

A Confused Teacher

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0:00] Good morning everyone. My name is Esther and I'm going to be reading from the Old Testament this morning. So if you have a Bible, please join me in Ezekiel chapter 36 and verse 24.

For I will take you out of the nations. I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors. You will be my people and I will be your God.

Morning, Brunsfield. Today's reading is from John chapter 3, verses 1 to 15.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, Rabbi, we know you're a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the signs you're doing if God was not with him.

[1:12] Jesus replied, Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. How can someone be born when they are old? Nicodemus asked. Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born.

Jesus answered, Verily I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. The flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to the 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 you do not understand these things?

Verily, truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen. But still we people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe.

[2:15] How then do you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who comes from heaven, the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.

That everyone we believe may have eternal life in him. Let us pray for Graham as he shares God's word with us this morning. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word that we have read this morning.

The Bible reveals how much you love us through the life, death and resurrection of your Son Jesus. We ask you to bless Graham as he shares your message with us today.

May we all hear your voice speaking to us through Graham. In Jesus' name, Amen. Well, great to have you with us today, folks.

Let me encourage you to grab a Bible and come with me to John chapter 3. Today we're going to see Jesus in a one-on-one conversation with this man that we meet in chapter 3 called Nicodemus.

[3:18] And I guess the one thing that we need to understand as we are introduced to Nicodemus is that he's the kind of man who we would call an odds-on favourite.

Right? He's an odds-on favourite. I don't know if you've heard that phrase before or used that phrase before. We often use it in our culture, don't we? When we talk about people who we think are most likely to win something.

So, I don't know whether it's the best film director at the Oscars or best in show at Crufts or top goal scorer in the Premier League. All these things have an odds-on favourite.

And Nicodemus is another one of those. He's an odds-on favourite. And so the question then becomes, he's the favourite for what? I mean, is he up for a Grammy or something? No. This

conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, if you've got the text there, it centres around verse 15.

This thing that Jesus calls eternal life. Right? And we find Jesus all the way through Joan's Gospel using this repeated phrase and making this repeated claim that he has come that we may have eternal life.

[4 : 36] And now what does that mean? Well, break it down. Eternal. Talking about quantity, length. Right? Right? That the life that Jesus offers, the one that never ends, that eternal life that is given to us from the moment that we receive Jesus, right through it goes after death into forever.

Except then it will be perfected and amplified because we will know it and experience it in God's new creation. Eternal and life.

Talking about quantity. Quality, rather. Quality, rather. You know, the kind that deeply satisfies the hungry, the thirsty and the restless human soul.

Stemming from our knowledge of and enjoyment of our Creator God who exists as a glorious three-in-one community of love. Jesus is talking about eternal life. Jesus is talking about eternal life. And in our world right now where we're bombarded, aren't we, with statistics every day of death. And we know and we see in the world people suffering with pain and people having questions.

[5 : 56] In our world, those two words, eternal life, should feel like a warm shower when you've just come in from a freezing wet run.

Right? As C.S. Lewis once said too, often we are like children who are content, we're happy making mud pies in the dirt. To stop and contemplate what's on offer of a holiday at the beach.

Eternal life. Right? Wonderful two words. Now, here's a question. Why is this man, Nicodemus, the odds-on favourite to get it? And I guess the answer is because this man in this day, Nicodemus, owns, quite frankly, a spiritual CV to die for.

I mean, his credentials here are simply outstanding. Look with me at verse 1. This guy is an Orthodox Jew. Right? Great start in this day.

And he's part of this devout group called the Pharisees who are deeply committed to external purity, legal observance and scripture knowledge which is unmatched.

[7 : 09] And Nicodemus is part of the religious ruling council of the day as well called the Sanhedrin. So, you bring that all together, this man holds in his hands what I guess we would call today the equivalent of a religious royal flush.

Right? You are just not touching this guy when it comes to his religious CV. We're not beating him. And here's the point. The point is that if you'd asked anyone who was around at the time, who is the odds-on favourite to get eternal life?

