

Jesus' Conversation with a Pharisee

Message 02 of 06 in the series: "Conversations with Jesus"

1. In his gospel, John recorded a number of conversations that Jesus had with people from diverse backgrounds so that we can better understand who Jesus is and what He came to do and believe that He is the Christ/Messiah.

"Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written." John 21:25 (NLT)

"But **these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah**, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John 20:31 (NIV)

2. One evening, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to have a conversation with Jesus.

"There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. 'Rabbi,' he said, 'we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.'" John 3:1-2 (NLT)

Background Information: In Jesus' day, the Pharisees (separated ones) were highly revered rabbis and teachers who led synagogue worship and instructed people on how to faithfully follow the OT Law. They were OT experts and lived by the strictest possible religious rules. The Pharisees believed this gave them special standing with God and elevated them above everyone else. Many Pharisees hated Jesus because He openly condemned their self-righteousness and religious hypocrisy. "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God'" ... Then the disciples came to him and asked, 'Do you realize you offended the Pharisees by what you just said?'"

Matthew 15:7-9 & 12 (NLT) (*Isaiah 29:13*)

Note: Nicodemus most likely met Jesus at night because being seen with Jesus would have been politically incorrect. "Many people did believe in him, however, including some of the Jewish leaders. But they wouldn't admit it **for fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue**. For they loved human praise more than the praise of God." John 12:42-43 (NLT)

3. Jesus shocked Nicodemus by pointing out that the only way to get into heaven is to be born again.

"Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.' 'What do you mean?' exclaimed Nicodemus. 'How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?' Jesus replied, 'I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. **Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, "You must be born again."** The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit.' 'How are these things possible?' Nicodemus asked. Jesus replied, 'You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things?'" John 3:3-12 (NLT)

- a. We need to be born again because apart from Jesus we are spiritually dead.

"Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else." Ephesians 2:1-3 (NLT)

"You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins." Colossians 2:13 (NLT)

- b. We need to be born again because we don't need just a few adjustments to our behavior; we need to be made new from the inside out by the Holy Spirit.

"...I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart." Ezekiel 36:25-26 (NLT)

“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

- c. Being born again is only possible through faith in Jesus, NOT human effort or religious practice.

“No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that **everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.**” John 3:13-15 (NLT)

“...’Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?’ they complained. ‘There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!’ So the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died. Then the people came to Moses and cried out, ‘We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take away the snakes.’ So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD told him, ‘Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. **All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!**’ So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!” Numbers 21:5-9 (NLT)

Note: The only reason anyone was healed by the bronze snake was faith. “Now **faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see...** And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Hebrews 11:1 & 6 (NIV)

“God saved you by his grace **when you believed**. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

4. I must decide whether or not I believe Jesus is the Son of God and if I want to be born again.

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. There is no judgement against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.” John 3:16-21 (NLT)

“But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.”

John 1:12-13 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions:

Read John 3:1-21, and then discuss the following questions:

1. When/where/how did you meet Jesus?
2. Discuss the following list of contrasts between Jesus’ encounters with Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman (John 4). Why do you think John placed these two stories back-to-back in his gospel? How did they each respond to Jesus? To whom can you best relate?

Nicodemus

at night
in Jerusalem
highly respected, pious Pharisee
Jew – God’s Chosen People
male
planned visit
left challenged

Samaritan Woman

at noon
in Samaria
immoral woman, social outcast
Samaritan – mixed-race/half-pagan
female
chance meeting
left changed

3. Read Numbers 21:4-9, Hebrews 11:1, & Ephesians 2:8-9. Why would Jesus refer to an Old Testament story about Moses making a bronze serpent and attaching it to a pole while talking to a Pharisee about what it means to be born again?
4. Why do you think many Pharisees hated Jesus? (Matthew 15:7-12 & 23:1-15) Why do you think Nicodemus secretly followed Him? (John 12:42-43 & 19:38-40)
5. What does it mean to be born again? Why did Jesus say being born again is necessary in order to go to Heaven? (Ephesians 2:1-9, Colossians 2:13, Ezekiel 26:35-36, 2 Corinthians 5:17)
6. Spend some time praying as a group for our church. Ask God to help us proclaim the gospel clearly and boldly so that many people can find new life through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Pray that we will also allow the Holy Spirit to guide us wherever He wants us to go and that we will stay far from self-righteousness and pride.
7. Discuss the following quotations:

“I believe that a great number of people are going to die and go to hell because they're counting on their religiosity in the church instead of their relationship with Jesus to get them to heaven. They give lip service to repentance and faith, but they've never been born again.” Adrian Rogers

“To be born again is, as it were, to enter upon a new existence, to have a new mind, a new heart, new views, new principles, new tastes, new affections, new likings, new dislikings, new fears, new joys, new sorrows, new love to things once hated, new hatred to things once loved, new thoughts of God, and ourselves, and the world, and the life to come, and salvation.” J.C. Ryle