

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 = He cleared the temple of sacrifice-animal merchants and money changers

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? = Selling inside the temple

John 2:16-17 = He wasn't trying to please men, but rather teach and show them God

Did the temple guards and leaders immediately try to arrest Him for this vandalism?

John 2:18 = No, they wanted to be sure He wasn't sent from God

What proof did Jesus offer to show He was sent from God?

John 2:19 = He foretold His resurrection

Did anybody understand what He said? = 46 yrs – Temple started 20 BC, now 26 AD, Finished 64 AD

John 2:20-22 = Not until after He rose, Jews were confused enough not to arrest Him

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

Did Jesus provide any proof other than foretelling the great miracle of His resurrection?

John 2:23 = Yes, He performed many miraculous signs

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

teras = A marvelous thing, astonishing happening, amazing

dunamis = Extraordinary power, *Dynamite* comes from this word

semeion = A sign, told something about the person (about God) - John's favorite word

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 = No, He kept His true nature hidden

Why did He not fully reveal Himself to the Jews in Jerusalem?

John 18:36 = *My kingdom is not of this world*, they would have had the wrong idea

How did Jesus know that is how they would react?

John 2:25 = *He knew what was in a man*

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

John 4:29 = The Samaritan woman at the well thought He must be the Messiah

How could Jesus know *what was in a man*?

John 1:47-50 (1:42; 5:42; 6:64; 8:10-11, 40+) = Nathanael said He must be the Son of God

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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 = Yes, Nicodemus came and said "We know you are ... from God"

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 = Didn't want to be seen talking with this vandal

What other reason do some give for Nicodemus' timing?

Luke 8:19 = To get away from the crowds and have private time to talk with Jesus

What does Nicodemus say that shows his respect for Jesus?

John 3:2a = He calls Him *rabbi*, a term reserved for respected religious teachers

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

John 7:32, 45-52 = Stood up for Jesus when the Sanhedrin wanted to get rid of Him

Why was this a risky move for Nicodemus?

John 12:42 = He could be expelled from the Sanhedrin & Judaism for following a false prophet

How do we see that Nicodemus may have been a secret Christian? = Shows he was wealthy

John 19:38-40 = He brought expensive spices and helped Joseph bury Jesus' body

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 = What must I do to be certain of entering the kingdom of heaven?

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

John 3:3 = He said rebirth, not perfect obedience, was needed to see God's kingdom

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 = As Abraham's descendant, he didn't need to be reborn to become an heir

What is the only other interpretation Nicodemus could make?

John 3:4 = Reborn physically - some say he was stating that such change is impossible

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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 = *No one can enter the kingdom unless he is born of water and the Spirit*

Was Jesus referring to John's baptism of repentance?

Mark 1:4, 8 = Need both the cleansing water of repentance and the power of the Spirit

How did Mark show this combination at work?

Mark 1:9-11 = Jesus received John's water baptism and then received the Spirit

How did Peter describe this at Pentecost?

Acts 2:37-39 = *Repent, and be baptized...for forgiveness of sins...and the Holy Spirit*

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

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

Romans 6:3-4 = His old sinful self dies with Christ and he becomes a new man

Is there really a difference in the baptized person?

2 Corinthians 5:17 = Yes, *he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

How powerful is this rebirth?

Titus 3:5-7 = It saves us for eternal life through God's grace

What promise do we have with baptism?

Mark 16:16 = *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved*

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

Luke 7:30 = Pharisees rejected God's purpose when they rejected John's baptism

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? = Cause God said so

Matthew 28:19 = God commanded us to make disciples and baptize them

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 = *Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit, not a surprise*

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

Psalms 51:5 = Original sin, we are sinful from conception

How can we then be born of the Spirit?

John 1:11-13 = Children of the Spirit are those who receive and believe in Jesus

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

John 3:8 = You can't see the Spirit, but you can see its effects

What are some of these effects which we can see?

Galatians 5:22-25 = *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness ...*

What Scripture would the scholar Nicodemus remember by Jesus' comments? = God does for us

Ezekiel 36:25-27 = *I will sprinkle clean water on you, ... and put a new spirit in you ...*

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

Did Nicodemus understand what Jesus was saying? = *the teacher of Israel*

John 3:9-12 = He knew the facts in the Scriptures, but he didn't understand the truths
If a devout Pharisee like Nicodemus couldn't understand heavenly things, how could Jesus?

John 3:13 = He is the only one who has been to heaven & can speak from experience
How could humans who have not seen heaven be able to obtain what they cannot understand?

John 3:14-15 = As those who trusted Moses lived, those who trust in Jesus will live

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

Numbers 21:4-9 = Moses lifted up a snake on a pole, those who looked in trust lived
In what ways were the Son of Man lifted up for us to trust in and receive life?

John 12:32-33 = He was lifted up upon the cross

Acts 2:32-33 = Raised from death to life; He was lifted up into glory

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

John 3:16 = Love - *that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life*

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) = Gather & restore Israel to greatness and judge the evil world

Was this God's purpose for sending Jesus?

John 3:17 = No, He did not send His Son to condemn the world, but to save it

Would anyone be condemned by the coming of the Messiah?

John 3:18 = Yes, those who reject Him are condemned, but believers are not condemned

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

John 3:19-20 = Jesus brought light to expose the ways of the world

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

John 3:21 = Those born of the Spirit will want the light to expose the Spirit

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*)