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#3 In the Worth It Series

Born Again

Forest Park Church

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Introduction:

Living Life involves risk, but not all risk is gambling.

- Risk is a necessary and defensible part of a stewarded life in a fallen world.”
- “Gambling is an artificially contrived risk, taken for selfish gain at another’s expense, with no constructive product or social good as its goal.”

Nicodemus had:

- Impeccable manners,
- High morals,
- An inquiring mind,
- But something was missing and he knew it!

Have you ever wondered what a church full of Pharisees would be like?

1. They would all attend every service.
2. They would all tithe.
3. They would all work in the church.
4. They would all go to hell.

The message of the gospel is simple:

- No one is so bad that they cannot be saved
- No one is so good he need not be saved.

They fail to see the worst form of badness is human goodness when human goodness becomes a substitute for the new birth.”



I. In The Dark

Many people think Jesus' first words of his public ministry were, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (**Matthew 4:19**). They aren't. The day after Jesus was baptized, Andrew and John ask him where he is staying. Jesus responds with his first three words: "Come and see" (John 1:39).

That's as simple as it gets. John and Andrew don't need to die for him (yet).

- He's not even urging the two to trust him or believe in him.
- He's just asking them to take a step on their journey with him.
- Jesus always started where people were, not where he wanted them to be.

It's about the lowest level of commitment you can ask of someone. Jesus always met people where they were.

The conversation between Christ and Nicodemus, which begins with these verses, is one of the most important passages in the whole Bible.

Jesus discipleship path involves transitioning people through a very intentional path.

There are three things to note in this story

A. The introduction:

John 3:1,

"There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews."

This tells us a lot.

- He had position
- He had influence
- He was a Pharisee
- He had something to lose

The stakes are high...and they are very real.

- We will either lose our life or we will find it.



- There is no middle ground.
- We can give up everything for Jesus Christ or we can store up everything for ourselves.
- And what we choose will have lasting implications on this earth and for eternity.

Every leader had the same opportunity as Nicodemus but very few will take it!!

4 B. The Question

It is important to note that God is not intimidated by questions.

- God invites us to enjoy close fellowship with Him.
- When we “question God,” it should be from a humble spirit and open mind.
- We can question God, but we should not expect an answer unless we are genuinely interested in His answer.
- God knows our hearts, and knows whether we are genuinely seeking Him to enlighten us.
- Our heart attitude is what determines whether it is right or wrong to question God.

5 John 3:2-10

He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

3 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

4 “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

5 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 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.”

9 “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?”



Notice the honest conversation that is happening here!

- In this final line Jesus is gently pointing out to an intelligent individual that there are many things he simple does not and cannot understand.
- He too must be willing to walk by faith and not only by sight

6

C. The Humbling Truth

Some people need to drink a “tall glass of reality”.

- Their narcissistic self love dilutes their sense of reality and enhances their false value in the world.
- Conquered by the vice of pride and guided by only material pursuits, they lose value of truth; the truth that without God we are nothing.

Humility is an important virtue because it reflects truth.

- In Christ, his humility reflected love and patience in having a conversation with this man that felt himself superior in many ways.

John 3:11-21

7

Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

Christ’s humility shows us how someone so powerful and mighty should act in this world.

- His humility showed example and pure love.



- So much love, that he allowed himself to be taken and crucified.
- **How more important is humility to fallen creatures who are truly imperfect?**
- Jesus taught that humility is a prerequisite for understanding.
- With this in mind, how foolish do some stars or vain individuals seem when they boast or brag of such meager accomplishments?

A visitor from Hungary stopped a passerby on a street in the town of Lizensk, Galicia, with the request: “Can you please direct me to the home of the great Teacher Elimelech?”

The man raised his eyes in astonishment: “You mean to tell me that you journeyed all the way from Hungary to see this ‘Teacher of Lizensk’?! Have the exaggerations and embellishments about this man traveled that far already? I know this Elimelech personally, and I can tell you that there is nothing exceptional about him. I’m afraid that you’ve wasted your time and money on these silly rumors.”

The visitor was outraged. “You lowly, despicable man!” he cried. “What do you know?! You obviously have no understanding of anything holy and spiritual!” Still fuming, the visitor stormed off.

Later that day, when he entered Elimelech’s study for his appointed audience, he nearly fainted with shame and remorse. The man he had derided earlier on the street was none other than Elimelech himself! With tears in his eyes, he begged the teachers forgiveness.

“Why are you so upset?” asked Elimelech. “There’s no need to apologize. I told you the simple truth, and everything you said was also true...”

Jesus loves you enough to start where you are, but he loves you too much to let you stay there.

That’s why over the course of his ministry, Jesus turns up the heat. Jesus never did anything by accident.

- He was intentional,
- Perfect,
- Focused on the mission.



Because Jesus starts his ministry with the lowest level of commitment, we can trust the process he models.

Here, Nicodemus took a minimal risk. But that's about to change.

8 II. Taking a Stand

John 7:45-53

"The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" 46 The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" 47 The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? 48 Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? 49 But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."

9 *Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, 51 "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" 52 They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."*

- **In John 3:1-21** we find Nicodemus in a clandestine meeting with Jesus;
- **In John 7:45-53** we find Nicodemus in a clandestine meeting about Jesus.

