

24 Hours - Joseph of Arimathea & Nicodemus

24 Hours

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

Bible Text: John 19:38-42
Preached on: Sunday, March 25, 2012

We find ourselves introduced to two men, Joseph of Arimathea and a man by the name of Nicodemus who would take it upon themselves to make sure that the body of Jesus is not only taken off the cross, but properly taken care of and placed in a tomb. In John 19:38.

And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.¹

This passage of Scripture focuses on two men: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Of these two men, probably Nicodemus gets the most time in Scripture as we are going to allude to in just a moment. But what we cannot get away from, because of the fact that today for a lack of time we are going to focus on Joseph of Arimathea but on the man by the name of Nicodemus because there is so much material about him in Scripture. One thing that we have to acknowledge about both of these men is both of these men took their belief, they took their faith, they took their thoughts about who Jesus Christ was and, possibly for the first time, they made it public. They made it known to any and all who would be aware of what they thought about and who they believed this Jesus of Nazareth was.

It says then that Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple. He was afraid of the Jews. But at this point he will no longer be a secret. At this point he is coming to the forefront to acknowledge what he thinks of Jesus of Nazareth because he not only takes Him off the cross, but he will place Him in the garden which bore his very name. But for the sake of time we are going to focus on a man by the name of Nicodemus. And so I want you to turn with me to the gospel of John chapter three. We are going to take a small, little journey through his life through the gospel of John. We will come back to chapter 19 in just a moment. We are going to see that there are three stages or three areas of life that Nicodemus goes through.

¹ John 19:38-42

Oh, by the way, it takes a period of about three years to experience all this. I will say, for the record, that everyone who is here presently, everyone who listens to us on the internet or on the radio of whatever communication device, every single human being listening to the message today has fallen into one of these three categories at one time or another. The first category or the first thing that we need to study from chapter three is this, that he was, Nicodemus personally, concerned for his soul. He realized as a human being well into years, as we will see in just a moment, he realized that there would come a day when he would breathe his last breath. And in chapter three of the gospel of John Nicodemus shows up to Jesus by night, as we will see in just a moment and he comes and he asks him questions and then he cannot answer some questions that Jesus asks. And I want to set the stage for you.

Nicodemus, according to verse one of John three was a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews. Notice what Jesus calls him in verse 10, a master of Israel. If there was anybody in Jerusalem, if there was anybody in Israel who should have been confident of their theology of life, confident of their philosophy of life, not afraid to see death's door, it should have been Nicodemus. This was a man who in his scope of life had all the answers. He had everything in its structured place. He had grown up. He had raised a family. He had become a leader both religiously and politically. This man had it all together.

But what you see is a man who was very curious about life's most important question, eternity. Beginning in verse one. There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.²

He came by night. And often times people say, "Well, maybe Nicodemus was scared."

I prefer to say that he was curious, because in those days, in those biblical days where the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Scribes and the theologians lived as they were described in the Bible, one of the things that they did was in the evening time when their wives and the kids and everybody had been put to bed, because of the climate, because of the culture of the Middle East, they would actually go on the roof tops and they would discuss the heavy matters of life. They would discuss the philosophies of life. They would discuss theology. This was a time period that probably hundreds of times in Nicodemus' life, he was the man sitting on the roof when some young guy came to him and said, "Sir Nicodemus, what do you think about this?"

But what we see here is that Nicodemus approaches Jesus. Why would he have been so curious? Because in chapter two everything that Nicodemus believed, everything that he professed, everything that he stakes his life and his eternity on, was put to the test and it was challenged. Jesus walks into that Passover, that holy week. He walks into the temple mount. He takes the tables of those that were selling the sacrifices and overturned them.

² John 3:1-2.

He sets the doves free. He challenges the religious thoughts of the day, not to mention that earlier in the chapter he changed water to wine.

Here was a man that supposedly had everything. Here was a man who should have had all of the answers and it says he comes to Jesus by night. In other words, he is initiating the conversation that used to be initiated to him and he says, “We know that you have come from God because you are different than anybody else. Something is different.”

