

# GOSPEL OF JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

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## *“Nic(odemus) at Night”*

John 2:23-3:3

Open your Bibles to John Chapter 2. We are going to reach back a little into chapter 2 and then study through the first three verses of chapter 3. Let's read our text and meet a most fascinating man. Beginning in verse 23 of chapter 2 John writes:

**<sup>23</sup>Now when He (Jesus) was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. <sup>24</sup>But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, <sup>25</sup>and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.**

**<sup>1</sup>There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, “**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**”**

Last time we looked at a different side of Jesus. Gone was the miracle worker who changed the water into wine and saw Nathanael from afar. And coming onto the scene was the Jesus who cleansed the Temple.

Having seen that the “Jews” had turned His Father’s House into a house of merchandise, Jesus did a different kind of business. He fashioned a whip of cords and chased away the animals that were being sold for sacrifices. Then He overturned the tables of the money-changers. Because of this, the religious leaders came to Jesus.

But they didn’t rebuke Him. (I think they knew what was going on there was corrupt.) So they just came and asked Him under whose authority He did it. But they did not get the answer they were seeking. Jesus told them this (verse 19):

**“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”**

Of course, Jesus was talking about the resurrection here.

But the religious leaders were earthbound, and did not understand what Jesus meant. They thought He was going to tear down the Temple that was still being renovated and not yet finished. This young carpenter from Galilee said He was going to not just rebuild

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the Temple, but do it in three days! The Jews had 18,000 men working on it every day for 46 years. So what Jesus said to them was preposterous.

But some of the people watching this event understood what the Lord was saying, at least in the end. The disciples of Jesus kept all of these things that the Lord did in their hearts. So after His death and resurrection, they remembered what Jesus said and believed in Him even more.

That is what we as believers want to do — grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. We see not only what Jesus did in the pages of the Bible but also in the lives of people, and our faith is strengthened. Unfortunately, not all people react in this way to what Jesus did or who He is. So John shows us three ways that people respond to Jesus and the Gospel. And that is what we are going to look at in this session.

### 1. The first group I want to talk about are the religious leaders, and others.

When they saw what Jesus did, they had one of two reactions. Some of them just blew Jesus off as a religious fanatic and went back to their lives. We've all met people like that. Some people just do not want to hear the Gospel. Pastor Chuck Smith always taught about how these people are blinded by the god of this age. The Apostle Paul spoke of these people in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 when he wrote:

**<sup>3</sup>But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, <sup>4</sup>whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.**

These people love the darkness that they live in. They don't think they need a change in their lives, so they have no need for a Savior. I think many unbelievers fall into this camp. And we cannot simply ask God to save them. The Lord will allow them to make their own choice. What we must do is to pray for the Lord to bind whatever is blinding them so they can make a decision for Christ.

Another group that falls into this category is the Pharisees and Sadducees (religionists). These people don't just want to be left alone in their rejection of the Gospel. They are outwardly set against it. The "Jews," as John called them, set out to destroy Jesus for what He said and did. They didn't like it that this 30-year-old Carpenter was usurping their authority and turning people against them.

Did you know that a group of Orthodox Jews in Israel introduce legislation almost every year that would make sharing the Gospel a crime? It always gets shut down, but they keep on trying.

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These kinds of people follow other religions or traditions and are basically antagonistic to the Gospel and may even persecute believers. And they are difficult to witness to — *but we must*. We have to always have an answer for them of the hope that we have.

2. We talked a little last time about the second way people react to the Gospel. These people are found at the end of chapter 2. After Jesus cleansed the Temple, John wrote about this (verse 23):

**Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.**

At first glance you might think, “Wow, that’s great!” But if you read it closely, your opinion might change. John writes that they believed in Jesus when they saw the “**signs**” that He did. It says here that they “**believed in His name.**” But it does not say that they wanted to follow Him. They were, as I said last study, “*make believers.*”

They loved the miracles Jesus did. They loved the rush they got from seeing these miracles happen. And they hoped Jesus might have a miracle in store for them or one of their friends or family. But as soon as things got tough, as we shall see later, they hit the road.

I remember as a babe in Christ, I used to watch a “Christian” TV channel late at night. I put the word “Christian” in italics because what was on this channel was a bunch of charlatans, the biggest of whom was Benny Hinn. For someone who didn’t know better, it was quite exciting when people would come up to the stage at his church. He would touch them on the head and say, “*push.*” Then they would fall back, “*slain in the Spirit.*” And when they got up, they were “*healed.*” Not!!!

I remember one particular night, toward the end of the show, Hinn was saying all you have to do is reach out and God will heal you. So I reached out and touched the TV screen! Of course, nothing happened. And then 30 seconds later, the announcer came on asking for money.

To be honest, the only thing Benny ever did was confuse me. It didn’t take long for the Holy Spirit to help me get away from that bologna. But many people do not — even Christians. They look to the miracle and not the One who caused the miracle to happen.

