

What Did Jesus Mean?

Digging deep into Jesus' teachings.

THE CHRISTIAN
WORKINGMAN



What Did Jesus Mean?
Jesus Meets Nicodemus
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Led by Mary Lowman

Introduction

How well do you know Jesus? In what we call his high priestly prayer, Jesus prays:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:1b - 3).

To know Jesus is to first know him as Savior and Redeemer. That *knowing* is eternal life.

Every Christ-follower is on the journey between that time when you became a child of God through faith in Jesus and the time when you will meet Jesus face to face in Heaven. In this journey there are three stages you and I pass through as Christ-Followers:

1. Justification
2. Sanctification
3. Glorification

Justification is that event when you became a new creation in Christ, and you were justified by grace through faith.

Glorification is the final, perfect state of being where the body and soul are made completely free from sin, sickness, and death, and conformed to the image of the resurrected Christ.

Sanctification is where we are now as believers. It is the progressive work that should be happening in our lives, as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. It involves a growing separation from sin toward righteousness.

The word *know* that Jesus uses here implies a deep level of intimacy.

No matter where you are on your spiritual journey, we all need an ever-deeper knowledge of who Jesus was when he was on earth, and who he is now, seated at the Father's right hand.

“Jesus commands us to love God not just with our hearts but also with our minds. This is a part of the lifetime work of putting off the old self of sin while putting on the new self, ‘renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.’ (Colossians 3:10)” (Daniel R. Hyde, *God With Us*, p. 7).

What I'm hoping and praying is that all of us will have a desire to know Jesus with a hunger we've never known before.

Psalms 42:1: As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.

Philippians 3:10: I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

2 Peter 3:18: But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

John 3:1 – 15

Now 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.” ³Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴Nicodemus 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?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

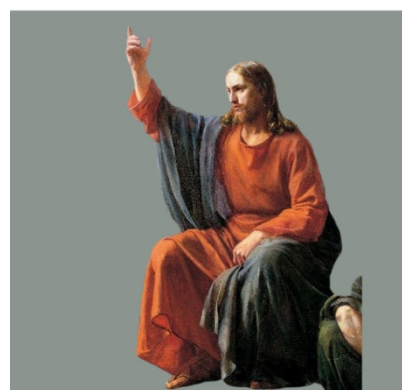
What do we know about Nicodemus?

He was a Pharisee, which means he was part of the elite Jewish people of that day. How would you describe those Pharisees in Jesus’ day?

Do you know why they opposed Jesus?

Matthew 23:14 – 15: “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. ¹⁵Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”

Nicodemus was a **ruler** of the Jews. He would be easily recognized by most everyone.



Nicodemus's first encounter with Jesus

Nicodemus begins by acknowledging that Jesus was a “teacher come from God.” Did he really believe that?

Jesus immediately tells Nicodemus what he must do to see the Kingdom of God.

So, what did Jesus mean? Jesus had never used that “born again” phrase before. So, we can understand

Nicodemus's quizzical and even skeptical response.

Jesus told Nicodemus *he could not see the kingdom of God* unless he was born again! Jesus says things nobody has ever dared say before.

When Jesus speaks of his kingdom, it can mean his kingdom on earth where he already has authority. But there is still a future kingdom—one that is operating in heaven now, that will someday rule all of creation.

The new spiritual life that comes in the new birth comes through the Holy Spirit.

John 6:63: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all."

Nicodemus had never heard anyone be so bold, so ridiculous as to make such a claim—yet this humble man from Galilee says he can impart eternal life to those who believe. Then Jesus goes on to explain what is going to happen: Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so I will be lifted up.

Number 21:8 – 9: The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

Nic knew that story cold, but never before had anyone suggested that it foretold the coming Messiah and what his purpose would be. Jesus then gives Nicodemus this most glorious truth:

John 3:16 - 21

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

John 7:50 – 52: Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, ⁵¹ "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?"

⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."

What does this tell you about Nicodemus's feelings about Jesus?

The final mention of Nicodemus in the Bible is in John 19 after Jesus' crucifixion. He is assisting Joseph of Arimathea in Jesus' burial. Joseph is described as a secret disciple of Jesus because he was afraid of the Jews.

Closing

What do you learn about Jesus through this story of his interaction with Nicodemus?