

## Opening Words

Do you believe Jesus is a miracle worker? That is not enough. Do you believe he is a healer? That is not enough. Do you believe he is a teacher? That is not enough. Today, I will explain what is enough.

### OSL 022 Nicodemus at Night 2

Nicodemus, this man, this teacher in Israel, this ruler of the people, this secret admirer of Jesus is afraid of others in the ruling class who are suspicious of new prophets and new would-be Messiahs. He comes to Jesus at night. He has a measure of faith, but his faith is not yet complete. He knows Jesus is a teacher sent from God. But he does not yet know that Jesus is much more. He hears from Jesus that he must be born again, that he must be born from above, but he does not know what that means. Today we continue our message on Nicodemus, and we pick up the conversation in John 3:5. Nicodemus has just asked Jesus, “Born again? How can a man be born again? He cannot go into his mother’s womb and be born a second time, can he?”

And so, Jesus says it again, although in a slightly different way. “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.” Jesus is talking about a *spiritual* rebirth, not a physical birth.

Many commentators have wondered why Jesus said a man must be born of water and the Spirit. What does “water” mean in this passage? Some have supposed that water referred to physical birth and Spirit to spiritual birth and that water refers to the amniotic fluid that is released during childbirth. If this were true, Jesus would be saying, “Nicodemus, a person who is born physically (water) must also be born spiritually.” That’s a possible interpretation.

Some have thought that “water” refers to the seminal fluid of man that creates the conception. Ancient people sometimes referred to male semen as water. The result would be the same. The “water” would refer to physical birth and Jesus would be contrasting it with spiritual birth.

Some have thought that “water” refers to John’s water baptism or later Christian baptism.

Probably, the best interpretation is that the two words refer to the same thing. In John, water symbolizes the Spirit of God. We will see this when we get to John 7. A proper way to translate this statement would be, “you must be born of the water of the Spirit.” Jesus would be saying the same thing as in verse 3 when he said you must be born from above, i.e., by the Spirit that comes from God and is symbolized by water on the earth.

Jesus reinforced this idea, that a man must have a spiritual rebirth, in verse 6 when he said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” These would be important words for Nicodemus. He was born a Jew and being circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day he entered the covenant God made with Abraham. But Jesus is giving the radical teaching that this does not qualify him to enter the kingdom of God. One’s physical birth only brings one into a physical family. A person needs to be born spiritually to be brought into God’s spiritual family and thus have the right to be a citizen of the kingdom of God.

I'm sure Jesus could see by the look on Nicodemus' face that he still wasn't getting it. In verse 7, Jesus said, "Nicodemus, you should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again."

Jesus sought an explanation that would help his new friend.

He spoke to Nicodemus of the wind. You can feel it, but you can't see it. You don't know where it has come from and where it is going. It comes from one part of the world, passes our way, and moves to another part of the world. We cannot put our arms around it. We cannot control it the way Nicodemus and his Pharisee friends tried to control every movement of God and his people with their traditions. But people accept that the wind is real, that it exists. In the same way, when a man is born of the Spirit, it is something a man cannot see or control or completely know but it is real, and it exists.

What a great illustration, yet Nicodemus still did not get it for he asked, "How can this be?" And Jesus replied starting in 10.

"<sup>10</sup>You are Israel's teacher, and do you not understand these things? <sup>11</sup>Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup>I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? <sup>13</sup>No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.

Those words must have struck Nicodemus like a thunderclap. Could it be that all these years he had lost sight of God in the laws of God? Could it be that he was so caught up in duties that he had lost a living faith in the living God?"

Jesus was saying. "Nicodemus, I have so many things to tell you. I have been talking about the work of the Spirit of God on the heart of a man as he lives in this world. But what if I start telling you about heavenly things I have seen? What if I tell you about what goes on in heaven that no one else knows because no one has been able to ascend into heaven? But I have come from heaven, and I know all about heavenly things and earthly things including being born again.

Jesus, then, used an illustration from their history. He said: "<sup>14</sup>Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

"Nicodemus, remember our history! Remember what happened when Moses lifted the serpent on the pole in the wilderness! The people were only then healed of their rebellion. It is not enough to know the laws of Moses and to make new rules and new traditions and try to bring in the kingdom of God by these traditions. The problem is much deeper than outward, fleshly observance. The problem is a deep, spiritual problem. The problem is sin.

"When our ancestors rebelled against God, and God sent the snakes in the desert to bite them, God did not direct the people to stricter obedience of the laws. They had poison in their bodies and no

amount of keeping the laws of Moses would help them. God told Moses to make a serpent out of bronze and to place it upon a pole. Moses lifted the pole, and when people looked upon it, they were healed.”

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that there is another snake bite, and its poison has seeped deep into the bodies and the spirits of every human. It is the snake bite of sin and just as Moses lifted the snake on the pole to bring healing so I, the Son of Man, will be lifted up before all the people so that whoever looks to me and believes in me will have eternal life. It takes the work of the Spirit of God to bring this kind of healing to the hearts of people.”

One wonders how much longer the conversation went on. Nicodemus listening, asking questions. Jesus patiently answering and showing love for this man. And we do not know how it ended at that moment.

But the question I have is, how does this conversation end for you? Have you been born again? Or are you trying to please God by your religious efforts?

The apostle John was present that night and later he would write about it in his Gospel and this is how he summarized the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. <sup>19</sup> This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

There are five truths Nicodemus, the visitor in the dark, needed to know that night and that you need to know today.

1. God loves the world. Nicodemus and his Pharisee friends had missed the point. They were caught up in the details and were using those details of the Law to drive people from God and one another. They had missed what the laws were all about – the love of God, for God so loved the world.
2. The greatest expression of the love of God is that He sent His only begotten Son into the world. God did not just talk about love. He showed love by sending Jesus, and when He sent Him, it was not with more laws but with love for sinful, confused people like Nicodemus and like us that we might be born again and come into a relationship with Him.

3. What God asks of us is faith. When we talk about believing in Jesus, we are talking about understanding who Jesus is. Do you believe he a miracle worker? That is not enough. Do you believe he a healer? That is not enough. Do you believe he is a teacher? That is not enough. You must believe that He is the manifestation of God who has come to deliver us from sin. You must believe that the real issue is not the number of commandments you keep or the number of good deeds you do but it is whether you have been born again. The primary problem of mankind is our sin from which we must be healed. To heal us, Jesus would be lifted on a cross so that all who would look to Him would find forgiveness and could have a new spiritual start and not perish from the snake bite of sin.
4. Fourth, we must realize that God sent Christ not to judge people to save them.

The Pharisees were so judgmental with their interpretations of the Laws of Moses, but God wasn't this way. If he were, all would be lost for we know we have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. What we need is a Savior who will deliver us from our failures. But if we will not take this path, and if we stubbornly hold onto our old ways then we are judged already – our eternal fate is sealed and we are doomed because we have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God, and what is His name? His name is Jesus.

5. Does this happen with some people? Do some turn away from the light and the love of God? And the answer is a sad "yes".

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

I hope that is not a description of you – a person who loves the darkness rather than the light. It need not be this way with you for our story concludes with these words:

"Those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."

Are you one who seeks for truth? If you are, then it shows that God is already at work in you and when you see the love of God in the person of Jesus Christ who came to show us all the truth, then you will come to Him, believe in His name, and find eternal life. We know that this happened with Nicodemus who came to him at night. Has this happened to you?