



## **Romans 4: 1-5 & 13-17 and John 3:1-17**

It's night. Night in Jerusalem in c.AD 30. With the possible exception of a late evening meal at the Roman governor's house, or perhaps attendees at a debate amongst religious leaders, almost all are asleep in the city. Yet through the streets hurries a cloaked figure, a man perhaps in his late forties seeking a house where a young teacher is staying.

He is a Pharisee (a member of an ancient Jewish group that carefully observed the written law, adhered to oral laws and traditions, and believed in an afterlife and the coming of a Messiah) and a member of the Sanhedrin (the highest court and council of the ancient Jewish nation, having religious and civil functions that had 71 members) who was born in Galilee.

His name is Nicodemus, and he wants an audience, out of curiosity as much as anything, with Jesus:

*'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him...'* he says.

As Nicodemus believed in the coming of a Messiah, it always saddens me that so many Jews who encountered Jesus in person back then didn't recognise Him as the very Messiah they had waited for, for so long. Israel had been a Roman province for the better part of 70 years at this time... and many longed for a Messiah in the form of a King David-like military leader would defeat the Empire and drive them out, so that Israel would be an independent state once more.

Yet despite paying Jesus the compliment of calling him a teacher and one who has come from God, he doesn't see a prophet, let alone the Messiah, in front of him, just a teacher who could do miracles.

Having walked in darkness to see Jesus is Nicodemus now having seen him still walking in darkness per Isaiah 9:2?

*"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned..."*

Is he still doing so as Jesus isn't the Messiah, he himself expected?

It's said that we create God in our own image... is that why the Jews of the time, with exceptions didn't see Jesus as who He was because He wasn't in the image created for Him?

How do we see Jesus?

Who do we say He is?

Would we recognise Him if He was here in person this morning?

And if He were physically with us now, what would we ask Him?

Jesus' answer to Nicodemus leaves this teacher of Israel, this religious scholar and debater stunned. Quite possibly he hadn't a clue what Jesus was on about – a response that has been repeated again and again ever since amongst believers and non-believers alike.

Not being a parent, let alone a mother, I can't begin to imagine the stress of giving birth to a 7, 8 or 9lb baby, but I do know there isn't an epidural in existence that could begin to dull the stress of giving birth to a 12, 13 or 14 stone adult, which only further supports the possibility that Nicodemus hadn't a clue what Jesus was on about.

'Born again?' 'Born of water and the Spirit?' So, what is Jesus on about here? I'll try and explain.

Born again. As "Israel's teacher" Nicodemus believed that the Kingdom of God would be ruled by God. He believed that one day (though not what day) that Kingdom would be restored on earth and believed that it would incorporate God's people that is the Jews, but just the Jews. Indeed, he would as a Pharisee, he would have presumed his place in this Kingdom was

certain, that his credentials as a teacher, a devout man of study and prayer would make such membership automatic.

So, gob already smacked, Nicodemus now listens to Jesus tell him that the Kingdom would indeed be restored on earth, that it would indeed incorporate God's people not just the Jews, but everyone, anyone who was born again even Gentiles (everyone who wasn't a Jew). The Kingdom then was not purely national or ethnic as was widely believed by Jews and for Jews alone, but it was for everyone who believed and had been born again: 'whosoever' as it says in the King James Version.

So, people deemed unclean by the Jews such as lepers, or looked down on by Jews such as Samaritans, or hated by Jews such as the Romans; all who believed and been born again could now enter the Kingdom of God.

So, more "Come as you are..." rather than "Don't you know who I am?"

Born of water and of Spirit here Jesus is on about is a double baptism: baptism in water, which bought people Jew and Gentile alike into the Kingdom movement begun by John the Baptist and later continued by Jesus' disciples, following the Day of Pentecost, and baptism in the Spirit, the new life that Jesus offered was now required to be part of God's Kingdom – another comforter as Jesus later called the Spirit.

I find it encouraging that Nicodemus is mentioned again twice in the Gospel of John, thus he did eventually understand. Later, in chapter 7 verses 50-51, Nicodemus speaks in subtle defence of Jesus, saying that Jewish law requires that a person cannot be condemned without first being heard which was after a row in the Sanhedrin as to why Jesus wasn't arrested for speaking in the Temple, and much later in chapter 19 verses 39-42, after Jesus' crucifixion, Nicodemus assists Joseph of Arimathea in laying Jesus' body in a nearby tomb (originally meant for Joseph) and brings with him a mixture of myrrh (a gum-resin extracted from a number of small, thorny tree species of the genus *Commiphora*) and aloes (pounded spice from aloewood/lignum) to anoint the body for burial.

In closing: *"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."*

This is the heart of the Gospel, why Jesus came and did what He did, and did it for everyone out of love for whoever, whosoever they are...

How do you see Jesus? Who do you say He is?

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