

Nicodemus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Mr Ken Macleod

[0 : 00] Let us now turn to John's Gospel and to chapter 3 and to the well-known words in the third verse. Jesus answered and said unto Nicodemus, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

My earliest memory of this building and the Stornway congregation stretches back to my childhood days.

The first time that I recall entering this building was through that door and sitting up in that area. It was our custom as a family and the habit of the majority of people who lived at that time in our village not to come to Stornway, but to make their way to worship down to Point.

But now and then a treat was in store. At communion time we used to come to Stornway. But it's not the communion that I recall as an early memory.

It's sitting there in a packed building. No room to sit in a seat. Sitting on my father's knee on the step.

[1 : 48] The preacher was a man from Eastern Europe. A man who had been invited to the island to preach. One who had been tortured reputedly by the Nazi commanders.

In a concentration camp. And this man made an impression on many. His text that night were these words.

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And I recall as a young boy in primary school.

I recall next day in the playground at the interval. I recall speaking with another young boy. He was also here that night.

And we talked about what the preacher had said. We recalled the verse. Today I can't recall the substance of his address.

[2 : 51] But I recall the verse. Except a man be born again. To my knowledge, the friend with whom I conversed that day in the playground.

Doesn't come within the sound of the gospel today. And I find myself standing here. A thought sufficient to humble me.

For time and for eternity. What is your earliest memory of the gospel, can I ask? When did the gospel have an effect on your life?

Was it your grandmother's prayers? If it was, bless your granny that she prayed for you. Was it a communion time?

Was it a fellowship? You must have an early memory. The gospel, when it comes, doesn't leave us the way that it found us.

[3 : 54] It has an impact to make. The process is either one of softening or one of hardening. We all have our early memories.

But God is gracious. In the chapter that we read, John chapter 3, some of the most profound questions and statements in the whole of scripture are to be found in this chapter.

Questions of deep significance and answers given to these questions. The story ought to be well known to each one of us.

Nicodemus, the teacher, coming to Jesus. He had been intrigued by this man. There was something about him.

He was different to everybody else. Nicodemus' attention was gripped. His mind raced. Perhaps he couldn't get to sleep at night.

[5 : 0 0] He longed to ask this man, this teacher, this performer of miracles. He longed to ask him questions. But he couldn't come in the daylight.

He had his reputation to consider. What would his friends think? What about his social standing? If they saw him coming during the day.

But sleepless nights take their toll. And Nicodemus came at night. It was a clandestine meeting.

Perhaps you can follow him. Perhaps you long to come to the morning service. You come regularly to the nighttime service.

And for that we give thanks to God. But perhaps, perhaps something that our late pastor said while he stood here.

[6 : 0 3] And preached the gospel so faithfully. Perhaps that word, that little word. Like the stone that slew the giant. Perhaps that little word has sunk into your mind.

And into your heart. And you want to come out to the morning service. But you can't. What will they say? What will your friends think?

Maybe you have come out to the morning service. And maybe you long to come to the prayer meeting. But again, what will people think?

The fear of man, the scriptures tell us. The fear of man brings a snare. And it's a very real fear. But you made your way to the prayer meeting.

The back seat. The furtive glance. No one had recognized you. You longed to hear something. Something that would satisfy your curiosity.

[7 : 0 7] You too can follow Nicodemus. He has many offspring to the present day. You listened eagerly.

I recall just now. I can see his face. He's not present with us. I can recall a young man telling me years ago.

How his own interest was aroused. His interest in the gospel. He was afraid to show that interest. He had been brought up in a good home.

A godly home. Both his parents were Christians. And at the communion season, folks would gather in their home. And after supper, the Lord's people would meet in the sitting room.

And Callum would sit down in the kitchen. And once the conversation started, he would make his way to the door and put his ear to the keyhole.

[8 : 1 4] Longing to be with them. And yet not plucking up the courage. Spiritual life begins like that. Imperceptibly.

The way that the sun rises. That's the way it was with Nicodemus. For a moment, let's leave Nicodemus.

Let's leave him with a burning question that's in his mind. The question that is asked the greatest teacher who ever trod this earth.

