

## John Lesson # 5 Articles

### Unclean but Unblemished John 3:1–21

It all started at night, when Nicodemus, “the teacher of Israel,” came to the Light.

Nicodemus makes three appearances in the Bible (John 3:1–21; 7:50–52; 19:39–42), and by the third time, we see that the seed Jesus planted by night blossoms in the light of a gloomy day. Nicodemus was present and assisted with the preparation of Jesus’ body for burial. According to his old way of life, Nicodemus became unclean; but in his new eternal life, he was unblemished.

Today, Nicodemus is still the teacher. We learn from him that Jesus is always there for us, night or day. We learn that in God’s perfect timing, He will answer our most confounding questions. We learn that regardless of our status, nothing is more important than the life of Christ within us. And we learn that no matter how great our sacrifice, it can never compare to Christ’s sacrifice<sup>1</sup>

The sometimes heard criticism of Nicodemus as a timid soul who came to Jesus at night in order to avoid detection by the Jewish hierarchy is erroneous. Any conclusion we come to about Nicodemus must harmonize with John 7:50 and 19:39 which testify that Nicodemus was courageous before his fellow Sanhedrinists. In the first of these passages he was obviously in the minority, yet was not afraid to speak out; the second is even more significant as it presents both a clear dissension from the Sanhedrin and more, for, by his action, Nicodemus insisted that his dissentient vote be recorded. As the Sanhedrin’s procedure required that a death sentence could only be imposed by unanimous vote, Nicodemus clearly labeled the whole proceedings of that body in connection with Jesus Christ’s death as illegal. But the moral bravery of the man is not yet exhausted; he was party to a demand to Pilate for Jesus’ body, thus serving notice on the Roman government that the Sanhedrin’s sentence was illegal. Clearly, the ramifications of Nicodemus’ action were vast.

Remember, too, this was Passover (2:13), so Jerusalem would have been packed with people; but equally significant, any devout Jew would want to preserve ceremonially purity so as to participate in the feast. Numbers 9:10 barred anyone touching a dead body from participating in the regular Passover, and contact with any form of uncleanness had the same effect. Now, Nicodemus probably had to negotiate several ill-lit streets to get to Jesus, so risked contacting some of the abundant filth in the streets, or an unclean Gentile, and thus becoming defiled. So if his visit was made before Passover, rather than being timid, Nicodemus knowingly took some risks to have this interview with Jesus.

Nicodemus’ position and title indicate that he was an intelligent man as well as a politician, so it is highly improbable that he would have overlooked the significance of his actions. It seems completely out of harmony with the New Testament record to suggest that this independent, upright spirit came to Jesus at night out of timidity. He was anything but timid or cowardly. We can therefore conclude that Nicodemus, as part of the hierarchy, came to Jesus out of a sense of duty to investigate the claim to messiahship which He had made. Nicodemus said as much in v. 2, for the miracles seemed to him to have substantiated Jesus’ claim. He came at night so as to have a private interview, probably because this was the only time he could be assured of an uninterrupted conversation. John 2:23 tells us that many people claimed to believe in Jesus, and they would naturally have constantly pressed around Him during the day.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley, C. F. (2005). *The Charles F. Stanley life principles Bible: New King James Version* (Jn 3:1–21). Nashville, TN: Nelson Bibles.

<sup>2</sup> Mills, M. S. (1999). *The Life of Christ: A Study Guide to the Gospel Record* (Jn 3:1). Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries.