

Conversion of a Pharisee, Nicodemus

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles again and turn to John chapter 3, the Gospel of John, the third chapter.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 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, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

How can a man be born when he is old, Nicodemus asked. Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born.

Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

[1 : 16] Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again.

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. You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus, and do you not understand these things?

I tell you the truth. We speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, 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?

[2 : 26] No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

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.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 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.

For the last two months or so, we have been studying Jesus' words in Matthew 23, his last words to the crowds in the temple before his crucifixion.

And he speaks those words, in those words, seven woes of judgment upon the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. And at the end, he says, how will you escape being condemned to hell?

[4 : 02] You see, the Pharisees were condemned by Jesus because of their religion, their religion that pretended to save, but left them and others who listened to them condemned.

And that's because they rejected the one and only Savior that God had sent from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son.

They turned the law of God into a gospel. By keeping God's law, well, we'll be accepted into heaven. Besides, we're Jews.

We're God's chosen people. We will not be turned away. How different was our Lord's view? And so, hearing the Lord weigh in on the Pharisees for eight messages, we may well wonder, well, can a Pharisee be saved?

Or has he sinned beyond salvation? Well, today we're going to see that there is love and grace in the Lord Jesus Christ to save even a Pharisee.

[5 : 09] And so important is that fact that the Bible records the conversion of a Pharisee named Nicodemus. It's interesting that John is the only gospel that, and the only place in the Bible that

even mentions this man, Nicodemus.

And what John gives us are three snapshots. Three snapshots on the life of Nicodemus as he intersects and connects with our Lord Jesus.

And it's always in Jerusalem, and it's always at one of the feasts. And this happens then over a period of three years. So let's look at the first snapshot.

It's his meeting, his first meeting with our Lord at night. That's the passage just read for us in John chapter 3. Jesus has just begun his public ministry of three years' length.

And he came to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. While he was there, as crowds came and swelled the population ten times there in Jerusalem, Jesus performed many miraculous signs.

[6 : 24] And he also made a whip and entered into the temple courts and drove out those who were selling their animals and the money changers, making money off of the pilgrims who were coming to make sacrifices to the Lord.

Well, that act stirred the anger of the religious leaders of the temple who challenged Jesus' authority to do such a thing. And then John introduces us to the man Nicodemus.

So he gives us his background information, his bio. And we learn that he belonged to the religious party of the Pharisees. And by now we know a bit about these fellows and what they believed.

He also says, and it's true as we saw, that many of the teachers of the law were Pharisees. And indeed that's true of Nicodemus.

In verse 10, Jesus says, You are Israel's teacher. He was one of the teachers of the law. Perhaps one of the top teachers. There's even the definite article, The teacher of Israel, as if he may have been the most well-known teacher in Israel.

[7 : 41] Furthermore, we're told that he's a member of the Jewish ruling council. This is the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel made up of the 70 top men in the country.

Nicodemus is one of those 70. And then we're told he came to Jesus at night. So he comes, clearly having an interest in learning more about Jesus and what he is teaching.

And his interest was stirred by the miraculous signs he was doing during the week of Passover.

Thinking, God must be with him or no man could do the things that he's been doing.

And so Nicodemus comes to Jesus, curious, but cautious. And that's probably why he came at night.

He's not wanting to be seen alone with him, as Israel's leaders were already offended by his claims and by his clearing out the temple the way he's done.

[8 : 46] The last verse of chapter 2 says of Jesus, He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

And then we meet, there was a man, Nicodemus. And because the Lord knows everything about Nicodemus, he cuts right to the chase with him, and out of love he says to him, pointing out his greatest spiritual need, the same need every one of us has, the need to be born again and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

He says, I tell you the truth, verse 3, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Now the kingdom of God is invisible.

You don't see it with the physical eye. It's the spiritual reign of God in the hearts of his people. He sets up his throne in the hearts of his people, and they are ruled by his will.

