

The Visitor at Night Faced the Light

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John 3:1-21

Once a group of men came and visited me at night. It was dark 11:30 PM and I was in my pajamas ready to go to bed. I opened the door and those young men asked permission to come in. We sat together and they said they have questions about the Bible. They wanted to know more about Jesus. I believe they did not want to come in the morning because they were worried about the talk of the town.

Today we have a similar story. Let us read the story:

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

³ Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

⁴ "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

⁹ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ 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. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his

Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever 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. ¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But 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.

Last week we studied the wedding in Cana; and I asked you to read the entire second chapter with Jesus cleansing the Temple as well. There was symbolism in both events: turning water into wine and cleansing the temple. In fact, the wedding event is considered the first sign. It was an important sign to reveal the glory of Jesus. Besides providing the wine for the wedding, **Jesus demonstrated a new creation. The Messiah came to fulfill the law and bring a new covenant, "new wine", new creation.** We read in commentary:

Jewish ritual vessels and the Jewish temple, both instruments of religious cleansing, now find a replacement in Christ. But in order for this replacement to be complete, we must wait "the hour" (2:4), the time when "the temple...of his body" will be torn down and rebuilt (2:19). ¹

The wedding of Cana was the first sign out of seven. Chapter 2 ends with an important fact about Jesus:

many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. ²⁴But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. ²⁵He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person. (John 2:23b,25 NIV 11)

- Jesus can see inside the heart of the people.

When Jesus saw Nathanael, he saw his heart. Jesus penetrates inside our heart! Isn't it true?

"He enters into a number of conversations in which he instantly gets to the heart of individuals with highly diverse backgrounds and needs, such as:

Nicodemus; the Samaritan woman; the Gentile official; the man at the pool of Bethesda..."²

For example,

Nicodemus is a Jew, member of higher social class, a Pharisee, member of Sanhedrin (The Jewish ruling council).

The Samaritan woman, of lower class in society; Samaritan, woman...

Nicodemus could boast in his righteousness; he was a theologian...t

The Samaritan woman stands as a sinner;

The irony is that the “righteous” man leaves with questions; the sinner woman leaves with believing in Jesus.

It does not matter who you are. Jesus can see inside your heart. You cannot hide from God.

-Came at night.

We can observe two things here. He literally came at night so no one would see that he was coming to meet with Jesus.

John also uses the word “night” metaphorically for **moral and spiritual darkness**.³

- **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.** (1:5)

- **As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.** (9:4)

- **It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”** (11:10)

Does not matter how you analyze the word *at night*, Nicodemus’ own heart was like the night, in the dark, and needed light, a genuine light.

Perhaps Nicodemus saw some signs (2:23), and that drew him to Jesus. (*signs are not enough to have faith, see last week’s sermon*). He had respect towards this teacher who came from God (3:2). Here is the issue: he could not see beyond the signs.

-How true is this in our lives. I have served in many churches. In all churches I have met people who are curious about the nature of Jesus. It is a good start; it is not enough.

-Born of God, above:

Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” (3:3)

Jesus’ answer is interesting. He introduces how someone can see (enter) the Kingdom of God. That can happen if the person has a new birth, a spiritual new birth. That birth makes the person a child of God, in father-child relationship.

“Jesus is not interested in the divine authentication of signs but in the reality of someone's relationship with God.”⁴

We see again Jesus is introducing how to believe in Jesus. Stop worrying about signs. Are you ready to have a new kind of birth? Become a new creation...enter in

a new covenant, new wine, new beginning. This theme will come again and again with John, to believe in Jesus.

We have so many verses in the New Testament where the concept of rebirth is mentioned:

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. (I Peter 1:23)

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. (James 1:18)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (II Corinth. 5:17)

The concept of rebirth is very important. We use it in secular world even, of rebirth of a nation, rebirth of a family and so on. Why not in spiritual life. It is very essential. Nothing is more important than being born from above.

-Can human nature really be changed?