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All the signs Jesus did pointed to Him. They are designed to make you believe on Him and Him alone. And they always bring glory to the Father. That is why Jesus did them.

I think a good example of this is found in John Chapter 6. In this chapter Jesus does the wonderful sign of feeding 5,000 people with five barley loaves of bread and some fish. The next day some of these same people searched for Jesus. But when they find Him, Jesus says that all they are looking for is physical food. They wanted another miracle, another loaf of bread and some fish. And they proved this when they asked Jesus where they could get them. But then Jesus tells them something important.

He tells them that **HE** is the Bread of Life. He is the One who the Father sent to sustain them. Everything they needed was found in Him. He was offering them spiritual, rather than physical, food. This irritated the people, especially the Jewish leaders. But not as much as what He said a little later. Listen to what He says in verse 51:

**“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”**

Just like the religious leaders who thought Jesus was talking about literally tearing down the Temple, these people thought He literally meant to eat of His flesh. And, they stopped following Him in droves. We will delve into what Jesus was talking about in much more depth when we study chapter 6.

But for what we are talking about here, the people were fine and dandy when Jesus miraculously fed them. However, when He challenged them with a hard saying, they left. They were there for the show. And that is not what following Jesus is about. So He does this (verses 24-25):

**<sup>24</sup>But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, <sup>25</sup>and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.**

The Bible Knowledge Commentary gives us great insight into what happened here, as well as a sedgeway into chapter 3. Listen to what it says:

*Having supernatural knowledge, Jesus does not need human help to evaluate men. As God, He sees beyond the superficial to people's hearts (1 Sam. 16:7; Ps. 139; Acts 1:24). John 3 and 4 give*

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*illustrations of this truth. He knew Nicodemus' need, and He told the Samaritan woman about her past (4:29). The connection of chapter 3 to chapter 2 is evident (cf. in a man [2:25], and "Now there was a man" [3:1]).*

Having been around the Vineyard movement (holy laughter, etc.), Julia and I have seen how destructive it can be for people to seek *signs*. We saw people go from church to church because the last one they were at was not exciting enough. And I know of many people who no longer go to church, because all of that fizzled out or what some "prophet" said to them never came true. I cannot think of anything better than to be excited about the Christian life.

We should all be on fire for Jesus. But when people seek the miracles, and not the Lord, they are bound to burn out. By the way, it is important to note how the disciples of Jesus reacted to this teaching — especially Peter. Listen to what John recorded in verses 67-68:

**<sup>67</sup>Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"**

**<sup>68</sup>But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

Some of the things Jesus says are hard to grasp and embrace. But they are the words of life. And, like Peter, I have no place else to go to get them. Jesus is the Christ.

3. Now we come to the third way people react to Jesus. And as we do we are going to meet a very interesting man named Nicodemus. Look at verse 1 of chapter 3:

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

The only place we meet Nicodemus is in John's Gospel. This first time he appears, John describes him as a Pharisee.

The Pharisees were one of the four sects of Judaism at that time along with the Sadducees, the Essenes and the zealots. They were the hyper-spiritual Jews. The Pharisees often opposed Jesus in His ministry, and He strongly denounced them for their legalism. There was a constant battle between Jesus and these legalists.

So much so that He spoke eight woes (called them "**hypocrites**") against them and their fellow brotherhood the scribes, in Matthew 23. The scribes interpreted the

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Law, and the Pharisees implemented it. And they came up with over 600 laws that the people were supposed to keep.

Jesus only followed the Laws found in the Bible and not the ones made by man. These legalists believed that their places were secure in the Kingdom of God for two reasons:

1. They were born of God's chosen people, the Jews, and
2. They meticulously kept God's Law.

Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee, as was his teacher Gamaliel. Many believe that Gamaliel sat under Nicodemus.

We also know that Nicodemus was a wealthy man. In John Chapter 19, we read that it was him, along with Joseph of Arimathea, who placed the body of Jesus in the tomb after His death. Joseph provided the tomb, and Nicodemus provided 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes. These were expensive items during that time. Only a wealthy man could have afforded them.

By the way, did you know that someone asked Joseph of Arimathea why he placed Jesus in his own tomb?

He replied, *"Don't worry about it. It was just for the weekend."*

These were rich and powerful men. In fact, tradition has it that Nicodemus was the third wealthiest man in Israel at the time. So, he was a rich Pharisee.

But John also describes Nicodemus as a **"ruler of the Jews."** According to John 7:50-51 he was a member of the Sanhedrin, which functioned as the Jewish court of the time.