Every single person is pointing squarely at this guy. It's him. And the odds-on favourite goes to see Jesus.

Right? We pick up this conversation here. He goes to see him at night, do you notice? That's probably a double meaning there in that word night. It's just the time of day that he went. Probably, I'd imagine, to avoid being seen in public coming to see Jesus.

Which maybe tells us a little bit about this man. He's genuine. He wanted to know what the commotion was all about. He wanted to meet this man for himself.

[8 : 19] He's genuinely intrigued. And maybe that's you here today as you watch this. As you hear about Jesus. Nicodemus has clearly heard about the signs. And we get that at the end of chapter 2.

The signs that Jesus is doing. Which is attracting quite the crowd. And maybe he's thinking to himself. Maybe it's time that I met this guy. And you know, I sussed him out. Maybe I can learn a little bit from him.

Maybe he can learn a little bit from me. And he can learn how we do things around here. I mean, who knows? Maybe I can persuade him to join our team. Imagine that. Jesus.

Imagine unveiling Jesus as our new summer signing. What a coop that would be. He's coming at night. Another meaning of that.

Is it's an indication of the true state of this man's heart before God. Spiritually speaking. What would we say today? That the lights might be on.

[9 : 17] But there ain't nobody hoping. He's in the dark. He's coming to Jesus at night. Doesn't understand. And you see Jesus here in this conversation.

Remember the man who knows. Again, we get this at the end of chapter 2. The man who knows the human heart. Knows that this is this man's greatest need.

And so this conversation develops between these two men. You see Nicodemus. He makes his play. Verse 2. It's a very polite play. Rabbi. Nicodemus makes his play.

And in turn, Jesus responds. And he challenges. And he flips the entire way that Nicodemus understands himself.

And understands life completely on its head. Because Jesus says two things to Nicodemus about eternal life. Firstly, Nicodemus, there's nothing you can do to earn it.

[10:19] You must be born again, says Jesus. And that is a bizarre metaphor, is it not? Really confusing one if you think about it.

And you can see this guy Nicodemus stopping and thinking, how does that work? He's thinking back to the biology lesson at school. He's thinking, how does that work? Especially if you consider that Nicodemus is most likely an older man at this point in his life.

It's a bizarre metaphor. But it's a metaphor that precisely makes the point. Jesus says you must be born again.

I was there at the birth of my two children. I'd love to tell you that I stood by and offered some inspirational words to my dear wife.

They were just fitting for the occasion at the appropriate time in those few hours. The final few hours of labour. You know, the kind you would get on motivational posters that you would buy at a student fair.

[11:24] The truth is that I did next to nothing. Apart from take up space in an already crowded and stressful room.

I was the water boy and I think even that is doing me over justice. I did next to nothing. But you know what? There was someone in that room who contributed even less than me.

The baby. I mean, neither of our girls contributed anything. Apart from a lot of pain on behalf of my wife. The kind that I cannot begin to imagine.

You see, a baby contributes nothing. And Nicodemus is trying to take that in. This is what Jesus is saying. You see, here's this man Nicodemus who has doubtless lived his whole life believing the maxim that to behave is to belong.

Right? You perform well. You keep the rules. And by in so doing you are demonstrating that you are on the right side of God and in the kingdom. That's what he's thinking.

[12:31] But here's noticing what Jesus doesn't say. Notice this. What Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say, go back and try again. Remember when you were at school and you went with your homework to your teacher and she said, go back and look at your sums.

And you went back and you looked over again. You thought, oh, that's how that works. And then you went back to your teacher and she went, well done. You got it now. You got it right. Jesus doesn't say that. He doesn't say try again. He doesn't say think again.

He says, you must be born again. Because this isn't about Nicodemus turning over a new leaf.

This is about God by his grace and his mercy and by the power of his Holy Spirit giving Nicodemus a brand new heart.

Working in him to bring a complete inner cleansing and transformation of his entire being. Only possible by the grace of God through the power of the Spirit of God.

