

John 3:1-17

3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 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? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man.

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.'

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Nicodemus doesn't fit the normal picture of a Pharisee:

We think of Pharisees as being sure about God and what he was like; **and** sure of themselves in that they knew what their God required. I've seen something similar over the years with Christians who are so blinkered that they're not open to something new that God might do; I've been like that myself too.

The Pharisees knew what the rules were and how to keep them; they knew how to bend the rules for their advantage and above all they knew how to play the religious game.

All this is clear in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And if you're not convinced read Matthew 23.

That's why it's a little bit surprising to see Nicodemus, a Pharisee, come to see Jesus. What's not so surprising is to find him coming under the cover of darkness – given the emerging hostility toward Jesus by his colleagues this is **not at all** surprising.

The scene is set then for an interesting dialogue between Jesus and a man who probably walked across town, the street and possibly the room to him, stumbling maybe on the way.

**'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.'**

Nice and respectful – called Jesus Rabbi, and at the same time he was prepared to recognise something's going on here that can't really be explained naturally.

And this is the key to Nicodemus – despite all the certainty, the clarity, the rule keeping, the practices something wasn't settled in his spirit. As we seek to walk towards others we need to sense the Holy Spirit at work around the question, in what area of another's life is there uncertainty, questioning a sense of not being settled.

Now Jesus interprets his statement to be a question about whether or not what Jesus does is about the establishing of the Kingdom of God. His reply suggests this.

**'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'**

And Nicodemus, very much in the manner of a child asks how? How can this be; impossible?

Jesus' indicates that he and Nicodemus have in mind different realities, Nicodemus is locked into human, fleshly thinking – the known and understood. Jesus speaks of Spirit, water (surely a reference to baptism), wind and unknown, not so easy for a fixed mind to grasp.

How, how Nicodemus says in his boyish was of responding. He doesn't get it, won't get it until he 'sees'

Interestingly Jesus says well how come, you don't understand:

**'You are Israel's teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things?'**

And in the context of this part of the dialogue, Jesus makes some observations before the statement that in so many ways encapsulates the truth of what he came to do.

**16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**

- Tells us about God – that he loves; that he loves his world
- Tells us about Jesus – that he is the one and only Son
- Tells us that Jesus didn't come to condemn but to save
- Tells us about what we're to do – believe
- Tells us how we can have life

For those of us who've walked this road for a long time it's very easy to take such amazing promises casually; I know all this stuff – tell me something fresh, something I don't know.

There's no certainty that Nicodemus ever did say yes to Jesus – I find this disappointing, challenging and in some strange way reassuring.

True he did speak for fairness among his colleagues when the question of what to do with Jesus came up in John 7. And he went with Joseph of Arimathea to collect Jesus' body after he'd died and provided spices for his burial; sympathy without a doubt; conversion – its left open.

Yet he heard as we have heard. Belief in Jesus, being born of the spirit and water – is that you? Or are you avoiding the real issues.