Under Roman authority, the Jews were allowed a measure of self-rule. And the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was the final court of appeals for matters concerning Jewish laws and religion. This was the body that eventually condemned Jesus, although they had to get Pontius Pilate to approve their death sentence. Listen to how Gene Pensiero described the Sanhedrin in his commentary on John 3:

*There were two classes of Jewish courts called Sanhedrin, the Great Sanhedrin, and the Lesser Sanhedrin. A lesser Sanhedrin of 23 judges was appointed to sit as a tribunal in each city, but there was only supposed to be one Great Sanhedrin of 71 judges, which among other roles acted as the Supreme Court, taking appeals from cases which were decided by lesser courts.*

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So Nicodemus was kind of a big deal among the Jews. But he was a spiritual leader as well. In verse 10 of chapter 3 Jesus is going to call him not “**a teacher of Israel,**” but “**THE teacher of Israel.**” Nicodemus was a Rabbi of the Rabbis.

He was a scholar, a statesman, and many other things. But most importantly, Nicodemus was a seeker of truth. And I believe he was one of the people who had witnessed all the things Jesus had done since coming to Jerusalem. Look at verse 2:

**This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”**

Nicodemus saw the “**signs**” that Jesus did.

But did you notice something different about Nicodemus’ attitude about these miracles as opposed to the people we met in chapter 2?

Who does he attribute these “**signs**” to?

God.

He admits that no one could do the things Jesus was doing if he did not come from God.

But was he ready to claim that Jesus was Messiah?

Not yet — although I do think that is a big reason Nic came to see Jesus. If this was just another fact-finding mission, he would have just sent some priests or Levites to pose more questions. That is what the Jews did earlier with Jesus and also with John the Baptist. But he knows there is something drastically different about this young Carpenter from Galilee. Perhaps, as he should have, he knew what the Scriptures said about the coming King. And that is why he came to see for himself.

Now, it has been suggested that the reason Nicodemus came to Jesus at night was because he didn’t want anyone to see him. I don’t think that is true. He doesn’t say, “**I know you are a teacher from God.**” He says, “**We know.**”

I think he and some of the other Pharisees had discussions about Jesus. And it is possible that some of them even remembered Him. We talked about Luke Chapter 2 earlier in our study. The family of Jesus heads to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover; but on the way back, Jesus is nowhere to be found. So Joseph and Mary head back to the city to try to find Him.

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Does anyone remember where He was?

Luke recounted this in verses 46-47:

**<sup>46</sup>Now so it was *that* after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.**

I don't think Jesus was an easy person to forget. We don't know if He ever went to the Temple and met with these men again. What we do know is that Nicodemus, the “**ruler**” of the Jews, went to see Him. And his fellow Pharisees and Saducees knew about it. Think about it this way.

The timing of this meeting was during the Passover celebration.

As THE “**teacher**” of the Jews, what do you think Nicodemus was doing all day?

He was teaching.

And Jesus, for His part, was being pressed by the crowds of people that were familiar with His miracles.

So I think that is why they met at night after everyone had gone home or to their tents. And some believe that the rabbis liked to teach in the cool of the night. This was the most enjoyable time of the day. They would go out on the flat-roofed buildings and have their conversations. John Courson, in his commentary, likened this to how David wrote in the Psalms that he meditated on the Lord in the “**night watches.**” He said that sometimes he feels pressed — like Jesus and Nicodemus — by the business of the day. But in the “**night watches,**” he can relax and concentrate on the Lord.

I personally like early mornings better, because that is when my mind is the freshest. But the point is, we need to take time to meet with Jesus. We can't know Him if we don't make time for Him.

So as we close we have this important man in his sphere of influence humbling himself and coming to meet with Jesus. He felt he just had to meet this Man. He is seeking the truth about who this Jesus is. And that is the third way that people react to Him.

They read about Him in the Word, or someone witnesses to them, and they realize that He did come from God. So they want to know more about Him.

Did you ever wonder who set this meeting up?



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That is where we come in. We have to be there when people want to meet Jesus. We have to “*set up*” the meeting. It is our job to bring Jesus to others and bring others to Jesus. And then the Holy Spirit comes alongside them and shows them their need for a Savior.

I believe that Nicodemus might have been giving Jesus the opportunity to identify Himself as Messiah. He wanted Jesus to say He was going to set up an earthly Kingdom. But instead of making any claims about establishing the Kingdom, Jesus tells him how to enter in. And I think what He says fried the brain of Nicodemus. Look at verse 3:

**Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**

Recall that at the end of chapter 2 it says that “**Jesus knew what was in man.**” I think He knew what was on Nicodemus’ mind before he opened his mouth. Like all the Jews of his time, Nicodemus hated Rome’s occupation. He longed for Israel’s former glory. Nicodemus had read all of the promises God made to Jeremiah and Ezekiel. We call that the New Covenant. And we’ll talk about that next time.

But instead of showing Nicodemus an earthly Kingdom, Jesus welcomes him into a spiritual Kingdom and eventually, a heavenly Kingdom. Then He tells him how to get there. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he needs to be born again.

What does that mean?

Read ahead and see what Jesus tells Nicodemus about how to get to Heaven.

Let’s pray.

SING THE REVELATION SONG