



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

### January 23, 2022

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

#### John 3:1-21 Nicodemus visits in the night

There are so many times in the Bible when someone comes to Jesus, they have a meaningful exchange, and we never get to know what happens next. We never know what happened to the rich young man who walked away sad in the Gospel of Luke. We don't know what happened to Zacchaeus after Jesus came to his house. We never hear from the man who was chained up in a cemetery from Gararsenes.

In this passage we read about Nicodemus visiting Jesus at night. This enigmatic exchange includes one of the most well-known concepts in American Christianity ("born again") and perhaps Jesus' most quoted sentence (John 3:16). Yet this is not the last we hear of Nicodemus. We will hear from him again when the other Pharisees want to arrest Jesus, and he pops up again at the foot of the Cross. He is there to receive Jesus' dead body with Joseph Arimathea, and provides an exorbitant amount of spices and oils to care for Jesus' body.

In this story Nicodemus is inquisitive. He is intrigued, but clearly afraid of what he might find. He comes at night. This is the first direct mention of a Pharisee relating to Jesus, but other religious leadership was already upset with him after his scene at the Temple. Think for a moment of what Nicodemus was risking. He came to Jesus seeking answers. He was intrigued by what he knew, but I think he was also worried about what might happen if people knew he was seeking out this conversation. He was risking alienation within his social, professional, and cultural circle. As a Pharisee, he was a man of influence, and he had a lot to lose. At the same time as a Pharisee, he might have been distrustful of the Temple elite. So he wanted to learn more.

Nicodemus does not understand Jesus. He is confused about Jesus' talk about being born anew. The last thing he says in this passage is, "How can this be so?"

The next time we see Nicodemus, he is defending Jesus from his other Pharisees. In the midst of turmoil and controversy that comes from Jesus' teaching in the Temple, there is a group of leaders who want to arrest Jesus. It is Nicodemus who speaks up—boldly in the face of his colleagues' opposition. Jesus is not arrested and Nicodemus has taken a huge step. What was it about this night-time meeting that made Nicodemus defend him? How has he gone from searching for Jesus in the night to defending Jesus in broad daylight?

The last time we see Nicodemus is at the foot of the Cross. When Jesus dies Joseph of Arimathea asks permission to take Jesus' body to care for it. He is joined by Nicodemus, who provides "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the



Study for Nicodemus Visiting Jesus, Henry Ossawa Tanner, public domain found at <https://www.wikiart.org>

Jews" (John 19:39-40).

This is an exorbitant amount of care that Nicodemus provides. This is how royalty is treated. This is an act of great love and devotion. I think we should wonder again, "How did Nicodemus come to this place of love and devotion?" We do not know the details of Nicodemus's journey, but I feel like it can be inspiring to see how Nicodemus developed over time.

During their exchange, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be "born again," and Nicodemus does not understand. In the last few decades this phrase "born again" has been coopted by an element of Christianity that I would argue also doesn't understand. For many, being "born again," is the mark of conversion. People share stories of the moment they were born again, as if it is something tangible and precise.

Anyone who thinks being "born again" is something that can be contained in a single moment of conversion has clearly never been around a birth. Being born includes months of gestation and preparation. It includes labor which can be painful and messy, and needs midwives, doulas, nurses, and physicians to care for those involved. Even if you can boil it down to one breath, the next moment is usually a lot of kicking and screaming, followed by years of nurture and growth. Being born of the Spirit is a communal, messy process.

We don't know all of Nicodemus's details, but we can take heart in his story. Nicodemus's birthing process took time, and so might yours. Wherever you are in the birthing process know that it all happens because God so loves the world, and God loves you so.