

The One-Soul Audience —Nicodemus

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”
(John 3:3).

“Consider the incident that Christ presents before Nicodemus in referring to the uplifted serpent.”—*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 149.

Suggested Reading: *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 167–177.

1. A PRIVATE INTERVIEW

- a. After Nicodemus heard Jesus, he decided to talk with Him. Who was Nicodemus—and why did he come at night? John 3:1, 2 (first part).
-
-

“Since hearing Jesus, Nicodemus had anxiously studied the prophecies relating to the Messiah. . . . He beheld the wonderful manifestation of divine power; he saw the Saviour receiving the poor and healing the sick; he saw their looks of joy and heard their words of praise; and he could not doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was the Sent of God.

“He greatly desired an interview with Jesus but shrank from seeking Him openly. It would be too humiliating for a ruler of the Jews to acknowledge himself in sympathy with a teacher as yet so little known. And should his visit come to the knowledge of the Sanhedrin, it would draw upon him their scorn and denunciation. He resolved upon a secret interview, excusing this on the ground that if he were to go openly, others might follow his example. Learning by special inquiry the Saviour’s place of retirement in the Mount of Olives, he waited until the city was hushed in slumber, and then sought Him.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 168.

“Nicodemus had witnessed the miracle of Christ, and he came to the Master by night, for he had not the moral courage to approach him openly, since this would excite the criticisms of the priests and Pharisees.”—*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1311.

- a. John 3:1-2 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2 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. (first part).

2. No Theological Discussion, But a Regeneration

- a. As soon as Nicodemus found Jesus in His place of retirement, what did he say to Him? John 3:2 (second part).
-
-

“Nicodemus had come to the Lord thinking to enter into a discussion with Him, but Jesus laid bare the foundation principles of truth. He said to Nicodemus, It is not theoretical knowledge you need so much as spiritual regeneration. You need not to have your curiosity satisfied, but to have a new heart. You must receive a new life from above before you can appreciate heavenly things. Until this change takes place, making all things new, it will result in no saving good for you to discuss with Me My authority or My mission.

“Nicodemus had heard the preaching of John the Baptist concerning repentance and baptism, and pointing the people to One who should baptize with the Holy Spirit. He himself had felt that there was a lack of spirituality among the Jews, that, to a great degree, they were controlled by bigotry and worldly ambition. He had hoped for a better state of things at the Messiah’s coming. Yet the heart-searching message of the Baptist had failed to work in him conviction of sin. He was a strict Pharisee, and prided himself on his good works. He was widely esteemed for his benevolence and his liberality in sustaining the temple service, and he felt secure of the favor of God.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 171.

- a. John 3:2 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. (second part).

2. No Theological Discussion, But a Regeneration

- b. Since the Lord realized that Nicodemus didn't need a theological discussion but a regeneration, with what answer did Jesus startle him? John 3:3.
-
-

“The figure of the new birth, which Jesus had used, was not wholly unfamiliar to Nicodemus. Converts from heathenism to the faith of Israel were often compared to children just born. Therefore he must have perceived that the words of Christ were not to be taken in a literal sense. But by virtue of his birth as an Israelite he regarded himself as sure of a place in the kingdom of God. He felt that he needed no change. Hence his surprise at the Saviour's words.”—Ibid.

- b. John 3:3 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.

3. The Work of the Holy Spirit on the Heart

- a. With what ironical question did Nicodemus try to dismiss Christ's words? John 3:4.

- a. John 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

3. The Work of the Holy Spirit on the Heart

- b. Ignoring Nicodemus' useless argument, how did Jesus emphasize His point? John 3:5-7.
-
-

“By nature the heart is evil, and ‘who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one’ (Job 14:4). No human invention can find a remedy for the sinning soul. ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ ‘Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies’ (Romans 8:7; Matthew 15:19). The fountain of the heart must be purified before the streams can become pure. He who is trying to reach heaven by his own works in keeping the law is attempting an impossibility. There is no safety for one who has merely a legal religion, a form of godliness. The Christian’s life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 172.