He began to question his eternity. It is most like an individual I had the privilege of talking to a couple of weeks ago when we were talking about sin and salvation and Jesus. I asked him that standard question.

I said, “Sir, if this were the last day of your life and you were to find yourself in the next period of moments standing before God himself at the entrance to heaven and he were to ask you, ‘Son, why should I let you into my heaven,’ what would you say?”

And this individual, though very sincere said, “Sir, I don’t know what my answer would be.”

We find Nicodemus in the same picture. He doesn’t know what his answer would be because everything that he was raised upon has just been thrown in his face by the teachings and the actions of Jesus. He was very curious, but at the same time we discover he was a very confused individual.

Jesus says in verse three, one of those most famous passages of Scripture, a man must be born again. Listen to how Nicodemus responds in verse four.

“Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”³

Jesus goes on to explain that it is like the wind. He compares to the Spirit, like the wind, that we are born physically but we have to be born spiritually. In other words, Nicodemus, you will never be good enough to earn salvation. You will never be religious enough. You will never have all the answers.

I want you to notice what Nicodemus says in verse nine. “How can these things be?”⁴

Here was a man who supposedly had all the answers. He was a teacher of Israel, a master of Israel. And he says, “I don’t get it.”

³ John 3:4.

⁴ John 3:9.

I do find it interesting that probably the theologian of theologians, one of the leaders of the leaders, a few verses later Jesus brings it down to his level. In verse 16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”⁵ In verse 17: “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.”⁶

The most famous verse in the entire Bible is a response to a very religious, well to do man who didn't know the answers to eternity. But he was at least concerned about it or he would not have showed up and he would not have asked the questions. Let me be honest with you. If you are not concerned about your soul, you would have not got up this morning and showed up here. There are all kinds of other things that a person could do except be here. Why are you here? Because every one of us at least in somewhere deep, down inside is concerned about where will I spend eternity and what are the qualifications and what has to take place in my life. That is the first step that Nicodemus took.

Then we find the second step in chapter seven of the gospel of John. We find out that he was convicted about who Jesus was and is. This is some period of time later and what I want to introduce to you is a phrase. Even though I have put on the screen that he was convicted of who Jesus was, I want to introduce you to something that kind of frightens me about our culture. In twenty-first century western civilization, in particular, the North American continent, we have adopted what I call cultural Christianity, Christianity by default. Why? Because I don't like any of the other options. I can't agree with these folks. And I would never believe what these guys believe and so Christianity is kind of safe. It is what my parents, my grandparents, the founding fathers; it is what all those guys established. So I am just going to lean on that.

In chapter seven of the gospel of John there is a group of people who are arguing. They can't decide is Jesus good or is Jesus bad? Is he holy or is he a demon? Pick it up in verse 46 of John chapter seven.

The officers answered, never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet. And every man went unto his own house.⁷

How did Nicodemus describe or explain or demonstrate to us that he was a man of conviction, that he honestly believed that what Jesus had to offer was different from or distinct from everything that he had grown up with, that he had displayed in chapter

⁵ John 3:16.

⁶ John 3:17.

⁷ John 7:46-53.

three? Look at the standard by which he had. He has a standard here. He says, “Does not our law say...?”

I know we live in a world of relativity. I know we live in a world of Pluralism. We live in a world where everybody thinks somehow that you can have your truth and I can have mine, but we would all have to agree this morning that you cannot say that both Jesus and Mohammed are both equally right. You can't do it because they taught and preached different things. You cannot say that Jesus and Buddha are equally right. You cannot say that two things that oppose each other are both to be true. And I believe that people in our culture even though we have adopted this relativistic culture, understand that. I think we know that you can't have two things that disagree with each other both be right. So what is happening is we have been convicted that Jesus is the answer. And we don't like what the others teach. We don't like what other religions profess. We don't like their behavior so we are going to somehow default to Jesus. “Does not our law state we must try this man?”

Let me tell you what Nicodemus was doing. All the prophecies of the Old Testament, all the things that it said that the Messiah would be, Isaiah chapter 53, the suffering servant. You see, guys, let's put him to the test. Let's see if he...

