

NOTES FROM SAM GORDON'S SERMON- 29th October 2023 am

TITLE: "Nicodemus meets Jesus" TEXT: John 3 verses 1-21

Scripture references from the ESV

John 3:1-21 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus^[a] by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again^[b] he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.^[c] ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You^[d] must be born again.' ⁸The wind^[e] 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."
⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you^[f] do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.^[g] ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.
¹⁶"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

Here we meet Nicodemus, a man who was well-known and highly respected by his peers. He had a heart for God and loved the ceremonies and traditions of his religion. He was a student of the scriptures and had devoted his life to keeping God's

law and all the manmade laws that were appended to it. Nicodemus was a religious statesman and if anyone could have earned his way into heaven, it was surely him. However, being deeply religious does not earn favour with Jesus.

It is not what a man does that matters. It is what he is and who he knows.

Even though Nicodemus is a man of conviction in all matters of faith, it is not enough. Like so many in today's world, he was a good living sinner. When he came to Jesus, he was totally unprepared for what Jesus said to him.

All kinds of people come to Jesus, and they come at all hours of the day and night. Jesus is never put out when we come to him – what matters is that we do actually come.

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, possibly to ensure that he could have an uninterrupted conversation with him. He recognised that Jesus is an excellent teacher, which was quite a compliment coming from one who was himself an excellent teacher. He saw, too, that Jesus had come from God (v2 above). No one could do the miracles that Jesus had been doing if the living God had not been on his side.

- However, his faith stopped short of acknowledging Jesus for who he truly was. Jesus' words to him were not what he expected (v3 above). The eyes of God looked into the eyes of this man and saw him for what he really was. He saw a man who was sincere but had a deep inward longing for reality.

Jesus saw him not as a religious person but as a sinner in need of the mercy and grace of God.

Jesus spoke to him with compassionate gentleness and convicting truth. He said to him:

Nicodemus, you must be born again.

That is what the gospel of Jesus is all about. It is a no strings attached message that tells ordinary people they must

be born again. It is a message we all need to hear and respond to.

Our response to that message will determine our eternal destiny.

What was Jesus talking about? Nicodemus missed the point completely (v4). Jesus did not say he had to be born all over again. He was using birth to describe a

spiritual encounter with the living God. The new birth is a simple illustration of what happens in our hearts when we come to the Lord Jesus and ask him to save us. Jesus summed it up with the punchline **'Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit'** (v6).

When Nicodemus was born the first time, it was a physical experience. When he is born again, it is a spiritual experience. That is how he is brought into God's global family.

**With the first birth, he has a natural mother and father;
with the second, he has a heavenly Father, for the words 'born again' mean to be
born from above.**

Jesus expressed horror that a man of Nicodemus' standing could not grasp the simple truth that was being shared (v7), and clearly implied that Nicodemus was out of his depth, despite all his learning(v10). Using a second illustration doesn't help Nicodemus either. Jesus spoke of the Spirit being like the wind (v8). The Spirit moves in men's hearts and although nothing can be seen, the results are very clear. Still Nicodemus doesn't get it (v9).

Finally, (v14-15) Jesus goes to an Old Testament story (Numbers 21:4-9) that Nicodemus would have known well. **And the people quarrelled with Moses and said, "Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! ⁴Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? ⁵And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink." ⁶Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them, ⁷and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁸"Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle." ⁹And Moses took the staff from before the LORD, as he commanded him.**

- It is a story of sin, for the nation went their own way, rebelling against God, and had to be punished. God sent fiery serpents that bit the people so many died.
- It is also a story of grace, for Moses interceded for the people and God heard his cry and provided a remedy. He told Moses to make a brass serpent and lift it up on a pole for all to see. Anyone dying from the poisonous venom who looked at the serpent would immediately be healed.

It is a wonderful story of faith. When the people looked at the serpent on the pole by faith, they were saved. They just had to look and live. It was God's generous and gracious provision for them.

This was a foreshadowing of Jesus being lifted up on the cross. Jesus went to Calvary to save those (like us) who were dying of sin and to bring healing to those who have been bitten by the enemy (Satan). Anyone who looks to him in simple faith can find deliverance.

All the Israelites needed to do was to look, and as they looked, they lived.

The same is true today – men and women just need to take a single look at Jesus.

Look and you will live.

We have a great illustration of the cross in **verses 14 and 15**, but then in **verse 16** we have the great explanation of the cross.

**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

This verse has been called the gospel in a nutshell and is the most famous saying that Jesus ever uttered.

**It is all about a God who loves us, and in fact loved us so much that he gave Jesus to
be our Saviour.**

He did not have to do it. He did not need to do it.

He did it because he chose to do it. He did it because he wanted to do it.

He did it for you and he did it for me.

When we look at the cross on Calvary, it shows us the words 'I love you' written in red – the red of Jesus' precious blood. When Jesus died on the cross, he met our need for love, but he also meets our need for life.

We read in **vv17-18** a grim reminder of our state if we do not trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour and these verses should always be quoted alongside **v16**. They powerfully remind us of the great necessity of the cross. If we do not look to Jesus, then we will not live. If we fail to enter in to a personal relationship with Jesus, then we are living our lives in a condemned cell on death row.

Jesus came to free us from the bondage and shackles of sin

He came to give us liberty and freedom

He came to give us LIFE

When we put our trust in Jesus, we're bound for heaven and home, for he gives us eternal life. If we do not trust in Jesus, it is clear that we will perish and spend eternity in hell.

We have observed that God meets us at our point of need:

- We have a need for love and God is love
- We have a need for life and God is a living God

We also have a need for light (**vv19-21**). In **1 John 1:5** we read that **God is light**. The contrast between light and darkness is a lesson we all need to take on board.

If we do not know Jesus, we're living in the dark.

Once we commit our lives to Jesus, we live in the light and we walk in the light. Before our conversion, we had our day in the dark and we liked it because our deeds were evil, but when Jesus came, he dispelled the inky blackness and switched on the light in our lives. Peter tells us that Jesus **called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1Peter 2:9)**

That is what happened to Nicodemus! When you get towards the end of John's gospel, you will have read what God had done in his life.

This all happened because he came to Jesus.

It happened because he was born again.
This is the message for us - You must be born again
Look and live