But that's an internal work in the heart, you see. It's not perceived with the eye like other kingdoms. There's no outward show of armies and territories and palaces and thrones.

[10 : 09] Rather, it's God's rule established in the heart. So apart from the new birth, Nicodemus will not be able to see the kingdom of God. He will not be able to perceive it, to understand it and its teaching.

And that's exactly what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2.14, that the natural man, that's how we come into this world by nature, man without the Holy Spirit, does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God.

Why? Because they're foolishness to him. They just write it off as folly. And he cannot understand them because they are discerned spiritually, not naturally.

Only by the Spirit of God can they be discerned. And that's why most of the world, even today, does not accept the Word of God. Jesus says they never will until they're born again of the Holy Spirit and enabled to understand, taught by the Spirit.

And sure enough, Nicodemus says, well, how can a man be born again when he's old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born. So you understand what's happening there.

[11:28] Jesus has said, without being born again, you cannot understand the teachings of God's kingdom to which Nicodemus says, I don't understand. How can this be?

Exactly. That's why you need to be born again, Nicodemus. So, after being introduced to the man, we now see his ignorance of essential truth.

He's ignorant of essential truths. He's completely befuddled by the necessity of the new birth. It's unheard of. It's outside the box of his Pharisaical religion.

And Jesus shows how damning his ignorance is by saying in verse 5, I tell you the truth. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he's born of water and of spirit.

Jesus is saying, Nicodemus, this is no unimportant matter. This is not a footnote matter that you can get by without reading. Not at all.

[12:32] There's no entrance into the kingdom of God without being born again. And he gives a little more truth about this new birth.

A little additional truth. This new birth, we see, is a work of God the Holy Spirit. To be born of the spirit. It's a spiritual birth then, not a physical one.

And it's a cleansing work as it's a birth of water and of spirit. And water and spirit are often joined because water is the symbol of cleansing. And when the spirit of God comes and gives new birth to a man or woman, boy or girl, he cleanses their heart of sin.

It's a cleansing birth. And then by that new birth, they can understand and enter the kingdom of God. So it's a supernatural birth that's needed, this being born of God.

It's not something you do yourself any more than your physical birth is something that you did yourself. No, the Pharisees' religion was all about what you do.

[13:41] You keep the commands and you'll get into heaven. But that's not what this new birth is. It's not your work at all. It's God the Spirit's work.

It's a supernatural work of God. A supernatural is saying, let there be light. And then out of darkness, suddenly light. Well, Jesus rebukes Nicodemus for not knowing about the necessity of the new birth for entrance into the kingdom.

Verse seven, you should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again. This should not surprise you, Nicodemus. This was in the Old Testament Bible that Nicodemus made a lifetime of studying.

And he missed it. Teacher that he was. Ezekiel spoke, for one, spoke of their need to get a new heart. To get a heart that had been circumcised from sin.

Cleaned from sin. And that God would give his people a new heart and put a new spirit in them. It was all there. Ezekiel 36, 26 and 27 and other places.

[14:53] Jesus goes on to talk about this work of the Spirit and said that there's mystery to it and there's sovereignty to it. Verse eight, the wind blows wherever it pleases.

You hear the sound of it, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it's going. So is everyone born by the Holy Spirit. Born by the Spirit. Oh, it's interesting that the word for wind and spirit is the same word both in Hebrew and in Greek.

So there's a choice that must be made by translators when they bump into that word. Is this a reference to wind or to spirit? And of course we see how tightly those two are brought together on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was given.

He came as a mighty rushing what? Wind. And so Jesus here uses wind then as a helpful teaching mechanism and a metaphor by which they can understand the work of the Spirit.

So kids, you don't see the wind, do you? The wind is invisible. But what do you see? Well, you see the effects of the wind, the leaves rustling or houses being flattened if it's a big enough wind.

[16:13] You don't see the wind, you see its effects. So it is with the Spirit of God. You don't control it.

You don't even know for sure where it's coming from or where it's going next. We've seen tornadoes hop around, haven't we? We don't know that.