The greatest one who ever spoke. And the question is this. How can a man be born again? Nicodemus is puzzled.

And I leave you for a little to consider that question. Have you ever asked it seriously? Questions are fascinating.

[9 : 14] Questions open all kinds of doors. Parents know this. Those of you who have had little ones, they ask the most awkward questions, don't they?

Questions that are so difficult, sometimes impossible. Impossible to answer. Teachers know this as well. And very often when they cannot answer, they say, you go home and see if you can find out, and then come back and tell me the answer.

But questions are fascinating. How is it, the little one will say, how is it that when I leave my bar of chocolate out in the sun, it melts?

And if I make a model of clay and place it side by side with a bar of chocolate, it doesn't melt. It hardens. How is it? Or this one.

Why is the sky blue? Or the grass green? Or the apple red? Why? Or this one. And it's not as ridiculous as you may think.

[10 : 26] Why is water wet? That's one that I was faced with by a young, coming from a young teenager. Why is water wet?

I can think of, I can think of a liquid, and if you put a garment or a piece of cloth into that liquid, and take it out again, it's dry.

Put the same cloth into water and take it out again, and it absorbs the water. It's wet. Why is water wet? Why do we suffer pain?

Why must we die? I just have to mention Bosnia. Bosnia. Bosnia. Bosnia. Chechnya.

The West Bank. Canary Wharf. Something has gone seriously wrong. Very far wrong.

[11 : 44] What about closer to home? What about the problems in our town? The alcohol problem?

The drug problem? Was it always like that? Will it always be like that?

Was there ever a time? Yes, there was. There was a time when there was absolute bliss. The sky was blue. His horizon was cloudless.

His peace was perfect. But something happened. Something went wrong. Now I would suggest that questions of that type, serious questions, before they can be given a serious answer, we must know something about the makeup of the article or of the object or of the material.

Without knowing its makeup, we cannot return a satisfactory explanation as to its behavior. likewise with ourselves.

[13 : 06] Why are we the way we are? Must it be like this? In order to return an answer to questions like that, we must ask this.

How are we made? And I think it was just last week that Mr. Martin was dealing with this. We were made, we were created, out of the dust of the ground, to quote from Genesis.

And God breathed into man the breath of life and man became a living soul. But something happened.

The communion, the fellowship that our first parents had with their maker that soon came to an end was evil entered.

Why? Evil entered. Now there's a question. What is evil? Where has it come from?

[14 : 20] It's a very deep question. Perhaps we can't answer where it came from. But one thing we can say about it is this.

It has brought tragedy in its wake. As evil entered, so did guilt. How do we know?

They hid themselves. At least they attempted to. They attempted to hide themselves from their maker. But it's not as easy as that. The psalmist told us, didn't he, in 139, that wherever he went, whether he ascended to heaven or went down to the depths, he was there.

Evil entered. Man had sinned. and man became guilty before his God. Before that happened, God was at the center of his life.

And when God is at the center, everything is perfect. There is order, there is life, and there is life.

[15 : 34] Life in all its fullness, when God is at the center. what happens when God removes himself? Well, the very opposite.

Darkness invades. Disorder reigns. And death expels life.

That's what happened to our first parents. And that's our condition by nature. We were told in the New Testament that we are dead in trespasses and in sins.

Why is water wet? Why are we the way we are? Let's return to Nicodemus and see how his thought processes are now.

we left him with that burning question. How can a man be born again? Why must he be born again?

[16 : 47] Ah, well, for this reason, there is darkness in his soul. But can't that darkness be removed? Wasn't the darkness at the beginning removed?

Simply with a word of power. darkness and God said, let there be light and there was light. But not with this darkness.

Speaking with all reverence, the Almighty himself could not remove the darkness on the soul of Nicodemus with a word of his power.

Nor can he remove that darkness from our soul tonight. God is not because of guilt. We read in the scripture that a threefold cord is not easily broken.

When sin entered, guilt became manifest. Once a person is guilty, punishment must follow.

[17 : 55] It's inevitable. God being who he is and God being what he is cannot overlook sin. But not only was Nicodemus' soul in darkness, it was worse.

