

## NICODEMUS COMES TO JESUS BY NIGHT

**Scripture: John 3:1-17**

Maybe as a child you chose to do something you weren't supposed to, just to see if you could. It might have been sneaking that extra biscuit that Mum or Dad said you couldn't have?

The challenge was to grab it in broad daylight even when there was a higher risk of getting caught. Sometimes though, you had to wait until it was quiet and dark, so no-one could see as you snuck into your brother or sister's room to steal their favourite teddy or toy car.

Most of us know that it is in the dark where we will least likely get caught or found out by others.

So here is Nicodemus, a well-respected member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Ruling Council. Why didn't he just walk up to Jesus during the day to ask his questions? Was it because he didn't want the rest of the Ruling council to know?

You see, Jesus was already a rule-breaker – performing miracles, developing many followers; challenging the system and angrily turning the tables in the Temple. This Rabbi named Jesus was unorthodox, and He was beginning to pose quite a threat to the religious system.

Nicodemus is sneaking around to catch up with Jesus. He had heard what the other Pharisees were saying, yet he was intrigued about this Rabbi Jesus. He wants to see him with his own eyes and to hear His words with his own ears.



What would you say to Jesus if you were Nicodemus? Look Jesus you are a bit of a rebel! But no, Nicodemus acknowledges what Jesus has done – great miracles and signs, surely You come from God.

And yes, that was true, but Jesus was not just a teacher who had come from God but was God Himself in a body rather than just a representative of God.

Nicodemus had all the credentials and was more religiously qualified than anyone else and so he starts to have an abstract theological discussion with Jesus about His identity.

But Jesus got to the heart of the matter – Nicodemus' spiritual condition – telling the Pharisee that he must be born again.

What - this is someone new – what do you mean?

So Jesus explains: ***“You can't enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh. But what is born of the Spirit is Spirit.”***

In the Old Testament water often symbolized the Scriptures. Jesus' statement about being born of water refers to the Word of God. To be in the kingdom of God, a person must be born of God's Word and His Spirit.

Now Nicodemus is really confused. Not only is Jesus saying that one cannot see the kingdom of God without being born from above, but one cannot *enter* the kingdom of God without being born of the Spirit.

How could Jesus tell him that his heritage, obedience to the law, and positions of leadership counted for nothing?

And not only that, but was Jesus saying that this kingdom of God might be accessible to *anyone* who was born anew, to *anyone* who was born of the Spirit? To those who were not even ancestors of Abraham? Or those who did not even observe the Mosaic law? This was completely unheard of.

To help Nicodemus understand who Jesus really is, Jesus shares from Jewish Scripture something that Nicodemus would have known quite well. ***“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,” Jesus says, “so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.”***

What did this mean? When God had rescued the Israelites from Egypt by way of Moses, they wandered in the wilderness. Then they had turned their eyes away from God and started complaining about every little thing. They complained against God and so God punished them.

Now if you don't like snakes, you wouldn't like this punishment – God sent poisonous serpents and many of the people were bitten and some died. And through this punishment, they realised their rebellion and sin and cried out to God in repentance.

Then God healed them by instructing Moses to make a bronze snake, put it on a pole, and lift it up before the people. And if they were bitten, they were instructed to look at the bronze snake, and they would be healed.

Now this story may really worry you as we read of God punishing the people. But for Jews in the ancient world, this story was *very* good news. It was a story that represented God's mercy, love, and grace. It was such an important story for the people of God in the ancient world, that

the bronze serpent was placed in the Temple for hundreds of years so that whenever they looked at it, they would remember this event that took place in the wilderness.

Aha, now Nicodemus finally gets it. God's saving acts in the wilderness. God's mercy and grace for His people. The Son of Man is offering this kind of mercy, salvation, and grace.

Then Jesus continues. And this verse is often referred to as: **The "Gospel in a nutshell."** ***"For God so loved the world in this way: that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but may have eternal life."***

The Greek word for eternal or everlasting means - "age-like" or having "the quality describing a particular age" or period of time.

According to Strong's Greek Concordance: this eternal life "operates simultaneously **outside** of time, **inside** of time, and **beyond** time.

It doesn't focus on the future, but rather on the *quality* of the *age* it relates to.

**Thus believers live in "eternal life" right now, experiencing this quality of God's life now as a present possession."**

Eternal life is an age and a state of being in which we experience and understand the love and grace of God that is realized in and through God incarnate, God in the flesh.

Eternal life is not just about some kind of life after death that we can only reach in a different time and a different realm. God is not in a place that is distant and separate from us. God is always with us in our current place and time.

Eternal life is a new life we enter into as we are born of the waters and Spirit:

- a baptismal life that is full of grace.
- a transformational life bringing to light our own sins; saving us from the bondage of sin which continue to haunt us.
- a life that is experienced when we recognize and begin to let go of our fleshly and worldly desires to put ourselves first, to strive to be on top, and to dominate over others.
- Eternal life experienced when we remember what God has and is doing for us and when we start to repent of our own participation in the evils in the world.

*This eternal life is one we can experience because of God's great love for us, not because of anything that we have done.*

I can just imagine Nicodemus' eyes opening wide as what Jesus is saying starts to make sense. The kingdom of God Jesus is telling him about involves grace, justice, and abundant love, which is extended not just to those in the inner-religious circle.

For God does not only love the descendants of Abraham and those who are good rule-followers and meticulously obey the Mosaic law.

**God loves the *whole world*** – that He gave His only Son – not so that God would condemn the world, but rather so that God would save it. Save the whole world *from captivity and oppression and from the bondage that evil and sin* has on it.

This is good news and Nicodemus recognized it as good news. Can you imagine what was going through Nicodemus' mind and heart as he left Jesus to walk back to his home in the dark. Through this change, he

risked his life when he later defended Jesus at a meeting with the Sanhedrin court and after Jesus' death, takes His body from the cross, lovingly wraps it with spices in linen cloths, and lays it in the tomb.

For God so loved the *whole* world.

For God so loved Nicodemus.

For God so loves me.

For God so loves you... in this way: that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in, trusts, and follows Him, should not perish, but may have eternal life.

This truly is the Gospel – the good news – in a nutshell. Jesus' arrival on earth to save the world is good news but only for those who accept Him.

Are you willing to accept Him today?

Finish with reading Psalm 29 from The Message Bible.

Bravo, GOD, bravo!

Gods and all angels shout, "Encore!"

In awe before the glory,

in awe before God's visible power.

Stand at attention!

Dress your best to honour him!

GOD thunders across the waters,

Brilliant, his voice and his face, streaming brightness—

GOD, across the flood waters.

GOD's thunder tympanic,

GOD's thunder symphonic.

GOD's thunder smashes cedars,  
GOD topples the northern cedars.

The mountain ranges skip like spring colts,  
The high ridges jump like wild kid goats.  
GOD's thunder spits fire.

GOD thunders, the wilderness quakes;  
He makes the desert of Kadesh shake.  
GOD's thunder sets the oak trees dancing  
A wild dance, whirling; the pelting rain strips their branches.

We fall to our knees—we call out, "Glory!"  
Above the floodwaters is GOD's throne  
    from which his power flows,  
    from which he rules the world.

GOD makes his people strong.  
GOD gives his people peace.