

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

JOHN 3.11-21



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets,

He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Gospel of John: John 2.3.11-21
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Introduction to *John 3.11-21*

This conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus is very important, both for the further unfolding of John's gospel, and for our callings as disciples and witnesses.

Jesus is gracious, but firm. As He continues to speak with Nicodemus concerning the spiritual and eternal nature of His message, we see the glorious Gospel in its simplicity and fullness. It's about Jesus. It's about God's love. It's about the Kingdom of God and eternal life.

Nicodemus won't get it yet, but he will, he will.

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1 All Believe

Read and meditate on John 3.11, 12.

It wasn't that Nicodemus didn't *believe*. Everyone *believes* in something. The issue in life is not *faith*. It's the *object* of faith – *what*, not *whether*, a person believes.

*¹¹ "I say to you,
We speak the things We know, and testify
what We have seen, and you prefer a lie
and choose not to believe Our witness. ¹² So
if I have told you earthly things, yet no
such things have led you to believe in Me,
if heavenly things I speak, how will it be
that you should come to faith by these?"*

- John 3.11, 12

Reflect

1. Jesus said that Nicodemus did “not believe” (v. 12). Did not believe *what*? How could Jesus tell that he did not believe this? Complete this prayer: *Lord, how do people know what I believe? How should they be able to tell that...*

2. Meditate on verse 11. Who is the “We” to whom Jesus refers? What is the role of each of the Persons of the divine Trinity in testifying and bearing witness to Jesus? *Father, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, today, make me more aware of...*

3. Jesus used two verbs to assert His authority (v. 11): “know” and “have seen.” How should these verbs factor into your testimony and witness for Christ? *Lord, help me to know You better and to see You more clearly and consistently, so that...*

4. The duty of a witness is to “tell.” Jesus said that Nicodemus did not believe His witness when He used an earthly metaphor – birth – to refer to a spiritual reality. Why did this not lead to Nicodemus believing in Jesus? What was Nicodemus believing that kept him from believing in *Jesus*? *Help me, Lord, to get to know the people around me, so that I understand what they believe and can...*

5. What is the answer to the question Jesus posed in verse 12? Hint: Jesus has already answered His own question in verses 6-8. How should knowing this affect our testifying and bearing witness to Jesus? Bring together into one the prayers you composed for questions 1-4.

Summary

“He advises Nicodemus to accept in simple faith what he cannot understand. Jesus testifies that he himself knows clearly what he says because of who he is, and to doubt what he says is a very dangerous thing. For it was not likely that Nicodemus would forget that he had earlier affirmed that our Savior Christ was a ‘teacher who had come from God.’ But to resist one who is both from God, and God, is terribly fraught with peril since one is clearly fighting with God.” *Cyril of Alexandria (375-*

444 AD)

Before people will believe in Jesus, they may need to see that what they *are* believing is not adequate. Nicodemus had faith, but it was placed in tradition and reason, and these were not sufficient to explain Jesus. Jesus did not try to explain Himself in terms of Nicodemus' belief system; instead, He further confounded Nicodemus by launching the conversation to a new and higher level. But by being firm in His testimony, and pointing to the Holy Spirit, Jesus laid the groundwork for Nicodemus to come to faith in Him. In other words, Jesus challenged Nicodemus' faith in tradition and reason by declaring the Word and pointing to the Spirit of God. How does this counsel us as witnesses?

Closing Prayer

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, bless His name;
Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.
Declare His glory among the nations,
His wonders among all peoples.
For the LORD *is* great and greatly to be praised;
He *is* to be feared above all gods.

Psalm 96.1-4

Psalm 96.1-4 (*Mit Freuden Zart: All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)

Sing to the Lord! O, bless His Name!
All nations tell His glory!
Salvation's tidings loud proclaim;
Let earth rehearse His story!
For God is greatly to be praised;
His throne above all gods is raised –
Fear Him, and sing His glory!

