

## EXPOSITION OF JOHN

### Message #14

### John 3:1-2

There is a man I know of who years ago was a leader in a particular religion. He was esteemed and revered as being a great spiritual leader. This man was not like most who were in his religion because he really did want to know truth. Through hearing the truth and reading the truth, this man came to believe the truth and he eventually walked away from his religion and became a great servant of God. That story fits the names of many men. It fits the story of Martin Luther the great Reformer. It fits the story of Lewis Sperry Chafer the great dispensational theologian. It fits the story of several who were in various churches or denominations for years and it is the Biblical story of Nicodemus.

The next two chapters of the book of John are two of the most famous chapters in the gospel. John 3 is about a religious man and John 4 is about an immoral woman. John 3 took place at night and John 4 took place at noon. John 3 has to do with a Jew and John 4 has to do with a Samaritan and a city councilman. In fact, each of the next segments in the Gospel of John center on Jesus Christ and one other person. Jesus Christ goes one on one with sinful humans.

I find it intriguing how Christ gets to the heart of things with each individual. In all reality, every person needs to be born again by faith in Him, and yet He actually only says this to one man - Nicodemus. His witnessing tactics are Divine. He knows what each person needs and directs the conversation according to the need.

One verse from John chapter 3 is perhaps the most famous verse in all of the Bible - John 3:16. John 3:16 sits in a remarkable context that is designed to teach us a very important lesson which is this:

**THERE ARE A FEW LEADERS IN FALSE RELIGIONS WHO REALLY DO DESIRE TO KNOW TRUTH AND THESE LEADERS NEED TO HEAR THE TRUTH THAT THE ONLY WAY TO HAVE ANY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS TO PLACE ALL OF THEIR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, WHO IS GOD, AND NOT RELY ON THEIR RELIGION OR WORKS.**

Every person needs to carefully study John 3, because this chapter proves that the only way to be right with God is to place ALL faith in Jesus Christ who is God to save you. If you believe in Him you will not perish because you believe in the God/man who can actually save you.

I want to draw your attention to the conjunction that begins chapter three - "now". Here is one time the translators of the King James Bible missed a word which is in all Greek texts. The conjunction "now" (δε) is a sharp contrasting conjunction. This is important because it shows us that Nicodemus was not like all the people described in verses 23-25. Nicodemus was different. He was a man who really did want to know the truth about Jesus Christ. In fact, in John 7:50-51, he is the only leader who stands for truth.

This was an important episode in the mind of John. It showed John that some religious leaders were beginning to recognize the importance of Jesus Christ. John was there to witness this scene and hear this discussion, and he describes it for us in great detail.

For sake of outline, there are two key narrative observations we want to make:

**NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #1** – The identification of the person who comes to Christ.  
3:1

I am convinced that Nicodemus had no idea that God's Spirit was actually drawing Him to Jesus Christ. He certainly had no idea that this discussion would become one of the most famous discussions in inspired Scripture. Now there are four facts brought out about this person:

**(Fact #1)** - He was a man. 3:1a

As we shall see, he was an extremely important religious man, but he was still just a man. Dr. Boice said this point is brought up because he is a representative man of us all (James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1, p. 186).

It doesn't matter who the religious leader is or how powerful he may be, he is still just a finite, sinful man. One may be a sports superstar, a famous actor or politician. One may be a noted scholar or business entrepreneur. He may work for the FBI, CIA or some factory or farm. He may be self-made, self-taught and self-reliant, but he is still just a man. **What that practically means is that he is a sinner just like everyone else and he needs a Savior just like everyone else.** You may be a real success in your own mind and own world, but you are just a dirty, sinful human like all of us and you need Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the most damnable man is the religious man because a religious man gets so steeped in his religion that he rejects his own need to trust in Jesus Christ to give him a relationship with God. Religious men tend to think they already have it. Nicodemus was just a man.

**(Fact #2)** - He was a Pharisee. 3:1b

Pharisees were a strict group of highly educated religious Jews, who stressed obedience to Jewish laws and traditions. They based much of their belief on the Mishnah, the codified Scribal law and the Talmud, which was the Jewish commentary on the Mishnah. The Pharisees viewed themselves as those right with God and held others in contempt (Luke 18:9). John the Baptist called the Pharisees "vipers" (Matthew 3:7) and Jesus pronounced seven "woe" judgments on them (Matthew 23:2ff). So the fact that Nicodemus was a Pharisee was not a positive plus for him in the mind of Jesus.