Nicodemus' soul is dead. Now that's a hard statement to make. We are dead, as far spiritually dead, as far as God is concerned.

Nothing could be more serious. Nothing could be more solemn. Dead in the sight of God. What a bleak outlook.

But the story doesn't end there. This is the miracle of the new birth. How does it take place?

Well, there is a place called Calvary. And there was one who hung on a cross outside the city walls.

[19 : 04] He was the only innocent man ever to walk on this earth. And he hung on a cross. He became guilty.

And that's precisely the charge that the enemies of the gospel lay against the atonement. The glorious atonement. The only way that a sinner can be born again and lay the charge against it.

What charge? The charge of immorality. They say it is immoral of God to punish one who is innocent.

indeed it is. No innocent person should be punished. How is this charge to be answered?

Just as scripture answers should. He was innocent indeed but at the same time he was guilty. How can that be?

[20 : 11] when he was there on the cross in all the innocence of his person he was there as well on behalf of his people.

They were guilty and they are guilty. The head and the body are one. So it's not immoral of the eternal God to punish his son.

he who knew no sin was made sin for us. That's how a man or a woman or a boy or a girl is born again because of what he has done.

This is where we pin all our hopes for eternity. Maybe they knock at your door as they knock at mine and they tell you how they're going to get to heaven and you tell them how you hope to get to heaven and you come down to this and you say to them well if you get there it's by your own efforts and if I get there it's by the work of another I pin all my hope all my expectation I pin my soul I pin my life upon the work of another he has finished the work and when by his spirit he works in the heart and he blows he works in the heart as the wind blows he said to Nicodemus you can't see the wind

Nicodemus but it's there and no one has ever seen the wind but you can tell it's there you can tell by its effects so is everyone who is born of the spirit we don't know where the wind comes from neither do we know where the wind goes to so is everyone who is born from above the work takes place as I said earlier imperceptibly not to him but to human eyes was Nicodemus born again well this chapter chapter three is silent on that question but if we read further on if we come to the place where it tells us about his burial the burial of Jesus we read there that Joseph of Arimathea came and he begged the body of Jesus but he wasn't alone he was accompanied by

[23 : 04] Nicodemus Nicodemus who was trembling at the first who didn't have the courage to come in daylight Nicodemus who came at night doesn't matter now fear has gone he has seen what his saviour has done for him nothing will hold him back there he is with Joseph of Arimathea and together they take that body and they wrap it lovingly and they lay it in the tomb Nicodemus will not lose he will get his reward for what he did what about ourselves do we know anything of this mighty change if we do that change will show itself it must show itself are the marks of the new birth in us do we believe that

Jesus is the Christ do we love righteousness do we love the company of the Lord's people is our hope the hope of the righteous or is it the hope of the hypocrite one will be put to shame and the other will be rewarded happy is the person who can give satisfactory answers to these questions I've now come almost come to the end of what I wanted to say and I'll be honest with you I feel emotionally drained I feel physically exhausted little did I know what this would cost that's the way that I feel why do I feel like that because I see another day coming I see a day when

I must give an account for all that I've ever done for all that I've said an account of what I've said here tonight but I also see this I see you standing there as well on the judgment day what will you do with what you've heard and you haven't heard it for the first time many many a night you came here many a tear was shed little do you know what it cost your pastor to preach the gospel to you many a sleepless night he had not any longer he has fallen asleep in Jesus ah you're saying to me you're getting very emotional now my friend there is emotion in it the day that our Christianity is cerebral the day that it remains in our mind and goes no further is a sad day have you ever gone out at night on a cold night on a frosty night on a cloudless night have you taken a walk down by the sea or down by the loch and you've seen what have you seen you've seen a thin film of ice there was plenty of light and the water froze it's the same in the spiritual life if we have light intellectual light and nothing more it can freeze we we need we need the warmth of the

Son of Righteousness I'll close with a quote from Bishop Ryle Bishop Ryle says this a day will come when those who are not born again will wish that they had not been born at all a day will come when those who are not born again will wish that they had not been born at all ah don't leave it too late