

Bible Stories for Adults

Nicodemus / Jesus' First Passover

John 2:12-3:21

Opening

Gathering: What questions would you ask Jesus if you could meet Him face-to-face?

Today's Focus: Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, visited Jesus at the beginning of His ministry and learned God's truths about how we can enter the kingdom of heaven.

Key Verses: *No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit.* John 3:5

We were buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. Romans 6:4

Opening Prayer

Lesson

First Impressions (*John 2:12-22*)

How did Jesus put His best foot forward during the first visit of His ministry to the temple?
John 2:12-15

Sold temple-certified unblemished sacrifice-animals and exchanged Roman money for temple money
Sacrifices had to be approved by priests – unblemished animals and untainted money

Why wasn't He more careful about making a good first impression?
John 2:16-17

Did the temple guards and leaders immediately try to arrest Him for this vandalism?
John 2:18

What proof did Jesus offer to show He was sent from God?
John 2:19

Did anybody understand what He said?
John 2:20-22

Further Proof (*John 2:23-25*)

Did Jesus provide any proof other than foretelling the great miracle of His resurrection?
John 2:23

Three words are used in the New Testament for Jesus' miracles:
teras
dunamis
semeion

Miracles have three aspects: Produce wonder, show God's power, sign of God's love
Through these signs in Jerusalem, was Jesus trying to show that He was the Messiah?
John 2:24

Why did He not fully reveal Himself to the Jews in Jerusalem?
John 18:36

How did Jesus know that is how they would react?
John 2:25

How did people respond when they realized that *He knew what was in a man*?
John 4:29

How could Jesus know *what was in a man*?
John 1:47-50 (1:42; 5:42; 6:64; 8:10-11, 40+)

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Jewish Leaders (*John 3:1-2*)

Did these miraculous signs provide proof of Jesus' authority to the Jewish leaders?

John 3:1-2

Sanhedrin - 70 member ruling body of the Jews headed by the high priest

Kept Judaism pure, had religious jurisdiction over every Jew in the world

Served as the supreme court for the Jews; Power given, but limited by Romans

Two parties - *Sadducees* (elite priests) and *Pharisees* (intellectual purists)

Pharisees - A *chaburah* (brotherhood) of no more than 6000 of the best Jews

Pledged before 3 witnesses to spend entire lives observing every detail of scribal law

Pharisee meant "*the Separated One*"; Kept separated to keep every detail of the law

Scribes took the great principles of God's Law and created detailed by-laws and regulations

"The Law is complete; it contains everything necessary for the living of a good life; therefore in the Law there must be a regulation to govern every possible incident in every possible moment for every possible man."

Mishnah (detailed scribal laws) and *Talmud* (explanatory commentary on Mishnah)

Nicodemus (*John 3:1-2*)

Why might Nicodemus have come to see Jesus at night?

John 2:15

What other reason do some give for Nicodemus' timing?

Luke 8:19

What does Nicodemus say that shows his respect for Jesus?

John 3:2a

Did Nicodemus sincerely feel Jesus might be from God or was he just curious?

John 7:32, 45-52

Why was this a risky move for Nicodemus?

John 12:42

How do we see that Nicodemus may have been a secret Christian?

John 19:38-40

Admission to the Kingdom (*John 3:3-4*)

Having devoted his life to obedience, what would Nicodemus want to know from a man of God?

Matthew 19:16

How did Jesus show that He knew Nicodemus' heart and the real question he wanted to ask?

John 3:3

RSV says born *anew* - Greek word is *anōthen*, it has three meanings, all of which fit:

From the beginning (completely, radically), *again* (second time), *from above* (from God)

A Gentile convert to Judaism was regarded as being *reborn*

Change was so radical that his past no longer existed, all old ties and sins were gone

Theoretically, he could even marry his mother or sister since he was completely new

Why might Nicodemus not be able to understand Jesus' comment about being reborn?