[13:44] You see, that's what Jesus is meaning at verse 8. Right? The Spirit of God. He is like the wind. He's like the wind. You can't see it.

You can't see him. But you can feel his effects. I was thinking this week, growing up, playing, learning to play golf. Yeah, I'll say this publicly.

My brother's a better golfer than me. Growing up, playing on the Lynx courses up in Fife. He always used to say to me, when it comes to a windy day, he said, remember the slogan?

When it's breezy, swing it easy. And here's the point. I was going at it. I was hitting it as hard as I can, straight up to the wind. The wind that I couldn't see was there.

And it was just coming straight back at me. That's the point that Jesus is making, isn't it? You can't see the wind, but you can feel it and see its effects.

[14:42] So it is with the work of the Spirit. You don't see where the Spirit is moving, but you'll see the effects of him moving. And we've got no idea how God is at work by his Spirit, through his Word.

You know, one of the privileges I have in this role is spending time reading the Bible with people.

And one of the most incredible privileges is reading the Bible with people and seeing them not understand it.

And in one day, by the grace of God, all of a sudden they see it. I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin, revealing Jesus through the words, creating faith in him.

And so here's what this means, if you're watching this today, whoever you are. If you're watching this and your faith is in Jesus. If this is true for you, how should we respond to this?

We should be the most humble people alive. That this was nothing to do with us. Right? God didn't look down from heaven and think that we would make incredible people for his team.

[15:56] No, God was moved by nothing other than his mercy and purely by his grace. As we grasp this, our lives should ooze humility and gratitude.

And the gospel of God's grace, you see how it frees us not to live a life of dead moralism. But to live an open life with one another and in front of one another.

To take the mask off and stop pretending that we were saved because of our good works and of our upright lives. No, we were saved by grace. And it frees us to acknowledge our weaknesses.

And then lean our whole lives on the sufficient grace of our heavenly father. See, Nicodemus thought he behaved so he would then therefore say he could belong.

The gospel says, no, you belong. You've been saved by Jesus Christ. You've been transformed.

Therefore, behave like children of God. Or someone put it on Twitter this week and I love this.

[16:58] Because religion says, I messed it up. My dad's going to kill me. But the gospel says, I've messed it up. Oh, I need to call my dad.

You know, if you're watching this and you're thinking to yourself, do you know what? I'm in God's good book, surely. Because of how I'm living. I think this should massively sober you.

I mean, if a guy is as good as Nicodemus, right? With his spiritual CV. I mean, honestly, he could take all of us to the cleaners and back again. If he can't earn eternal life, let me suggest that none of us can.

Maybe you're watching this and you're at the other end of the spectrum here. You think you're like the anti-Nicodemus. I mean, if only you knew how broken and complicated my life is.

If only you knew how wrong I get it each and every day. If only you knew how much I struggle. Well, let me encourage you, particularly to tune in next week. Because you will hear a story about a woman who we meet in chapter 4.

[18:03] Who, when it comes to pain and brokenness, she could take you to the cleaners and back again. And yet Jesus pursues her for a relationship so that she might have eternal life.

When it comes to eternal life, Nicodemus. You see how there's nothing you can do to earn it.

There's nothing you can do to earn it. I mean, accept. Secondly, trust that I've done everything that you might have it.

I mean, verse 9. How can this be true? I mean, well, according to Jesus, you see, Nicodemus should have known this. I mean, this isn't coming from left field here.

And if you think back to that reading we had earlier from Ezekiel 36 in the Old Testament. Here's what God had promised. He promised and said what he was going to do in the time, in the days to come rather, for his people.

As he brings about the heart transformation that they need. What's he going to do? He's going to take out that heart of stone. And in its place instead he's going to give them a heart of flesh.

[19:12] Right? It beats for him. And he writes his law. Not out there, but in their hearts. That all of them might know him. And so here's what Nicodemus should have been doing.