And there's a sovereignty to the Spirit. So is everyone born of the Spirit. He works secretly within. You can't see Him giving new life to an individual. And He works sovereignly where and when He wills.

Indeed, James 1.18 says of God that He chose to give us birth. He is sovereign in the giving of this new birth.

[17:09] So you don't see the Holy Spirit in the new birth, but you do see its effects. You see the effects of the new birth. You can't miss it.

It's a new life. A new life of faith in the Lord Jesus. A new life of repenting of our old ways and learning and walking with Christ in His ways.

So have you been born again? Has the Spirit of God come to you since you were born physically and given you another birth spiritually? Spiritually. The Bible says we're all spiritual stillborns.

We come into this world spiritually dead. Dead toward God. His Word comes to us and it has no more effect than water on a duck's back.

It just rolls off. But when the Spirit comes and gives us new birth, suddenly what seemed like foolishness that I don't need to pay attention to became the most necessary thing in my life.

[18:15] I need to know this Savior. I need to know how I can be right with God. I want to be right with God and I know I'm not. He comes. Have you had that work of opening your eyes to your need of the Savior and showing you how He perfectly fits your need?

Has He changed your heart to want to be right with God? To want to have fellowship with God? Has He empowered you to repent and renounce that old way and given you a new desire to go God's way?

To hate what He hates and to love what He loves? Those are the evidences of a new birth that leaves you a new person in Christ.

Well, once again, Nicodemus shows his ignorance by saying, how can this be? None of it makes any sense to him.

Even as Jesus, the more he talks, the more befuddled he is. There's no place for such a truth in the Pharisees' religion.

[19:20] He's still lost. He's still dead in his sin. He's without this spiritual new birth and understanding to see his need for a new birth and to want it.

So once again, Jesus confronts his guilty ignorance. You know, no one will get serious with God until they see what a sinner they are. That's why Jesus is like a bulldog hanging on to his pant leg. You're guilty for your ignorance. You study. You make a life of studying the Bible and yet you're blind to this. You don't want it. You will not accept the teaching because you don't want it.

We saw it last week. The reason if you're here and you don't have Jesus as your savior, it's not because you want to be saved and he hasn't saved you. It's because you don't want Jesus. And so Jesus is after this sinner.

He's coming after him with love and so he says, again, you are Israel's teacher and you do not understand these things. You know, it's not a small thing to be the teacher of others.

[20:25] That's why James says not many should be teachers because we will receive the greater judgment. And these Pharisees will receive the greater judgment for claiming to be guides to heaven.

Follow me. And all the while leading as a blind man, leading other blind people, both falling into the ditch of hell.

Faulty pilots do not perish alone, but take others down with them. And so it is with faulty preachers and false teachers.

Nicodemus, you should be listening and learning from me and my disciples before teaching others. And that's what he says next.

Verses 11 to 13. I tell you the truth. We speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen.

[21:29] But still you, plural, you Pharisees and other leaders, you do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe.

Then how will you believe when I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man.

How are you going to ever know anything about heaven? I'm the only one that's come from heaven and I've come to teach you the way to heaven and you won't listen to me.

You will not believe. So we've seen the bio of Nicodemus, the facts of his life. We've seen, secondly, his great ignorance of the most important truths that any man or woman, boy or girl could ever face.

And now Jesus gives him the gospel in a nutshell. It's a beautiful thing to see Jesus giving the gospel to people, especially in the gospel of John.

[22 : 32] Here it's a religious Nicodemus. Turn a page in John chapter four and it's an immoral Samaritan woman and you know they both need the same thing, new birth and faith in Jesus Christ.

Well, here he is. He's going to give the gospel to Nicodemus, this self-righteous, proud Pharisee.

And what he does is he attaches a well-known event in Israel's history back in their time when they were coming out of Egypt and going toward the promised land.

It's about the snake on the pole. And that was a passage that was well-known. Nicodemus probably taught on it many times.

