and through your life in whatever wild ways He desires.

Whichever of the two “camps” describes the state of *your* soul, hear the familiar good news:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him” (John 3:16).

Reflection Questions

- We have some later hints that Nicodemus stayed connected, but we don’t really know what his final response was to Jesus’ invitation. What do you think were his greatest obstacles to being born again?
- How is the wind of the Spirit blowing in your soul through this message?
- How will you respond to Him?