

## Quarter Four: Themes in the Gospel of John

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### Lesson 4—Witnesses of Christ as the Messiah

#### Thursday: The Witness of Nicodemus

October 24, 2024

- **Last Week:** “The Backstory: The Prologue”
  - John 1, 3, 9, 17 – major themes of the prologue to this gospel
- **This Week:** “Witnesses of Christ as the Messiah”
  - Scripture & Jesus’ own testimony speak of Him as Messiah
    - His multiple healings in John testify to His being the Messiah
    - This week, we study examples of people who testify to who He is
      - John 1 & 3

**Memory Text:** “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” (John 3:3, NKJV)

The week in brief:

- 1. **Sunday:** The Testimony of John the Baptist (Daniel)
  - John 1 – John the Baptist as a witness the Messiah; differences between Jesus and John, & the Baptist’s mission
- 2. **Monday:** The Lamb of God (SQ)
  - John 1:29 – 37 – the Baptist’s understanding of Jesus & His Mission as the Lamb of God
- 3. **Tuesday:** The Two Disciples of John (Ryan)
  - John 1:35 – 39 – John & Andrew follow Jesus & then witness about Him
- 4. **Wednesday:** Philip & Nathaniel (John D)
  - John 1:43 – 51 – dealing with prejudice & “judging” Jesus for ourselves
- 5. **Thursday:** The Witness of Nicodemus (Jill)
  - John 3:1 – 21 – Nicodemus searching, some doubt about Jesus; Jesus showcasing that the Jews, too, needed conversion, including Nicodemus; Nicodemus later witness of Jesus

## Thursday: The Witness of Nicodemus

John 3:1 – 21; John 19:39

7 takeaways from the witness of Nicodemus

- John 3:1, 2 – “There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a **ruler of the Jews**. (2) This 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.’”
  - Ruler = a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leadership council (the supreme court of Israel)
    - At the time of Jesus, the Sanhedrin consisted of both priests (mostly Sadducees) & Pharisees
    - Spiritual leader amongst the Jews
    - Well respected
  - The Jews = phrase used often in the gospel of John for those who opposed Jesus

- Nicodemus was impressed by Jesus' signs / miracles
  - Wanted to become better acquainted with Him (God draws us to Himself)
  - Still came with some doubt – did not recognize Jesus as the Christ
- **Takeaway #1: Come with your doubts**
  - Nicodemus came by night
    - Afraid, uncertain, doubting – still took where he was
    - Came where he was
  - Don't have to be perfect or have all the answers to come to Christ
    - Rom 2:4 – Goodness of God that leads...
- John 3:3 – “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born **again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”
  - Again = has 2 meanings in Greek – “again” or “from above”
    - Both could be meant here; but specifically “from above” – moral purification & cleansing from the Spirit
  - Pharisees = very strict observance of the law
    - Separated themselves from the common people; thought God was pleased with their exclusive behavior
  - Jesus cut immediately to the heart of the matter
    - No fluff
    - Nothing to make Nicodemus feel good about himself
    - No social gospel
    - Pointed out Nicodemus' sin
  - **Takeaway #2: Speak the truth, in love**
    - Jesus cut immediately to the heart of the matter
    - Nicodemus needed a new heart / conversion experience
    - He was not good enough on his own
    - Jesus was not afraid to share the truth with him
- John 3:4, 5 – “Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?’ (5) Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the **Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’”
  - Nicodemus' questions got him nowhere
    - Clear now that it doesn't mean again; rather means “from above”
    - Jesus doesn't even address his question
      - Simply rephrases the answer from b4 – with more detail
  - Spirit = *panyoo'-mah* = “wind, breath, spirit” – context determines
    - Later the Spirit is likened to the wind
  - Born of water & the Spirit
    - Refers to water baptism & the infilling of the Holy Spirit
    - Moral purification & inner transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit
  - Jesus questions' Nicodemus' core beliefs
    - Jews believed the Gentiles needed to be converted, not the Jews

