

# For God So Loves Us, Every Step on the Way

## John 3:1-17

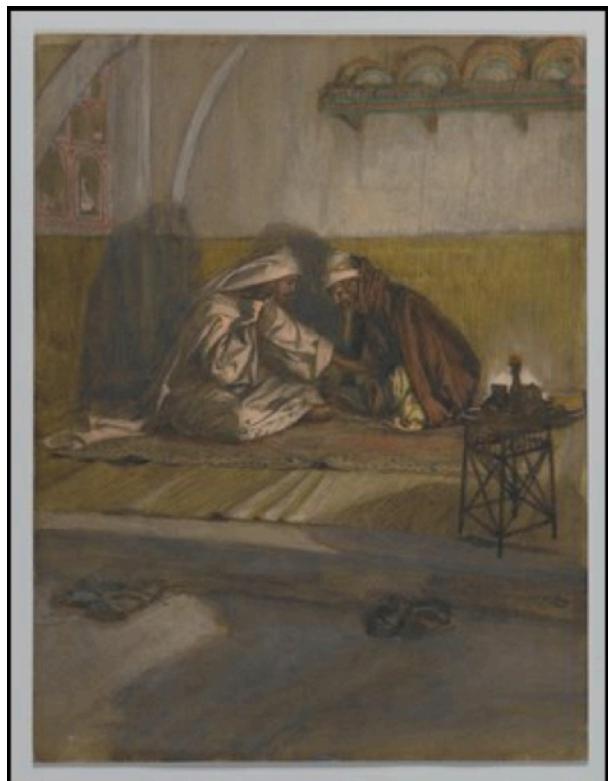
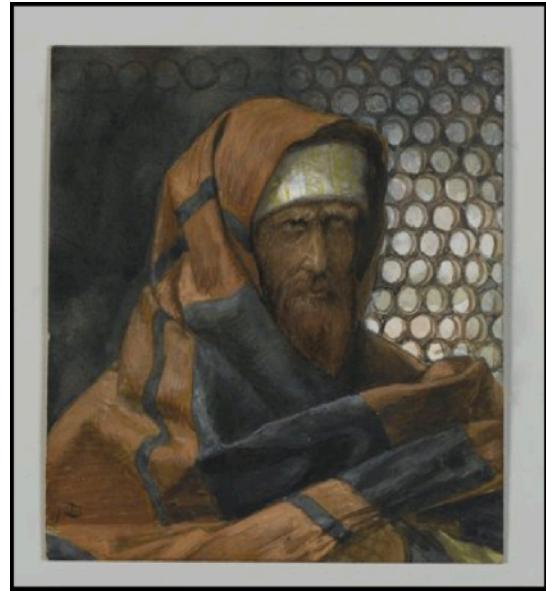
Let me introduce you to my friend Nic. Well, it's actually Nicodemus. And primarily, I want to introduce Nic to you to help you in your new life, to study God's Word, to receive his good news, and to share it.

God introduces us all to Nicodemus today in John 3, doesn't he.

You've probably heard of him. His resume reads like this...

Nicodemus is a member of the Jewish Ruling Council, a leading Jew, a member of the Sanhedrin, the powerful religious body in Israel.

He's a Pharisee. The Sanhedrin was a council of mainly Sadducee leaders, sources tell us, and had 71 members. Note that a major difference between Sadducees and Pharisees was the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, whilst the Pharisees did.



The Pharisees were focused the Torah, the Law, and this tells us something of Nicodemus, too.

The Sanhedrin was a powerful body. It produced and enacted legislation and was a judicial court, and we'll come to witness the Sanhedrin as a judicial court when we journey with our Lord closer to the cross of Good Friday, won't we!

But the Sanhedrin was essentially a religious body. The High Priest its president. It met in Jerusalem.

It's in Jerusalem where we meet Jesus in John 3, today.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. What's going on?

Well, for a rabbi, a teacher such as Nicodemus, night time is the time to study... like a good Year 12 or university student for example. The Pharisees studied the Scriptures by night. So we meet this Nicodemus, a leader of the Jewish people, a religious teacher and student.

And he comes to Jesus to study the Scriptures with his fellow rabbi.

As we meet Nicodemus, we can deduce that he's come to Jesus to learn; he's come with a desire and willingness to know and to do God's will.

He's a Jewish religious leader, an elder... *but he does not yet understand.*

A vital question for the Pharisees was "How and when will we see the kingdom of God?" The well-documented answer among the Jews was that the coming of God's rule is hastened by obedience to his law.

But Jesus has a new revelation for Nicodemus and for the world. "Truly, truly I say..."

One must be born anew. A new life! The birth is from above because it is produced by the Spirit of God and made possible by the Son who comes from above... from the Father.

Jesus teaches: Its not by keeping the law, but by being born again... being born anew, and Jesus points Nicodemus already to the cross.

Being born anew means being in a relationship of trust with Jesus. The Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of people to look to Jesus in faith.

