

Men's Sunday Night Live
Lesson 3 - John 3:1-36
Finding Identity and Purpose
A Matter of Life and Death

This is perhaps the most important chapter in John's Gospel, for it deals with the subject of the new birth. Some religious groups have so confused this subject that many average church members, let alone religious leaders like Nicodemus, have no idea what it means to be born again.

Nicodemus was a moral, religious man, one of the chief teachers of the Jews, yet he did not understand the truth about the new birth. Being religious and moral does not make a man fit for heaven; he must be born again. He thought in terms of physical birth, while Christ was talking about a spiritual birth. Many things are mysterious but still real. Jesus assures Nicodemus that the new birth is not a fantasy, it is a reality. If a person will but believe Christ's words and receive Him, he or she will discover how real and wonderful the new birth is.

Christ again refers Nicodemus to the Old Testament, this time Numbers 21, the account of the brazen serpent. The serpents were biting the Jews and killing them, and the strange solution to the problem was found when Moses made a serpent of brass! Looking to the serpent in faith brought healing. Christ was made sin for us, for it was sin that was killing us. As we look to Christ by faith, we are saved.

Verse 25 can be translated: "There arose a question between some of John's disciples and *a Jew* concerning ceremonial purification." Could this Jew have been Nicodemus, still searching after truth? Like many people today, Nicodemus was confused about baptism and religious ceremonies. Perhaps he thought "born of water" meant baptism or some Jewish purification rite. Note how John the Baptist pointed this Jew to Christ. If baptism were necessary for salvation, then this is the place for the Bible to say so; but nothing is said. Instead, the emphasis is on believing.

It is evident that Nicodemus came "out of the dark" and finally became a born-again Christian. Here in John 3, we see Nicodemus in the darkness of confusion; in John 7:45–53, we see him in the dawn of conviction, willing to give Christ a fair hearing; and in John 19:38–42, we see Nicodemus in the daylight of confession, openly identifying himself with Christ.

Read John 3:1-36 and answer the following questions

1. What can we learn about Nicodemus from the following verses? John 3:1, 10; 7:45-52; 19:38-42

2. Why do you believe Nicodemus chose to visit Jesus at night? What do you think his purpose was?

3. In your own words, explain Jesus' answer to Nicodemus (See 3:3-8).

4. Who was Jesus referring to when He used the word "We"? (See 3:11)

5. Jesus had barely begun His ministry. According to 3:14-15, what did Jesus already know about His mission?

6. What can we learn about the Father from the fact that He voluntarily gave His Own Son for the corrupt world of humans? What does this act reveal about the meaning of love?

7. Jesus came because of God's love to save and not condemn. Why then, do most people hate Him? (See 3:19-21)

8. How in your life, can you become less and Jesus become more?

9. What might have been the main issue of the argument between the disciples of John the Baptist and the Jews? (See 3:25-26)

10. Why in verse 30 did John say, “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*”?

11. According to John 3:18 and John 3:36 what is the result of believing or not believing in Jesus?

12. What one truth from this chapter would you like to take to heart and act upon? How would you like this truth to affect your life?

The Gospel in a Mixed Society

Jesus’ night time meeting with Nicodemus and His midday encounter with the Samaritan women (4:5-42) show two of the many different ways in which He dealt with people. Whether it had to do with a respected leader like Nicodemus or a hardened, streetwise loner like the woman of Samaria, Jesus approached people on their own terms, as individuals with unique concerns. He modeled for us what it means to live, work and communicate the gospel message in a mixed society.

Nicodemus was an upper-class Jew, a Pharisee from one of the prominent families of Jerusalem. He approached Jesus, alone, at night. The Lord confronted him with his need to be born again, then let him go to think things over. The next time we see him, he is defending Jesus on a procedural issue. Nicodemus, apparently didn't openly identify with Jesus until after the crucifixion, when he helped prepare His body for burial.

The Samaritan woman on the other hand, had lived a scandalous lifestyle with multiple husbands and with a live-in partner. As a result, her community despised her. She also probably came from mixed ancestry for which the Jews despised her. She was spoken to by Jesus in broad daylight, in public, first by herself but later in the company of others. He told her of "living water," and the need to worship in spirit and truth. She responded much more quickly than Nicodemus.

John goes on to record many other ways Jesus dealt with people, and many ways they responded to Him. Some became believers after they were fed, others after they were healed, and others after they had seen the resurrected Christ. Some responded to the Lord's miracles, others to His teaching. There was no one kind of response to Jesus.

We as Believers today must present the hope of the Gospel message in an increasingly mixed world. Like Jesus, we need to use many different approaches. What are some creative ways that you can use to influence friends and coworkers for Christ?