2 Heaven to Earth

Read and meditate on John 3.13.

As if Nicodemus' brain was not sufficiently scrambled by this point! Yet Jesus scrambled it even more, by making a statement about Himself which Nicodemus could not possibly have processed from within his own worldview. But Jesus made it anyway, and precisely because of this.

*¹³No one
to heaven has ascended but the Son
of Man, Who came to earth from heaven.*

- John 3.13

Reflect

1. The thrust of this verse is to insist that the message Nicodemus is hearing does not come from the traditions or minds of men. Its provenance is elsewhere. Where? Should we be reluctant to assert the same about what we believe? Explain. Complete this prayer: *I know that Your Kingdom is not of this world, Lord, and that I am a citizen and ambassador of that Kingdom, so...*
2. Meditate on the verbs Jesus uses here: “has ascended” and “came down” (the Greek text does not include “is in heaven”). Jesus refers to Himself. Summarize what He is saying. How does this compare with what Jesus asserted in John 1.51? Is Jesus doing this still today? Explain. *Lord, You may not make sense to my unbelieving friends, but they still need...*
3. Conversation and communion between heaven and earth travels through and by means of Jesus. We can only “ascend” to heaven in Him, and we can only receive heaven’s teaching and life through Him – not through our own wisdom or cherished traditions. What are the implications of this for following Jesus? *You are my great High Priest, Lord Jesus, and today I need You to...*
4. Nicodemus believed in the spiritual realm. He believed in God, angels, and heaven. As a Pharisee, he would have believed in all these things. So why was he having so much trouble believing *Jesus*? Do you see any parallels with Nicodemus and people today? *I know, Lord, that most people will say they believe in God, but this “belief” is...*
5. Jesus is saying to Nicodemus that He and He alone has the authority to make sense out of things earthly and heavenly. Given what John has already told us about Jesus, why is this so? Should we be reluctant to proclaim this to the people in our Personal Mission Field? Explain. Bring together into one prayer the prayers you wrote from questions 1-4.

Summary

“Some people, certainly, find very surprising what the Lord said in the Gospel, ‘Nobody has ascended into heaven, except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.’ How, they ask, can the Son of man be said to have come down from heaven, when it was here that he was taken on in the Virgin’s womb? People who say this are not to be rejected but instructed. I think, you see, that they are raising this question out of piety but are not yet able to

understand what they are inquiring about. They do not realize, I mean, that the divinity took on the humanity in such a way as to become one person, God and man; and that the humanity was attached to the divinity in such a way that Word, soul and flesh were the one Christ.” *Augustine (354-430 AD)*

These are hard words, and Nicodemus does not understand them. But do we? Do we understand all the mystery involved in being born from above? But do we *believe* it? What’s the difference?

Closing Prayer

The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”
The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.
Rule in the midst of Your enemies!
Your people *shall be* volunteers
In the day of Your power;
In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning,
You have the dew of Your youth.
The LORD has sworn
And will not relent,
“You *are* a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek.”
The Lord *is* at Your right hand...

Psalm 110.1-5a

Psalm 110.1-4 (*Aurelia: The Church’s One Foundation*)

“Sit by Me at My right hand,” the Lord says to my Lord,
“Until I make Your foot stand on all who hate Your Word.”
From in His Church the Savior rules all His enemies;
While those who know His favor go forth the Lord to please.

Filled with the Spirit’s power, in holy robes of love,
From early morning’s hour they serve their Lord above.
Christ reigns a priest forever, the King of Righteousness
And King of Peace Who ever His chosen ones will bless.

3 Lifted to Save

Read and meditate on John 3.14, 15.

Put yourself in Nicodemus' shoes: This just gets more and more confusing. Yet Jesus is insistent, confident, self-assured, gracious – and all those signs! We can only wonder what sparks of insight may have been ignited in Nicodemus' brain at the mention of the incident of the brazen serpent.

¹⁴And
as Moses in that barren desert land
the brazen serpent on a pole held high,
so must the Son of Man be lifted high
for all the world to look upon, ¹⁵that all
who trust in Him, and on His mercy call,
shall have eternal life, and never die.

- John 3.14, 15

Reflect

1. Meditate on Numbers 21.6-9. What's the relevance of this incident to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus? Complete this prayer: *Lord, thank You for healing me of...*
2. Jesus has steadily moved the conversation from being born again (or from above), through seeing and entering the Kingdom of God, the work of the Spirit, and now to having eternal life (the Greek text does not include "not perish"). See if you can string these ideas together into a single sentence. *Lord, I see this as applying to me. I can see how in my life You...*
3. How would you explain "eternal life" to an unbelieving friend? How does your explanation compare with what Jesus says in John 17.3? Improve your explanation by incorporating what Jesus says in John 17.3. *You have given me eternal life, O Lord, and now I...*
4. Read Daniel 7.13-18. You've perhaps noticed that Jesus is keeping this conversation objective, speaking only about the "Son of Man" and not Himself, not directly at least. Given that Nicodemus was a student of the Old Testament (*the teacher of Israel!*), why would Jesus want to keep referring to this and other Old Testament ideas? *Lord Jesus, Son of Man, You have given us Your Kingdom so that...*
5. Jesus is carefully anchoring His conversation with Nicodemus in a framework and concepts that would have been very familiar to Nicodemus. How can you see that? Meditate on 1 Corinthians 9.19-23. Is Paul simply describing Jesus' practice here? Explain. Bring together into one prayer the prayers you wrote for questions 1-4.

Summary

"With the wonderful skill of heavenly teaching, the Lord directs our attention to the teacher of the Mosaic law and to the spiritual meaning of his law, by recalling some of the ancient history and explaining that it happened as a figure of his own passion and of human salvation." *The Venerable Bede (672-735 AD)*

We will be more effective as witnesses if we understand the people we're talking with – their background, framework of thinking, interests, concerns, and the like. As we will see again, Jesus met people where they lived, and addressed them within their worldview. We need to do the same. Suggest some ways you might learn more about the people to whom God sends you each week.

Closing Prayer

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good!
For His mercy *endures* forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,
And gathered out of the lands,
From the east and from the west,
From the north and from the south.
They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way;
They found no city to dwell in.
Hungry and thirsty,
Their soul fainted in them.
Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
And He delivered them out of their distresses.
And He led them forth by the right way,
That they might go to a city for a dwelling place.
Oh, that *men* would give thanks to the LORD *for* His goodness,
And *for* His wonderful works to the children of men!

Psalm 107.1-8

Psalm 107.1-3 (*Faithfulness: Great is Thy Faithfulness*)

Lord, You are good, we give thanks and we praise You!
Your steadfast love will forever endure.
Let the redeemed, who from trouble You rescue,
Gather and say that Your mercy is sure!
 Lord, for Your wondrous works, and for Your steadfast love,
 We give You thanks, we exalt Your great Name!
 We who from east and west, north and south gather,
 Boldly redemption in Christ we proclaim!

4 To Save the World

Read and meditate on John 3.16, 17.

Here in perhaps the best-known and most-beloved passage of all Scripture, Jesus proclaims the core truths of the Good News.

*¹⁶For God so loved the world, that from on high
He sent His only-begotten Son, that they
who trust in Him should know eternal day,
and never perish. ¹⁷For God did not send
His Son into this cosmos to condemn
it, but to save it through Him.*