The actual word "Pharisee" is a Greek word which comes from an Aramaic word which means "separated." Now the Pharisees originally began around the time of Ezra. The name Pharisee was one people gave them because they separated themselves based upon their interpretation of the Mosaic Law. As near as can be determined, this group started out as a group of priests and scribes whose desire was to lead Israel back to a commitment to the Mosaic Law.

By the time of Jesus Christ, however, they had become extremely powerful and extreme . separatists. They not only held to the Mosaic Law, but they invented their own laws. Jesus Christ never takes a favorable view of the group known as the Pharisees. For the most part they were religious frauds.

You may be one who has all kinds of religious rules and codes and you still don't really have a relationship with Jesus Christ. You could be one who has been in church all your life and people view you as one who really knows his Bible and truly knows God. The Pharisees had all that stuff. But they did not have any real relationship with Jesus Christ. They rejected Christ because He did not follow them or their tradition. If one believes his religion can make him right with God, "woe" to him.

**(Fact #3)** - He had a name . 3:1c

The name of this man is Nicodemus. The actual name means "one who conquers the people." Nicodemus was the "cream of the crop." People respected him, looked up to him and esteemed him. Nicodemus was a name many in Jerusalem knew because he was so highly regarded by the people. You can be a person all people know and respect and still not know Jesus Christ. You may be after truth or you may be a closed-minded Pharisee but no matter which, all are known by name by Jesus Christ. Also, as we shall see, if you are a person who really does want to know truth and grow in truth, you are also known by Jesus Christ. Whatever we really are is really on display before Jesus Christ.

**(Fact #4)** - He was a Jewish ruler . 3:1d

Titles in the Bible are not given to flatter, but to show truth and to show the great hindrance Nicodemus had to overcome in order to come to Christ. **Not only was Nicodemus a Pharisee, but he was a ruler, which meant he was a key officer and leader and he was a main teacher for Israel** (John 3:10; 7:50). He was a professionally paid interpreter of the law who eventually would turn his back on his religious traditions in order to have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, a group of seventy religious leaders who had jurisdiction in Christ's day over all the Jews in all parts of the world. Other than Nicodemus, there are only two others named in the N.T. who are Pharisaical leaders who are viewed favorably: 1) Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43); and 2) Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 5:34-39; 22:3). Nicodemus was very wealthy. When Jesus died he provided a great amount of expensive treatments for His dead body (John 19:39).

What this tells us is that it is possible to be a high ranked leader in a messed up works religion and still really desire to know truth. One could be in Judaism, Mormonism, Buddhism or Islam and actually be one of those rare individuals like Nicodemus who does want to know truth. By the time this chapter is over, Nicodemus will know that he needs to be born again or else he will be condemned. He will understand this and he will respond to this. No matter how religious you are, you need to be born again and if you will really and truly place your faith in Jesus Christ, you will end up in a right and true relationship with Jesus Christ, and you will eventually move away from false doctrine and religion and will be greatly used by God.

God says in I Corinthians 1:26 that not "many" high and mighty, wise and noble people are called, but He does not say not "any" are called. Some are. Of all of the high ranking religious leaders known as the Pharisees, three of them really did have a true relationship with Jesus Christ and eventually got out of their false religion and took a stand for Christ.

Perhaps you are here and you are a good religious person. You are moral and you have honor and integrity. You are still a sinner who needs a Savior and that Savior is Jesus Christ. Believe in Him and you will not perish, but will have everlasting life.

**NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #2** – The conversation of the person who comes to Christ.  
3:2

It is amazing that a Pharisee who is already regarded as good, would wish to talk with Jesus Christ. Most Pharisees thought since we're so good, we don't need to talk with Him. But deep in the heart of Nicodemus was the realization that something was lacking, so he went to see Jesus.

**Now the first thing we notice is that Nicodemus came to Christ "by night."** One quiet, serene evening, Nicodemus had an encounter with Jesus Christ that would change his life forever. There have been many suggested reasons why he went to Christ at night:

**(Suggestion #1)** - Some say Nicodemus visited Christ at night because he was afraid .

This view says Nicodemus really did want to know the truth but he was afraid of what others might think or do to him if they saw or knew he had gone to Jesus. Therefore, he went at night, when no one would see. Joseph of Arimathea certainly did not initially come out in the open about his faith because he was afraid of what the Jews might do to him (John 19:38). It is possible this was also true with Nicodemus.