He was convicted that there was something about Jesus different from everybody else. He was convicted that the message that we now know as Christianity was not the same as everything else and it was different.

We live in a culture today that over a majority of our country, a majority of our nation, when asked will say that they are a Christian. They will say they believe in Jesus. And I believe the problem is they have adopted this cultural Christianity. They just kind of say, “Well, I agree with what he says versus what everybody else says.”

Here is the problem. The problem with cultural Christianity, the problem with being convicted is verse 53. “And every man went to his own house.”⁸

Now those of you that are first time guests or visitors, put up with me for just a moment. I want to share with you some deep theological insight. The New Testament as we know it was originally written in Greek. Do you want to know what the word in Greek for every really means? Every.

Every man, not everybody but Nicodemus... think about that for just a moment. There is a crowd of religious theologians. There is a crowd of politicians. There is a crowd divided. Who is Jesus? Is he the Messiah? Is he not? Is he the Savior? Is he not?

Nicodemus stands up, that one who says, “Guys, we are divided here. Let's at least put him to the test. Let's give him the benefit of the doubt. Let's see where he winds up,

⁸ John 7:53.

because what he is saying is different than everything we have been taught through the years.”

And they said, “Are you also one of them? Are you one of his disciples? Have any of us believed on this guy? Are you going to be the first to take a stand for Jesus?”

And notice what it says in verse 53. “And every man went unto his own house.”⁹

See, Nicodemus was silent. See, that is the problem with being convicted about Jesus. You may say, “Well, according to everything else, I believe he is right. I will default. I like the message of Jesus.”

The problem isn't the standard. The problem is the silence. To be convicted of something is to know or acknowledge that it may be true or you believe it to be true, but not being willing to stake one's life upon it, not being willing to put one's reputation on the forefront, not being willing to publicly confess that that is what you believe or what you think.

See, I believe in our country today we have got a lot of people who are convicted about Jesus, but we have got few who are converted of Jesus. There is a difference between conviction and conversion. A conversion is to go from one arena to another. To be convicted is to simply acknowledge the truth or the validity of whatever you are convicted about.

There are a lot of people who are convicted that Jesus is the answer. There is a lot of people that are convicted everything else is wrong. The question is this. Are they converted? Have they made that conscious decision that I am a sinner, that Jesus is the Savior, and what he did on the cross; his giving of his life is an exchange of his righteousness for my sinfulness. We can acknowledge it. We can be convicted about it. The question is: Are we converted?

As we go back to where we started in John chapter 19 I want to state that I believe that Nicodemus demonstrates for us in chapter 19 that he became a convert of Jesus Christ. He started out curious. He started out confused. He made his way through life defending Jesus, but remaining silent of Jesus. But there comes that point in everybody's life—to excuse the phrase—you have got to put up or you have got to shut up. There comes a point in life where you are forced with the decision. Do you declare publicly or do you hide privately?

In this passage of John chapter 19 beginning in verse 38, two men, Joseph of Arimathaea who even says feared the Jews but was a disciple of Jesus and Nicodemus, come and they prepared the body of Jesus and they placed Him in the empty tomb that three days later would be empty again.

⁹ Ibid.

And I want to share with you how I believe that Nicodemus demonstrates not only his conversion but what it means or how we need to understand what it means to have a conversion to Jesus Christ. And the first part is this. He had a personal conversion experience. You say, “Well what is a personal conversion experience?”

Understand. Nobody goes to heaven just because they are religious Nobody goes to heaven because the name that is on the door. Nobody will ever go to heaven because of who their pastor is or was, okay? He will go to heaven because he has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You say, “What does that mean?”

That means that you as an individual person understand that Romans 3:23 is correct, that you have sinned in your life. Understand that we have messed up. We have thought the wrong thoughts, done the wrong deeds and said the wrong things. We are sinners in need of saving.

