

January 2, 2022 7 Words of Jesus Pt. 1 John 3:1-21

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a Jewish priest, a scholar who had studied the Law and the Prophets. He was a man of note, that is, he was a member of the Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem, also called the Sanhedrin. He was supposed to be critical of Jesus. The fact is, Nicodemus was attracted to HIM. He sought Jesus out at night, under the cover of darkness. He wanted to talk. He wanted...well he was not sure what he wanted. He did not want to criticize or attack Jesus. He was attracted to HIM for a number of reasons, not the least being the miracles that had already occurred.

The degree of respect Nicodemus had for Jesus is obvious. He addressed him as Rabbi. It was an acknowledgement that Jesus was wise, knew the Scriptures, and was "alive." His words as he addressed Jesus represented an opening of his mind and heart to this teacher, that was uncommon among Nicodemus peers. "We know you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus response sweeps the compliments off the table. Jesus knows two things about Nicodemus. He is a Pharisee, a spiritual leader in his own right. And Jesus can tell the man is hungering for something more. HE goes to the heart of Nicodemus' need. "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." There is an awkward silence. And then Nicodemus speaks in utter frustration.

“How can a man be born again when he is old? Surely he cannot enter again into his mother’s womb to be born!” He was saying, it’s not possible. I can’t go back. I can’t wipe the slate clean. I can’t start over. I am stuck with burdens created by my past. I can’t undo my record of sinfulness. The judgmental words, the acts of rejection of others, my ambition to be...Nicodemus.

Jesus is gentle in response to Nicodemus struggle to make sense of what has been said. “I tell you the truth. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again. 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.”

Nicodemus was astounded. “How....How can this be?” he asked.

And Jesus said, “You are Israel’s teacher, and you do not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen...you people do not accept our testimony.” Nicodemus is struggling. And we too often struggle with the things that are part of reality, but to which we have paid less attention than we should have. Jesus tells Nicodemus, it is not about flesh, it is about the spirit. So often among us human beings the body grows up, the

bones lengthen, the muscles grow in strength, we feed the mind. But we neglect the spirit, and we are surprised we do not have an understanding of the things of the Spirit of God. To grow spiritually we need spiritual food. That is why we worship, praising God, seeking to comprehend the words we find in the Scriptures, praying as Jesus taught us to pray, seeking the experience of the Spirit of God who leads us into the service of God by touching the lives of other people. Finding faith, experiencing love and joy, peace and hope.

And Jesus told Nicodemus things he had not expected to hear. Like what is going to happen in the future to Jesus, and Nicodemus would be involved and a witness with a front row seat. “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.” The crucifixion. “That everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.”

Sometimes we are so familiar with the words we fail to grasp them, even as we recite them. Jesus told Nicodemus, “For God so loved the world that He gave HIS one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send HIS Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through HIM.” Spiritual truth. A great preacher of our time stressed that faith is not something you work up in yourself, but it is a choice we make. A decision. A decision to accept the fact that not all things are resolved by logic, which is a very human discipline. And it can limit what we see.

The fact is, as the world has just celebrated, Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the time of Augustus Caesar and Herod the King. And though some recognized HIM, by the grace of God, some were dedicated to destroying HIM. And they failed at every turn because it was not time. And when it was time, death did not mean destruction. It led to resurrection. And the resurrection led to faith that fueled hope and joy in a hostile world. A world where violence exists alongside gentleness. A world in which sinfulness exists alongside the grace of God which forgives.

As Jesus implied spiritual realities and spiritual truth exist beside physical realities and science. It is only our lack of insight that causes us to believe, the two cannot co-exist.

By faith in Jesus we are forgiven. Washed clean and made new. We not only find hope and joy, the fact is we learn that we are brothers and sisters to our neighbours. The Spirit of God helps us to see things differently than we did. The newness of new life is real. We who so resist change are changed. As part of my Christmas tradition I once again read Charles Dickens Christmas Carol. I watched as I read, "the spirits" opening the mind and the heart and breathing new life into the soul of Scrooge, who became generous, caring, a member of the family of his kin, and a father figure to the Cratchits and tiny Tim. I understand it is a work of fiction. But it is a work of fiction that is unthinkable, without Jesus and his insights as HE talked with Nicodemus, about the possibility, and the reality, of rebirth...even when we are old.

There is a question that lingers in the air. How did this conversation affect Nicodemus? Or did it affect him at all?

As a matter of fact, John chapter 19 gives us insight on both of those questions. Joseph of Arimathea, asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. John says he was disciple of Jesus, but secretly. He was also a Pharisee. "He was accompanied by Nicodemus who had earlier visited Jesus by night." There follows a description of how the two men prepared the body for burial according to Jewish custom. Nicodemus provided the myrrh and spices. The two men provided the tomb that had never been used before and laid Jesus to rest. Were they taking risks doing this? Of course they were. On the Sunday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> day Jesus rose from the dead and was seen by many.

As I begin a new year, I can think of no more valuable insights than these. Salvation comes by faith, and faith by the grace of God. HE sent HIS Son into the world, to redeem it. I praise God for that simple and singular truth.

Let us pray;

O Lord, forgive us for the words we have spoken that should never have been uttered, and the things we have done that we cannot undo. Help us to be agents of your grace and love. Make us a blessing to others, in Jesus name we pray. Amen