

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

NICODEMUS

JOHN 3:1-21 • JOHN 7:45-52 • JOHN 19:38-42



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley
Pastor & Teacher

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

NICODEMUS

Sermon

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley
www.ReasonTogether.Church

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Our invitation is simple: Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

Whether this is your first time with us or you have been here from the beginning, we are grateful that God has brought us together today.

Before we open the Scriptures, let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for the privilege of gathering around Your Word. Clear our minds of distraction. Humble our hearts before the truth. Help those who are searching to find Christ. Help those who already believe to follow Him without fear. Let the Holy Spirit make the written Word living and powerful in us today. We ask for wisdom, conviction, comfort and courage, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Our primary passages are found in John chapters 3, 7 and 19.

We will begin with John 3:1–3:

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Guests are not expected to give. Members of another church should normally give through their home church. If God leads you to support this ministry, a giving box is available in the back.

If you are visiting, we invite you to complete a guest card with only your first name and email address. After the service, please join us in the Reason Together Café, where COFFEE reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere. Conversations have free refills.

Parents may also ask about the Keiki Kids Center, and anyone who wants to talk or pray after the service is welcome to meet with us in the Pastor’s Study on the second floor.

Now let us open our Bibles and reason together about Nicodemus.

Most Christians know the name Nicodemus.

We remember that he came to Jesus by night.

We remember that Jesus told him, “Ye must be born again.”

We remember John 3:16.

But Nicodemus did not disappear when that nighttime conversation ended.

John brings him before us three times.

The first time, Nicodemus carried questions.

The second time, he raised his voice in a hostile council.

The third time, he carried an enormous quantity of spices to the body of the crucified Christ.

Three appearances.

One man.

And one question that John never answers with a simple sentence.

Was Nicodemus truly born again?

We must be careful.

The Bible never says, "Nicodemus believed."

The Bible never says, "Nicodemus became a disciple."

The Bible never records his baptism or places a verbal confession upon his lips.

But neither does John leave Nicodemus where we first met him.

Something happens between the night in John 3 and the tomb in John 19.

John does not describe every step.

He gives us scenes.

He gives us words.

He gives us actions.

Then he asks us to look carefully.

Before John introduces Nicodemus, he tells us something important.

John 2:23 says, "Many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did."

That sounds encouraging.

But verses 24 and 25 say, "Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."

Many people were impressed by the miracles.

They believed something about Jesus.

But Jesus knew the condition of their hearts.

Then chapter 3 begins, "There was a man."

His name was Nicodemus.

And the first thing Nicodemus mentions is the miracles.

"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

Nicodemus had examined the evidence.

He had reached a reasonable conclusion.

Jesus was not a fraud.

God was working through Him.

But Nicodemus's conclusion was still incomplete.

Jesus was more than a teacher come from God.

He was more than a miracle worker.
He was more than another prophet.
He was the only begotten Son of God.
It is possible to believe true things about Jesus without yet placing saving faith in Jesus.
It is possible to admire His teaching, respect His morality, acknowledge His miracles and still fail to receive Him as Savior.
Nicodemus had nearly everything religion could provide.
John calls him a Pharisee.
That means he was serious about religion.
He knew the law.
He knew the traditions.
He cared about ceremonial purity.
He understood public respectability.
He had likely spent his life trying to honor God through disciplined obedience.
John calls him a ruler of the Jews.
He belonged among the religious leadership.
Other people probably came to him with their questions.
He was accustomed to giving answers.
Yet on this night, the teacher became the student.
Jesus later called him “a master of Israel.”
He was a recognized teacher.
He had education, influence, position and reputation.
But he did not possess the one thing none of those could provide.
He did not possess life from above.
He was close to the things of God, but closeness is not life.
He could explain the law, but explanation is not transformation.
He could trace his religious heritage through generations, but no one inherits the new birth from a parent or a grandparent.
He could occupy a respected seat among the rulers, but no chair in a council could give him a place in the kingdom.
Jesus was not insulting Nicodemus.
He was loving him enough to tell him the truth.
The cruel thing would have been to praise the man’s religion while allowing him to remain without life.
The loving thing was to uncover the need that position, learning and reputation had hidden.

Some people are far from God and know it.

Others are far from God but are protected from that realization by a wall of religious achievement.

Nicodemus had a strong wall.

