

Armagh Baptist Church
Sunday 28th June 2009 – 7:00pm
John ch.2:23 - 3:16
“People who met Jesus: Nicodemus”

Introduction

Last Sunday night as we looked at John ch.2 we saw Jesus performing his first miraculous sign – as he changed the water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Then as he moved on down to Jerusalem, he cleared the Temple of the money-changers, because he was angry about the corruption that he saw going on there in what was supposed to be God’s house. The Jewish leaders then had the gall to ask Jesus for another miraculous sign to prove to them that he had the authority to clear the Temple. Jesus’ reply was very clear – the only sign that they would be given would be his resurrection from the dead:

‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days’ (2:19)

He was of course talking about his own body (v.21) and after he was raised from the dead, the penny dropped for the disciples, and they believed the Scriptures and all that Jesus had spoken. (v.22)

I pointed out to you then that in v.23, while Jesus was at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem ‘many people saw the miraculous signs that Jesus was doing and they believed in his name.’ But then we read a strange thing in v.24-25.

‘But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men.

He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.’

It seems that Jesus was being very cautious about the people he was meeting in Jerusalem, and perhaps rightly so. Even though 5000 people on one occasion and 4000 people on another occasion were miraculously fed by Jesus using a few loaves and a few fish, yet by the time we get to Acts ch.1 there are only 120 believers still following Jesus, and waiting expectantly for the Day of Pentecost to come. So there were many during Jesus’ years here on earth who looked like they were following the Lord Jesus, but in fact they weren’t – they had never truly been converted to Christ, they had never truly been saved. Jesus knew the hearts of men and women – he knew whether they were really trusting in Him or not, and he knows each one of us tonight as well – whether we are truly converted to Christ in our hearts, or whether we are merely empty professions of faith! That brings us then to John ch.3 and to one man in particular that Jesus knew all about – and that was Nicodemus – a key Jewish leader.

Tonight we’re going to be looking at the well known story of Nicodemus – the man who came to Jesus by night. We will see that Nicodemus went away unchanged on this particular occasion, but before we finish tonight I want to show you that later on in John’s Gospel Nicodemus did change. God changed his heart. And he can do the same for you tonight! - Or maybe not tonight? Maybe what you hear tonight will stay

with you, and you'll not be able to forget about what you have heard until one day you bow the knee before Jesus and ask him into your life to be your personal Saviour. All I would say is - don't put it off forever. You never know when your last night might come. *'I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation!'* (2 Cor 6:2) – So tonight is the best night to get right with God!

First of all let's notice:

1. The Character who came to Jesus.

What sort of a man was he? Who was this man Nicodemus?

(i) Well, we're told he was a Pharisee (v.1)

This was the strictest of all the Jewish sects.

He was proud of his own particular brand of religion.

The Pharisees prided themselves in how well they kept the Law.

They were very self-righteous.

They were very legalistic.

If salvation was by good works, then they thought they were well in!

(ii) He was a Ruler of the Jews (v.1)

Jesus referred to him as *'The teacher of Israel'* (v.10)

He was a leader in the Jewish Religion.

He was a man who taught others in religion,

But he wasn't right with God himself! Do you know anybody like that?

- Sadly there are unsaved churchmen to this very day!

He was well-learned in religion, and respected by all the people, but lost!

(iii) He came to Jesus by night (v.2)

I wonder why? Many reasons have been suggested.

Was he a secretive sort of person?

Was he afraid of what others might think of him meeting with Jesus?

Afraid of what the other Pharisees, his co-religionists might say?

(iv) He was very impressed with Jesus

'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God...'

He thought very highly of Jesus.

He had noticed something special about Jesus.

Maybe you're like this man? – (apply, illustrate).

2. The Conversation he had with Jesus.

In v.2 Nicodemus treats Jesus as an equal – a teacher, a rabbi.

And yet he sees something even more special about Jesus.

'For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.'

(Was Nicodemus, like many others, about to believe? - John 2:23).

Or was he just a flatterer?

In v.4 he seems content to theologize and philosophize with Jesus.

But he seems unwilling to take the brunt of Jesus' words and apply them to his own life. (There are many people like that!)

Instead of asking, 'Am I born again?' for example, he asks,

'How can a man be born when he is old?'

He's more interested in the logistics of it all than he is in whether or not, he himself is actually born again. This is all third person, it's not personal yet!

I remember a man I used to work with in Dowlers in Lisnaskea, one day saying to me,

'I can't understand how someone can live as he likes for 30 odd years and then get converted and everything's alright, as if he'd never done anything wrong!'

Maybe that's like you - content to talk about it, but not to take it to heart yourself and do something about it! - Is that you?