- John 3.16, 17

Reflect

1. Why did God send His Son to earth? What was motivating Him? Do you think lost people today generally think of God as *loving* them? Do we as believers help or hinder their understanding of this great truth? Explain. Complete this prayer: *Lord, show me how I can help others experience Your love, and...*
2. Note the *object* of God's love: the *cosmos*. Not just humans, but the entire, vast universe, and everything in it. What does it mean to say that God loves *the cosmos*? Why should He? Should we? What would it look like if we loved the cosmos like God does? *Lord Jesus, I know that You love the cosmos, because...*
3. Jesus contrasts having everlasting life with perishing. What does it mean for a human being to "perish," as Jesus uses this idea? Should the fact that people you know might *perish* affect you in any way? Did this fact affect God? Explain. *I pray for those in my Personal Mission Field who might perish, O Lord. I pray that...*
4. Jesus connects God's love for the cosmos with His plan to bring eternal life to people. How do people receive eternal life? Should receiving eternal life have any benefits for the *cosmos*? Meditate on Romans 8.19-22. In what ways should your salvation bring relief to the creation? *I want to love the world as You do, Lord, and I want my salvation to relieve creation's groaning by...*
5. If God did not send His Son to condemn the world, but to save it, why are people still condemned? Who condemns them? Do you think they understand this? Explain. Bring together into one your prayers from questions 1-4.

Summary

"He who is without bounds bound himself with the cords of our humanity. He was victim and high priest—yet he was God. He offered up his blood and cleansed the whole world. He was lifted up on the cross, but it was sin that was nailed to it. He became as one among the dead, but he rose from the dead, raising to life also many who had died before him. On the one hand, there was the poverty

of his humanity; on the other, the riches of his divinity. Do not let what is human in the Son permit you wrongfully to detract from what is divine. For the sake of the divine, hold in the greatest honor the humanity, which the immortal Son took on himself for love of you.” *Gregory of Nazianus (329-389 AD)*

Meditate on 2 Corinthians 5.17-21. The salvation Jesus came to bring is *cosmic* in nature. What does that mean? What does that mean for *you* as a witness to this salvation?

Closing Prayer

Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth;
Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.
Sing to the LORD with the harp,
With the harp and the sound of a psalm,
With trumpets and the sound of a horn;
Shout joyfully before the LORD, the King.
Let the sea roar, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell in it;
Let the rivers clap *their* hands;
Let the hills be joyful together before the LORD,
For He is coming to judge the earth.
With righteousness He shall judge the world,
And the peoples with equity.

Psalm 98.4-9

Psalm 98.4-9 (*Duke Street: Come, Let Us Sing unto the Lord*)

Raise to the Lord your loudest voice!
Break forth and sing! Rejoice! Rejoice!
Praise, praise to You, our God and King
With all our hearts and strength we bring!

Now let the whole creation ‘round
Burst into song with joyous sound!
Jesus will come to judge the earth;
Let all proclaim His matchless worth!

5 Self-condemned

Read and meditate on John 3.18.

Nicodemus needed to understand that there are serious consequences to failing to believe the Good News of God's Son, and to receive the gift of eternal life He offers. That's as true today as it was in Jesus' day.

*¹⁸Everyone
who trusts in Him, in God's eternal Son,
is not condemned; but who does not believe
in Him is judged, and ready to receive
eternal condemnation, choosing not
to trust in God's own Son, Whom He begot
from all eternity.*

- John 3.18

Reflect

1. What does Jesus mean by "condemned"? Why, according to Jesus, will some people be condemned? Complete this prayer: *Lord, help me to see the people of this world as You do, that I may understand that...*

2. Who is not *condemned*, according to Jesus? What does it mean to *believe* in the Son of Man? If they who believe are not condemned, what do they have? How do they have it? Do *you* have this precious gift? How do you know? *I know, Lord, Whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that...*

3. In this conversation, Jesus is using "Son of Man" (Dan. 7 and elsewhere) and "Son of God" (Psalm 2 and elsewhere) interchangeably. What do these ideas tell us about Jesus? Why does the fact that He is each of these uniquely qualify Him to accomplish salvation? *Let me know You, Lord Jesus, more fully and completely, because in knowing You, I...*

4. Jesus insisted that "he who does not believe is condemned already..." Is the world *already* and *even now* under some kind of condemnation? How would Paul answer this (cf. Rom. 1.18-32)? Should the fact of condemnation – now and yet to come – be part of our Gospel presentation? Explain. *I don't like to talk about judgment and wrath, Lord, but...*

5. In effect, Jesus says to Nicodemus, "If you do not believe in Me, that I am Son of God and Son of Man, and that I bring from heaven the gift of eternal life and entrance into the Kingdom of God, then you will die in your sins, and be condemned forever." How is this "Good News"? Is this part of the Good News as you share it? Bring together your prayers from questions 1-4 into one prayer.