As readers and hearers of John's gospel, we today would not be surprised by this. In chapter 1 of John's gospel, the verses we might hear every Christmas Day service include these words:

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

*John 1:11-13*

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John 1:12-13

Nicodemus does not yet understand, does he?

"What! How can an old person be born again?" And of course, we today know that Jesus is not talking of physical/biological birth, but new birth by the Spirit.

Jesus again says, "Very truly I say" (let's sit up and take pay careful attention):

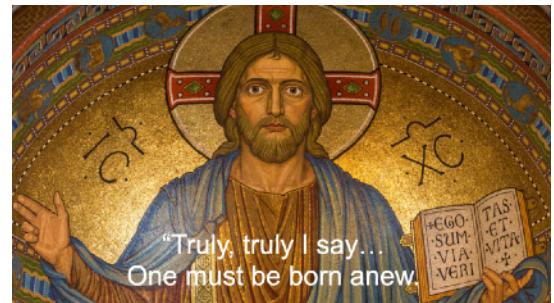
Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the

Spirit. 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."

*John 1:5-8*

Unless you are born of water and the Spirit. The new birth Jesus speaks of here is not one which obtained by one's own powers, but it is only — and can only be — a gift from God. It is the gift of the Spirit who works faith in the hearts of people, bringing them, bringing us, into relationship with Jesus, and receiving his promises in faith. Being brought into relationship with Jesus. That's the job of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says. And we know that in baptism, that is the gift.

That's the work of the Spirit in you, and the work of the Spirit through you and me. How?



By receiving and then pointing others to the one we know so well through John 3:16-17:

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.

John 3:16-17

Do you know those words? Do you know those verses? Study them. Learn them, if you learn no other. Know them, and live them by heart. Share them in your relationships with others, in your words, in your love and care, in your actions.

Just as the people of the Old Testament Israel looked up in faith to the snake lifted up, in order to be saved from a plague of snakes, so all who look in faith to the one lifted up on the cross will be saved.

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.



John 3:16-17

It's not rocket science, is it? But you and I know, from our own lives, that this is not easy for us. We so often struggle to witness to someone we know and love who doesn't seem to understand or want to understand.

How much does Nicodemus understand, and how worried is Jesus about this? Jesus does not go chasing Nicodemus into the night. But he will meet him again.

Nicodemus disappears from the scene now, but he will return two times in our reading of John's gospel (and please learn from Nicodemus and study the Scriptures perhaps at night with him with Jesus this Lent). The second time we will meet him is in John 7 when Nicodemus defends Jesus when other Pharisees and the Chief Priests want to arrest Jesus. It seems that Nicodemus is learning. He's learning who Jesus is.

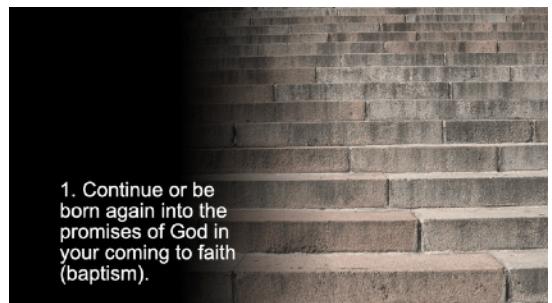
And then we'll meet Nicodemus amazingly at the cross with Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus as together they take the body of the crucified Jesus to be buried. John is telling us that this Nicodemus too has been born again into living faith. The flow of grace from side of Jesus and the Spirit has brought the one we might least expect to faith. As Jesus has made the steps to the cross, Nicodemus has been on steps of the journey to faith. And that's often the way it is as we witness to Jesus on the cross.

So be encouraged in your witness.

1. Continue or be born again into the promises of God in your coming to faith, as begun in your baptism.
2. Witness clearly of this, in your love and care for others, and don't give up. I think especially, here today, of the people in your life whom you love but who don't know the joy of the relationship of faith with the one lifted up on the cross for them and for all. Like Nicodemus, our life of faith is one of many steps in growing to know Jesus fully as our Lord and Saviour. And so too our witness. We may think that we have tried hard for many years to share the gospel with someone we know... maybe



2. Witness clearly of this in your love and care for others and don't give up.



1. Continue or be born again into the promises of God in your coming to faith (baptism).

someone we love... maybe someone we love very much; and they haven't responded in the way we want or expect. Keep on witnessing in love, for Jesus is with you.

3. Learn from Nicodemus, who came from the group who rejected Jesus outright, and yet who by his encounter with Jesus for him in word and deed, was born anew by the Spirit and the grace which flowed from Jesus' side.

Don't lose heart. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Place your life in his hands, and continue to learn who Jesus is for you, and for your witness to others that "God so loved them that he sent Jesus, that they would not die but have eternal life." Amen.



3. Learn from Nicodemus.

*Video of the service including the above address: [https://youtu.be/\\_0Pj8j0X0Aw](https://youtu.be/_0Pj8j0X0Aw)*