John 8:33

What is the only other interpretation Nicodemus could make?

John 3:4

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Water and the Spirit (*John 3:5*)

How did Jesus explain to Nicodemus the spiritual rebirth He was describing?

John 3:5

Was Jesus referring to John's baptism of repentance?

Mark 1:4, 8

How did Mark show this combination at work?

Mark 1:9-11

How did Peter describe this at Pentecost?

Acts 2:37-39

Christian Baptism (*Romans 6:3-4*)

What happens when a person is baptized into the Christian family?

Romans 6:3-4

Is there really a difference in the baptized person?

2 Corinthians 5:17

How powerful is this rebirth?

Titus 3:5-7

What promise do we have with baptism?

Mark 16:16

Does this mean that if someone is not baptized, they will not be saved?

Luke 7:30

Luther's Small Catechism: *It is unbelief only that damns; and though saving faith cannot exist in the heart of one who refuses to be baptized, it can exist when for some reason Baptism cannot be obtained.*

Why is it so important, then, to baptize?

Matthew 28:19

Luther's Large Catechism: *Here stand the Word and command of God, which have instituted, established and confirmed baptism. Whatever God institutes and commands cannot be useless; it is most precious, even if in appearance it is not worth a straw.*

Born of the Spirit (*John 3:6-8*)

How did Jesus explain to Nicodemus his need to be reborn despite being a son of Abraham?

John 3:6-7

What was He reminding Nicodemus by saying that *flesh gives birth to flesh*?

Psalms 51:5

How can we then be born of the Spirit?

John 1:11-13

How can we tell if someone has been born of the Spirit?

John 3:8

What are some of these effects which we can see?

Galatians 5:22-25

What Scripture would the scholar Nicodemus remember by Jesus' comments?

Ezekiel 36:25-27

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Lift High the Cross (*John 3:9-16*)

Did Nicodemus understand what Jesus was saying?

John 3:9-12

If a devout Pharisee like Nicodemus couldn't understand heavenly things, how could Jesus?

John 3:13

How could humans who have not seen heaven be able to obtain what they cannot understand?

John 3:14-15

What story was Jesus referring to that Nicodemus would know well?

Numbers 21:4-9

In what ways were the Son of Man lifted up for us to trust in and receive life?

John 12:32-33

Acts 2:32-33

God lifted up the snake in the desert so His people wouldn't perish. Why did He lift up His Son?

John 3:16

The Light of Judgment (*John 3:17-21*)

What did the Jews believe was a key purpose of the Messiah?

Isaiah 11:12, 14 (34:2)

Was this God's purpose for sending Jesus?

John 3:17

Would anyone be condemned by the coming of the Messiah?

John 3:18

Then why did the prophets say the Messiah would bring judgment to the world?

John 3:19-20

Since we are all sinful, why would we even dare to enter the light?

John 3:21

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. When have I stood up for God's will against the will of man?
(*John 2:13-17; Exodus 1:15-17; Matthew 23:5-7; John 2:13-17; Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29; Romans 8:5-8; Galatians 1:10; 6:7-8; 1 Thessalonians 2:4*)
2. How have I controlled myself in response to knowing that God knows what is in me?
(*John 2:24-25; 6:64; Deuteronomy 31:19-21; 1 Kings 8:39; Psalm 139:1-4; Proverbs 15:26; Isaiah 55:8; Matthew 9:3-4; 15:17-20*)
3. Can others recognize God working in me?
(*John 3:1-2; Matthew 5:14-16; 7:15-20; 9:8; Philippians 2:14-15; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Peter 2:12; 3:15-16; 1 John 4:1-6*)
4. Do I live as a new creation?
(*John 3:23; Romans 6:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:16-17; Galatians 6:15*)
5. How do I reveal Christ's light to others?
(*John 3:19-21; 1:4-9; Psalm 36:9; Matthew 5:14-16; Luke 11:33-36; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 5:8-14; 1 John 2:9-11*)