

Chris Lewis. 11th May 2008. John 3:1-21

Nicodemus; Brilliant but Clueless

Introduction - Jesus provokes a reaction

It's fantastic how The Holy Spirit commands respect from so many people. My housemates apologised to me for swearing. A colleague, a "born again atheist" was one of the most vocal supporters at my baptism.

There is recognition when "something holy" appears, even though as we will see, it is totally misunderstood.

God wants to increase people's faith this morning, by reminding us about what he has put inside us, and showing us how much He loved us in order for this to happen. Remember how powerful the Holy Spirit is this morning. Remember He is in you.

Jesus's appeal was widespread. Rich and poor alike were captivated by who he was. Zacchaeus climbed a tree just for a glimpse. An audience with him was sought after. Nicodemus went to him at night.

In us, the Holy Spirit's appeal is widespread, provoking a reaction in our everyday situations. How well do we recognise this?

Read John 3:1-21

First Contact

(To set the scene. Showing how Nicodemus's fascination with Jesus led to an encounter. He wanted to understand him more, but didn't have God's eyes)

- Nicodemus is a member of the Jewish ruling council. A Pharisee. He had it made. Upholding the treasured principles of a fine and proud people! His name (Greek of origin), "Victory of the people".

- John mentions this happens at night. Pharisees didn't purposefully seek Jesus's company. Perhaps this was the safest time. Also Jesus was likely to have more time to talk.
- *This was a brave move for Nicodemus. He had a lot to lose. Prestige, honour. But his fascination with Jesus seemed greater than this here. When people talk to us, this can often be the case.*
- Nicodemus respects Jesus. He calls him "Rabbi", or teacher / master. He understands that the power of God is with him. This is in direct contrast to others who were demanding signs to prove his authority in Chapter 2.
- "We" know. Was he part of a delegation? He saw worth in what Jesus was doing. Maybe others did. "I see you are doing good. **I can understand a bit of what you are doing.**"
- BUT Nicodemus only sees Jesus and his followers through the understanding of his experiences and traditions. Jesus sees Nicodemus through the eyes of God.

What it looks like to be "born of God"

(You cannot see God's kingdom unless you are born of God. You won't understand what God's about unless you are born again)

Jesus then lets him have it. **"You don't understand me. You will not understand what I am all about unless you are born again."** Nicodemus was not expecting that! Quite understandably he queries this whole being born again business. This is now not going as planned.

Can you imagine a parrot trying to be a dog? A parrot might do "doggy" things, but would have no idea what being a dog would be about. You have to be born a dog.

Some translations quote Jesus of saying “be born from above”. This would fit in with John 1:12-13, becoming a child of God, born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband’s will, but of God.

Flesh cannot give birth to spirit. It’s impossible. Only spirit can give birth to spirit. The wind is not confined to trends or regulations as to where it can or cannot go. It is free to go where it pleases. People born of the spirit are the same. Not tied to convention, tradition, like the flesh is. This is why Nicodemus does not understand it. No one can explain some of the “crazy” things that people of the Spirit do.

- Jesus is now putting Nicodemus through the mill. “You are Israel’s teacher...” the tradition, the responsibility of leading the people of God, and you’re thick! You are representing something you have not the first idea about! Jesus and his followers tell it as plainly as they can but their words are still not accepted.
- *When Sarah and I moved up to Birmingham, many people thought we were crazy, even irresponsible. Many more admired us. God makes us do “crazy” things for His kingdom.*
- ***Is “reason” taking over your life? Experience? Tradition? Do you long for the bravery you once had? God wants to awaken formerly “brave” people, who used to do “crazy” things to do them again, remind you that you ARE born of Him!***

How it is possible to be born of God

(God’s love for us and Jesus’s sacrifice have made it possible for us to be saved)

- The flesh has to die! Our natural birth and all it stands for has to die for us to be born of God.

Nicodemus would have known the snake story. The bronze snake was to heal those who were bitten by snakes when they didn’t believe God. Flesh will die, but Spirit entrusted to God will never die. This is our eternal life when we look to Jesus dying on the cross. His resurrection

gives us the promise of eternal life, and now he is at the right hand of the Father praying for us.

People who look to Jesus have the right to become children of God. This is why Jesus came, not for condemnation, but to save.

People who believe in him are alive in the spirit, dead to flesh, therefore not condemned. Those who refuse to look to Jesus are condemned by their own flesh.

Condemnation is only avoidable through God's son. The world was already condemned.

God loved us so much he sent his son to die for us. Jesus's sacrifice and love for us has meant that God has exalted him to the highest place.

We are more than conquerors through him who loved us... (Romans 8:37). We are not condemned like we once were. God's spirit is inside us, making us his own.

The Verdict

Light has come, but everyone who does evil hates the light...If God is in your life, HE HAS DONE GOOD THINGS IN YOU ! Light focuses on what God has done, darkness focuses on our fear of being found out for what we have done. Light surely is the better option!

The reason why my friend came to my baptism is because God had done amazing things with me. He has taken the confused, self-pitying mess of my upbringing into something beautiful.

*I used to have a problem with the song "He's brought me to his banqueting table"... the line "you do all things well, just look at our lives..." I thought it was rather big-headed of me to sing. **What I did was call God a liar.** He has done marvellous things in me*

Nicodemus would still be living in fear that his badness would be exposed. Loss of position, loss of identity, loss of face. This is not what

God wants for us. Being in the light is a celebration of what God has achieved in us.

***Have you been refusing to believe that God is doing good in you?
Can you see how much God loves you? He thought of salvation before
you even knew Jesus's name!***
