

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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Nicodemus: A Ruler on the Right Track

By Brian R. Kenyon

The Bible first introduces Nicodemus (whose name means “victor of the people”) with this description:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: ²The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. (Jn. 3:1-2)

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a sect of the Jews that seems to have started after the Jewish exile. Pharisees recognized oral tradition as the standard of belief and life. They sought for distinction and praise by outward observance of external rites and by outward forms of piety (i.e., ceremonial washings, fastings, prayers, and alms giving). They strongly believed in: (1) the existence of good and evil angels; (2) the expectation of a Messiah; and (3) resurrection and afterlife. Most of them, however, staunchly opposed Jesus.

Nicodemus was also of note among the Jews. The word translated “ruler” (from *archon*, ἄρχων) refers to an official, or authority. The modifying term “of the Jews” indicates that he was likely a member of the Sanhedrin, which was the supreme council of the Jewish people in the time of Christ and earlier. It consisted of chief priests, elders, men of age and experience, scribes, lawyers, and those learned in the Jewish law.

The text does not reveal exactly why Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. Perhaps he was afraid or perhaps he was just too busy during the day. However, the one-on-

one conversation he had with Jesus is certainly of great benefit for Christians living today (Jn. 3:3-21). Nicodemus is only found in the Gospel of John, but people today can learn great lessons from him.

Nicodemus Recognized Jesus

Nicodemus, without bias, concluded that Jesus was from God (Jn. 3:2). Although he was a member of the most antagonistic sects of Judaism toward Jesus, Nicodemus was able to rationally consider the evidence and come to the correct conclusion. Jesus said elsewhere, “But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me” (Jn. 5:36). Anyone who examines the evidence without prejudice will likewise conclude that Jesus is from God. Perhaps this is why Jesus could say to Peter after he confessed Him as the Christ, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 16:17).

Additionally, Nicodemus wanted to know more about Jesus and the truths He spoke. He asked the Lord, “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (Jn. 3:4). Then later, after hearing more about being born of the Spirit, Nicodemus asked, “How can these things be?” (Jn. 3:9). Nicodemus certainly exemplifies what it means to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Mt. 5:6)!

Nicodemus Defended Jesus

In John 7:32, the “Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take” Jesus. When the officers returned to “the chief priests and Pharisees ... they said unto them, Why

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have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man” (Jn. 7:45-46). The Pharisees responded, “Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed” (Jn. 7:47-49). Nicodemus defended Jesus by saying, “Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” (Jn. 7:51). Nicodemus only appealed to what was just and fair in the Jews’ own law (cf. Ex. 23:1; Deut. 1:16-17).


Nicodemus tried to open closed minds, but in so doing, he was met with flagrant prejudice, “Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet” (Jn. 7:52). The question about being from Galilee implied only a “hometown boy” would see no problem with Jesus. The charge that no prophet was from Galilee was also untrue (cf. Jonah, 2 Kgs. 14:25, and perhaps Nahum [cf. Capernaum = “Nahum’s town”]). Besides that, Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Mt. 2:1). Nicodemus shows people today that defending Jesus will often bring irrational responses with opponents willfully forgetting the basic truth (cf. 2 Pet. 3:5).

Nicodemus Respected Jesus

The final time Nicodemus is mentioned was while Jesus was dead on the cross. After the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate and received permission to “take away the body of Jesus” (Jn. 19:38). Accompanying Joseph was Nicodemus, who “brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight” with which to respectfully prepare the body of Jesus (Jn.

19:39). Then Joseph and Nicodemus took “the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury ... There [in a never before used tomb] laid they Jesus” (Jn. 19:40-42). This clearly showed that Nicodemus was on Jesus’ side. He paid final respect to Jesus’ body (Mt. 27:57-60), and in so doing took great risk! Nicodemus exemplifies what it means to risk life and reputation to practice the Golden Rule: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mt. 7:12).

Conclusion

The Bible never explicitly calls Nicodemus a “disciple” of Christ, although it seems he likely was or later became one. However, one thing that can be said for sure is that he was at least on the right track. Where do “religious” people, including members of the church, stand today in relation to Jesus? Do we truly recognize Jesus for who He is and thus live for Him? Are we willing to defend Jesus when people verbally attack or make false statements about Him? Are we willing to risk our lives in order to show Jesus the respect He deserves? 

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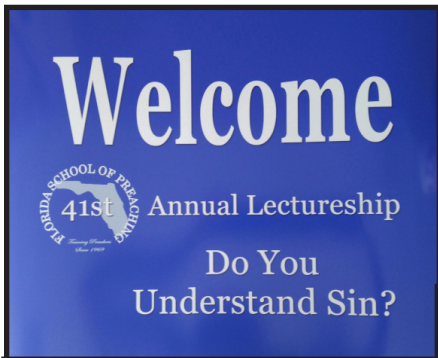
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Current students. Top row: James, Kyle, Federick, Forest. Middle row: Andrae, Shawn, Chad. Bottom row: Dylan, Rico, Hiram, Scott. **Thanks for your support!**



Special Thanks to all the local churches and individuals who financially contributed to our 2016 lectureship! By God's grace and your support, we were able to meet and slightly exceed our total expenses, which was around \$12,000. It is only right that the school provide travel expenses, lodging, and monetary support for each speaker (cf. 1 Cor. 9:14). This quality of a lectureship would not be possible without your help!