How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" (3:4)

Nicodemus got puzzled. Can you possibly turn the clock backward and go back to be born from your mother again? In other words, Nicodemus did not understand what was going on. In fact, in v 12 we see that Jesus says that a new birth is the requirement to enter the Kingdom of God, and Nicodemus did not believe.

-Baptism with water and Spirit

Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Jesus continues explaining what it means to be born from above or born again. A person is born of the water and the Spirit...

There are different interpretations about this:

-Some say Jesus is talking about two births, literal birth of water (Mother's womb, amniotic fluid); followed by a spiritual birth.

-Some say the water birth is baptism, Christian baptism, which accompanied by spiritual regeneration. (*Nicodemus will not know about this?*)

-Some say John the Baptist baptized with water (repentance), then Jesus will baptize with the Spirit.

-Another opinion suggests that “water and Spirit” form a unified concept to express the eschatological renewal promise in the Old Testament. The prophets in the particular described a coming era when the transforming spirit of God would be poured out generously on all people (Isaiah 32:15-20, Joel 2:28). Sometimes this renewal is described metaphorically as water.⁵

Ezekiel prophesied about this era saying:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezk 36:25-27 NIV 11)

Jesus is explaining to Nicodemus that this era has arrived. John the Baptist started, and Jesus is continuing.

The Spirit of God is moving over humanity. Hello Nic, wake up? You know your scriptures. Water and spirit...

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:6b-8 NIV 11)

The Spirit is here. *Ruah* or *Pneuma* “wind” will move in mysterious ways. Nothing will stop it, not even religious establishments. Wake up Nicodemus!

He did not get it. **He is still asking how can this be?**

Jesus answers to him using the title of rabbi, teacher. (Remember Nic use the same term when he addressed Jesus)

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. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the

one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” (John 3:11-15 NIV 11)

“Nicodemus you don’t get it; it is amazing. You know the OT very well.”

Jesus is declaring who he is again to this man who knew that one day the Messiah would come.

Jesus continues giving the example of Moses lifting up the snake in the wilderness (numbers 21) so that whoever gazed on it would be healed from snake bites.

Jesus is talking about the Son of Man will be lifted up, on the cross that anyone who believes will have enteral life. Anyone who believes will be born above, born again, new birth, new wine, new life...same themes....

Application:

1. You don’t need to be from right kind of family to belong to the family of Jesus.

Nicodemus was from the “right” family. He belonged to Abraham’s dynasty. Jesus introducing the new birth, to belong to new family, where ordinary birth is not enough. We all are called and given a chance to be born from above, or again (this is not political movement). The initiation is from God, born from above.... The Son of Man must be lifted up so we will be saved.

-Sevan and I did premarital counseling to a couple in Beirut, Lebanon. She knew few things about Jesus. She was never exposed to Jesus, although she was nominal Christian. In counseling, I had the opportunity to speak about who Jesus is. She heard it, yet nothing happened.

After the wedding, the couple had to leave Lebanon and go to a country where Christianity is not allowed. She called me one day from there... far away, and with a tearful voice she said, “Pastor Nerses, I am a creation, I found Jesus, I found the light, my life is changed...” She found Jesus in the dark world, in the night ...The light of Jesus and the Spirit cannot be contained...

2. Jesus brings light to the darkness.

Nicodemus had religious training and lot of information. But he remained in the darkness. Later in the Gospel we see he risked his life and reputation by asking for the body of Jesus, and to bury it.

Coming back to our story today, I don’t know how Nicodemus left that day. I don’t find in the Gospel that he became disciple of Jesus. Did he believe in Jesus or he was an admirer of this rabbi?

I don't know where you are also in your walk with Jesus. You can attend Bible studies, you can sing Christian songs, you can be serving Jesus, but none make you disciple of Jesus. If you are not born from above, you are not in relationship with Jesus. You can be born from above by believing in Jesus and asking Him to fill you with His Spirit.

I started with men coming and knocking my door at night, three of them became disciples of Jesus, and one of them became a pastor serving the Lord. To God be the Glory.

1 Gary M. Bruce, *NIV Application Commentary* p111

2. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p185

3. Carson 186

4. Gary M. Bruce, P 114

5. *ibid* p 116