

Guess Who?

Nicodemus

Part 4 – February 16, 2014



We're weaving together Jesus' 3½ year mission in the Gospels, connecting the jots of the OT Law and Prophets, and pausing on the signs and symbols and people and parables that populate it.

The story of the Pharisee Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish Ruling Council¹ that conspired against and condemned Jesus, is **one of the great hidden victories of Christ!** I say *hidden* because, like a great treasure, you have to seek it and dig for it.



Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night ... – John 3:1-2a NIV

Why'd he wait until dark? Why Nic at night? There were **two groups on the Jewish ruling council: the Pharisees and the Sadducees.** Pharisees were strict and had people's respect; Sadducees were permissive but had political power. **Sadducees said there was no spirit or resurrection; Pharisees said there was.** (Acts 23:8) Now, after Jesus was baptized and tempted, he called a couple disciples, (Jn 1:35-51) turned water into wine, (Jn 2:1-11) went to Jerusalem, and turned over the trading tables in the Temple. (Jn 2:13-17) The Jewish rulers demanded a sign to show by what authority He had thrown His Temple tantrum, but rejected His cryptic response.



Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. **[Including Nicodemus]** But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man. – John 2:23-25 NIV

And, in the very next verse ... *Nic at night!* John later says that **many leaders believed but failed to confess their faith, for fear of being rejected, because they valued the praise from man more than the praise from God.** (John 12:42-43) But, Jesus knows what's deep inside, and entrusted himself to *Nic*.

He came to Jesus at night and 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." In reply Jesus declared, **"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."** **[Nicodemus knew that a gentile could be baptized into and 'born again' as a Jew; that made sense. But Jews were what others became!]** **"How can a man be born when he is old?"** Nicodemus asked. **"Surely he cannot [because this is what it sounds like you're saying,**

¹ There were 71 total members of the Jewish Ruling Council, called the Senate or Sanhedrin when they assembled.

Yeshua] enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" [What other type of rebirth could there possibly be for a good Jew to do?] Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. [A man who through baptism-water is a Jew, or through birth-water is a Jew, is still a man] Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. [You're a Pharisee; you believe in the resurrection of the spirit] You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' [Dead flesh is not allowed in eternal life, you need the Spirit of Life] The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. [I rule with 70 of the wisest elders and teachers, and I've never heard or read anything like this] "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, [He has no idea he was just officially appointed to teach the Jews – by standing boldly in broad daylight, opposed to being a bystander in the dark. Why? Isn't it obvious? Jesus knew what was in his heart] "and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak [Jesus and His handful of disciples] of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, [concealed in plain sight in God's Word] but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? [Let's give it a try, shall we? First riddle:] No one has ever gone into heaven [i.e. sky, space, or God's dwelling (ouranos, G3772)] except the one who came from heaven [i.e. sky, space, or God's dwelling]—the Son of Man. [And, here's a puzzler!] Just as Moses lifted up the snake [into heaven (i.e. the sky)" as a sign, on a pole with a crossbar] in the desert, [a desolate place (G2048); so that all who were poisoned by a serpent could turn to it, believing and trusting God, and live (Num 21:4-9)] so the Son of Man [You should look into all the references to Him!] must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world [Jew and Gentile] that he gave his one and only Son, [That's a reference, oh teacher of Israel, to Isaac, the Child of Promise, when his father was asked to extinguish his life on this very mountain ... as a sign. Look into it!" (Gen 22:2)] that whoever believes in him [the One all signs point to] shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [On a crossbar with a serpent] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. [And, His name is ... the "Word of God" (Rev 19:13)] This is the verdict: [Nic at night! You who come in darkness, filled with darkness] Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, [drawn like a moth, like you] so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." – John 3:2-21 NIV

This story has it *all!* **God's grace and patience and longsuffering, death to our flesh and pride, rebirth through God's Spirit, life through God's Son, and revelation through God's Word, and standing up and standing firm and becoming conquerors with Christ.** The ruling council wouldn't let Jesus' family or followers near His dead body, for fear they'd hide it and say He'd risen. (Mat 27:64)