Jesus walked directly through it with five words: "Ye must be born again."

Nicodemus began by telling Jesus what he knew.

Jesus answered by telling Nicodemus what he lacked.

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Jesus did not tell Nicodemus to study a little harder.

He did not tell him to become a stricter Pharisee.

He did not tell him to add one more religious practice.

He did not tell him to improve the life he already possessed.

Jesus told him that he needed a life he did not possess.

He needed to be born again.

There are people who think the Gospel is mainly for the obviously broken.

They think the drunkard needs Jesus.

The criminal needs Jesus.

The person whose family is falling apart needs Jesus.

But they imagine that the respectable person needs only minor adjustment.

Jesus spoke the necessity of the new birth to one of the most religious men in Israel.

If Nicodemus needed to be born again, so do I.

If Nicodemus needed to be born again, so do you.

A preacher must be born again.

A deacon must be born again.

A Sunday school teacher must be born again.

A lifelong church member must be born again.

The child raised in a Christian home must be born again.

Education is not the new birth.

Church membership is not the new birth.

Baptism without personal faith is not the new birth.

Religious activity is not the new birth.

Knowing the vocabulary is not the new birth.

Jesus did not say, "It would be helpful if ye were born again."

He said, "Ye must be born again."

Nicodemus came at night.

Why?

The honest answer is that John does not tell us.

Perhaps Nicodemus feared being seen.

Perhaps he wanted a private conversation away from the crowds.

Perhaps nighttime was simply the best opportunity for an uninterrupted discussion.

We should not turn a reasonable possibility into a Biblical fact.

But John's mention of the night carries weight because light and darkness run throughout his Gospel.

John 1 says, "The light shineth in darkness."

Jesus says in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world."

At the end of this conversation, John 3 speaks of people who love darkness rather than light and of the person who "cometh to the light."

Later, when Judas goes out to betray Jesus, John writes, "And it was night."

Judas had lived near the Light and walked away into darkness.

Nicodemus began in the night and walked toward the Light.

Whatever his reason for choosing that hour, he came to the right Person.

Jesus did not send him away.

Jesus did not mock him for asking.

Jesus did not say, "Come back when you are brave enough to ask publicly."

He received the questioning man.

But Jesus also refused to leave him with a comfortable misunderstanding.

Christ welcomes sincere questions.

That is why our invitation at Reason Together Church is to bring your questions and open your Bible.

Christian faith does not require us to pretend that hard questions are easy.

It asks us to bring those questions into the presence of Christ and submit our conclusions to His Word.

But questions can serve two very different purposes.

A question can be a door through which we seek the truth.

Or a question can become a wall behind which we hide from the truth.

Jesus welcomed Nicodemus through the door, but He would not let Nicodemus rebuild the wall.

The goal is not merely to win an argument about Jesus.

The goal is to know Jesus and receive the life that only He can give.

He does not fear investigation.

But He will address the need beneath the question.

Nicodemus wanted to discuss the signs.

Jesus spoke about his soul.

Nicodemus answered, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

The expression translated "born again" can also carry the meaning "born from above."

Nicodemus heard the physical meaning.

Jesus was describing a supernatural birth produced by God.

This kind of misunderstanding occurs repeatedly in John.

Jesus speaks about the temple of His body, and people think He means the building.

Jesus speaks about living water, and the woman at the well thinks about water from the ground.

Jesus speaks about spiritual food, and the disciples think someone brought Him lunch.

Jesus uses an earthly picture to reveal a heavenly truth.

Nicodemus cannot return to his mother's womb.

He cannot begin his physical life again.

The new birth does not mean that a believer instantly becomes mature or never struggles again.

It means that God gives a new source of life, a new heart toward Him and a new direction.

A newborn child is alive before that child can walk, speak or understand a family name.

In the same way, spiritual life begins by the gracious work of God, then its effects develop in repentance, faith, love, obedience and courage.

We must not confuse growth with birth.

Growth may be gradual.

Birth is decisive.

We do not slowly earn our way into life.

We receive life from above and then learn to walk in it.

And he cannot create spiritual life within himself.

Jesus says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Human effort can change a schedule.

Discipline can change a habit.

Education can increase knowledge.

Religion can regulate outward conduct.

But flesh cannot manufacture spirit.

Only the Holy Spirit can give spiritual life.