Summary

"Separation from God is death, and separation from light is darkness. Separation from God consists in the loss of all the benefits that he has in store.... This is the same thing that happens in the case of a flood of light: those who have blinded themselves or have been blinded by others are forever

deprived of the enjoyment of light. It is not that the light has inflicted on them the penalty of blindness, but it is that the blindness itself has brought calamity on them. Therefore the Lord declared, 'He who believes in me is not condemned,' that is, he is not separated from God, for he is united to God through faith. On the other hand, he says, 'He who believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God,' that is, he has separated himself from God by his own doing." *Irenaeus of Lyons (135-202 AD)*

The Good News about condemnation is that it doesn't have to happen. People today are under the wrath of God because of their sin, even though He continues to love them and care for them. But a day is coming when that love of God will cease, and eternal separation from God to an eternity of vile self will ensue. The Good News is that there is a Way to avoid this, and to know full and abundant life with God. Whom can you tell about this Good News today?

Closing Prayer

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?
The goodness of God *endures* continually.
Your tongue devises destruction,
Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.
You love evil more than good,
Lying rather than speaking righteousness.
Selah
You love all devouring words,
You deceitful tongue.
God shall likewise destroy you forever;
He shall take you away, and pluck you out of *your* dwelling place,
And uproot you from the land of the living.
Selah
The righteous also shall see and fear,
And shall laugh at him, *saying*,
"Here is the man *who* did not make God his strength,
But trusted in the abundance of his riches,
And strengthened himself in his wickedness."
But I *am* like a green olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.

Psalm 52.1-8

Psalm 52.1-4, 8 (*Warrington: Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.
They utter words, both harsh and strong, with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

But as for me may I be seen in God an olive, ever green!
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!

6 Lovers of Darkness

Read and meditate on John 3.19-21.

I'm sure Nicodemus must have been feeling rather "in the dark" about what Jesus was saying. He should have. Because he was, and Jesus was lovingly seeking to extricate him from it.

¹⁹And this, this is the condemnation: Light has come to this dark world, but men loved darkness more than light, because their deeds are evil. ²⁰They love night and hate the light, whose deeds are evil. They will not come to the Light, but from it stay, so that their wickedness remains concealed, and not exposed. ²¹But good works are revealed by Light, and those who do the truth come to it, that the good works they are seen to do are done in God."

- John 3.19-21

Reflect

1. Do you think people today who don't believe in Jesus consider themselves to be "in the dark" about the most important thing in life? Why or why not? Complete the following brief prayer: *Lord, I remember when I was in the darkness, and it...*
2. The graciousness of Jesus appears here in that He does not say to Nicodemus, who is sincerely seeking the Lord's truth, "You are in the darkness, and you hate the light." This was true, but Jesus didn't need to say it this way; rather, He set this truth up somewhat at a distance, and let Nicodemus judge for himself where he stood in relation to it. What can you learn from this about being a witness? *Lord, help me to show Your grace to others as I talk with them about You. Give me...*
3. Jesus makes the contrasts stark and clear: hate the light/love the darkness; practicing evil deeds/deeds done in God; hate the light/come to the light. Is it true that everyone falls into one or the other of these categories? Explain. *Keep me, Lord, in...*
4. Light banishes darkness and exposes the wicked deeds which are concealed there. By saying this, Jesus, without directly confronting Nicodemus, challenges him to consider his own works, whether they're as good as he has been supposing them to be. The Law of God – beginning with the Ten Commandments – can shine the light on evil works, as Paul explains in Romans 7.7-12. Should the Law factor into our witness for the Gospel? Explain. *Lord, concerning Your holy and righteous and good Law, I want my own works to...*
5. Here Jesus connects His message (born again, see the Kingdom, work of the Spirit, believe in the Son of God, have eternal life) with good works. What place do good works have in the Gospel? Can we be saved by them? Can we be saved without them? Explain. Bring together into one prayer the prayers you composed from questions 1-4.

