

## Nicodemus, The Nighttime Visitor

John 3:1-21 records the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus at night. It is within this visit we find Jn. 3:16. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Most people do not realize this verse is part of the larger conversation with Nicodemus. Even fewer understand the verse is **not** teaching we are saved by faith alone (inactive belief).

Verse 1 tells us Nicodemus was a ruler and a Pharisee. He came to Jesus by night (2) perhaps to protect his position. Although he acknowledges Jesus is a teacher come from God as evidenced by the miracles, he does not seem terribly receptive to Jesus' teachings. Like many he claims to accept the man but seems to reject the plan. Many want Jesus' salvation but not His teachings. They fail to realize that it is by the teachings we learn of the salvation and how it is to be obtained.

Verse 3 tells us Jesus first words. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* As Nicodemus misses the spiritual meaning (4) Jesus clarifies in verse 5. *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* If we were to stop right here in the reading we would recognize that a person is not saved by inactive faith. Without being born again of the water and of the Spirit (baptism) no one can enter the kingdom.

The ruler of Israel is not very spiritually minded. Like the audience in John 6 who wanted physical bread and could not grasp that Jesus was the Bread of Life, or the Samaritan woman who wanted literal water instead of the eternal fountain provided by Jesus, Nicodemus could not see the spiritual method of being born again by baptism. 6 -9 reveals further contrasts of the spirit and flesh that the ruler did not get.

The following verses reveal the resistance of this Pharisee. 10 *Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?* 11 *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.* 12 *If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*

Jesus alone was in a position to know God's will and to accomplish it. 13 *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.* 14 *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:* 15 *That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* Jesus was going to be lifted up on a cross to draw people back to God. Those who believed to the point of obedience could avoid perishing from their sins by obtaining forgiveness.

16 *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* This verse shows God's motive (love), His action (gave), His gift (the only begotten Son), and His purpose (to keep man from perishing so he could obtain everlasting life). Man is required to come to Jesus in faith (belief) to gain the gift as verses 17-18 further explain.

If you are yet struggling with the idea of inactive faith please notice the rest of the verses in the conversation with Nicodemus. 19 *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their **deeds** were evil.* 20 *For every one that **doeth** evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his **deeds** should be reprov'd.* 21 *But he that **doeth** truth cometh to the light, that his **deeds** may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

Nicodemus was still in the darkness. There is no Bible evidence that he was an atrociously evil man filled with despicable deeds, but all men are in the darkness without Jesus. Jesus is the light. His appearance will either draw men to Him so they can practice good deeds before Him, or send men scurrying like cockroaches for the cover of darkness. At his current level of understanding the Pharisee is still in the dark. He came by night and he wants to stay concealed for the time being.

There are only two options in life. We can go to Heaven or Hell. We can come to the light or stay in the darkness. We can obtain eternal life or perish. We can obey or reject. The religions of the world try to complicate this simple truth by suggesting there are many more alternatives. "You can be saved by faith alone and then get baptized later if you wish." "You can get baptized as a baby and start believing when you get older." "You can accept Jesus without taking His doctrine."

Many of these doctrines are derived by using improper definitions of Biblical concepts. **Believing** is defined as inactive faith. **Baptism** is determined as an unnecessary ceremony some wish to engage in to show they are already saved. Being **born again** has been defined as a warm feeling you get during a stirring worship service. They claim you get the Spirit, but there is no explanation as to what happened to the water.

Nicodemus became a follower of Jesus some time after this. In John 7:50 he defends Jesus before the counsel without much success. In chapter 19 (39ff) he removed our Lord from the cross and assisted in His burial. He left the dark and accepted the truth about Jesus. Those who continue in the darkness will use alternative meanings for the Scriptures. They will memorize the words of John 3:16, put the passage on a poster, but still remain in ignorance as to what Jesus was teaching. It is sad that something so good could be used by Satan to bring false comfort to those who are still perishing.

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