To be born again is not to turn over a new leaf.

It is not to make another promise that we will try harder.

It is not temporary emotion.

It is not learning to imitate the outward behavior of Christians.

It is God cleansing the sinner, giving a new heart and imparting spiritual life.

Jesus says a person must be “born of water and of the Spirit.”

Christians have interpreted those words in several ways.

Some understand the water as physical birth.

Some see Christian baptism.

Some connect it with John’s baptism of repentance.

Some understand it as cleansing through the Word.

But Jesus expected a teacher of Israel to recognize what He meant.

That directs us toward the promises of the Old Testament.

Ezekiel 36:25 says, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean.”

Verse 26 says, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.”

Verse 27 says, “And I will put my spirit within you.”

Water and Spirit.

Cleansing and life.

A new heart and the Spirit of God.

Nicodemus taught the Scriptures, but he had missed the promise standing behind Jesus’ words.

Baptism beautifully portrays cleansing, burial and new life.

But water applied to the outside of a person cannot substitute for the Spirit’s work within the person.

An outward ceremony cannot create an inward birth.

Jesus then points to the wind.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

We cannot see the wind itself.

We see what the wind moves.

We see branches bending.

We see leaves crossing the road.

We feel the air against our skin.

The cause is invisible, but its effects are visible.

We cannot manufacture the Holy Spirit’s work.

We cannot command God to regenerate a person on our schedule.

But when the Spirit gives life, effects begin to appear.

Desires change.

Faith appears.

Sin becomes grievous.

Christ becomes precious.
Love seeks expression.
John never shows us a moment when Nicodemus kneels and announces his conversion.
Perhaps John shows us something like the wind.
We do not see the invisible moment.
We begin to see movement.
Nicodemus asks, "How can these things be?"
That is the great question.
How can a sinful man receive a new heart?
How can a condemned person receive eternal life?
How can someone who cannot save himself be saved?
Jesus takes Nicodemus back to Numbers 21.
Israel had sinned against God.
Fiery serpents came among the people.
The people were bitten.
They were dying.
They could not remove the poison by moral effort.
They could not cure themselves by studying medicine.
God provided the remedy.
Moses lifted a serpent upon a pole.
The dying person who looked lived.
Looking did not earn the healing.
Looking was faith in the remedy God provided.
Jesus says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."
Nicodemus asked how new life could be possible.
Jesus pointed him toward the cross.
The Son of Man would be lifted up.
He would bear the judgment of sin.
He would die so that dying sinners could live.
The new birth is the Spirit's work, and the life we receive is made possible through the crucified Son of God.
Then come the words known around the world:
"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Ancient manuscripts did not use modern quotation marks.

Interpreters differ about whether Jesus continues speaking through verse 16 or whether John is now giving an inspired explanation of Jesus' words.

The truth does not change.

John 3:16 belongs to the message presented in the account of Nicodemus.

God loved.

God gave.

The Son came.

The Son was lifted up.

Whosoever believes receives everlasting life.

The night ends without John telling us what Nicodemus decided.

There is no recorded prayer.

There is no public confession.

Nicodemus disappears.

But he does not disappear forever.

In John 7, hostility toward Jesus has intensified.

Officers had been sent to arrest Him.

They returned without Him.

The religious leaders demanded an explanation.

The officers answered, "Never man spake like this man."

The Pharisees responded with contempt.

They accused the officers of being deceived.

They appealed to the rulers' unbelief as though truth were determined by a vote of important people.

They dismissed the common people as ignorant and cursed.

Then someone within the council spoke.

John 7:50 says, "Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,)"

John reminds us again.

This is the man from the night.

And John adds that he was "one of them."

He belonged to the group speaking against Jesus.

His position was among the rulers.

But his words no longer sounded exactly like theirs.

Nicodemus asked, "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?"

He did not declare that Jesus was the Messiah.