Summary

“Jesus says that unbelievers had the opportunity to be illuminated but preferred to remain in darkness. Such people, in fact, by failing to choose enlightenment, determine their own punishment against themselves and provoke their own suffering, which was in their power to escape. God preserved human freedom so that people might justly receive praise for good things and punishment for the contrary. As indeed he shows in another place, saying, ‘If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword.’”

Cyril of Alexandria (375-444 AD)

Review question 5. Using the progressive outline Jesus suggests in His conversation with Nicodemus, write a presentation of the Gospel that you could share in two or three sentences. Share that with a Christian friend today, and ask for feedback. How might you improve your presentation?

Closing Prayer

Let my cry come before You, O LORD;
Give me understanding according to Your word.
Let my supplication come before You;
Deliver me according to Your word.
My lips shall utter praise,
For You teach me Your statutes.
My tongue shall speak of Your word,
For all Your commandments are righteousness.
Let Your hand become my help,
For I have chosen Your precepts.
I long for Your salvation, O LORD,
And Your law *is* my delight.
Let my soul live, and it shall praise You;
And let Your judgments help me.
I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
Seek Your servant,
For I do not forget Your commandments.

Psalm 119.169-176

Psalm 119.171-176 (*Regent Square: Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

With our lips we praise You, Jesus, for You teach us, full and free.
Now Your Word will ever please us; Your commandments true shall be.
Let Your hand come forth to ease us; we Your Word choose gratefully!

For Your saving grace we plead, Lord, and Your Law is our delight.
We to live and praise You need, Lord, all Your help by day and night.
Straying sheep, we do not heed, Lord; come and seek us by Your might!

7 God So Loved

Read and meditate on John 3.11-21.

To appreciate the importance of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, you have to take everything John has said and reported in the run-up to this, and fold it into Jesus' words. When you do this, when you take the time to consider Who Jesus is, why He came, and what He would do to satisfy the love and justice of God, the enormity of God's saving grace and love brightens and expands, so that you see afresh how truly Good the Good News is. Everything else that follows in John's gospel will develop within the trajectory established by this late night conversation.

*¹¹“I say to you,
We speak the things We know, and testify
what We have seen, and you prefer a lie
and choose not to believe Our witness. ¹²So
if I have told you earthly things, yet no
such things have led you to believe in Me,
if heavenly things I speak, how will it be
that you should come to faith by these? ¹³No one
to heaven has ascended but the Son
of Man, Who came to earth from heaven. ¹⁴And
as Moses in that barren desert land
the brazen serpent on a pole held high,
so must the Son of Man be lifted high
for all the world to look upon, ¹⁵that all
who trust in Him, and on His mercy call,
shall have eternal life, and never die.
¹⁶For God so loved the world, that from on high
He sent His only-begotten Son, that they
who trust in Him should know eternal day,
and never perish. ¹⁷For God did not send
His Son into this cosmos to condemn
it, but to save it through Him. ¹⁸Everyone
who trusts in Him, in God's eternal Son,
is not condemned; but who does not believe
in Him is judged, and ready to receive
eternal condemnation, choosing not
to trust in God's own Son, Whom He begot
from all eternity. ¹⁹And this, this is
the condemnation: Light has come to this
dark world, but men loved darkness more than light,
because their deeds are evil. ²⁰They love night
and hate the light, whose deeds are evil. They
will not come to the Light, but from it stay,
so that their wickedness remains concealed,
and not exposed. ²¹But good works are revealed
by Light, and those who do the truth come to
it, that the good works they are seen to do*

are done in God.”

