

=LITTLE-KNOWN BIBLE CHARACTERS=

Lesson 10

Nicodemus, a Man Who Needed To Be Born Again

AIM: to teach my pupils the necessity of the new birth.

POINT OF CONTACT: Use the illustration of a butterfly and a caterpillar. There must be a complete transformation before the butterfly can fly. This is an illustration of the new birth that would be especially applicable to children. They could understand this.

- I. NICODEMUS WAS A PHARISEE, YET, HE NEEDED TO BE BORN AGAIN. There were three different sects of the Jews: the Essenes, the Sadducees and the Pharisees.
1. The Essenes believed in more or less an ascetic life. They escaped defilement by forming colonies by themselves. Each colony had its synagogue, a common dining hall, an assembly room, and provisions for daily bathing in running water. When a person became a member of this sect, he gave to it all that he possessed. Money was almost unnecessary. This sect also abstained from wedlock, their morality was high, and their lives were clean.
 2. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were the liberals of their day.
 - 1) They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead or future retribution.
 - 2) They believed that the soul died with the body.
 - 3) They did not believe in the existence of angels and spirits.
 - 4) They believed in fatalism, contending that all our actions are done in our own power, and God is not concerned in our doing good or not doing wrong.
 3. The Pharisees believed in the doctrine of foreordination.
 - 1) It was the straightest, strictest sect of the Jews.
 - 2) It was the strongest in religious character.
 - 3) They were the best people in the nation.
 - 4) They believed in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body and the existence of spirits.
 - 5) They believed in punishment and rewards in the future life.
 - 6) They believed in conformance to the law and that God's grace was promised only to the doers of the law. In other words, their religion was external.

The latter was the group to which Nicodemus belonged. He was a strict Pharisee. Notice he was of the best religious sect, and yet, Jesus said in John 3:1-7, "Ye must be born again."

- II. NICODEMUS WAS A RULER OF THE JEWS, YET, HE NEEDED TO BE BORN AGAIN. Nicodemus was not only a ruler, but he was also an extremely wealthy man. He was reputed to have been so rich that he could have supported all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem for ten years. In spite of this fact, Jesus said, "Ye must be born again."
- III. NICODEMUS WAS A HEAD BELIEVER. John 3:2 says this. Yet, Jesus said, "Ye must be born again."
- IV. HE WAS A TEACHER. John 3:10b says, "Art thou a master of Israel...?" The word "master" here means "teacher." He was a Bible teacher. He knew the Scripture. Yet, Jesus said, "Ye must be born again."
- V. HE TRIED TO BE A SECRET FOLLOWER, YET, JESUS SAID, "YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN." You will notice in John 3:2 that he came to Jesus by night. Hence, we take it for granted that he had no desire at all to become a disciple of Christ openly, for baptism and circumcision, which were the initiating ordinances of the Jews, were never administered in the nighttime. If any person were baptized at night, it was not accepted. So we readily understand that Nicodemus had no interest in conversion openly.

- VI. HE EVEN SPOKE A GOOD WORD FOR CHRIST, AND STILL JESUS SAID, “YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN.” (John 7:50-52) Jesus was being tried by the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus defended Him and, as far as Nicodemus was concerned, saved His life. Yet, this did not suffice.
- VII. NICODEMUS PREPARED THE BODY OF OUR LORD FOR BURIAL. (John 19:39, 40) Yet, he still needed to be born again.
1. He brought a mixture of 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes. One hundred pounds of aloes was reportedly enough to embalm 200 people. The amount of embalming material that was used also determined the importance the embalmer placed on the person who had died. (For example, Gamaliel was embalmed with 80 pounds, which is enough to embalm 160 people. He was a man of the law and a great man of Israel.) So Nicodemus was saying that he had great respect for Christ, and yet he needed to be born again.
 2. Nicodemus wound the body of Christ in linen clothes after the manner of the Jews. These were long strips of linen a few inches in breadth which were used to wrap the body and legs of the dead, especially those who were embalmed, that the embalming materials might be kept in contact with the flesh. In other words, Nicodemus had great respect for Christ and gave Him protection, admiration, even head knowledge; yet, he needed to be born again.

CONCLUSION: If a man with all these religious, moral, and secular qualifications could not go to Heaven without being born again, certainly none of us can go to Heaven without the new birth!