He did not say, "I am His disciple."
He did not even announce that Jesus was innocent.
He appealed to justice.
He asked the experts in the law to obey the law they claimed to defend.
It was a cautious defense.
But it was not nothing.
His colleagues immediately turned their contempt toward him.
"Art thou also of Galilee?"
Notice how quickly a request for fairness was treated as disloyalty.
When a group has already decided what it wants to believe, even a reasonable question can sound like rebellion.
Nicodemus did not control the whole council.
He could not force them to hear Jesus.
But he could refuse to lend his silence to an unjust conclusion.
There are moments when faithfulness begins with one calm sentence in a hostile room.
You may not be able to change every mind.
You can still refuse to repeat a lie.
You can still ask whether the evidence has truly been heard.
You can still insist that Jesus be judged by truth rather than by ridicule.
In John 3, Nicodemus approached Jesus privately.
In John 7, his own colleagues began associating him with Jesus.
That is often where courage is tested.
It is easy to have private sympathy when nobody knows.
It is harder when the room turns and asks, "Are you one of them too?"
Nicodemus did not yet give a full confession.
We should not pretend that he did.
Defending fair procedure is not the same as professing saving faith.
But the man who came privately is no longer completely silent.
The rulers tell him, "Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."
They spoke with confidence.
They also overlooked Jonah, who came from Gath-hepher in the region later known as Galilee.
Religious pride can make a person confident, forceful and wrong at the same time.
Nicodemus disappears again.
Jesus is arrested.
Jesus is condemned.

Jesus is crucified.
The Teacher Nicodemus visited is silent in death.
The hands that performed the signs are still.
The Son of Man has been lifted up, exactly as He said.
Then John 19:38 tells us that Joseph of Arimathaea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus.
John explicitly calls Joseph a disciple, but secretly for fear of the Jews.
Joseph steps into the open when association with Jesus appears least advantageous.
Then verse 39 says, "And there came also Nicodemus."
John could have stopped there.
But he adds, "which at the first came to Jesus by night."
There is that phrase again.
The man from the night is now standing beside the body of Jesus.
Did Nicodemus remember the conversation?
Did he remember the serpent lifted in the wilderness?
Did he look upon the crucified Christ and finally understand the words "lifted up"?
The Bible does not tell us what he thought.
We must not turn imagination into history.
But John clearly wants us to remember the night as we watch Nicodemus at the tomb.
The first time, Nicodemus brought questions.
This time, he brought "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight."
Picture the hands of Nicodemus.
Those hands may once have opened scrolls before students.
Those hands may have been raised in formal debate among the rulers.
Now those hands helped receive the wounded body of Jesus.
The blood was real.
The thorns were real.
The wounds were real.
The death was real.
The learned teacher could no longer keep the question at a safe distance.
The Son of Man had been lifted up before him.
The King who had been mocked with a crown of thorns was being honored with a burial fit for royalty.
Rome saw a condemned man.
The rulers saw a defeated threat.
Joseph and Nicodemus treated Him as precious.

Love had moved from conversation to costly service.
The ancient Roman pound was smaller than a modern American pound.
The amount would have been roughly seventy to seventy-five modern pounds.
That was an extraordinary quantity.
It required expense.
It required preparation.
It required effort to carry.
We cannot calculate its exact modern price.
We should not say that a particular quantity was legally reserved for royalty.
But the abundance unquestionably communicated extraordinary honor.
John has filled the crucifixion account with the language of kingship.
Jesus wears a crown, although it is made of thorns.
He wears purple, although it is placed upon Him in mockery.
Pilate announces, "Behold your King!"
The inscription above the cross identifies Him as King of the Jews.
Now He receives a new tomb and an extravagant quantity of spices.
Psalm 45 associates myrrh and aloes with a royal setting.
Second Chronicles describes King Asa's burial with abundant spices.
Isaiah foretold that the suffering Servant would be with the rich in His death.
Men mocked Jesus as a king while He lived.
Nicodemus helped bury Him with honor befitting a king after He died.
There was possible cost beyond the price of the spices.
Association with an executed man could damage reputation.
The council had opposed Jesus.
Contact with a dead body brought ceremonial uncleanness under Numbers 19.
The work was physical, unpleasant and emotionally heavy.
The Bible does not say Nicodemus lost his office.
It does not say he lost his fortune.
It does not say he was expelled from the council.
But it does show that he personally came.
John 19:40 says, "Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices."
Nicodemus did more than send a gift.
He placed his hands upon the body of the crucified Christ.
He participated in wrapping Him.
He helped place Him in the tomb.