- b. John 3:5-7 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

3. The Work of the Holy Spirit on the Heart

c. How did Jesus illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit? John 3:8.

“The wind is heard among the branches of the trees, rustling the leaves and flowers; yet it is invisible, and no man knows whence it comes or whither it goes. So with the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. It can no more be explained than can the movements of the wind. A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or to trace all the circumstances in the process of conversion; but this does not prove him to be unconverted. By an agency as unseen as the wind, Christ is constantly working upon the heart. Little by little, perhaps unconsciously to the receiver, impressions are made that tend to draw the soul to Christ. These may be received through meditating upon Him, through reading the Scriptures, or through hearing the word from the living preacher.”—Ibid.

c. John 3:8 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.

4. "I Will Put My a Spirit Within You"

- a. Nicodemus was impressed by the words of Jesus, which he did not fully understand. What did he then ask? John 3:9. What did Jesus answer? Verases 10–13.
-
-

“The Jews whom Jesus had driven from the temple claimed to be children of Abraham, but they fled from the Saviour’s presence because they could not endure the glory of God which was manifested in Him. Thus they gave evidence that they were not fitted by the grace of God to participate in the sacred services of the temple. They were zealous to maintain an appearance of holiness, but they neglected holiness of heart. While they were sticklers for the letter of the law, they were constantly violating its spirit. Their great need was that very change which Christ had been explaining to Nicodemus—a new moral birth, a cleansing from sin, and a renewing of knowledge and holiness.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 173, 174.

- a. John 3:9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

John 3:10-13 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

4. "I Will Put My a Spirit Within You"

- b. What scriptures did Nicodemus now begin to understand? Psalm 51:10; Isaiah 64:6; Ezekiel 36:26, 27.
-
-

"[Isaiah 64:6; Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26, 27 quoted.] Nicodemus had read these scriptures with a clouded mind; but he now began to comprehend their meaning. He saw that the most rigid obedience to the mere letter of the law as applied to the outward life could entitle no man to enter the kingdom of heaven. In the estimation of men, his life had been just and honorable; but in the presence of Christ he felt that his heart was unclean and his life unholy.

"Nicodemus was being drawn to Christ. As the Saviour explained to him concerning the new birth, he longed to have this change wrought in himself."—*Ibid.*, p. 174.

b. Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

4. "I Will Put My a Spirit Within You"

- c. By what symbol did Christ make plain His mission to Nicodemus?
John 3:14–16.
-
-

c. John 3:14-16 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 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.

5. A New Life

- a. As Nicodemus wanted to know by what means the new birth could be accomplished, what did Jesus say? John 3:17–21.
-

“The symbol of the uplifted serpent made plain to [Nicodemus] the Saviour’s mission. When the people of Israel were dying from the sting of the fiery serpents, God directed Moses to make a serpent of brass and place it on high in the midst of the congregation. Then the word was sounded throughout the encampment that all who would look upon the serpent should live. The people well knew that in itself the serpent had no power to help them. It was a symbol of Christ. As the image made in the likeness of the destroying serpents was lifted up for their healing, so One made ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ was to be their Redeemer (Romans 8:3). Many of the Israelites regarded the sacrificial service as having in itself virtue to set them free from sin. God desired to teach them that it had no more value than that serpent of brass. It was to lead their minds to the Saviour. Whether for the healing of their wounds or the pardon of their sins, they could do nothing for themselves but show their faith in the Gift of God. They were to look and live. . . .

“The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour. Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 174–176.

a. John 3:17-21 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

5. A New Life

b. How are we saved? Titus 3:4–6.

b. Titus 3:4-6 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, 5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is needed by many people who have a desire to discuss religion?
2. How did Jesus focus on Nicodemus' need rather than on his words?
3. Why did Christ use the wind to illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit?
4. What symbol did Christ use to explain His mission to Nicodemus?
5. How did Jesus explain to Nicodemus the mystery of a new birth?