

# THE GATE TO GOD'S KINGDOM

Dr. Fred Fourie ~ Sunday, August 19, 2007



## Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

**John 3: 1 – 10** Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; **for** no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can

one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? < >

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Once there was a small jazz club in New Orleans. In a corner of that club sat an old piano, in **deplorable** condition. All of the jazz artists complained about this **antiquated** instrument. The piano players **dreaded** playing on it. The vocalists dreaded **singing** with it. And all of the **combos** that played the club wished that they could bring in their own piano -- just like they could a saxophone or a trumpet. Finally, after years of listening to these jazz musicians **complain** about his piano, the owner of the club **decided** to do something about it. And he did! Do you know what he did? **He had the old piano painted!**

Many people are like that club-owner. They realize that their lives are in a **sad, broken and unhappy condition** without spiritual power and faith. So they attempt a superficial shallow make-over on the surface. Sadly, for them, nothing really changes! **This is important. Something to understand.** Being a Christian, having faith in God – following Jesus is not and should never be like a **fresh coat of exterior paint for a deeply unhappy existence and deteriorating quality of life.**

Some people **turn to Churches like ours, because they trust that Christ has truly changed our lives and can change their lives as well.**" They enter this Sanctuary because they expect and believe that **we will act and do as Jesus did** –because they yearn for wholeness ~ and long to be set free from the bondage of a life without God. If they do not sense the life changing presence of God's Spirit in our midst – then they quietly vote with their feet and we never see them again! **Painting pianos is not my trade! Painting pianos is not the mission of this Church.**

We know that there are some who simply nod their heads in agreement, but never allow the true gospel of Jesus Christ to penetrate their lives. **They are satisfied to simply paint the old piano. They will never take the necessary steps to make the changes they really need.** The Biblical story of Nicodemus is helpful in this regard!

There is very little known about Nicodemus. His appearance in the Bible is limited to the Gospel of John. It is surprising that the other Gospel writers apparently didn't know about this event, or simply just ignored it. John identifies Nicodemus as a Pharisee, **"a ruler of the Jews"** that is, a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, and as **"a teacher of Israel."**

Nicodemus greeted Jesus with a title of respect, **"Rabbi"** (teacher), recognizing Him as a teacher whose life bore witness to the presence of God. Jesus told Nicodemus could never see the kingdom of God without being **"born from above"** Nicodemus could only marvel at the impossibility of such a changed life, but the Bible does not tell us anything more. Nicodemus appears and then disappears without further trace!

Many of us experience adverse reactions whenever we hear the phrase **"born again"** Many have associated this term with a **fundamentalist religious right**, using this term to shove their brand of religion and own interpretations and ideas down our throats. **But, maybe we shouldn't throw out the baby with the bath water after all.** There are different, much deeper, powerful and **life changing truths** in this story.

Nicodemus, a church leader in Jesus' time, was **so** acutely aware that there was something missing in his life, that he secretly visited with Jesus ..... seeking to fill the emptiness in his heart ..... seeking to hear the life-giving words that will show the way to a better and fuller life ... Finally Jesus confronted him with the sad truth: **"You are a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things!"**

If you truly seek the Kingdom of God, something has to change deep, **very deep** inside. Nicodemus knew all about God's laws, and most certainly he lived his life within the letter of that law. He was a good man--a solid citizen any community would be proud to call its own.

Church history reveals that there are many who have filled important positions within churches of all ages **who sadly never understood** this basic Christian truth. People who never allow the message of Jesus Christ to penetrate their lives. **Heart breaking, when Church people so close to living water never get around to drinking it.**

Obviously, there was something about Jesus that intrigued Nicodemus. Despite the devotion of Nicodemus to God's rules **he knew that there was something missing in his life.** Maybe this Jesus **could offer** what he needed. Maybe this Jesus could help Nicodemus **fill the void** that he was feeling in his life.

Have you ever felt like that? A feeling that organized religion does not really satisfy? That you needed more, that you wanted more? **Have you ever longed for a midnight visit with Jesus so that you might hear the secret of true life?**

Faith is not something we can borrow. For faith to be genuine it has to be our own. There are many secondhand Christians. They have inherited it from their families, borrowed it from their friends, married it, taken it over like the cut of their clothes from the fashion of their group." Faith is not something we can borrow from another person, for faith to be genuine it must always be our own.

Shortly after the senseless slaughter of a large herd of Buffalo, in the movie: "Dances with wolves," the character played by Kevin Costner stares in disgust over the piles of dead meat left to rot on the prairie. The so-called "hunters" took the skins to sell for profit and left a sad and stinking scene behind!

This experience brings so much resentment in his heart that he finally rejects his old "self" and culture in favor of the insights, lifestyle and culture of the tribes-people whom he befriended. In a moving scene he trades his soldier's uniform for the noble clothing of the tribe who took him in and cared for him after he was wounded ~ and thus adopted their culture and habits.

Jesus, lived, demonstrated and taught the principles that governs God's Kingdom. When you and I stop, listen and follow ~ powerful inner change will take place deep within us. In a profound spiritual way we learn how to discard the old "uniform" and culture of selfishness and how to reach for new "clothing" which is a radical change in our thinking and doing. Stop painting the piano. Go inside – rebirth is a process in the company of Jesus. Believe, reach out, accept the truth, and begin over again. If Nicodemus did, we might have heard from him again!

AMEN

### PASTORAL PRAYER ~ GATE TO GOD'S KINGDOM

Now we are in your presence, O God. We know that nothing can come of nothing - and that without seeking you we cannot find you. We thank you for our faith and for this time of worship. O come and lift us, make us hope-filled and Spirit-borne. Help us to counter unkindness in the world with bold Christly compassion. Touch our lives and renew our hope!

We bring before you the sick, the grieving, the dying, and lay before you every concern that each of us brought into this Sanctuary this morning. We yearn for wholeness, comfort and security. We need to be away from the hustle and bustle of life and to renew our spirits.

Jesus taught that unless we are born anew, we would not see the Kingdom of God. Today, like so many times before, we have another opportunity to begin anew. Teach us again how to see, but this time through your eyes. Teach us again to walk, this time in your shoes. Teach us again to feel, this time through your senses. Teach us again to love, this time with your heart. Help us to be born from above and inspire us with the confidence that you will be with us in our life journey. Help us to let go of those things that hold us down.

Let your light shine through our times of darkness, of despair, of death. Let your Spirit work among us to heal us and move us toward new life and new beginnings. O would you empower us to see with the eyes of Christ!

We pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior!

AMEN