Instead of leading the people trying to earn it. Remember, this man who knows the scriptures.

Nicodemus should have been leading the people and pleading with God. Getting on their knees.

That he might do it in them.

That he might do it in them. And here is Jesus come to make a way for that to happen.

And do you see how he claims to speak? Not as an opinion here. He's claiming to speak as the opinion. He claims to speak authoritatively.

And we should listen to him. That is his claim at verse 13. Think of it this way. I don't know if you're anything like us. You know, when we book any kind of holiday. What we go on is not normally what the hotel says of itself.

[20:20] Right? I mean, no hotel is saying of itself. Yeah, our food. You know what? If we're honest, it's average. We could probably get better down the road. Our rooms. To be honest, budget at best.

But you're paying what you're paying. So they'll get you there. No, they say come here and you'll have the best holiday ever. Ever. We don't listen to the hotel.

We tend to listen to what the people who have actually been there say about the hotel. Right?

That's the voices that swing it for us. The people who have actually been there. Who know what they're talking about.

You see, Jesus is qualified to speak about heavenly and eternal realities. Because he's been there. In fact, heaven has been his home since before time began.

Except now he's taken on our flesh. And he's come down. And he's the very embodiment of truth.

[21 : 17] Because of the pursuing, loving determination of God. He's here. The God that so loved the world.

A world that is perishing because of its own decision to reject God. By rejecting Jesus. And is subject to the eternal judgment of our creator.

Because of that decision. Jesus committed to bring this transformation to bear in the hearts of his people. And here's how. Verse 14. Jesus uses this Old Testament story.

Nicodemus would have been very familiar with this. Right? We get this in the book of Numbers in chapter 20. And the story is about the Israelites wandering in the desert.

And they are complaining. They are moaning. The text says they are impatient. All the way. They are grumbling against God and against Moses. And God sends snakes among them.

[22 : 19] And those snakes bite many of the Israelites. Sometimes fatally. And in his mercy God says to Moses.

Make a statue of a snake. And put it on a pole. And lift it up. And tell everybody who wants to be healed. That if they look at the pole. If they trust what I say is true about the snake. They will be healed.

All they need to do is look at the snake. Here's the thing to consider. That people were saved. They were healed. Not by being in proximity to the snake.

People were healed. Not by acknowledging the mere existence of the snake. People were saved solely. Because they looked at. And they trusted what God said was true.

Concerning the snake. And Jesus says in the same way. Do you know what? My earthly life will end with me. Lifted up. On the cross.

[23 : 17] As I take the place of sinful humanity. As I bear the wrath of God the Father on myself.

What you need to understand is that your sin is way more deadly than a snake bite. What can you do? What is your only hope but to look at me? Believe and live.

And by doing that. You have eternal life. You see the only hope here for the odds on favor. The only hope for the man with the unrivaled spiritual CV.

For eternal life. Is the same as everyone else. To look and live. So what's he going to do as we leave him here?

In verse 15. What's he going to do? Friends what are you and I going to do as we respond to this? Well just as we close. Let me tell you a story that I once heard. And it was by the former Archbishop of Canterbury.

[24 : 26] Called Donald Cogan. And he used to tell a story about a sculptor. Who once unveiled a statue that he'd made of Jesus. And tourists used to flock from all over to come and see this statue.

And what would inevitably happen is that the tourists. People would walk around all around this statue. Trying to take in its every angle. Looking for that perfect picture. And they were always left disappointed.

And so they'd ask their tour guide. They'd say where do we need to stand? Where do we need to be to get the best view of this sculpture? Of this statue? And the answer always came back.

That the sculptor had deliberately designed the statue. So that the place for the best view. Was to get down on your knees.

And to look up. And here's the thing about the odds on favourite. As we leave on this morning.

[25 : 27] Junior appears two more times in this gospel. Once at chapter 7. In a discussion where he's speaking up for Jesus. When the religious leaders are talking about unlawfully seizing him.

