

NICODEMUS, THE SILENT BELIEVER

Midweek Lent (7 March Anno Domini 2012)

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Texts: John 3:1,2; 7:50,51; 19:39

¹Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This 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.”

⁵⁰Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ⁵¹“Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”

³⁹Nicodemus also, who had at first come to him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds' weight.

In thinking about people of the passion, I sometimes wonder whether Nicodemus might have felt any remorse that he did not do more to prevent Jesus' suffering and death. Did he ask himself later if he could have done something differently to have saved Jesus?

You remember Nicodemus, don't you? Some people call him the disciple of the night, personally I like to think of him as Nick at Night, because the first time he came to Jesus was late at night. Tonight, I have chosen to call him the Silent Believer.

We wouldn't exactly call Nicodemus a disciple that first time he came to Jesus. He had seen Jesus and knew about His miracles. He thought Jesus must be **“a teacher who has come from God”** (John 3:2). But still he had many questions.

I. NICODEMUS MET JESUS IN SECRET AT NIGHT

First of all Nicodemus came at night because he wanted to talk with Jesus alone, away from the crowds, out of view. He wanted to speak with Jesus (διδάσκαλος ἐν διδάσκαλο) teacher to teacher. Nicodemus was a teacher and leader among the Jews and Jesus a teacher with signs from heaven. Nicodemus speculated and he hoped to find out more. He wondered and hoped that Jesus was the Messiah.

So he came to Jesus at night. But choosing the night time was not entirely noble of Nicodemus. He wanted to talk with Jesus, undetected by the other leaders of the Jews who, like him, were members of the ruling Jewish council. Jesus was not popular with most of them. They saw Him as a threat to their security and hated the way He seemed to ignore some of their church laws. They were jealous of the following He was getting.

If the council members knew that Nicodemus went to Jesus, they would likely have turned on him and possibly have deposed him from the council. He did not want to jeopardize his good standing with them.

That night with Jesus changed Nicodemus' life forever. Jesus told Nicodemus things about the kingdom of God and how he needed a new life from the Holy Spirit. **He said that God loved the world and gave his one-and-only Son. And whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.**

Nicodemus did not understand all of what Jesus told him, but the seeds of faith were sown that night. He had much to ponder. He liked Jesus. But he kept silent about his visit and kept his real feelings to himself. He still had doubts and fears. He did not let on that he knew Jesus personally. On the outside he was quiet, but inwardly his soul cried out to know more.

II. NICODEMUS MADE A FEEBLE DEFENSE OF JESUS

As time went by, the members of the Jewish council grew more and more hostile toward Jesus. They did not hide their feelings. They opposed Jesus openly. They spoke out against Jesus in their meetings. But Nicodemus, remained silent.

As matters grew worse, some of the rulers plotted to have Jesus arrested. But those sent to do the job returned empty-handed. When the council pressed them to tell why they failed, they simply answered: **“No one ever spoke the way this man does”** (John 7:46).

Imagine Nicodemus hearing them say that. He knew exactly what they meant, but again he kept silent. Most of the others flew into a rage. **“Nobody who is anybody believes in Him, The rulers don’t, the Pharisees don’t. And the mob knows nothing of the law, but is cursed”** (John 7:48-49).

Finally, Nicodemus retorted. He was both a ruler and a Pharisee. He was not ready to say he did believe in Jesus. And they talked about not knowing the law? They themselves ignored the law in their plotting against Jesus. Now Nicodemus had to say something. His conscience would not let him remain silent any longer.

He gained the floor of the council. He asked, **“Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?”** (John 7:51). It was a good legal question. But it still fell far short of defending and confessing Jesus.

The council ignored this legal challenge. Instead, they ridiculed Nicodemus, wondering if he too was deceived by this Galilean.

The meeting no doubt left Nicodemus with a heavy and sad heart. He must have wondered if anyone had guessed his real feelings about Jesus. If they did, it was not because he clearly and boldly confessed them.

He pondered his dilemma. He had tried to help Jesus and had daringly faced his hostile peers. Still, he had failed to press the point, failed to expose their madness, failed to confess Jesus. He needed more understanding and strength.

Nicodemus was on the road to a bold, open faith in Jesus, but he had a long way to go. For the time being, probably determining it would be fruitless to say anything more would, he remained silent.

About six months later, the high priest Caiaphas convinced the council that Jesus must die. As the judgment was declared, only Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea would not consent. But they did they strenuously object. It was too late and impossible to stop the brewing storm. They remained silent.

Then it happened. Late into the night during the Passover Festival, the council was summoned to meet. Jesus had been captured and was on trial for His life. Everything about it was wrong. The false witnesses, the trial, Caiaphas’ hatred were all wrong. Yet it happened. That normally majestic religious body pronounced the death sentence on Jesus. Nicodemus did not agree. Yet being swept along in the unremitting tide of injustice, he remained silent

III. BUT NICODEMUS BROKE HIS SILENCE AFTER JESUS DIED

Was it at Calvary that Nicodemus finally realized that he had to break his silence? There was Jesus, hanging on the cross in torment. Nicodemus watched, feeling that he had let it all happen. He could have spoken out more emphatically. He could have confessed his faith. Maybe he could have prevented this murder of an innocent man.

He marveled to himself how passively Jesus accepted His sentence. He heard Jesus cry out from the cross, **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”** (Luke 23:34). That word of forgiveness had to mean much. In Nicodemus’ mind, no one needed forgiveness more than he.

His faith grew stronger. It seems he determined right then and there not to hide his faith any longer. Although it was terribly late, he would show that Jesus did not die in vain. He would help bury

him. He would publicly confess his allegiance to Jesus and His teachings. Let the rest of the council do their worst. Nicodemus' place was now with Jesus, even a dead Jesus.

Nicodemus no doubt faced the wrath of the council. But he did not need them anymore. He had Christ.

The days ahead brought untold joy to Nicodemus. The man he had buried rose from the dead and appeared alive. Jesus' death was not in vain. In death, Jesus won forgiveness of sins and eternal life for Nicodemus and all sinners. He did not die because Nicodemus failed to speak. He died because He had a mission to save the world. Now that Jesus was alive, how could Nicodemus not speak out?

I need to stop for a moment and ask a question. "Are you like Nicodemus?" Do you sometimes stay silent when you should be telling the truth of Christ Jesus? Are you intimidated by bold and threatening unbelievers? Do you strain to express your faith, but hold back in weakness?

If so, I urge you to learn from Nicodemus' example. Remember Jesus on the cross. Remember Him in the grave and then alive. Speak up and tell the world about Him. If you have hesitated before, don't hesitate any longer. Take the lead to honor Christ. Repent of your weaknesses and sins. Trust in Christ. Be bold to speak of the crucified Savior and the forgiveness of sins. ***For if God is for us, who can be against us?***

In Jesus Holy name, amen and amen!

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
AMEN