Many public followers had scattered, though John and several women had remained near the cross.
Two previously cautious men now stepped forward.
The cross brought hidden convictions into visible action.
Was Nicodemus born again?
There is evidence pointing toward genuine faith.
He continued moving toward Jesus.
He challenged the rush to judgment.
He accepted visible association with Christ.
He brought a costly offering.
He personally honored the body of Jesus.
His story fits John's movement from darkness toward light.
His conduct may show the effects of the Spirit's invisible work.
But there are reasons for caution.
John never explicitly calls him a disciple.
John never records him confessing Jesus as the Christ.
His words in John 7 defend due process rather than declare faith.
Honoring the body of Jesus does not automatically prove regeneration.
God did not give us enough information to certify the condition of Nicodemus's soul.
Later traditions attempt to fill the silence.
Some say he was baptized by the Apostles.
Some say he was expelled from the Sanhedrin.
Some say he lost his wealth, lived with Gamaliel or died as a martyr.
The so-called Gospel of Nicodemus appeared centuries later and was not written by the Nicodemus in John.
We cannot use later stories to answer a question Scripture leaves unstated.
The most responsible conclusion is this:
The Bible gives compelling evidence that Nicodemus moved from respectful curiosity toward genuine discipleship, but it does not record an explicit confession of his faith.
Perhaps John leaves the final words unspoken because he wants the question to move from Nicodemus to us.
We can spend an hour asking whether Nicodemus was born again and never ask whether we have been born again.
We can analyze his courage while hiding our own faith.
We can calculate his spices while withholding our own lives from Christ.
God has not commanded us to certify the salvation of Nicodemus.

He has commanded us to believe upon His Son.
Have you been born again?
I am not asking whether you attend church.
I am not asking whether your parents were Christians.
I am not asking whether you have been baptized.
I am not asking whether you believe Jesus was a great teacher.
I am not asking whether you know John 3:16 from memory.
Have you recognized your sin and trusted the Son of God who was lifted up for you?
The Israelites bitten by the serpents could not heal themselves.
God provided the remedy.
They looked and lived.
You cannot cleanse your own heart.
You cannot create spiritual life.
God has provided the Savior.
Jesus died for your sins.
He was buried.
He rose again.
Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
You may have come with questions.
Bring them to Jesus.
But do not use questions as a permanent hiding place from faith.
You may have lived many years in religion.
Religion cannot replace regeneration.
You may feel that it is too late to begin again.
The new birth does not depend upon your ability to return to the beginning.
It depends upon God's power to give life from above.
Today, look to the Son of Man who was lifted up.
Admit that you are a sinner.
Stop trusting your goodness, position or religious record.
Believe that Jesus died and rose again.
Call upon Him for salvation.
Receive the everlasting life that God gives through His Son.
Do not leave merely wondering whether Nicodemus was born again.
Make certain that you have been born again.
Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for giving Your only begotten Son. Thank You that Jesus was lifted up so that sinners could look to Him in faith and live. Search every heart. Save those who have trusted religion without trusting Christ. Give courage to those who believe privately but fear being identified publicly. Let the cross turn gratitude into service, love into generosity and silence into faithful witness. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

If you still have questions, please do not leave alone with them.

Meet with us in the Pastor's Study after the service. Let us open the Bible together and talk honestly.

To the person who is searching, remember that Jesus did not reject Nicodemus for coming with questions. Bring your questions to Christ, but listen when He tells you that knowledge, morality and religion cannot substitute for new life.

To the religious person, remember that if Nicodemus needed to be born again, you need it. No title, education, membership, ministry or reputation can replace the work of the Holy Spirit.

To the hesitant believer, do not remain permanently in the shadows. Ask God for courage. Private conviction should grow into visible faithfulness.

To every Christian, remember the One who was lifted up. Let His sacrifice loosen your grip upon reputation, possessions and comfort. The spices did not purchase salvation, but love sought a way to honor the Savior.

Nicodemus entered the Gospel carrying questions.

He appeared again carrying a concern for justice.

He appeared finally carrying myrrh and aloes.

John does not tell us every step between the darkness and the tomb.

But he tells us enough to ask the question that matters most.

Have you come to the Light?

Have you looked to the Son of Man who was lifted up?

Have you been born again?

Aloha Nui Loa.

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NICODEMUS

Biblical Commentary

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley
www.ReasonTogether.Church

Primary passages: John 3:1–21; John 7:45–52; John 19:38–42

Introduction

Nicodemus appears in only one Gospel, but John places him at three decisive moments in the ministry of Jesus. He first comes during the night, while Jesus is attracting attention through signs in Jerusalem. He appears again when the religious authorities are moving toward condemnation. He appears finally after the crucifixion, bringing an extraordinary quantity of burial spices.

