

# Missing the Most Important

## John 3

Imagine this scenario – you're at a car yard looking to buy. Finally you find the one that looks right. It's the right colour, the right upholstery, and the seats feels comfortable. You see that it has all the bells and whistles – air-con, power windows, cruise control and central locking. And you can't believe it, it even has a DVD player! Best of all - it's selling for a good price. Before the test drive you decide to have a look under the bonnet to see that everything looks right. You're not much of a mechanic, but you see one thing that might be a problem – it doesn't have an engine.



When you're missing the most important thing, it has big consequences. When you're missing the most important thing, you're going to have problems. Today we're going to meet a guy called Nicodemus. He's also going to learn something about missing the most important thing.

### Read John 2:23-3:36

#### Knowing Nick

a) From 2:23-3:2, what do we know about Nicodemus?

Obviously Nicodemus was a Jew, which meant his understanding of himself was that he was part of God's chosen race. But his religious credentials went further than that. He was a zealous man for God. He was a Pharisee which meant he was part of that religious party who highly valued the scriptures and desired to keep God's laws. Because he was a member of the Jewish ruling council (called the *Sanhedrin*) he would have been well respected and valued for his wisdom and knowledge. Despite certain stereotypes we might carry in our heads, it's important to understand that the Pharisees were genuinely good people and were well liked. Nicodemus would have been sincere in wanting to please God and in waiting for God's kingdom to be established on earth.

#### New Life v1-8

From verse 3, we see that Jesus isn't interested in responding to Nicodemus' complimentary statement but takes the conversation in an unexpected direction.

b) What does Jesus say about how someone 'sees' the kingdom of God, and what is Nicodemus's confusion? v3-4

c) What meaning do you think the phrase "born again" conveys?

d) What does Jesus say to bring out the meaning of being "born again"?

When Jesus talks about being 'born again', he's actually drawing on the teaching that already existed in the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament). This seems clear from what Jesus says to Nicodemus in v10. Being born again is a way of talking about inward spiritual change that God brings about. To be born again means to be given a new heart to love and live for God. Such inward change was spoken about in Deuteronomy 30:6 and Jeremiah 31:31-33. But a very key passage to look up and read is Ezekiel 36:25-27.

e) What connection do you see between Ezekiel 36:25-27 and what Jesus says to Nicodemus?

Ezekiel 36:25-27 talks about the cleansing power of the Spirit of God. God's Spirit washes us clean of our sinful past and gives us the power to start afresh and live with a new heart inclined to Him. When Jesus speaks about being born of 'water and the Spirit' don't be confused that Jesus is saying anything about water baptism. Jesus is referring to the same thing as Ezekiel – the wonderful cleansing work of the Spirit.

**Shock 1:** For Nicodemus', what would have been shocking about what Jesus says?

f) How does Jesus teaching about being born again help or change your thinking about what happened when you became a Christian?

### **Being on the 'Inside' v9-13**

In verses 9-13, the word 'testimony' and 'testify' keeps coming up. As we saw in the first study, this is a big theme in John's gospel. We've already it in 1:6-7; 1:15; 1:32; 2:25, and here it is again.

g) What is Jesus' claim about himself in v10-12? Also read v31-32.

**Shock 2:** For Nicodemus, what would have been shocking about what Jesus says?

h) What is the tragic tone that comes through in these verses?

### **Believe v14-21**

i) What do we learn about God's character in these verses?

j) What do we learn about humanity in these verses?

We looked at the theme of light and darkness in the first study (1:4-5) and here it is again. Darkness is a moral and spiritual quality. It is sinfulness and rebellion towards God. The awful reality is that "men [and women] *loved* darkness instead of light".

k) What must we do to have new life?

**Shock 3:** For Nicodemus, what would have been shocking about this?

### **A couple of things to think about**

l) Why is it that people can go to church and still not be truly Christian ie. miss out on the most important thing?

m) How does what we've looked at in this study help you to have right thinking when it comes to evangelism? - ie. What is the message to speak? How does someone become a Christian? Why do some people resist the message?

### **Share & Pray**

1. Give thanks for the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus that John has recorded for us.
2. Praise God for the cleansing and change he brings in those who are followers of Jesus.
3. It's been a constant prayer point over this series— but again share and pray about those people in your life that do not believe in Jesus but you would so like to believe and be born again.