And Nicodemus is there fighting Jesus' corner. And then right at the end of this gospel. As he steps into the light. And as he comes out into the open. About his faith in this man Jesus.

We see him again. And he's there after Jesus has died on the cross. And he's there with Joseph of Animathea. And the two of them take down Jesus' body from the cross.

And they put it in a tomb. And so it would seem that in the months following this encounter. As Jesus' words bounced around Nicodemus' mind.

As the spirit penetrated his heart. And perhaps even. And what a wonderful thought this is. That as he stood there taking in Jesus on the cross.

[26 : 27] As he saw this man Jesus who he had talked to. Lifted up on the cross. Because maybe this conversation came back to him.

And Nicodemus thought there's nothing else that I've got. Nothing else that I've got. Nothing in my hand I bring. But simply to the cross I cling. This man looked.

And lived. Only by grace can we enter. Only by grace can we stand. Not by our human endeavour. But by the blood of the Lamb.

Into your presence you call us. You call us to come. Into your presence you draw us. And now by your grace we come.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father what an incredible God you are. Father help us to grasp.

[27 : 57] Something more of the glory of Jesus Christ. May we look to him today. And have eternal life. In his name. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen. Well thank you very much Graham. We're now going to move on in our service. And we're going to hear from one of our members. On what they've been learning.

During this lockdown period. And we're going to hear about some of the ups and downs. Of the Christian life from her. So I'm just going to hand over now to one of our members. And hear their story. Hello.

My name's Anne. And I've been part of the Brunfield family for almost 40 years. So I've seen lots of changes over that time. Although I have never quite seen anything like lockdown before.

So what's that been like for me. I think for all of us it's been a time of loss. Perhaps some gains too. But for me. My big loss has been that I have lost my big brother.

[28 : 57] David was older than I am. So he was always there. I can remember my mother giving him a row. For always winding me up. And teasing me. Because he was so much older.

And could do that. And giving me a row. For always rising to the bait. So he was always there in my life. However just before lockdown.

David called me to tell me that he had cancer. But that it was okay. It was treatable. However only a few short weeks later. He was admitted into hospital.

In dreadful pain. And it became clear. That he was really unwell. And there was no coming back from this. So he got home from hospital. And had a very special week at home.

With his family. With his wife. His son. Able to speak to people on the phone. And to video call them. And he and I had precious times together.

[29 : 53] As we thought about how God loved us. And we thought about the prayer in Ephesians. Where it talks about the love that we just can't escape from. And that it strengthens us.

In the inner places. Where it really matters. However he was only home for just under a week. And he had to go back to hospital. And he died just a few hours after getting back to hospital.

And David lived in Southampton. So I couldn't go to see him when he was ill. And I couldn't go to the funeral. Which I found really hard. His wife couldn't be with him going in the ambulance.

She couldn't be with him when he died. So it was quite a difficult time. And not being at the funeral hurt more than I thought it would. But David had always gone before me.

And he did that yet again. As he demonstrated how much his faith mattered to him. How real it was. How it sustained him in life. And how it was there when he faced death.

[30 : 57] And I really appreciated being able to have that time with David. And have that demonstrated to me.

You know I see where I live. I see the tide rolling in and out. Every single day without fail. And that puts quite a perspective in life. I like to walk on the beach.

And see that. And look into the sky. And see how big it is. And it reminds me of how God is always there. Has always been there. And so I would encourage all of you.

That as we face this lockdown. And we face things that are difficult. We face losses that are difficult. But that God is there. And so I leave you with another part of the Bible.

That is another favourite of mine. And it's from Romans 8. And it says. Who shall separate us from the love of God? Neither death nor life. Neither the present nor the future.

[31 : 55] Nor any powers. Nor anything in all creation. Not even COVID-19 will be able to separate us. From the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Meaning. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. To ice.

Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. single issue. Cheers. To me. Cheers. Cheers. Is this the last one. Gracias.in committee.

Cheers. Cheers. Cheers. affir. spelled . Cheers. Cheers.