And Jesus takes that historical event and he uses it as a metaphor to illustrate the gospel. This is what he says in the gospel nutshell, verses 14 to 16.

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

[23 : 48] For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Numbers chapter 21, verses 4 to 9, records the event.

As I said, Israel's coming out of Egypt. They've made their way pretty much for the 40 years through the desert and now they're getting closer to the promised land. And this is what Moses records in Numbers 21.

They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way. They spoke against God and spoke against Moses and said, why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert?

As if that's all God had in mind for freeing them from bondage in Egypt. There's no bread, there's no water, and we detest this miserable food. That manna that God sent down six days a week.

We detest it. The Lord heard what they said and it goes on to say, the Lord sent venomous snakes among them. They bit the people and many Israelites died.

[25 : 00] And so the people came to Moses and said, we sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord that he will take the snakes away from us.

And so Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, make a snake, put it up on a pole, and anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.

So Moses made a bronze snake, put it up on a pole, and then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. So the poisonous snakes were on an assignment from their creator, go bite those complaining, blaspheming Israelites.

And that's exactly what they did. And people started dropping like flies. It was for their sins against God.

Complaining that God was not good and all along he had a murderous intent of leading them out into the desert to die. Well, this was their judgment.

[26 : 12] And then the only way to escape death was provided by God against whom they had sinned. Amazing grace, isn't it? And God's remedy was a bronze snake held up on a pole where the people who were bitten wherever they were in the camp could see that snake.

And so it was lifted up. And the response that brought healing was faith that looked away from anything in themselves away to that remedy that God set up in the midst of the camp.

And whoever looked lived. Even though they were bitten by the poisonous snakes and everybody else had died, those who looked lived.

lived. It's amazing. Historical account. Really happened. And Nicodemus, as I said, knew the event well. And then Jesus says that just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.

Notice the elements of the gospel clearly portrayed in this event. Our sins are all against God and have brought His punishment of death to us.

[27 : 34] Spiritual death, physical death, and the second death in the lake of fire, eternal hell. It is the wage that sin must bear.

Secondly, the only way of escape is provided by God Himself, just as in the wilderness.

forgiveness. It's God who out of amazing love sent His one and only Son, the only one that could save us.

And He sent Him to what? To be lifted up on a tree. To suffer instead of sinners who look to Him in faith and whosoever looks away from themselves and anything they've done and puts their trust in God's remedy in Jesus Christ shall not perish but have everlasting life.

That's what saving faith is. It's believing. It's trusting. It's putting the whole weight of your eternal soul upon what Jesus is doing over there.

You say, well, what's the connection between that snake on the pole there and my poison over here? It's the only remedy. What's the difference between my sin that has me in its clutches and I'm a slave to it and to the punishment that's coming when Jesus returns in wrath for those who have rejected Him?

[29 : 02] What's the difference? What's the connection between that and what Jesus did at Calvary? Everything. That's the only remedy for our sin. And saving faith is then resting, relying upon what Jesus has done for sinners in His life and His death and His resurrection.

And this faith is the fruit of the new birth. The new birth that enables us both to understand our need and understand the remedy being Jesus and then to enter in by faith in Jesus Christ into the kingdom of God.

So Jesus' gospel assaulted the whole foundation of Nicodemus' deeply held pharisaical religion that we've been studying for the last two months. Salvation from sin, eternal life is not a reward to be earned by your good deeds, Nicodemus, but a free gift paid in full by the Son of Man and received by faith alone in Christ alone.

His works, not mine, not yours. Well, that's the first snapshot, the first meeting. It's a night picture and there's Jesus and there's Nicodemus and they're having a chat.

He came curious and cautious. He went away lost in unbelief but with his head spinning and a lot to chew on. He's heard things that night that he'd never heard before.

[30 : 34] His core beliefs were challenged, his pride undermined by his ignorance of what Jesus says is essential if you're ever to enter the kingdom of God. Well, John gives us a second snapshot.

