

A Lesson from the Great Evangelist (John 3:1-21, NKJV)

By James Moriello, Evangelism Conference 2021, at FFCC, Woonsocket RI

3:1: “There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.”

*Nicodemus was a religious man. Sometimes we will come across folks with much spiritual training, and sometimes we will come across folks with little spiritual training. But most folks have some spiritual background.

3:2: “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 “came to Jesus by night.” It may have been for fear of men, or it may have been because this was a more convenient time where these two men could talk privately without being swarmed or interrupted. Probably both. One on one is best for soul winning. Groups, peer pressure, distractions, and other dynamics can all sometimes make personal evangelism difficult.

3:3: “Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.””

*To be “born again” is to be regenerated. Life reformation is not enough, and in fact tends to spiritual pride (Luke 11:24-26). All true Christians are “born again”, and if the use of term causes others to label us ‘holy rollers’, so much the better, since we can explain the term. Before explaining, you may want to ask what the hearer thinks it means, and this will give an avenue for dialogue.

3:4-6: “Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.””

*To be “born of water” is a reference to physical birth (Proverbs 5:15-18; also consider the ‘water breaking’). “And the Spirit” is the second birth. The regenerated man or woman has two births and one death. The unsaved individual has one birth and two deaths (Revelation 20:11-15).

3:7-8: “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.””

*The 'invisible birth' is just as unseen as the wind, but just as real (Hebrews 11:1). To this point, Jesus the Great Evangelist has gently instructed in such a way to arouse curiosity, and now the question comes.

3:9: "Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?""

*This kind of question is open door. Take it! Avoid any secondary issues, and steer the conversation to the most needful truths of the gospel.

3:10: "Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

*Christ knew something about Nicodemus, his background and his status. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, and most probably a head of a rabbinic school, as the term connotes with the definite article. Jesus could have obtained such knowledge by omniscience or by any other means. We can learn that we ought to take time to know the one to whom we are witnessing, by listening, and asking questions to understand their background.

3:11-12: "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

*Here the Triune God is witness. This is essential belief. Cf. 1 John 5:6-13.

3:13: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven."

*Jesus instructs Nicodemus, based upon the level he is at. His knowledge of Scripture was extensive, even to the point of Messianic gospel applications from Deuteronomy 30:12-15 and Daniel 7:13-14.

3:14-15: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

*Here we have an illustration from Numbers 21:4-9. Jesus often would use illustrations familiar to His hearers in His teaching. More needful truths relating to the gospel are brought forth here, including crucifixion, resurrection (implied), and faith and belief upon certain facts. Jewish understandings of salvation common in that day are also spoken to here (Cf. Luke 13:23-24). Let us learn that it is always good to use Scripture illustrations, but we ourselves must know them if we are to be effective.

3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

*The gospel is clearly spelled out here. The Christian worker must commit this verse to memory. And if the Christian worker learns only one passage, let it be this passage at hand. We read of God's desire (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). We read of God's Son (Psalm 2:12; Proverbs 30:4). The doctrines of eternal security of the believer and heaven and hell are also found in this verse. We learn that we must believe, but believe what? The content for today is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. For Nicodemus, it was what was revealed to that time. The gospel is always by faith but the content of progressive revelation was more fully developed throughout the Bible. Romans 1:20 lays the responsibility for belief in faith in what has been revealed at the feet of every individual. Do not get sidetracked on what the Bushmen are doing. Stay with the gospel and with the individual. If there is such great concern over those folks, then let the person first be saved and then go on the mission field!

3:17-18: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

*Salvation is through Christ alone. Learn John 14:6 and Acts 4:12.

3:19-21: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.""

*Here we find three reasons for rejection of the gospel by unbelievers. They are love of sin, shame of sin, and the abasement of pride which exposure of sin brings. Let us seek to bring truth and light to bear in our witnessing. Godly sorrow which produces repentance is a good thing (2 Corinthians). In fact, it is a necessary accompaniment of salvation. How can a man be saved if he is not conscious of his own sin and need of the Savior?