A personal relationship with Jesus Christ is initiated when we confess that we are sinners and we confess that Jesus is the only, not a good one, the only means of salvation and then we ask Him. We acknowledge and say, “I am a sinner. Would you, because of what you did on the cross, because the tomb is empty, would you save me? Would the righteousness that you have had for all eternity be transferred to me and with the sinfulness that I have exhibited all my life, would you take that and nail it to the cross?” There is an exchange, not of identities, but of experience.

Second Corinthians chapter five verse 20 says that he who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might be declared the righteousness in Him.

I want you to see what Nicodemus does in verse 39. It says: “Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight.”¹⁰

Now some of your Bibles may say 75 pounds of weight. Don’t panic. Don’t get discouraged by that because 100 pounds in Jewish weight 2000 years ago is about 75 pounds in America today. That is a lot of aloe. That is a lot of myrrh. That is a lot of things to prepare the body.

Now here is what you need to know. You say, “Why do you believe Nicodemus had a personal conversion experience?”

Because I believe that Nicodemus not only understood who Jesus was, but he understood his need to have an exchange of roles. Let me share with you why. What was the sign that was placed over Jesus in three languages? King of the Jews.

¹⁰ John 19:39.

The amount of ointment, the amount of myrrh, the amount of things that would prepare the body is the equivalent of what would have been used in a state funeral in the day. This is the amount of stuff that you would put on the body of a king, not the body of a pauper, not even the body of a good friend of yours, because very few people could come up with the resources. But for that person who was a king just like we see today, they roll out the red carpet and they go for everything. And that is exactly what happened.

But what I think is more important is this. In the culture of the day Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews. He was a man of the Pharisees. Jesus called him a master of Israel. You would be hard pressed to find any man more powerful, more prestigious and more knowledgeable than Nicodemus. Allow me to share with you a could it be that Nicodemus who would have been well in age, could it be that Nicodemus who had seen so many years wasted in religion and not in relationship, could it be that because he would have one day the equivalent of a state funeral, could he have given to Jesus that which had been reserved for himself? Could it be that in the giving of all this ointment, in the giving of preparing his body, he was saying, “Jesus that which was meant for me you took. And, Jesus, that which you inherently have, you offered.” A great exchange, for lack of better terms. He acknowledged he was the king, but he also acknowledged that what Jesus did was for him and what he needed to do was give back and reciprocate. It was a personal decision. It was a personal exclamation. It was his ointment. It was his substance that he exchanged and gave to him that day.

But as important as that is, I believe also we can conclude today’s message, we conclude the entire series, 24 hours That Changed the World, with this one thought, that his conversion was made public. It was not held in secret. It was not held in some dark room. It was not held wishing and waiting that somebody would not know what he had done. Because of verse 42: “There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews’ preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.”¹¹

I think you and I as predominantly Gentile individuals need to understand the significance of this day. We will study next week as we look at Christ in the Passover; this is what we know as the 14th of Nisan. This was the day that was prophesied in the book of Numbers. This was the day where every religious, every law-abiding Jew was to take the Passover lamb that had been kept up all night just like Jesus, have him slain and gather together with his family and people of influence and celebrate the Passover, to celebrate coming out of Egypt, to celebrate no longer being under the rule of Pharaoh.

You say, “Why is that so significant?”

Go back to the book of Numbers chapter nine just look at it later when you have time. Read the whole chapter, because the book of Numbers chapter nine talks about who is and who is not qualified to take the Passover meal. And it says that there is nothing that you can do in life to disqualify you from taking the Passover meal. In fact, it specifically says, “Even those who have defiled themselves with a dead body...”

¹¹ John 19:42.

Has Nicodemus defiled himself with a dead body? Absolutely, correct. That they are to take the Passover. But as you read through Numbers nine they are to take it on the second month, 14th day. In other words, when Nicodemus did what Nicodemus did and Joseph of Arimathaea did what he did, there is no way that that evening when they sat down with their family they could have taken of that meal.

I will take it even a step further. These men were leaders, not just of the community, but of their family. And if you have ever had the privilege of knowing a religious Jewish family, orthodox, reform, whatever, you will know that in many of their homes they design their kitchens, they design their living rooms, they design their basements for the purpose of the Passover.