Let's quickly turn over to John chapter 7. Jesus is back in Jerusalem. This time it's the Feast of Tabernacles and by now the Pharisees' opinion and the leader's opinion of Jesus has hardened into outright persecution.

Now they're trying hard to kill Jesus. This is just a few chapters later in John 7 but they've already made up their minds about him. He's breaking the Sabbath because he heals on it and he's calling God his Father making himself equal with God.

He's a blasphemer. So halfway through the feast the week of the feast Jesus goes into the temple courts and was teaching the crowds and we're told that they marveled at his words and his miracles and yet the crowd was divided in their opinion of Jesus.

Some said he is the Messiah when Messiah comes will he do more miraculous signs than this man whereas others said no this is not the Messiah and they had their reasons for doubting.

[31 : 50] Then we're told in verse 32 the Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things back and forth about him about Jesus and then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

Jesus had stood up and cried 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. Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees. Now Nicodemus is there. He'll show up in a moment. So these temple guards come back to the chief priests and the Pharisees.

Why didn't you bring him in? They asked and the guards replied no one ever spoke like this man does. You mean he's deceived you also?

The Pharisees retorted. Has any of the rulers of the Pharisees or the Pharisees believed in him? No. But this mob that knows nothing of the law there's a curse on them.

[32 : 56] Up to this point Nicodemus has been silent but he too had come under the spell of Jesus' words. These words like no one ever spoke. He understands why these guards came back empty handed.

And so he doesn't say much he just raises a question about an important procedural matter in their law. And we see it in verses 50 and 51. 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?

You know that's the basis for our law in the United States that a man is considered innocent until he's tried and proven guilty. So Nicodemus is asking don't we have the cart before the horse here? We're condemning him before we've hurt him. Well he was right but their hatred of Jesus had no concern for procedural matters at this point.

They just want him dead and silenced. So they dodged his question by raising another. They replied to Nicodemus you're from Galilee too look into it you'll find out that a prophet perhaps the prophet does not come out of Galilee.

[34 : 09] So they had the reasons for rejecting him. Well that's the second snapshot of Nicodemus. We don't know how many times Nicodemus had heard Jesus teaching and preaching.

The Pharisees were never far from wherever Jesus was. We're not told the condition of his heart at this point. If he believes in Jesus the spokesman of the Pharisees knows nothing of it.

When he asked has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No. And Nicodemus was both one of the 70 rulers as well as a Pharisee.

So he knows nothing of his belief in Jesus but we do see Nicodemus rather shy defense of Jesus here hidden under this important procedural matter of their law.

And so at the least he's out of step with the greater part of the Pharisees concerning Jesus. They'd already condemned him and in their minds they are trying hard to kill him.

[35 : 08] It's interesting that in John chapter 12 42 and 43 after speaking about the Jews stubborn unbelief John goes on to say yet at the same time though most of the Jews did not believe yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him but because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue for they loved the praise from men more than praise from God.

And I wonder if Nicodemus is in that group convinced that Jesus is the Messiah or at least becoming convinced and yet not willing to count the cost to identify with him not willing to lose his life that he might gain it not willing to come out of the shadows and confess his faith in the Lord Jesus because he still loves the praise for men his fellow Pharisees his fellow Sanhedrin loves the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Nicodemus surely had a lot to lose he's a Pharisee he is a member of the Sanhedrin he's a highly respected teacher in Israel he could lose it all if he came out as a follower of the despised and rejected Jesus of Nazareth.

So we're taken then to the third snapshot. It's found at the end of John's book in chapter 19 and Jesus now is back in Jerusalem and it is the feast of Passover once again.

Actually he's a little outside of Jerusalem on a hill called Golgotha and he's hanging on a Roman cross between two condemned criminals and his hands are no longer touching and healing the multitudes.

[36 : 52] They're now stretched out and nailed to a rack of torture. His mouth is no longer speaking words of life as they had done throughout his ministry.

