

Lesson 5 – Nicodemus

Text: Matthew 14:1-5; Luke 3:19-20; John 3

Main Characters: God, Jesus, Nicodemus, John the Baptist, Herod Antipas

Key Passages:

- John 3:16 – Because God loved the world, God sent Jesus to die so that believers could be saved.
- John 3:36 – While those who believed would have life, those who did not believe would not see life.

Main Storyline:

One night, Nicodemus, one of the Pharisees on the Jewish Sanhedrin (ruling council), came to speak to Jesus. (It is not revealed why he came at night, thus it would be best if no assumptions were made concerning his often-debated motives. While it is possible that he came at night because he was afraid of appearing to be a disciple of Jesus, it is just as possible that he was busy during the day or he just wanted a private conversation with Jesus and night was the best time for that.) Nicodemus knew that Jesus was a teacher from God because of all of the signs that Jesus had done. Still, he clearly wanted to know more about Jesus.

Jesus commented to Nicodemus that, in order to see the kingdom of God, a person would need to be born again. Nicodemus had no idea how to take this statement from Jesus; though, obviously, it could not be a literal rebirth, he still had to ask the question, “Would one need to re-enter his mother’s womb and be, literally, born again?”

Jesus clarified for Nicodemus, “...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” In other words, Jesus was explaining that the rebirth would not be merely physical, but spiritual. Like wind, one would be able to see the effects of the Spirit, but one would not be able to see the Spirit. Despite this explanation, Nicodemus still did not understand Jesus’ teachings.

Jesus chided Nicodemus for his lack of understanding, since Nicodemus was a prominent religious leader and teacher. Jesus asked, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” Nicodemus should have understood the spiritual aspect of the kingdom of God, yet he had a difficult time understanding and accepting even Jesus’ simpler teachings.

John (the author) or Jesus (often debated) went on to explain the ultimate plan of God. The Son of Man (Jesus) would need to be lifted up (referring to the crucifixion) in order to give life to those who believed in him. This would be similar to Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness to save the people from the fiery snake bites (see Numbers 21:4-9).

Further, John or Jesus explained that God had sent Jesus, his only begotten son, out of love for the world, that whoever would believe would not perish, but have eternal life. Those who would not believe would be condemned. Those that are evil (darkness) would hate Jesus (light), because they would not want their deeds exposed as evil. Those that follow the truth would come after Jesus.

After all of this, Jesus and his disciples went to Judea, and his disciples began baptizing people (see John 4:2). John the Baptist was also baptizing at the same time in around the same area. An argument started between some of John’s disciples and the Jews because Jesus was baptizing at the same time as John. John took the opportunity to explain that he, himself, was not the Christ, but Jesus was from heaven. It was time for John’s role to decrease while Jesus’ role increased. Again, John the Baptist emphasized that those who believed in Jesus would have eternal life, while those who did not believe in Jesus would get the wrath of God.

At some point, John the Baptist rebuked Herod Antipas, one of the rulers of the area, for taking his brother’s (Philip’s) wife unlawfully. Herod was very upset and decided to put John in prison. Herod really wanted to kill John, but he feared the people because they believed that he was a prophet.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) Jesus was sent because of God’s love; God wants people to be saved from their sins (2 Peter 3:9).
- 2.) Those that do not believe in Jesus will not receive eternal life; instead, they will receive God’s wrath.
- 3.) There are times when teaching against sin will cause unwanted consequences; we must still do right.