In vs.5-8 Jesus goes on to explain the need to be '*born again*' and the working of the Holy Spirit.

To be born again is '*anóthen*' it means – to be 'born from above' or 'born of the Spirit'. In other words if you're born again, God's Holy Spirit is at work in your life. He gives you power from above to change; to be different, to be saved and to live a completely different life than what you did before.

In v.9 Nicodemus is completely puzzled.

He was so religious, but he couldn't grasp his need to be born again! How sad!

Apply: Like Nicodemus, so many people are quite happy to discuss religion. They'll talk and argue and debate with anybody who comes to their door, but they'll not consider getting saved themselves. They only want to win their particular argument!

True religion is not just head knowledge. It's a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Salvation is a change that God makes in your life by his grace – it's a real change of heart!

But Jesus stopped Nicodemus in his tracks - he stopped his theologizing, and brought him to the point straight away. And so we see:

3. The Crux of the encounter.

In v.3, the very first words that Jesus says are:

*'You **must** be born again!'*

This means, to be born from above, from heaven, or born of the Holy Spirit of God.

That's not in your power to do. This is God's work.

You can't make yourself be born physically,

Likewise you can't make yourself be born again spiritually.

It's from above; It comes from God; It's by the work of God's Spirit. (See v.8)

Therefore you need to ask God to do this for you.

To give you this new birth; This life-changing experience.

(v.8) The Spirit moves who he wishes, when he wishes.

It's just like the wind: You can't see the wind, but you can see the effects of the wind on trees, or the sea, or damage it might do to houses in a storm, etc.

Likewise you can't see the Spirit, but you can see the effects of his work in somebody's life – the evidence of the new birth, or someone truly being born again, is a changed life.

But what about this 'born again' lark?

Sure Mike Tyson, a few years ago, claimed to be born again.

Many celebrities over the years have claimed to be born again, but there was no change in their lives.

I agree. But just because there are frauds, doesn't mean that the whole idea is wrong. A fake just shows up the fact that the real thing is the genuine article. There are many truly born again people, even though there are some empty professions.

But some people say, sure 'born again' is a term that only appears once in the Bible – so why do you put so much emphasis on it?

Well first of all, it doesn't just appear once in the Bible. The term 'born again' appears many times in the Bible and the idea of the New Birth appears many more times again. (e.g. 1 Peter 1:23, and 2 Cor 5:17).

But even here in John ch.3 we find that Jesus used the term 'born again' interchangeably with at least 2 other equivalent terms:

(i) v.15, 16 and 18 – 'Believes in Him'

To believe in Jesus Christ, to trust in Him with all your heart, to have faith in his person and his work – who He is, the Son of God, and what he has done for you on the cross, and to believe in his power to save you, is the same as being 'born again.'

(ii) v.17 – 'Be saved'

Are you saved? Do you really know that you are?

To believe is your responsibility, by God's grace, as you hear the Gospel.

If you believe, you will be saved, and you will be born again of God's Spirit.

Verse 16, of course, is the Gospel in a nut-shell.

*'For God so loved the world, that He gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him, will not perish, but will have eternal life.'*

It reminds us that the good news of the Gospel is for everyone:

For God so loved the World – this is God's Word to the World!

It reminds us of the extent of God's love for us:

He gave his one and only Son for us – as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross.

It reminds us again of who this is for –

It's for whoever will believe in Him – Jesus. That could include you!

And it reminds us of the consequences either way –

Eternal life for those who believe – in Heaven with God!

Eternal loss for those who don't – they will perish forever in Hell!

So John 3:16 is the Gospel in a nut-shell. Many know it, but the question is have they done anything with it? – Have you acted upon it? That's what matters.

4. The Consequences of the Encounter

(i) There is no evidence in John ch.3 that Nicodemus trusted in Jesus then.

(ii) But later, in John 7:51, Nicodemus speaks up in defense of Jesus before his peers.

(iii) But it wasn't until John ch.19:38-40, that he came out into the open, when all the other disciples had fled and left Jesus. It's then that Nicodemus helps Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus. He was there when it really mattered!

Was he a secret disciple up until that point? Perhaps?

But at last he came out into the open and publicly declared his faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

What about you? Do you see yourself in Nicodemus' shoes?

Religious, knowing the Bible inside out since childhood - but not saved?

What you must do: John 3:14-16 – You must be born again.

That's the only real kind of a Christian.

The new birth is a work of God's grace.

But if you believe in Jesus, you will be saved. (Philippian Jailer - Acts

16:31)

But John 3:16 comes with a Health Warning: It's John 3:36.

You're either one or the other! Condemned, or Not!

What have you personally done with Christ?

That's what really matters.

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