Because you see he's dead. He's dead. He's a corpse. And it's here at the cross of a dead Jesus. His body hanging there that we meet Nicodemus for the third time. That's the snapshot. Get it in your mind. Jesus dead. Nicodemus at the cross.

It's been three years since his initial meeting with Jesus at night. And he's with another member of the Sanhedrin. There's another guy on the 70 court of 70.

And his name's Joseph of Arimathea. And we're told he's one of those followers of Jesus who had kept it secret because of his fear of the Jews. We're told in Luke's gospel that this Joseph was a good and a righteous man who had not consented to the judgment of the Sanhedrin to condemn Jesus to death.

[37 : 58] And it seems by now that Nicodemus too had become a secret follower of Jesus. But had been afraid to openly confess him. So here they are found together, the birds of a feather.

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph had gone to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus to bury him. And so he came to get the body of Jesus.

And this is where John writes in verse 39, chapter 19. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. You might need to be reminded of that.

It's chapter 19. That was John chapter 3. And Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes about 75 pounds and taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it with spices and strips of linen and then laid them in Joseph's tomb nearby.

Both of them now clearly identifying with the Lord Jesus and giving him an honorable burial that he is deserving of. What was it that brought Nicodemus, the Pharisee, out of the shadows of secrecy? [39 : 10] I believe he never forgot that night interview with Jesus three years earlier when the Lord Jesus had spoken those life-giving words to him that just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that whoever believes in him might have eternal life for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

What is it that Nicodemus now sees at Golgotha? He sees the Son of Man lifted up, hanging on a cross, and now having been born again, he understands why, and he accepts the truth that Jesus had spoken and what it all meant for him, that the one lifted up on this middle cross is none other than God's one and only Son.

Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal God, and he's been provided by God's own love as the only way of escape, to escape the punishment that our sins deserve, our sins against God, and that this sinless Jesus suffered there all that we sinners had coming for our sins, and whoever looks away from self and puts their trust in Jesus will not perish but have everlasting life.

And Nicodemus looked and he lived. Did he suffer all of that for me? Then how can I live another day for myself?

And so this proud self-righteous Pharisee who had been, who had given so much of his life to leading other people to hell while he was telling them he's leading them to heaven, found mercy in a crucified Messiah.

[41 : 11] He looked in faith and he lived. And so out he comes into the open, melted by the wonder of God's love and grace in Jesus for him, a poor sinner.

No more secrecy to his faith. No more veiled reference of defense as in chapter 7. No more confusion about what does all this mean?

He comes out boldly and unashamed and he nails his colors to the mast. I'm a follower of the despised and rejected Jesus of Nazareth. He's my Lord and Savior.

I'm his and he's mine forever and forever. From now on I'll live for him who died for me. But Nicodemus, what about the cost?

Your job as a respected teacher, your place of honor on the Sanhedrin, the praises of your fellow Pharisees, the threat of being cast out of the synagogue in all social life in Israel as a pariah.

[42 : 17] Now, it means nothing to him now. And everything before, enough to not come out for Jesus. Now it means nothing.

You can take it all. Just give me Jesus. Having him, I have all I need. I have all I want. Having his praise makes the praise of man not non-essential, of no consequence to me.

Brothers and sisters, we hear all around us of the courage of sinners, don't we? Coming out to own their perversion. And they're marveled at for their courage.

Oh, then let us have sufficient courage to openly own our Savior and Lord. They do it to own their sin. We do it to honor and own our Savior from sin.

Did he die the shameful and painful death of the cross outside the city gate to make us holy by his own blood? Hebrews 13 says, then let us go to him outside the gates, outside of the camp.

[43 : 30] Bearing the disgrace he bore. That was Nicodemus. He's now willing to go out to Jesus and to bear the disgrace of his master. Better to be disgraced with him than to be honored without him.

I think it was Luther that said, I'd rather be in hell with Jesus than to be in heaven without him. Now that has some problems, but you get his heart. I mean, heaven is the presence of Jesus.

