

NICODEMUS IN JOHN - A STUDY IN DISCERNMENT – 12 March 2017

Nicodemus confronts his growing belief that Jesus is from God.

He moves with the promptings of the Spirit.



Nicodemus Visits Jesus

3:1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus[a] by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.'

A Pharisee, a leader of the Jews, a member of the Sanhedrin (ruling council)

Came to Jesus by night – secretly, perhaps furtively, because of his position and/or because he was in a spiritually dark place?

A literalist belief – 'How can anyone be born after having grown old?';
in the face of Jesus' spiritual teaching that one needs also to be born from above, of the Spirit.

Jesus gently, but firmly, confronts N. with his spiritual poverty –

'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?'

Nicodemus learns that the things of the Spirit are spiritually discerned.

1 Corinthians (NRSVA) 2¹⁴ Those who are unspiritual^[a] do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually.

So we observe that N. continues walking his spiritual journey with some new perspectives – Jesus perspectives if you like. It's a good and wholesome thing to do this. To take stock; to think again; to open to the Spirit afresh and ask, 'Is there is anything I might better understand or do?'

A bit like Abraham in our OT & Epistle readings today, who hears God and embarks on a journey, a pilgrimage when he was 75 years old. And we read in the Epistle,

'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Rom 4:3b

As we will discover today, that is exactly what Nicodemus in Joh is doing!

Nicodemus is objective in urging his peers to give Jesus a fair hearing.

N. demonstrates his respect for the law – he knows the Scriptures – he genuinely and wholeheartedly seeks after God.



He reminds his colleagues in the Sanhedrin that the [law](#) requires that a person be heard before being judged – John 7:50-51 – a lone voice in the Sanhedrin; but one with many of the crowd including the Temple police!

The Unbelief of Those in Authority – John 7

⁴⁵ Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, 'Why did you not arrest him?' ⁴⁶ The police answered, 'Never has anyone spoken like this!' ⁴⁷ Then the Pharisees replied, 'Surely you have not been deceived too, have you?' ⁴⁸ Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.' ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus^[a] before, and who was one of them, asked, ⁵¹ 'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?' ⁵² They replied, 'Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.'

They seek to pass from the matter of fact immediately before them to the question of authority. The Sanhedrin's generalisation includes an historical error which cannot be explained away. [Jonah](#) is described in 2Kings 14:25 as of Gathhepher, which was a town of Zebulun, in Lower Galilee. Possibly Elkosh, the birthplace of [Nahum](#), was also in Galilee, and [Hosea](#) was certainly a prophet of the Northern Kingdom, though not necessarily of Galilee. The Sanhedrin, in their zeal to press their foregone conclusion that Jesus is not a prophet, are not bound by strict accuracy; and it is likely that, in the general contempt of Judæans for Galilee, this assertion had become a by-word, especially with men with so little of the historical sense as the later Rabbis. As compared with Judæa, it was true that Galilee was not a country of prophets, and by-words of this kind often rest on imperfect generalisations. We have seen that of [the great prophets of Christianity all were Galileans](#). [Judas Iscariot](#) alone, of the Twelve Apostles, was probably a Judæan.

N. was a seeker after truth. In cautioning his colleagues in the S. to give J. a fair hearing he was discerning, with the crowd and the temple police, that the Sanhedrin were dealing with no ordinary false prophet here. He refused to be blind to the truth that was dawning on him and was bold to speak up rather than remain silent.

The Q. for us here might be, when and where do I remain silent when faith calls me to speak up for Christian truth?

In my conversations where I hear untruth, or negativity, or blasphemy, or misunderstanding or bigotry?

In my groups where I witness xenophobia (such as the S. express here), or the mob mentality negatively expressing itself?

In my heart and mind when my self talk becomes untrue, like I'm a failure or she's better than me?

In all these situations and more, the Spirit of Christ invites us to declare the truth. God is love, God loves us and God loves me therefore how can I do other than love those around me, including myself.

Nicodemus is courageous in public to help prepare Jesus' body for burial

N. puts his life and reputation on the line – a sign of true conversion – he does not count the cost.



Provides the customary embalming spices, and assists [Joseph of Arimathea](#) in preparing the body of Jesus for [burial \(John 19:39–42\)](#).

The Burial of Jesus – John 19

³⁸After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Some say that true conversion happens when one's finances and possessions are given to God. If that is so then here we have Nicodemus (with Joseph of Arimathea) joining the rank of disciples.

Perhaps at this point N. is truly born again in a way he wasn't when he first dialogued with Jesus (see John 3).

True conversion is not hidden but is declared publicly. The converted one is boots and all in with the community of God's people. They have grasped that identification with the God and father of Jesus the Christ is a matter of first priority. Nothing else is more important. Even if that identification means I lose friends, status, popularity or worldly security.

Here we have Nicodemus converted boots and all.

Is that how it is for you?

What's holding you back?

Part of my job amongst you, as I see it, is to have dialogue with those of you who want to wrestle with this question.

Not judgemental discussions but talks a bit like that first one that Jesus had with Nicodemus. Honest, caring, revealing and respectful. Perhaps life changing. My diary is not very full at the moment. There's space for you....

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12 March 2017