10 A: Confusion

We observe that the unbiased soldiers, who were tasked with arresting a criminal, returned empty handed because the character of Jesus did not resemble the rhetoric.

11 **John 7:46**
"The officers answered, 'No man ever spoke like this Man!'"

Matthew 7:28-29



*“And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for **He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.**”*

Mark 10:24

And the disciples were astonished at His words.”

Luke 4:22, and 36

“So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, ‘Is this not Joseph’s son?’ . . . Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, ‘What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.’”

Luke 19:47-48 *“And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.”*

Jesus didn’t come with human opinions.

He spoke with conviction and power as though God Himself were speaking; and, in fact, it was God Himself speaking.

- If you want to know what God thinks, read the words of Jesus.
- If you want to know God’s insights into any subject, listen to Jesus.
- If you want the wisdom of God, listen to the words of Jesus.”

Notice the confusion that came to those who conspired against Jesus before the time appointed for Him to be crucified.

12 B: Contempt

The second thing we find is the contempt Nicodemus observed toward Jesus.

John 7:47-49



“Then the Pharisees answered them, ‘Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.’”

John 7:52

“Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.”

The Pharisees further show their ignorance of Scripture in that both the prophets Jonah and Hosea came from Galilee.

Matthew 12:38-41

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.’”

13 C: Concern

Nicodemus voiced concern for Jesus.

John 7:50-51

“Nicodemus. . . said to them, ‘Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?’”

Deuteronomy 1:16-17

“Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment is God’s. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.’”

Here, as faith grows, Nicodemus become more and more open about his convictions. No more last night clandestine conversations this is open and costly questing of the official narrative and authority.

14 III. Under Fire

John 19:38-42

15 *“After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.”*

It is interesting to note each passage in the Gospel of John refers to Nicodemus in the same way.

- John 3:2 “This man came to Jesus by night. . . .”
- John 7:50 “he who came to Jesus by night. . . .”
- John 19:39 “who at first came to Jesus by night”

16 A: Courage

This is an open act of alimnt with Jesus. Nicodemus who first came privately, came publicly.

There can be no doubt that this act and those which followed cost Joseph and Nicodemus very dearly.

- John 12:42 indicates that ‘many among the chief rulers’ actually believed on Christ, but ‘because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.’

- Not only would Joseph and Nicodemus have been excommunicated, but they would quite likely have lost their possessions and possibly even their lives because of this.”

17 B: Investment

Consider the contribution of Nicodemus for the burial of Jesus. J

- And Nicodemus. . . also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.”
- Nicodemus provided the burial of a king, for Jesus

Isaiah 53:9

“And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.”

The heroism of faith is almost always kindled by desperate circumstances.

The heroism of Joseph began in Christ's hour of darkness.

When the only voice lifted up for Him all that day had been the voice of a dying thief.

‘Bold’ is the fit word for describing his request of Pilate.

- This request, in later days, had cost men their lives.
- But the brave deed was successful.

Joseph and Nicodemus most likely had met in the high places of life, each knowing the other had faith in Christ that he was afraid to profess; **they now met at the cross as at the altar of decision.”**

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus went from timidity to boldness at the burial of Jesus.

- Remember, both were members of the Sanhedrin.
- Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were either absent from the meeting or they abstained from the voting.
- Remarkably, right after the death of Jesus, they were prepared to quickly come forward and provide a burial fit for a king.



- Any cowardice was replaced by courage!

Nicodemus took a major risk.

Come and see had turned into something far more real.....Come and Die

As Jesus gets closer and closer to the cross, he makes the ultimate request of his followers.

- 18 **Matthew 16:24**
“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”

We often don't understand the full impact of that statement.

- Today a cross is a symbol of hope.
- In Jesus' time, the cross was a symbol of death.
- Even worse, it symbolized a criminal's death where the person would agonizingly suffer in the process.

When Jesus tells his followers to “take up their cross,” he's saying “come and die.”

- The entire process of discipleship is about following Jesus' process of moving people from “come and see” to “come and die.”

1 Conclusion

Where are you in the story of Nicodemus?

Where do I stand? Have I been born again? Have I looked away in simple faith to the Lord Jesus for salvation?

Romans 16:3-4

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.”



Remember if you are a Christian you will risk your life and livelihood in the will of God.”

- Are you born again? If not, come to Jesus, it’s a risk worth taking!

A very young minister still adjusting to all the demands that fall upon one in pastoral ministry found himself neglecting his study in order to meet other needs. One Sunday evening following the worship service a dear lady — a person who loved and cared for her preacher—said t I can hear the dipper banging against the bottom of the bucket.”

It’s a remark that he never forgot. . It was her way of admonishing him not neglect my time in the Word and with the Lord. His pitcher was empty...and she knew it.

Are you weary and worn-out — can people hear the dipper banging against the bottom of your bucket? Or are you vibrant and victorious?

We have before us one of the most remarkable and challenging statements in the whole of the New Testament. Jesus said,

”If anyone thirsts, let him come unto Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”

(John 7:38).

These words were spoken by Jesus to people who were spiritually dry, empty and defeated. They are like many people of our day, going through religious ritual and ceremony but finding no real meaning, life and victory.

The apostle John includes the commentary on the words of Jesus. **John 7:39** tells us that Jesus’ statement about “*rivers of living water*” is a reference to the Holy Spirit.