Hell is the absence of Jesus. But you see his heart, and that was Nicodemus. His heart is moved.

Jesus, and shall it ever be a mortal man ashamed of thee, ashamed of thee whom angels praise, whose glory shine through endless days, ashamed of Jesus, that dear friend on whom my hopes of heaven depend.

Know when I blush, be this my shame, that I no more revere his name. It really is a marvelous faith, isn't it? Amazing what the Spirit of God worked in this man.

Nicodemus stands up for Jesus when Jesus' own disciples, Peter, James, well, John's there at the cross, but they all deserted him and fled. Nicodemus is standing up for his master now.

[44 : 52] He stands up for Jesus when he had everything to lose for doing so. You know, God always has a people who live to the honor of his son in a world that despises and rejects him.

Some of you are those. Though may we be challenged to stand up for Jesus in our day. Who was lifted up. To draw us to him.

He said it earlier in John 12, 32, Jesus said, and I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me. He was speaking of the Gentiles who had come to have a word with Jesus. No longer will it only be the Jews that he's calling.

No, now all men, whatever their background, Jew, Gentile, he will draw them to himself. This is the attraction of the old rugged cross.

This is that divine magnet of Christ and him crucified for sinners by which the Holy Spirit woos and wins and draws people to this humble savior to trust in him, to worship and adore him, then to rise up and to go and to serve him.

[46 : 02] Millions have been drawn to Christ and him crucified. Even Nicodemus comes to faith in Christ.

You know, it will be a great day to sit down with Nicodemus someday and say, well, fill me in. We had three snapshots of your life, but fill me in with the blanks, will you? What were you thinking when you left Jesus that first night?

After he exposed your ignorance about the gospel. And when were you convinced that he was indeed the Messiah? And please, please, can you in any way put into words what your heart felt when you looked at him lifted up on the cross for you?

And what did you do when three days later you learned that Jesus walked out of those swaddling clothes that you wrapped him in with spices? And what happened after that?

Tell us more of your life in Christ. Well, what of the Pharisees? What happened to you? Heaven will have so many interesting testimonies to hear of the wonderful saving grace of Jesus.

[47 : 15] But what about you? Will you be there in heaven? Will you be there in the eternal kingdom of God? Are you trusting in what Jesus has done for sinners? Are you renouncing and confessing your old way of life of being content to live without Jesus?

To not pay any cost? Just to live for yourself? Are you renouncing that? Are you trusting in what Jesus has done and then walking with him? Have you identified publicly with him in the waters of baptism?

Saying, I'm his disciple. He's my savior. I'm unashamed to identify myself as his follower. What do you have to lose by coming out in the open for Jesus?

Maybe a few bad friends and a few pleasures of sin for a season. But you have everything to gain. Christ himself and that forever. What a sweet word is that word?

Whoever, whoever believes in him. You Jew, Gentile, Sadducee, Pharisee, religious, non-religious. Whoever believes in him shall not perish.

[48 : 25] That's you, my friend. None are excluded except those who exclude themselves by refusing to take Christ as their Lord and Savior. Take him. Take him this moment. Call out to him in prayer.

With man, salvation is indeed impossible. With God, yes, even salvation of a Pharisee is possible. Your salvation is possible.

Come to him. Hallelujah, what a savior. It's number 432. We're going to stand and sing together. 432. 432. Jesus, what a friend for sinners.

Let's stand and we're going to sing one, two and five. One, two and five. 432. Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus.

Lord Jesus, thank you for being lifted up for us on the cross. Holy Spirit, thank you for giving us a new birth, opening our eyes and cleansing our hearts that we might prize this Jesus and his salvation and come in faith to him.

[49 : 44] Oh, forgive us that ever we would hide our lamp under a bushel and be ashamed of him who died for us. Forgive us and help us.

Holy Spirit, have you not come to make us courageous and to give us a boldness beyond our own? And so may you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be glorified in us and through us and unto the salvation of more who are outside of Christ.

We ask in his name, amen.