- Jews heritage – back to Abraham
- Jesus' discussion with the Pharisees in John 8
  - Vs 31 – “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed. (32) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’
  - Vs 33 – “They (Pharisees) answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free?’”
- Jews believed
  - They were the chosen people
  - They were not in bondage
  - They were not sinners
  - They did not need conversion
- John 3:9 – “Nicodemus answered & said to Him, ‘How can these things be?’”
  - Nicodemus’ problem is not a lack of understanding
    - But reluctance in applying Jesus’ words to himself
  - Almost seems easier for God to change a bad person into a good person
    - Then to change a “good” person into a new creature
    - Problem was Nicodemus didn’t see himself as “bad”
- John 3:10 – “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?’”
- **Takeaway #3: Open your mind to accept the truth**
  - Truth is hard to accept, when it goes against our tradition
    - Upbringing
    - Culture
    - What we’ve always believed
  - In order for Nicodemus to set aside his tradition & accept what Jesus said, he needed an open mind & heart
- John 3:11, 12 – “Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. (12) If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”
  - If Nicodemus couldn’t understand & apply to himself a basic concept (conversion), how would he understand more complicated religious topics?
    - If Nicodemus couldn’t understand “earthly things” – the new birth
      - How could he understand “heavenly things” – further instruction?
  - **Takeaway #4: Only share what a person is ready to receive**
    - We push people – share too much too quickly
    - Let people grow at their pace – push, but not too much

- John 3:14, 15 – “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so much the Son of Man be lifted up, (15) that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”
  - Jesus goes back, and explains the new birth (conversion) with an object lesson
    - Story that Nicodemus would’ve been taught & had taught
    - It is Jesus’ death on the cross that makes the new birth possible
      - Need to look to Him in faith
  - **Takeaway #5: Try new means, methods, to share the truth**
    - Jesus could’ve said – “I already told you once. Why are you so stupid?”
      - Why can’t you get it?
      - Used an illustration, instead
    - Jesus spoke in parables / stories the people understood
  - **Takeaway #6: Lift up Jesus**
    - When Jesus is lifted up, we see our sin
      - Our guilt, our ugliness
- John 3:16, 17 – “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes** in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (17) For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”
  - One of most popular verses in Scripture – connected with Jesus & Nicodemus
  - **Purpose statement:** best statement in the gospel of John about “why” Jesus came to this world
    - God’s love is so wondrous that He gave His best: His only Son
    - God’s love is so immense it embraces all humanity – nobody is excluded
    - God’s love is so powerful it’s effects will last forever – life will last forever
    - God’s love is not compulsory – can be enjoyed **only** when we respond with faith in Jesus
      - Eternal life = a gift; but we can choose to accept or reject it
    - Our belief is ongoing – belief = verb; constant action over time
  - Switch in author – from Jesus to John
    - Verb tense changes – indicates John wrote this later
    - Words / phrases distinctly from John (not Jesus)
      - “only”; “believes” in Him; “only begotten Son”
      - Reads like the prologue / beginning of John
      - Section is explanatory, rather than progressive
    - John is explaining / expounding upon, what Jesus told Nicodemus
    - In the original Greek, there are no quotation marks here; translators left to determine who said it
      - Different translations include it differently
      - Andrews Commentary suggests it was John
- Nicodemus pondered that night
  - Did not publicly acknowledge Jesus, but quietly studied Him
  - In the Sanhedrin, thwarted the schemes of the priests to destroy Jesus
  - When Jesus died, Nicodemus remembered the words of Jesus
    - He saw the world’s Redeemer & fully accepted Him
    - John 19:39 – he brought 100 pounds of spices to anoint the body of Jesus

- DA, p. 177, “After the Lord’s ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned & persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other days. He became poor in this world’s goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus.”
  
- **Takeaway #7: Never give up hope**
  - Took Nicodemus time, yet he fully surrendered to Jesus & became a faithful witness for Him

### **7 takeaways from the witness of Nicodemus**

- #1: Come with your doubts
- #2: Speak the truth, in love
- #3: Open your mind to accept the truth
- #4: Only share what a person is ready to receive
- #5: Try new means, methods, to share the truth
- #6: Lift up Jesus
- #7: Never give up hope