I know individuals that have places designed for the Passover meal with 40, 50 even 75 seats. All the family from all over the world comes together and they gather. Why? This is the most important celebration on the calendar to their family. This is the Passover.

I think we will be ignorant to think that Nicodemus did not leave his family's Passover meal. I think we would be ignorant to believe that Joseph of Arimathaea did not leave his family's Passover meal. They were the patriarchs. They were the leaders, not only of the communities. They were the leaders of their homes. The body is brought down. The aloe has been applied. He has been laid in the empty tomb. Where do you think they went next? Home, where everybody was gathered, everybody was celebrating, everybody was excited about the Passover meal. And there was only one thing missing. Dad or granddad or uncle or cousin or friend or employer, whatever the relationship was. Upon his entrance to the ceremonies of the house everybody would have began to be seated. There would be two empty seats at the table. The one that is reserved for Elijah which we will study next week and the one for the head of the house, for Nicodemus, for Joseph of Arimathaea.

Can you imagine what happened when he did not take his seat at the head of the table? He could not...

Nicodemus said, "We have to judge him by the law."

Nicodemus was not a man who said, "Well, I will just obey the law when it is convenient for me."

He obeyed it. What did the law state? The law stated he would have to wait a month to take it.

Second Chronicles gives us an illustration of a time in the Israelites' history. They did not have enough priests to ordain or to do the Passover, so they had to wait for a group to do it a month later, those who were to lead it when they were defiled.

Can you imagine what happens when Nicodemus pulls up a chair from the guest room and sits it next to his wife and his oldest child and they say, "What are you doing?"

He says, "I am sorry. I am not qualified tonight, honey."

She says, "What do you mean you are not qualified?"

"Well, I had a part of a funeral service."

"Whose? Everybody we know is here."

Silence, right? Can you imagine that night when Nicodemus and Joseph had to go home to their friends, their families and those who looked up to them and had to explain why they would not lead the Passover? They had to explain why they had to hand it over to someone. They had to explain why they would not eat the items. And their explanation was: I buried the terrorist.

See, that is how Jesus was viewed. He was a terror to the religion. He was a terror to them. Why? Because the message of Jesus takes everything that we want to believe and turns it upside down. And he identified himself. We never hear of Nicodemus again in the Bible. We never hear of Joseph of Arimathaea again. I am convicted. I am convinced. Most likely they lost their reputation. They lost their income. They probably lost their wives. Their kids probably disowned them. Their businesses fell apart.

So let me ask you a very dumb, simple question. Why do we have a problem walking an aisle? Why do we have a problem getting in a pool of water?

We say, "Well, you know, I just don't... I just don't want people to know. I just want to stay where I am. I just... I don't like being a public spectacle."

Hello. None of you today at our time of invitation is going to risk your life. None of you is going to risk your job. None of you is going to risk your family. None of us. And what these two guys showed us today is they showed us what it means to have a public conversion to Jesus Christ.

Listen to me very clearly. Walking an aisle doesn't get you any more to heaven than anything else. Getting in a pool of water doesn't get you to heaven. It is what happens in the heart. It is the decision, the personal decision for who Jesus Christ is.

But find me, I challenge you, find me anybody in the New Testament who followed Jesus privately. They all followed publicly. In fact, Jesus said in Mark chapter eight, "If you are not willing to confess me in front of other men, I will not confess you in front of the Father which is in heaven."

And I don't understand everything about that verse, but it scares me enough to where about 30 years ago when I understood I needed to be saved, I didn't just walk an aisle. I ran down that aisle. I didn't put off the whole baptism thing. I jumped in the pool before the pastor had a chance. Why? Not because I am hyper, which I am, but because I

understood that sometimes you have got to put up or shut up. And Nicodemus put it all out. We don't know what happened that night in his home. We never hear of him again, but we know what tradition would be and we know what the religious rituals would be. And I got a sneaky suspicion that that night he confessed to his family and friends that he believed that Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

That being said, none of us should have any problems doing the same today.