

Make Disciples 2

Last Sunday we began a new series of messages involving a close examination of how Jesus and some of His brightest students interacted with people as they presented the gospel of the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is my hope that we all can learn and grow from these demonstrations which will help us overcome our fear, ignorance and apathy regarding our own obedience to the Great Commission.

Last Sunday we examined Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well of Sychar. We considered how Jesus was "**On His way**" to Galilee when He stopped in the village of Sychar. He began with "**normal conversation**" to begin to break down the barriers. He used a "**pivot**" to turn the conversation into one of spiritual matters. Then He "**set the hook**" at the right time by presenting her with the concept of living water and confronting her own sin which led to faith. And we examined the "**results**" of the encounter. Not only did she believe in Christ but much of the town did because of her witness.

Today we're going to look at a very different encounter Jesus had with a man. This man was a prominent Jew and he actually came to Jesus rather than Jesus going to him.

1 There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to Him at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him." **3** Jesus replied, "**I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" **4** "But how can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked Him. "Can he enter his

mother's womb a second time and be born?"⁵ Jesus answered, "I assure you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.⁶ Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.⁷ Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again.⁸ The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."⁹ "How can these things be?" asked Nicodemus.¹⁰ "Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?" Jesus replied.¹¹ "I assure you: We speak what We know and We testify to what We have seen, but you do not accept Our testimony.¹² If I have told you about things that happen on earth and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about things of heaven?¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended from heaven—the Son of Man.¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.¹⁶ "For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.¹⁸ Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.¹⁹ "This, then, is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.²⁰ For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed.²¹ But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light,

so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.”

John 3:1-21 (HCSB) End of encounter...

Learn from the Master

1. “Nic” came to Jesus Nicodemus was definitely, at the very least, seeking answers. He in fact acknowledged that Jesus had to be from God or He would not be able to do the things He had done. He likely came at night, not because he had had a busy day and couldn't work Jesus in, but because he was afraid of being seen by his peers. But don't be too hard on Nicodemus, he was not yet a follower of Christ. At least he was courageous and curious enough to seek Jesus out. And, you have to imagine that by the time Nicodemus snuck around to get to Jesus that it was pretty late. Jesus had to have been exhausted from the day's ministry activities but He was willing to meet with Nicodemus and took the time to try to open His eyes to the truth about the kingdom.

Application: Nicodemus sought out Jesus because he had already heard of and seen the wonderful things He had done. He wanted to know more.

When our lives come to the point of living such a consistent Christ-like walk, full of humility, gentleness, grace and love, people will seek us out. They will want to know how we can live our lives with such joy and peace. And it seems that the greatest potential of that happening is when we're going through hardships and they see God's peace and grace shining through the darkness that is surrounding our lives.

15 but set apart the Messiah as Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. **1** Peter 3:15 (HCSB)

This in no way implies that we are to just sit around and wait for people to come to us. We must continue to seek out divine appointments.

2. Jesus drew pictures Jesus was the Master at telling stories and drawing figurative pictures for the sake of revealing spiritual truth. With the woman at the well, it was living water. With Nicodemus it was being born again. Parables permeated the public teaching of Christ. Symbols, pictures, stories helped earthly people see and understand heavenly things.

Application: You may think, "I'm just not good at that." You don't don't have to be a professional writer or story teller to draw a simple picture to help someone understand the gospel. Use the familiar. Use something you are familiar with. Better yet, use something revealed in casual conversation that the person is familiar with.

A picture that I have used from time to time to explain the need to actually receive the gift of eternal life: Salvation is a like gift under the tree with your name on it on Christmas morning.

When does that gift actually become yours? Answer: when you receive it.

And please don't forget, if you are praying and seeking the help of the Holy Spirit, He will assist you in this. He will help you to draw the right picture for the right person in the right situation.

3. No “cookie cutter” approach Nowhere else in the bible did Jesus or anyone else use the figurative language of being “born again” to explain the necessity of repentance, faith, and regeneration. And in this one-time, unique presentation of the gospel, Jesus gave us the most beloved verse in all the bible, John 3:16, but, as far as we know, He never used it again.

Application: It is a great place to start to learn the ABCs, the Four Spiritual Laws, FAITH, Roman Road, or the Four Rs, EE, or Share Jesus without Fear, but we cannot limit ourselves to just a cookie cutter approach to presenting the gospel. Every lost person is different. They may all be lost but that's where the similarities end. Every person comes from a different background, life experiences, pre-existing beliefs, questions, doubts, arguments, misconceptions, and needs. One person may be a simple presentation of the gospel away from genuine

salvation while another may be on the other side of the world from being anywhere near coming to genuine faith.

We have to meet them where they are and help them along the way in their journey to Christ. Thus the more plans, and even better, the more bible verses we know the better prepared we will be to help move them closer to Christ. We may or may not be the one who leads them through that final step so we need to be ready to meet them where they are and take them at least a few steps closer to salvation than they were. The more diverse our own knowledge, experience, and growth are the better equipped we will be to do this.

Gospel presented We are not given much information as to how receptive Nicodemus was to Jesus' words at that time. At that initial encounter, Nicodemus only asked questions. But Jesus responded to these questions by presenting the most clear and concise presentation of the gospel in all the bible.

Application: If you only had a few seconds, if you only could use one verse in sharing the gospel with someone who was about to get on a plane or to slip into eternity, you probably should use John 3:16. Remember it is the Word of God that is alive and powerful and it doesn't get any

more alive and powerful than John 3:16. Let's consider it as a presentation tool of the gospel:

For God so loved the world

He gave His one and only Son

Whoever believes in Him

Will not perish/will have eternal life

Don't ever underestimate the power of the word of God, even one verse, coupled with the conviction and instruction of the Holy Spirit. You are just the delivery man.

Result There is no indication given throughout this encounter that Nicodemus believed and became a follower of Christ. But, my guess is that he left the presence of Jesus and spent a number of restless nights pondering His beautiful and powerful words. Then he became a truly devoted follower Christ. How do I know? The bible. At one point the Jewish leaders were arguing over what to do with Jesus as in to arrest and kill Him but Nicodemus, still a Pharisee, somewhat defended Him in front of his peers.

50 Nicodemus—the one who came to Him previously, being one of them—said to them, ⁵¹ “Our law doesn't judge a man before it hears from him and knows what he's doing, does it?” **J**ohn 7:50-51 (HCSB)

Then, after the crucifixion, Nicodemus showed great courage and faith.....

³⁸ After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus—but secretly because of his fear of the Jews—asked Pilate that he might remove Jesus’ body. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and took His body away. ³⁹ Nicodemus (who had previously come to Him at night) also came, bringing a mixture of about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. ⁴⁰ Then they took Jesus’ body and wrapped it in linen cloths with the aromatic spices, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ There was a garden in the place where He was crucified. A new tomb was in the garden; no one had yet been placed in it. ⁴² They place Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation and since the tomb was nearby. **J** John 19:38-42 (HCSB)

Application: Even when you present the gospel faithfully, creatively, and passionately, using all the creative and biblical tools in your tool chest, responses are going to be all over the place. From immediate rejection and even anger to sudden and complete repentance and faith leading to true salvation. Most often, unless you are in the most perfect and exact place at the right time with the right person you will not see immediate repentance and faith leading to salvation. You will likely often never see the results of your witnessing efforts this side of eternity. But remember, we are not responsible for the harvest. We are responsible for the planting, cultivating and watering. It is God who brings the harvest. We hopefully will be there from time to time when it is time to gather the harvest but never forget to give God the glory.

⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. **1** Cor 3:5-7 (HCSB)

You must be born again!