Read separately, the passages concern the new birth, lawful judgment and burial. Read together, they raise a personal question: What happened to Nicodemus? John never records a conversion testimony, yet he repeatedly identifies the later Nicodemus as the man who came to Jesus by night. The repetition invites comparison without giving readers permission to fill every silence with imagination.

John 2 23 through John 3 2 Signs and the Human Heart

The account begins conceptually before Nicodemus arrives. John 2:23 reports that many believed in Jesus' name when they saw His miracles. The following verses introduce caution: Jesus did not commit or entrust Himself to them because He knew all people and knew what was in humanity.

John then introduces "a man of the Pharisees" who begins by discussing the miracles. Nicodemus's statement is not false. The signs do demonstrate that God is at work. His conclusion is simply inadequate. "A teacher come from God" does not yet confess the eternal Word made flesh or the only begotten Son.

John distinguishes fascination with signs from the faith that receives life. Evidence matters, but the purpose of evidence is to bring the hearer to Jesus. A person may admire Christ, appreciate His teaching and concede supernatural power while still avoiding the question of His full identity.

John 3 1 Nicodemus the Religious Leader

Nicodemus is a Pharisee. This locates him within a serious religious tradition rather than outside the worship of Israel. His problem is not the absence of religion. It is that religion cannot create spiritual life.

He is also "a ruler of the Jews." John later places him among the chief priests and Pharisees and calls him "one of them." He therefore possesses influence, responsibility and public standing.

Jesus calls him "a master of Israel." The wording communicates recognized teaching authority and adds irony. A man responsible for teaching Israel has not understood Israel's promises of inner cleansing, a new heart and the Spirit of God. Jesus' rebuke is not contempt for study. It exposes the tragedy of knowing the text without perceiving the saving work to which the text points.

John 3 2 Coming by Night

John does not explain why Nicodemus came at night. Fear of colleagues is possible, but privacy and freedom from daytime crowds are also possible. A careful interpretation leaves the motive open.

The literal night nevertheless fits John's spiritual imagery. Light shines in darkness in the Gospel's opening. Jesus later calls Himself the Light of the world. The Nicodemus conversation ends by

contrasting those who love darkness with those who come to the light. When Judas leaves to betray Jesus, John adds, “and it was night.”

Judas moves from proximity to the Light into darkness. Nicodemus begins in darkness but approaches Jesus. John’s repeated reminder of the nighttime visit makes it reasonable to trace a movement, though the Gospel never labels the stages in a formal conversion account.

John 3 2 We Know

Nicodemus speaks in the plural: “We know.” He may represent a small number of leaders impressed by the signs, may refer to private discussion among colleagues or may use a respectful form of speech. The Gospel does not identify the group.

The irony is more important than the membership of “we.” Nicodemus announces knowledge, but the conversation reveals ignorance. He knows that the signs require explanation. He does not yet understand the kingdom, new birth, the Spirit or the necessity of the Son of Man’s death.

Jesus answers neither the compliment nor the unasked question. He goes directly to the condition of entrance into the kingdom. The knower must become the receiver. The teacher must become the child born from above.

John 3 3 through 8 The New Birth

“Born again” translates a term that can also mean “born from above.” Nicodemus hears repetition and responds with the impossibility of a second physical birth. Jesus describes origin: spiritual life must come from above through the Holy Spirit.

The new birth is necessary, universal and beyond human production. Flesh can produce flesh, but it cannot produce spirit. Moral reform may change conduct. Education may change understanding. Discipline may change habits. None of these raises the spiritually dead.

Jesus joins water and Spirit. Ezekiel 36 provides the clearest Old Testament background: clean water, cleansing from uncleanness, a new heart, a new spirit and God’s Spirit within His people. Nicodemus should have recognized that entry into God’s promised kingdom required divine cleansing and renewal.

The wind illustrates the Spirit’s work. Its movement is not controlled by the observer, but its effects become evident. John does not record the moment of Nicodemus’s regeneration. His later actions may be read as effects of a work the narrator does not describe directly.