**(Suggestion #2)** - Some say Nicodemus visited Christ at night because this was the norm .

This view says private visits with Jesus normally occurred after the day's activities, so if Nicodemus wanted to visit Christ privately, he would need to visit him at night. For example, when Christ's disciples wanted to see where He lived, they had to travel to be with Him that night (John 1:38-39). So this is truly possible. Nicodemus, himself, was a busy man during the day. He had no idea how long Christ's discussion would last so night was a good time.

**(Suggestion #3)** - Some say Nicodemus visited Christ at night because he would be uninterrupted .

Nicodemus was somewhat of a scholar and he wanted to discuss things with Christ in an uninterrupted way and night time would be most conducive to this. Rabbis taught the best time to study the law was at night.

**I want you to see this point - I don't care if it is night time or day time, if you are going to be right with God, you need to have a personal and private visit with Jesus Christ.** There is

no getting around this. You need to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Don't wait until night, meet him right now. **There must be some point in time when you privately go to Him.** This is what Nicodemus did and, as you will eventually see, it changed his life. Nicodemus was searching for something his religion could not provide. He went to Jesus Christ.

Now when Nicodemus goes to visit Christ, he would have known four realities:

- (Reality #1) - He would have known about the strange things that happened 30 years prior to this.
- (Reality #2) - He would have known that a man named John the Baptist was proclaiming the Kingdom was at hand. He was challenging Israel to repent.
- (Reality #3) - He would have known about what Christ did in the temple - He chased people out of the temple and called the temple the house of "My Father" (2:16).
- (Reality #4) - He would have known about the signs and miracles Christ was doing (2:23; 3:2).

These rumors piqued his interest, but it was the Holy Spirit that was really behind this. God had certainly given enough evidence that one did not need to be a scholar to realize there is something very special about Jesus Christ. So Nicodemus went to Christ. Now it is interesting to observe how the conversation begins. There are three preliminary observations we want to draw to your attention:

**Observation #1** - Nicodemus identifies Jesus as Rabbi. 3:2a

This term is a Jewish term of respect. The word literally means "master." This was a very respectful term that Jews used concerning their spiritual leaders and instructors. In Jewish schools of thinking, there were three grades of a Rabbi: 1) Rab - was the lowest grade which meant one was "a" master; 2) Rabbi - was the middle grade which meant one was "my" master or instructor; 3) Rabboni - was the highest grade which meant one was "my" lord and "my" master.

From Nicodemus use of the word, we may observe he did believe that he was subject to and subordinate to Jesus Christ. As important a leader as Nicodemus was, he realized that Jesus was above him.

**Observation #2** - Nicodemus identifies what "we" know. 3:2b

The plural "we" would refer to things that all the leading Pharisees knew and it would certainly refer to things that he and Joseph of Arimathea knew. When the Pharisees turn against Jesus Christ, they know, deep down inside that they are turning against God. They knew and sensed He had come from God, but their hearts were evil and they would not repent.

**What they specifically know is that Jesus Christ was a great teacher sent from God. What they also knew was that no one could do the miracles except by the power of God. In other words, Nicodemus' concept of Jesus Christ is based on signs, not the prophetic Scriptures.** They wanted some Jewish leader to surface who would run Rome out of business.

They were longing for that to happen. Also, let me point out something here - the religious leaders did not doubt the miracles that were performed by Jesus Christ. The doubters of miracles are modern day scoffers who sit in their seminary towers and call themselves "professors." They are the ones who criticize and question the miracles.

The Pharisees knew the miracles were real and they knew He was doing these miracles by the power and authority of God. By the way, some of these same Pharisees will say later on that He is doing the miracles by the power of Satan, when they really know better. They will say this because of envy and jealousy (Matthew 9:34). It will be this very evil that will guarantee their condemnation.

**Observation #3** - Nicodemus reveals what they don't know . 3:2c

**Now here is what Nicodemus reveals to us- they know that Jesus Christ was a teacher sent from God. What they don't know is that Jesus Christ was God sent as the Teacher. Jesus is not just a teacher come from God, He is God who came to teach.** The Pharisees had a very inadequate view of who Jesus Christ really was. However, that view will be radically changed for Nicodemus by the end of this discussion.

There have been many wonderful teachers who were sent from God to teach His Word: Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Chafer. These were great teachers who were sent from God. But there was only one time when God came to teach and one Person who was God - the Person of Jesus Christ.

Unless you come to terms with Jesus Christ and be born again, you will not go to heaven. Pure and simple. You will not even see it. No matter who you are, you are just a human which means you are a sinner like everyone else and you need a Savior who can wash away all of your sin and that Savior is Jesus Christ. Believe on Him and you shall be saved.