- John 3.11-21

Reflect

1. Try to get into Nicodemus' mind in this passage. Why does he come by night? What is he hoping to learn? Why is it so hard for him to understand Jesus? In what ways is he like any people you know? Complete this prayer: *Give me a heart of love for the lost Lord. Let me learn from Nicodemus...*
2. Jesus is firm but gracious with Nicodemus. In our witness for Christ there is no reason to separate truth from love, conviction from kindness. Explain. *I want to learn from You, Lord, how I...*
3. In chapter 4 we will see an entirely different approach by Jesus to leading someone to the truth – more confrontational, direct, and clearly focused on Himself. He will not use the kind of “glancing” approach that we see here with Nicodemus. Jesus' approach to Nicodemus is not so much “you” as “whosoever.” And it doesn't focus on Jesus the “Teacher sent from God” but on the Son of Man and Son of God. Why is this? Why is Jesus indirect with Nicodemus, rather than confrontational? Do you think it's important to be able to adjust our presentation of the Gospel to the circumstances and attitude of the one with whom we're sharing? Explain. *Teach me, Lord, how to speak graciously, so that I may know how to answer every person, and to...*
4. Jesus did not seem to expect Nicodemus to understand everything He was saying, especially as He spoke to Him about being born “from above,” about the Spirit, coming down from heaven, eternal life, and so forth. But He told him these things anyway. Why? What's the lesson for us as witnesses? *I know people aren't necessarily “ready” to hear the Gospel, Lord, but I also know that...*
5. What are the most important lessons for you from this conversation with Nicodemus about being a witness for Christ? About following Jesus? Bring together into one prayer the prayers you composed for questions 1-4.

Summary

“You must hate your own work and love the work of God in you. And when your own deeds begin to displease you, that is when your good works begin as you begin to find fault with your evil works. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil works, and then you do the truth and come to the light. How do you do the truth? You do not soothe or flatter yourself or say, ‘I am righteous,’ while in actuality you are unrighteous. This is how you begin to do the truth. You come to the light so that your works may be shown to originate in God. And you have come to the light because this very sin in you, which displeases you, would not displease you if God did not shine on you and his truth show it to you.” *Augustine (354-430 AD)*

Every believer is called to *follow* Jesus and to *be a witness* to Jesus. From this conversation with Nicodemus, we gain precious insights into both aspects of our calling as disciples. Explain.

Closing Prayer

Trust in the LORD, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
Delight yourself also in the LORD,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring *it* to pass.
He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,
And your justice as the noonday.

Psalms 37.3-6

Psalm 37.4-9 (*Neumark: If Thou but Suffer God to Guide Thee*)

Delight yourself in God's salvation; He'll give you all your heart's desire.
Commit to Him your every station, and His good purpose will transpire.
Your righteousness a blazing light He will bring forth against the night.

The Gospel of John: John 3.11-21

Rest in the Lord and wait on Jesus; fret not at those who brandish sin.
Forsake all wrath till anger ceases; let anxious fears not enter in.
The wicked perish from the Lord, but they are blessed who heed His Word!

The Gospel of John: John 3.11-21

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What would you say is the most important *discipleship* lesson from Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus? How are you applying this in your life?
2. According to Jesus, what is the Good News God sent Him from heaven to bring?
3. What do we need to keep in mind as we proclaim heavenly, spiritual, Good News to people who are stuck in earthly and secular ways? How should our own experience ("know," "have seen") factor into our presentation of the Good News?
4. How linked are the Gospel, the Kingdom of God, and the work of God's Spirit in Jesus' mind? Are they that closely linked in yours? Explain.
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from John 3.11-21? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Items for prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.