John 3 9 through 15 How Can These Things Be

Nicodemus’s question permits Jesus to move from the necessity of new life to the provision of that life. Jesus invokes Numbers 21. Israel’s rebellion brought judgment through serpents. The dying people could not remove the poison or reverse the sentence. God provided a visible remedy and promised life to those who looked.

The serpent was lifted so the dying could see. The Son of Man must be lifted so the believing may receive eternal life. In John, lifting up includes crucifixion and exaltation. The cross is the place where judgment and mercy meet, where apparent humiliation reveals divine glory.

This saying casts a long line toward John 19. When Nicodemus appears beside the body of Jesus, the Son of Man has been lifted up. John does not tell readers what Nicodemus remembered, but the narrative invites them to remember the earlier words.

John 3 16 through 21 Love Light and Judgment

Modern Bibles differ over whether Jesus continues speaking through verse 21 or whether John supplies an inspired explanation beginning around verse 16. Ancient manuscripts did not provide quotation marks that settle the question. The meaning is unchanged: God's love is demonstrated through the gift of His only begotten Son, and eternal life is promised to the believer.

The passage does not portray a morally neutral humanity waiting for information. The Light has come, but people love darkness because their deeds are evil. Condemnation is already present in unbelief. Coming to the Light exposes the person before God.

Nicodemus entered at night. The discourse ends by describing the person who comes to the Light. John leaves the immediate response unstated and lets that tension accompany Nicodemus into his later appearances.

John 7 45 through 49 Hostility in the Council

The Feast of Tabernacles scene is charged with division. Officers have been ordered to arrest Jesus but return empty-handed. Their explanation, "Never man spake like this man," is itself a testimony to Jesus' authority.

The Pharisees answer with contempt rather than investigation. They accuse the officers of deception, treat elite opinion as decisive and dismiss the crowd as cursed. Their confidence becomes a substitute for hearing the evidence.

John 7 50 through 52 Nicodemus Speaks

John reintroduces Nicodemus with two reminders: he had come to Jesus by night and he was one of the rulers. His identity is now under pressure.

Nicodemus does not give a confession of faith. He asks whether their law judges a man before hearing him and learning what he does. The intervention is limited but meaningful. He challenges a predetermined verdict and appeals to the standards his colleagues claim to honor.

The answer is personal ridicule: "Art thou also of Galilee?" His defense of lawful procedure causes the council to associate him with Jesus. The man who approached privately is now exposed to public suspicion.

Their assertion that no prophet arises from Galilee overlooks Jonah's origin in Gath-hepher. The moment illustrates how contempt can distort interpretation. People who command another man to search may themselves have searched carelessly.

John 19 38 Joseph of Arimathaea

Joseph provides an important comparison. John explicitly calls him a disciple of Jesus, though secretly because of fear. The Gospel does not use that same title for Nicodemus. This difference should be preserved.

Joseph asks Pilate for the body. That request itself involves visible identification with a condemned man. Whatever fear previously kept Joseph hidden no longer prevents action. The death of Jesus draws the secret disciple into the open.

John 19 39 Nicodemus Comes Again

John writes, “And there came also Nicodemus,” then again identifies him as the man who first came to Jesus by night. The wording forces the reader to place the two scenes side by side.

The first Nicodemus brought words and questions. The final Nicodemus brings myrrh and aloes. The first meeting concerns the Son of Man who must be lifted up. The final meeting occurs after that lifting. The first scene asks whether Nicodemus will come to the Light. The final scene shows him accepting visible participation in Jesus’ burial.

John 19 39 One Hundred Pounds

The KJV reports about one hundred pounds, using the ancient measure. One hundred Roman pounds equaled roughly seventy to seventy-five modern pounds. This was an exceptional amount of aromatic material.

The text does not provide a price, so large modern estimates should be avoided. It also does not state that a particular quantity was reserved exclusively for kings. The amount nevertheless communicates lavish honor.

Royal associations surround the passage. John’s crucifixion narrative repeatedly calls Jesus King. Psalm 45 joins myrrh and aloes in a royal context. Second Chronicles records an abundant spiced burial for King Asa. Nicodemus’s gift fits the Gospel’s irony: the rejected and mocked King receives extraordinary honor in death.

John 19 40 through 42 Personal Participation

Joseph and Nicodemus take the body, wrap it with linen and spices and place it in a new tomb. Nicodemus does not merely finance the work. The plural wording includes him in the burial preparation.

