

March 27, 2022

“Nicodemus Learns of New Birth”
Lesson 4 of Unit

John 3:11-21

Intro

Modern lights and electricity allow us to stay up as long as we want. Not so in the days of Jesus. The meeting described in today's passage would have been unusual, well past the time that people would have normally met to eat and converse.

We need to understand Nicodemus' position better to appreciate today's study. According to John 3:1, Nicodemus was a Pharisee; they were strict in their following of the Law of Moses. He must have been a good teacher as well, for Jesus calls him “Israel's teacher” in John 3:10.

Also from 3:1, Nicodemus is noted as a member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. (See John 7:47-50). This council consists of only 71 people (70 priests, elders, and scribes plus the high priest at the time). These are the “cream of the crop” in Israel—and Nicodemus is one of them.

Nicodemus's status as a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin indicates his status to us. We must see him as being a very loyal and observant Jew.

Read John 3:11-21

1. vs. 11: Jesus says that He “speaks the truth” to Nicodemus

Jesus says some variation of “I tell you the truth” 26 times in John's gospel!

He frequently says this at the beginning of an important teaching

The term at the root of this phrase is the word we translate “amen”

When we pray “amen”, we are saying we agree with the truth of the prayer

Prior to this verse, Jesus has done miracles which were not believed (2:23-25)

Nicodemus can only understand being “born again” in physical terms (3:4)

He doesn't understand Jesus' clear explanation of spiritual birth (3:9)

Jesus is trying to show Nicodemus that He has been speaking truth

Jesus is, as always, trying to bring others into an understanding of the Kingdom

2. vs. 12: Jesus draws a simple analogy here for Nicodemus:

He has spoken of earthly things, and Nicodemus hasn't believed

If Jesus speaks of heavenly (spiritual) things, how will Nicodemus believe them?

Nicodemus seems to be a person unable to believe what is shown to him!

It's ironic that he doesn't understand spiritual matters, since he is a teacher of the Law

3. vs. 13: Jesus begins telling Nicodemus significant spiritual truths

First, Jesus knows about God because He Himself came from heaven

Because of this, Jesus' teachings are reliable and should be followed

4. vs. 14: Jesus uses another analogy here to explain His purpose in coming from heaven

He references a story that Nicodemus as a teacher would surely know

In Num. 21:5-9, God punished the people for their disobedience by sending poisonous snakes into the camp. When the people come to Moses confessing their sin and asking for saving, God tells Moses to make a bronze snake and lift it above the camp on a pole. Anyone bitten by a snake who looked at the bronze serpent was saved from death.

Jesus says that He too will be "lifted up", referring to being nailed to the cross

He doesn't say here how this action will result in salvation, but the analogy is clear

The "snake in the desert" story is a prophecy of the saving power of the cross

5. vs. 15: The salvation connection is further developed here

People who looked at the bronze snake were spared from death

They eventually died, so this was a temporary situation

Everyone who believes in Jesus (who looks to Him in faith) will be saved eternally

These words apply universally to all of humanity

However, Jesus is speaking specifically to Nicodemus here

Nicodemus will not be saved by ritually observing the Law

Salvation comes only from belief in Jesus, which Nicodemus is having trouble with

6. vs. 16: This is likely the most well-known verse in the entire Bible, and for good reason

This is essentially the gospel in a nutshell

Our text paraphrases this verse nicely:

"God works to save us because He loves the world. God saves us by sending the One closest to His heart: the Son. We must believe in Him, placing our trust in the Son of God. The result is that we no longer have to fear death, for we will not perish. Instead, we have the gift of eternal life."

7. vs. 17: This verse address two things: why Jesus came, and why he didn't come

The negative is given first: He didn't come to condemn the world

"Condemn" suggests being judged, found guilty, and sentenced to death

This is not why Jesus came; He confirms this in John 8:15

Jesus came to save the world—that is His purpose, His mission

He is not both Savior and condemner at the same time

He came to earth the first time as Savior

When He returns, He will come as a Judge (see Matt. 25:31-33)

8. vs. 18: This verse warns of the consequences of unbelief

Those who don't believe are under condemnation now

They have chosen not to believe, not to have faith, in Jesus and what He did

Having a general belief in God, like Nicodemus, will not achieve salvation

There is no middle ground here

Salvation is found in Jesus alone (see John 14:6 and Acts 4:12)

9. vs. 19: Jesus draws another analogy, between light and dark

He is referencing Himself here as being the “light of the world” (John 8:12)

Those seeking spiritual truth will seek and accept Him

Those who don’t seek or accept Jesus as content/happy with being in the darkness

Their deeds Jesus calls “evil”

Jesus says this to both Nicodemus and to all people in the world

Again, there is no wiggle room in what He says

10. vs. 20: This verse can be seen as Jesus offering a test for a person to see where they are

If a person doesn’t want their deeds to be seen or known, they are doing evil

These people reject the light (meaning they reject Jesus)

Jesus notes that evil deeds will be exposed—there is no hiding in the long run

11. vs. 21: Here is the opposite idea from verse 20

Those who live in the truth gladly come to the light

They are unafraid of their actions being found out

This verse also connects truth as actions

“it may be plainly seen that what he has done...”

The other connection is that the actions of truth are not done by human effort alone

“has been done through God”

We are always assisted by God in carrying out His will

Application: There is a difference between “eternity” and “eternal life”. Eternity refers to time. At some point, God will remove time as a construct in His creation. Eternal life means that believers will continue to have life beyond the point when time ceases to exist anymore. Believers who follow the Lordship of Jesus Christ have the promise of eternal life because of Jesus’ death on the cross—He came to save the world, meaning He came to save each of us!

Prayer: Father God, Thank You for the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Help us to continually seek the light of Your truth and Your presence, and to live our lives in such a way that they reflect the truth of who You are. In Jesus’ name, Amen.