

52 THE PURSUIT OF JESUS

EASTER 2022

Shane Philip
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The Crossing Church
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OPENING

It's Easter weekend and we are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. Imagine what it must have been like 2000 years ago to be Joseph and Nicodemus¹ awakening that morning to hear that the stone had been removed from the tomb and Jesus was not there. After a terrible Saturday of mourning and questioning, a whole new future of joy was opened up before them. Jesus had risen from the dead just as He had promised He would. No other religious leader in history has been resurrected from the dead so this miraculous event sets us apart as Christians. We have a Savior who is Truth itself and we can believe everything He has told us in His Word. Without the resurrection our faith is just is purposeless and dead as all the others in the world.

SCRIPTURE²

John 3:1-7 Now there was a *Pharisee*, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the *Jewish ruling council*. He came to Jesus *at night* and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a *teacher* who has come from God. For no one could perform the *signs* you are doing if God were not with him." Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the *kingdom of God* unless they are *born again*." "How can someone be *born* when they are *old*?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be *born*!" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God *unless* they are born of *water* and the *Spirit*. *Flesh* gives birth to flesh, but the *Spirit* gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"

John 3:9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

John 3:13 No one has ever gone into heaven *except* the one who came from heaven—the *Son of Man*.

John 7:45-52 Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?" "No one ever spoke the way *this man* does," the guards replied. "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. "Have any of the *rulers* or of the *Pharisees* believed in him? No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them." *Nicodemus*, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked,⁵¹ "Does our law condemn a man without first *hearing him* to find out what he has been *doing*?" They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."

John 19:38-40 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a *disciple* of Jesus, but *secretly* because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.

¹ Quest 52, Chapter 13

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture referenced here is **NIV**

He was accompanied by *Nicodemus*, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking *Jesus' body*, the two of them *wrapped it*, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

Luke 24:1-6 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the *spices* they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? *He is not here; he has risen!*"

John 3:16-17 For God *so loved* the world that he *gave* his one and only Son, that whoever *believes in* him shall not perish but have *eternal life*. For God did not send his Son into the world to *condemn* the world, but to *save* the world *through* him.

OBSERVATION

In Jesus' day, while the Romans conquered Israel, they allowed religious leaders to continue in place in order to keep the people apathetic and under submission. Those leaders were Pharisees, 70 members of the Sanhedrin and Temple Priests. A man named Nicodemus was a member of the first two. He believed that Jesus was a good teacher and a miracle worker and even a prophet. He also believed that he had to be born into the right religion (Judaism) and then he had only to work his way to God in order to enter His Kingdom. But he acknowledged that Jesus couldn't feed 5000 people or heal a blind man if God was not with him. When Nicodemus approached Jesus one night, he was curious about His identity and had many questions, but he was also fearful for his own life because the ruling religious leaders hated Jesus and were looking for reasons to arrest Him.

QUESTION: When have you held Nicodemus' beliefs about Jesus? What do you believe about Him today?

Nicodemus asked Jesus how he could enter the Kingdom of God and His reply was astounding. "You must be born again." Not physically, but spiritually - a new concept that Nicodemus received **skeptically**. About a year after this conversation, Jesus was very popular with the people who heard His teachings and experienced His miracles. Nicodemus was beginning to believe Jesus was who He said He was – the Son of God Himself. He was turning into a **supporter**.

QUESTION: What is your understanding of Jesus' response to Nicodemus?

When Jesus was arrested and crucified, Jewish law required that He be buried before Passover began – at dusk on the same day - Friday. A man named Joseph of Arimathea, a Pharisee, had a tomb available and wanted Jesus to be buried there. Nicodemus arrived with him to ask Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body and they both brought burial spices to complete that process. This was a very dangerous thing to do: It was still daylight, they went to a Roman ruler for permission, they were seen to be respectfully carrying Jesus' dead body and therefore defiled themselves under Jewish law, and applying expensive spices - generally honoring an "enemy" of Jewish religious law. They therefore both publicly revealed themselves to be **supporters** of Jesus. Can't we imagine that they both **surrendered** completely to Christ as He spoke to disciples and even a crowd of 500 people during the 40 days He walked the earth after His resurrection?

QUESTION: Where do you find yourself today? Are you a skeptic? A supporter? Have you publicly surrendered to Jesus?

APPLICATION

Some of us are **skeptics** because we have barriers to our faith. It may be **1) intellectual** because it requires faith; or **2) emotional** because we see suffering in the world or our prayers don't seem to be answered; or **3) moral** because of issues in our lives that are contrary to Bible teaching. Some are afraid there will be too high a cost if they surrender; some need to maintain control; or, because we are ashamed of our pasts or it can be pride making us think we can do it all ourselves.

QUESTION: What are the barriers keeping you from total surrender to Jesus?

If we fail to surrender, we are responsible for the outcome. God honors our freedom, He won't force Himself on us. Or, we can surrender to God and He will take responsibility for the outcomes of our lives. The irony is that when we surrender our lives to Jesus and accept His sacrifice for our sin, then we truly find our lives.

QUESTION: As a follower of Jesus, what do you still need to surrender to Him?

QUESTION: If you haven't surrendered to Jesus, what do you think life after death will be like for you?

QUESTION: What do you understand about The Rapture?³

QUESTION: Who are you expecting to see in heaven when you get there? Who are you not sure will be there? Is it not too late to share Jesus with them?

We are all welcome at the marriage supper of the Lamb – at the table of our King. His table is spread out for all who call Him Lord. There is acceptance and conversation and relationship available to us there – maybe Nicodemus will tell us the rest of his story.

QUESTION: Who is welcome at your dinner table? What would you want to share with them there?

QUESTION: In chapter 13 page, 81 of our book Quest 52 by Mark E. Moore, the author compares the influence of the woman at the well with that of Nicodemus. His conclusion is that, while “Nicodemus was the one who could move the needle for the movement, but he never did - she went down in Biblical history as the single most effective evangelist in all the Gospels.” Do you agree? Why/why not?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us so much that You sent Your Son to pay the price for our sin and reconcile us back to You. His death on Good Friday was horrific and hard to think about, but joy came when Your Holy Spirit raised Him up three days later. Glory to God in the Highest!! In Jesus' name. Amen.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION: When have you shared Nicodemus' beliefs about Jesus?

QUESTION: What is your understanding of Jesus' response to Nicodemus?

QUESTION: Where do you find yourself today? Are you a skeptic? A supporter? Have you publicly surrendered to Jesus?

QUESTION: What are the barriers keeping you from total surrender to Jesus?

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³ Matthew 24; 1 Peter 1; 1 Thessalonians 4; 2 Thessalonians 2; Luke 17