Touching a dead body brought ceremonial uncleanness under Numbers 19. Public association with an executed man could also bring reputational consequences, especially for a member of the ruling leadership. The quantity of spices represents financial sacrifice and physical effort.

The Gospel does not record that Nicodemus lost office, wealth or family. It gives enough to demonstrate costly honor without permitting a biography of unrecorded consequences.

Was Nicodemus Born Again

A positive reading observes clear movement. Nicodemus approaches Jesus, later resists unjust condemnation and finally honors Jesus openly and extravagantly. The light and darkness imagery and the Spirit’s invisible work support reading his actions as evidence of faith.

A cautious reading notes the missing confession. John never calls him a disciple, never records baptism and never states that he believed. A procedural defense and an honorable burial do not logically prove regeneration.

The best conclusion respects both sets of evidence. Nicodemus's final actions are difficult to dismiss as mere curiosity and strongly suggest genuine devotion. Yet Scripture does not authorize an infallible verdict concerning his soul. The openness serves John's evangelistic purpose by directing the question toward the reader.

Belief and Discipleship in John

John uses the language of belief with careful attention to its object and endurance. At the close of John 2, many believe in Jesus' name because of the signs, yet Jesus does not entrust Himself to them. In John 6, some identified as disciples turn back when His teaching becomes difficult. In John 8, people who are said to believe quickly resist His word. The Gospel therefore refuses to reduce saving faith to momentary excitement, social identification or admiration of miracles.

At the same time, John's purpose is explicitly evangelistic. The signs are written so that readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and have life through His name. The answer to inadequate belief is not suspicion of all assurance. It is a clearer view of Jesus and personal reliance upon Him.

Nicodemus begins with a conclusion based on signs: Jesus is a teacher from God. Jesus leads him toward the identity and work of the only begotten Son. The narrative asks whether Nicodemus will move from acknowledging evidence to trusting the One to whom the evidence points. His burial actions provide narrative evidence of attachment, but John leaves the reader to weigh them in light of the Gospel's full portrait of belief.

Regeneration and Developing Courage

The conversation in John 3 and the later appearances should not be combined into a theory that regeneration is earned in stages. Jesus describes birth from above as the sovereign work of the Spirit. A person does not become increasingly born any more than a child becomes increasingly delivered. Spiritual life is received from God.

The outward recognition of that life may unfold gradually. Understanding deepens. Fear is confronted. Courage is exercised under pressure. Nicodemus may therefore display a developing public response without implying that salvation itself was a reward for accumulating brave deeds.

This distinction is pastorally important. Some believers can name the hour of conversion with precision. Others recognize that their confidence, understanding and willingness to be identified with Christ emerged over time. Assurance rests finally on Christ and His promise, not on the vividness of a remembered experience. Fruit does matter, but fruit gives evidence of life; it does not create life.

Nicodemus also warns against using gradual growth as an excuse for permanent secrecy. The Spirit who gives life produces effects. The trajectory of discipleship is toward truth, obedience and identification with Jesus, even when those steps carry social cost.

Doctrinal and Pastoral Application

Nicodemus proves that the new birth is not reserved for people with visibly ruined lives. The morally serious, Biblically educated and publicly respected stand under the same necessity as everyone else.

His story also encourages honest inquiry. Jesus receives the man who comes with incomplete understanding. He does not shame the questioner, but neither does He lower the demand of truth.

The narrative distinguishes new birth from growth. Regeneration is God's gift of life. Courage and understanding may mature over time. A slow-growing confession must not be mistaken for a slowly earned salvation.

Finally, the story challenges hidden faith. Fear may explain secrecy, but it cannot be allowed to rule forever. The cross calls love into expression. Costly service does not purchase grace; it becomes the grateful fruit of grace.

Conclusion

Nicodemus enters John's Gospel as a knowledgeable man who does not understand the new birth. He appears again as a ruler unwilling to approve judgment without a hearing. He appears finally beside the crucified Jesus with a gift of extraordinary honor.

John does not record every step between those scenes. He gives enough to make hope reasonable and enough silence to keep presumption from becoming certainty. The final question is therefore not merely historical. The Son of Man has been lifted up, and the promise remains: whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. The reader must decide whether to remain in darkness or come to the Light.