

“The Night Visitor-Part 1”

November 23, 2025

John 3:1-13

I. Introduction

In chapter 2 John described two things Jesus did at the beginning of His public ministry—the miracle at Cana where Jesus turned water into wine and the cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus did other miracles that aren’t recorded; **John 2:23** says, “**Many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name.**” However, this belief was just a shallow, sign-based faith. At most, these so-called “believers” believed that the signs were from God, but they weren’t too sure who Jesus was.

The story of Nicodemus is about one such believer. Nicodemus is an example of one of those who was attracted to Jesus because of the “**miraculous signs**” Jesus did. Nicodemus recognized Jesus as one “**who has come from God,**” and he wanted to learn more about Jesus and the doctrines He taught. But rather than having a give-and-take theological discussion, Jesus directed the conversation to the life-changing effect of true *saving* faith. But to understand this conversation, we need to know who Nicodemus really was.

II. Who was Nicodemus?

A. He was a Pharisee. John described Nicodemus as “**a man of the Pharisees.**” The word “*Pharisee*” means “*to separate.*” The Pharisees were zealous for the Mosaic Law (and all the extra traditions they had added to it.) As a Pharisee, Nicodemus lived by the strictest possible religious rules and was separated from much around him—he was one of the *separated ones*. During the time of Herod the Great, there were about 6000 Pharisees. Unlike their archrivals the Sadducees, who tended to be wealthy priests or Levites, the Pharisees generally came from the middle class. Therefore, although they were few in number, they had great influence with the common people. To be fair, not all of the Pharisees were hypocrites and his coming to Jesus indicated Nicodemus’s search for the truth.

B. He was a member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus was no run-of-the-mill Pharisee; he was also “**a member of the Jewish ruling council,**” the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the governing council of Israel.

The Sanhedrin consisted of 71 members, and, under Roman rule, it had the authority to make arrests and conduct trials. As seen in Jesus' crucifixion, their ability to punish stopped at the death penalty.

The fact that Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin might explain why he “**came to Jesus at night.**” He might not have wanted his coming to imply approval of the entire Sanhedrin or, perhaps, he didn't want to bring upon himself the disfavor of his fellow members. Nighttime would also be the best time to have a quiet, uninterrupted conversation with Jesus—they were both busy during the daytime. *The important point is not when Nicodemus came, but that he came at all.*

C. Finally, he was a recognized teacher of Israel. In **verse 10** Jesus called Nicodemus “**Israel's teacher**”—in Greek it actually says: “**the teacher of Israel.**” Nicodemus was a recognized religious teacher in Israel and should have been able to understand the things about which Jesus talked. In summary, Nicodemus was a man of deep religious hunger, high moral character, and, as a leader and teacher, well versed in the Scriptures, i.e., the Old Testament, and yet, as seen in today's Scripture, he was blind to spiritual things.

III. Nicodemus's Question

Understanding Nicodemus's position as a member of the Sanhedrin and as an eminent teacher, his first question in **John 3:2** showed a tremendous amount of respect for Jesus. When he said, “**Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him,**” Nicodemus acknowledged Jesus as a teacher. In fact, he addressed Jesus as an equal and was willing to give Jesus the benefit of the doubt: Jesus' activities must have come from God and His efforts must have some divine endorsement. This is what Nicodemus wanted to discuss: Jesus' signs and God's approval.

IV. Jesus' Answer

But Jesus wasn't interested in discussing His signs, which had led to a superficial faith by many. Jesus went straight to the real issue, the heart issue, the reason He was there—the salvation of Nicodemus. In order to teach Nicodemus the basics of salvation, Jesus used four different illustrations—we'll consider the 1st two today.

A. Salvation is like birth. Jesus began with the familiar illustration of birth when He said, “I tell you the truth, or truly, truly, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” Salvation is like birth. The word translated “again” also means “from above.” *Born again* means to be *born from above*. Though all human beings have experienced natural birth on earth, Jesus was saying that if they expect to go to heaven, that is, to the kingdom of God, they must experience a supernatural birth—they must be born “from above.”

Jesus’ statement was more than Nicodemus expected or could really grasp so he asked, “How can a man be born when he is old?” This highly educated Pharisee wasn’t so dense that he thought that Jesus was talking about being reborn physically, but he replied in the same context using Jesus’ analogy. Basically, Nicodemus was asking how he could start all over, that is, go back to the beginning of his works-based righteousness—his spiritual life. This didn’t seem possible or, for that matter, reasonable.

Jesus was trying to explain to Nicodemus that entrance into God’s salvation—into heaven—was not a matter of adding something to his efforts, not increasing (the choir would say “octa vising”) his religious devotion, but rather canceling everything and starting all over again. Salvation, being born from above, means starting all over again. Jesus was making entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven dependent on something that could not be obtained through human effort. As Eph. 2:8-9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works so that no one can boast.”

By calling him to be born again, Jesus was challenging Nicodemus to admit his spiritual bankruptcy and abandon everything he was trusting in for his salvation, his work-based system. Another Pharisee by the name of Saul had a similar challenge, turn to his response in Philippians 3:7-9. Salvation means starting all over again, admitting as Rom. 3:10 says that “there is no one righteous, not even one.”

Being a patient and an expert teacher, Jesus picked up on Nicodemus’s words and further explained this new birth, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” There are a variety of ways that people try to explain the phrase “born of water.” Some see two

births here, one natural and the other spiritual—the water representing human childbirth. Others view the water as Christian baptism but that wasn't a thing yet. Water baptism is certainly a part of our obedience to Christ, but it cannot be an essential for salvation, otherwise, none of the Old Testament saints were ever saved, nor the thief on the cross. In every age, there has been one way of salvation—faith in God's promise. As Jesus will say in [John 3:16](#), “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.”

Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand this truth about “born of water and the Spirit.” Jesus' illustration was something with which Nicodemus should have been familiar. In the Old Testament, in which Nicodemus was well versed, *water* and *Spirit* often refer symbolically to spiritual cleansing and renewal. [Turn to Ezekiel 36:24-27](#). The restoration of Israel to the Lord through a new covenant is through water and Spirit. As a student of God's Word, Nicodemus would know these words. Without the spiritual washing of the soul, a cleansing accomplished only by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, no one can enter God's kingdom. Paul wrote about a similar cleansing, [turn to Titus 3:4-5](#). “Born of water and of the Spirit” means that a person must be born again through the power, cleansing, and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus continued to emphasize that this spiritual cleansing is completely the work of God. Just as only human nature can give birth to human nature, so only the Holy Spirit can cause a spiritual transformation. “The Spirit gives birth to spirit.” *Salvation—being born again—is a spiritual transformation.* And just as a child inherits the nature of his earthly parents, the child of God inherits the nature of God. [Turn to 2 Peter 1:3-4](#). When one is saved, through the power of the Holy Spirit, his nature is changed; he shares God's divine nature.

Nicodemus must have had a surprised and perhaps a bewildered look on his face when the Lord said, “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’” But Nicodemus was born a Jew. He was part of God's chosen people. Certainly, his birth was better than that of a Gentile or a Samaritan. And

his life was commendable—he was a faithful Pharisee. He could well understand Jesus telling the Romans that they had to be born again but certainly not the Jews—especially a Pharisee!

B. Salvation is like the wind. Jesus' second illustration came from nature: the wind. He said, **“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.”** Though its general direction can be known, the wind cannot be controlled or easily forecast. Nevertheless, the wind's effects can be observed. The same is true of the work of the Spirit. His sovereign work of regeneration in the human heart can neither be controlled nor predicted. Yet His effects can be seen in the transformed lives of those who are born of the Spirit, whether Jew or Gentile.

Nicodemus had come *“by night,”* and, sadly, he was still in the dark. He could not understand the new birth even after Jesus had explained it to him. **“How can this be?”** he asked. Nicodemus may have been a great teacher, but he was a poor learner. Jesus said that as a prominent scholar of the Old Testament, Nicodemus's knowledge should have given him the understanding he needed. This **“teacher of the Jews”** knew the facts recorded in Scripture, but he could not understand or apply these truths.

Nicodemus and the majority of the Jewish people did not accept the truth to which Jesus and His **“miraculous signs”** testified, **“but still you people do not accept our testimony.”** They refused to believe. They claimed to believe Moses, yet they wouldn't believe Jesus, the Son of God. They, especially the Pharisees, were more concerned about the praise of men than the praise of God.

“‘I have used earthly illustrations,’ said Jesus, ‘and you do not believe. How will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?’” Nicodemus's shallow profession of faith in Jesus as a teacher sent from God was meaningless, as was his incorrect understanding of salvation. Because of his refusal to believe, he could not even understand the earthly truth of the new birth, not to mention deep heavenly truths like the relationship of the Father to the Son, God's kingdom, or God's eternal plan of redemption.

V. Conclusion

There were two parts to Nicodemus's unbelief: intellectual and spiritual. **Intellectually**, while he did acknowledge Jesus as a teacher sent from God, he was unwilling and unable to accept Jesus as God

Incarnate. **Spiritually**, he was very reluctant to admit that he himself was a helpless sinner; this was nearly impossible for the proud members of the Pharisees, the self-righteous, self-confessed religious elite of Israel. On top of that, he was a privileged member of the Sanhedrin and thus a prominent spiritual leader of the people. To humble himself, to admit that he was in spiritual darkness and needed to come to the light of true salvation and righteousness, would have been to confess his sinfulness and lack of righteousness. Like many who were impressed by Jesus' miracles, Nicodemus initially refused to commit himself to Christ as Lord and Savior. However—**spoiler alert**—by the time Jesus was crucified, Nicodemus had made Jesus his Lord and Savior—Nicodemus helped take Jesus' body down from the cross and bury Him.

Things haven't changed in 2000 years. Intellectually, many people today say that Jesus was a moral teacher sent from God or some other higher power, but they are unwilling to accept Him as God. Spiritually, many refuse to admit or accept that they are sinners destined for an eternity in hell. They compare themselves to others—*"I would never steal or kill someone."* *"I'm not like those who beat their children or lock them up in rooms for hours on end."* Instead, they say things like, *"I am a good person. I do the best I can. God will understand."* Even when they recognize that they are sinners (as [Romans 3:23](#) says, **"All have sinned."**) and when shown that [Romans 6:23](#) says, **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,"** they refuse to accept God's gift. They ignore this moral Teacher, Jesus, who said in [Matthew 13:49-50](#), **"This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** Jesus said that sinners go to hell—a fiery furnace.

How about you, have you admitted that you are a sinner, as [Isaiah 64:6](#) says, that **"All your righteous acts are like filthy rags"** and that you cannot save yourself? On the other hand, if you are a child of God, does your life show it? Do those around you know that you are a Christian by your nature, by what you love, i.e., by the things you do and by the things you don't do? Can people see your Heavenly Father by watching you? Nicodemus recognized that what Jesus did was approved by God—what about the things you do and say? Are you approved by God?