

## **A MAN WHO VISITED THE LORD**

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Lessons: *John 3*

In the darkness of the night a man of importance, a ruler of the people, came to talk to the Lord.

Why would an important person come in the nighttime? Being important, he might be afraid of what other important people thought, and he might lose his high position. Do you think that while the Lord was in the world there were chief rulers who started to take notice of the things the Lord did and said and who started to believe in Him? Listen to what is said in a later chapter of the Gospel of John:

Among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (*John 12:43*).

Don't you know what it is like to believe something is wrong, but to feel afraid to say anything about it, because of fear of other people calling you names? Yes, there were men of high rank who believed in the Lord, but they were afraid they would lose position if they openly said so.

If someone is shy or afraid at some time in life, is that the end of the story? No. And that is why this story of the man named Nicodemus is useful for us to know. This man comes into the story of the Word just three times. This coming to the Lord at night is the first time, and the other two times it is mentioned that he had first come to the Lord in the nighttime.

At the end of the story, when the Lord was crucified, notice what is said of this man. "And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh..." (*John 19: 39*). Together with Joseph of Arimathea, he put the Lord's body into a sepulchre, not at all afraid of what others would say or think.

The other time he comes into the story is recorded at the end of *John 7*. It is a great story. As you think of it, make sure you notice what a difference was made by the great courage of a man named Nicodemus. More than two years had passed since Nicodemus had come to speak to the Lord in the night. The worst of the leaders by this time were so against the Lord that they sent officers to arrest Him. And the whole council of leaders sat waiting for the officers to bring the Lord under arrest.

But when the officers returned, they did not have the Lord with them. “Why have you not brought Him?” the leaders demanded. The officers gave an answer, and the tone of voice in which it was given must have been very final:

“Never man ever spoke like this Man” (*John 7: 46*).

Angry with the officers, they said, “Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?” (Little did they know at that instant that one of the rulers sitting with them *did* believe, but they would know it in just a moment.)

They went on to say that the common people were stupid for believing in the Lord. They said, “But this crowd who does not know the law is accursed.” And it is right at that point that Nicodemus spoke. By mentioning the law, they were giving the impression that the Lord had broken the law. But they themselves had been trying to arrest the Lord without cause. And so we read, “Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, ‘Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?’”

This made them upset, and they all went home. “And everyone went to his own house” (*John 7: 53*).

Isn't it amazing what a simple question can do? Suppose a group of children or young people are making life miserable for some one person they are picking on. Somewhere in their hearts they know it is not fair for a group of people to gang up on one person or tease one person. But no one has the courage to put that into words. If one single person asks, “Is this really fair, all of us picking on this person?” it can change the whole mood. Maybe everyone will lose interest in this unkind enterprise and will return to their own business.

What about in a conversation when a group is talking about someone who is not present? The more they talk, the more uncomplimentary things they bring up about this person. One says, “Oh, he is so dumb.” Another says, “He is such a pain.” And so on. What if one person in that group just said, “Is he really so very hopeless a person that we can all talk as if we were high above him?” That is only a question, but it can have a lot of power. Well, don't forget the example of Nicodemus.

This gives you an idea of the whole story of Nicodemus as we concentrate on chapter 3 of the Gospel of John, that most interesting place in which a man comes to the Lord in the darkness of the night. It is said at the beginning of the Gospel of John: “In Him was life and the life was the light of man. And the light shines in the darkness...” (*John 1: 4, 5*). Nicodemus came to the “Light of the World” and talked with Him.

The Lord told him, “You must be born again.” Nicodemus greatly marveled at this saying, but the Lord said, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be

born again.” The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (*John* 3: 7, 8).

There are wonders of the Lord’s Providence working secretly. There are wonders of regeneration in which secretly the Lord makes a person new and prepares him for heaven. The Lord had many things to tell people at that time, but they could not yet understand—not even a ruler like Nicodemus. “If I have told you earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (*John* 3: 12).

Those “heavenly things” might be called secrets of heaven or “arcana celestia.” We can always learn a little more about them, and we will learn if we come to the Lord out of our darkness, for “he who does the truth, comes to the light” (verse 21).