

October 1 – Read John 3:1-2. Our introduction to Nicodemus lets us know he was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council or Sanhedrin. The Pharisees were a group of religious leaders whom Jesus and John the Baptist often criticized for being hypocrites. Most Pharisees were intensely jealous of Jesus because he undermined their authority and challenged their views. But Nicodemus was searching, and he believed that Jesus had some answers. (And he came at night because he was eager to learn or didn't want to be seen.) A learned teacher himself, he came to Jesus to be taught. No matter how intelligent and well educated you are, you must come to Jesus with an open mind and heart so he can teach you the truth about God.

October 2 – Read John 3:1-3. What did Nicodemus know about the kingdom? From the Bible he knew it would be ruled by God, it would be restored on earth, and it would incorporate God's people. Jesus revealed to this devout Pharisee that the kingdom would come to the whole world (3:16), not just the Jews, and that Nicodemus wouldn't be a part of it unless he was personally born again (3:5). This was a revolutionary concept: the kingdom is personal, not national or ethnic, and its entrance requirements are repentance and spiritual rebirth. Jesus later taught that God's kingdom was already begun in the hearts of believers. It will be fully realized when Jesus returns again to judge the world and abolish evil forever.

October 3 – Read John 3:3-10. "Of water and the Spirit" could refer to (1) the contrast between physical birth (water) and spiritual birth (Spirit), or (2) being regenerated by the Spirit and signifying that rebirth by Christian baptism. The water may also represent the cleansing action of God's Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Nicodemus undoubtedly would be familiar with God's promise in Ezekiel 36:25,26. Jesus was explaining the importance of a spiritual rebirth, saying that people don't enter the kingdom by living a better life, but by being spiritually reborn. Who is the Holy Spirit? God is three persons in one – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit first became available to all believers at Pentecost. Jesus explained that we cannot control the work of the Holy Spirit. He works in ways we cannot predict or understand. It is also a gift (Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:5,6). Nicodemus knew the Old Testament thoroughly, but he didn't understand what it said about the Messiah. Knowledge is not salvation. What you know is important, but WHO you know is important for salvation.

October 4 – Read John 3:16. The entire gospel comes to a focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God sets the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships – when you love someone dearly, you are willing to give freely to the point of self-sacrifice. God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest price he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had brought us. When we share the gospel with others, our love must be like Jesus' – willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

October 5 – Read John 3:1-21; 7:50-52 and 19:39-40. God specializes in finding and changing people we consider out of reach. It took a while for Nicodemus to come out of the dark, but God was patient with this "undercover" believer. Daylight conversations between Pharisees and Jesus tended to be antagonistic, but Nicodemus really wanted to learn. He probably got more than he expected - a challenge to a new life! We know very little about Nicodemus, but we know he left that evening's encounter a changed man. He came away with a whole new understanding of both God and himself. Nicodemus next appears as part of the Jewish council. As the group discussed how to eliminate Jesus, Nicodemus raised the question of justice. Although his objection was overruled, he had spoken up. He had begun to change. Our last picture of Nicodemus shows him joining Joseph of Arimathea in asking for Jesus' body in order to provide for its burial. Realizing what he was risking, Nicodemus was making a bold move. He was continuing to grow. God looks for steady growth, not instant perfection. How well does your present level of spiritual growth match up with how long you have known Jesus? Prepare to continue to continue growing in our next sermon series. It's going to be an adventure!