So, three years earlier Jesus begins preparing one of their own to prepare His body for burial, as if He was his own son, a timid blind Pharisee who wants to see, and whose **name means Conqueror.** Likewise, **Jesus has been preparing you.** And, only two questions really matter: **preparing you for what?** And **how are you responding?** Remember when the blind man, who Jesus healed by making mud on a Sabbath, was brought before the Pharisees? Healing blindness was one of four prophesied miracles of the Messiah. (Is 35:5-6)

Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” [Hmm. Sure sounds like Nic. “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.” (John 3:2)] So they were divided. ... for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. ... Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?” [Nicodemus does. And, a prominent member, Joseph of Arimathea, already is, but secretly, for fear of his so called friends (Mk 15:43; Jn 19:38)] Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.” [Hmm ... “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.’ ‘How can this be?’ Nicodemus asked” (John 3:8-9)] The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. [Listen up Nic] Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” [Hmm. Nic’s own words] To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out. – John 9:16, 22b, 26-34 NIV

The man’s eyes were working, but do you see what made him *not blind*? **He courageously refused to blindly base his faith on the religious assumptions and traditions of others.** He truly believed in the *name* of God’s one and only Son! **The Word of God is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path** (Ps 119:105), **everything else is blindness and darkness.** Know what the big argument was regarding Jesus?

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, [of Tabernacles, three years after His baptism and six months before His death] Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. ... some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” Others said, “He is the Christ.” Still others asked, “How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David’s family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. – John 7:37-43 NIV



33 years earlier the shepherds of Bethlehem *had* claimed that the Christ had been born, only to be killed by King Herod’s men. It hadn’t been revealed that he’d been born there, and escaped. So to them, Jesus was from Nazareth, a tiny town in Galilee. But **even when denouncing Him as a Galilean they were unintentionally confirming the Word and involuntarily glorifying God.** Nobody was seeking the treasure God had buried. Instead, the Ruling Council sent guards to arrest Jesus ... but they couldn’t.

Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why didn’t you bring him in?” “No one ever spoke the way this man does,” the guards declared. “You mean he has deceived you also?” the Pharisees retorted. “Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No! [Nicodemus is right there, perspiring heavily] But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them.” Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, “Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?” [Because, um, no offense, but, you’re kind of acting like a mob that knows nothing of the law] They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.” [They’re saying there’s no prophecy proclaiming such a thing concerning the Messiah] Then each went to his own home. – John 7:45-53 NIV

Maybe it was then, alone in his own home, that Nicodemus began to scour the scrolls, and seek, and ask, and knock, for *himself*. And then ... he found it ... what *even he* had *assumed* wasn't *there*.

[766 years earlier the prophet Isaiah had said] ... in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles ... The people walking in darkness have seen a great light ... you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders ... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ... He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom ... – Isaiah 9:1-7 NIV

Now, even the disciples didn't see the cross coming. But, **when Jesus was lifted up, Nicodemus connected those jots!** And, he had to be overwhelmed by just how much "*For God so loved the world.*"

So, why did God ask Moses to lift up a snake on a pole? Because, "In this corner, with the weight of eternal damnation: the *Prince of Darkness!* And in *this* corner, the reigning *Lightweight Champion:* the *Prince of Peace, Mighty God, the Galilean!*"

From their first meeting, Jesus had gently shared and prepared timid Nicodemus for this time. **Jesus often uses hindsight to open our eyes to truth. His Spirit is gracious that way.**



Nicodemus became Israel's example, fulfilling with remorse and repentance, what he'd been appointed to fulfill, 550 years before.

[For the Lord had said to the prophet, Zechariah] And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. – Zechariah 12:10 NIV

And so he did, as did Joseph of Arimathea, who had not consented to the council's decision. (Luke 23:51) And together they prepared all they would need to care for the One, the Son they had failed. **In broad daylight, even as Jesus' own disciples were running from the cross, Timid Nic and Secret Joe were running toward it; so much for reputation and position - the unfulfilling stuff.**

... Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. – John 19:38-40 NIV

Don't wait till it's too late, and regret sets in.

Leave the religious shadows of others and chase after Him in His Word!