

Nicodemus: It Feels Too Good To Be True

John 3:14-21

John 3:1-21

Nicodemus was a Jewish Pharisee who was intrigued and fascinated by Jesus— his teaching, his actions, and his life. Pharisees were Jewish religious leaders, who with the Sadducees, formed the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious body of the Jews. The Pharisees were known for living their lives according to the strictest observance of both the traditional and written laws of the Jewish people. The commonly agreed upon total number of rules was a whopping 613 laws. Of those 613 laws for life, 243 were things that a good Jewish person was supposed to do; 365 were negative rules, things you should never do.

The rest of Jewish society looked to them for interpretations of these 613 rules. The power the Pharisees had in Jewish society created a culture of pride and arrogance. Their intent may have been to help the people live holy and righteous lives before God, their use of shame, guilt, and fear to keep the people in line, became nothing more than an exercise in keeping power. They loved having influence and status among their fellow Jews.

Nicodemus is having a conversation with Jesus in at night following Jesus' cleansing of the Temple. Nicodemus has been observing Jesus, and he is wondering if He is the long-awaited Messiah. Nicodemus was not sure of who Jesus was, but what he heard from Jesus that evening seemed too good to be true.

Nicodemus lived his whole life devoted to ritualistic purity. He thought this was how God would love and accept him; how he could be in right standing before holy God. It felt like he had lived every day of his life striving for a perfect grade in God's eyes. Then Jesus comes along and changes the rules telling him that God would complete the assignment for him, give him the "A" and all Nicodemus had to do is believe this.

Surely what Jesus was telling him could not be right. How could it be that all that was required to be right before God was to believe? That was too good to be true.

To help Nicodemus understand this, Jesus appeals to the Old Testament account of Moses lifting up the bronze snake from Numbers 21:4-9. While the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they continued to crumble against Moses and God. God was tired of their grumbling and sent poisonous snakes into the camp. Many Israelites were bitten resulting in the death of several people. The only remedy was one that God would provide.

Nicodemus needs to see that life and death depend upon God's provision. All the his ancestors had to do was look on the lifted bronze snake to live. They had to believe that God would use His own provision to cure His people. There is no number of remedies for sin that religious people can create and keep, that will make someone right and holy before God. Jesus uses this Old Testament account to foreshadow his death as God's provision to bring us dying people back to life. For Nicodemus, what he heard from Jesus felt too good to be true.

John 3:16 tells us that the love of God is what drives the provision for eternal life. The way to receive such a gift is not through keeping a bunch of religious rules in correct fashion. Jesus tells us that it starts and ends with belief in Jesus. It has been said that "religion" means "we must do

something.” The message of the Gospel, however, means “Jesus already did something on our behalf.” We must now believe and receive.

Dallas Willard - “a heart to have rather than a bunch of rules to keep.” The only way we have such a heart toward God is to believe. We must believe that what Jesus did on the cross is sufficient for our rescue from sin. The level of our obedience to rule keeping does not affect the acquittal or condemnation before God. That’s what Jesus was saying in verses 3:17-18.

Jesus’ death on the cross is God’s unique provision that saves all who turn toward Him and believes, like how God provided for His people in the desert with the snake bites. They had to turn toward God’s unique provision that would save them from their impending sickness leading to death. They had to put all their hope in what God had done on their behalf and believe. Those who did were saved from their death sentence. If they did not turn toward the bronze snake, they were condemned to death already. Likewise, those who do not look to Jesus as the remedy from sin and its devastating, eternal consequences also are condemned already.

John 3:19-21 - These verses help us see the greatness of Jesus and provision He made through Him that leads to life. He is the light of the world! He leads all that live in the darkness of sin into a new hope! This is what God has done on our behalf that we could not do on our own. To live in the darkness is the refusal to relinquish control of one’s life and ways to the life and ways of Jesus.

Application

Now, what about you? Are you living life thinking and believing that I must do something like keeping 613 rules before God will accept me, before I can be saved? Are you trying to live and secure your salvation by picking yourself up by your bootstraps and gutting out life? If you are, how is that working for you? Stop this nonsense of thinking you need to help God save you! If you have not received and believed this provision of God, His Son, Jesus Christ, lifted on the cross, dying to pay the penalty of your sins, rescuing you from His wrath and from sin, Satan, death, and hell. Then I plead with you to receive this gift now.

For those of you who have received and believe in Christ for your salvation, are you stuck somewhere in your spiritual growth because your unbiblical thinking, attitudes and beliefs are hindering you? Are you becoming more like the world than Christ?

And for us at Bethel— are we embracing unbiblical thinking, attitudes, and beliefs that are hindering people from seeing the provision of God in Jesus Christ for their salvation. The Jews wanted the Gentiles to go away, so they abused the Court of the Gentiles. This effectively kept the Gentiles from coming to God and being numbered among God’s people.

The church has two jobs: worship God and bring in the elect.

How are we doing, and how can we do this better?