

=FAVORITE BIBLE CHAPTERS=

Lesson 9

John 3

INTRODUCTION: Someone has said that if the Gospel of John were the only book in the Bible, we would have enough Bible to get us to Heaven; and if the third chapter of John were the only chapter in the Bible, we would have enough truth to get us to Heaven; and if the 16th verse of the third chapter were the only verse in the Bible, we would have enough Gospel to get us to Heaven. The chapter is built around an event that took place in the early ministry of Christ, when a man named Nicodemus came to Him at night to discuss the matter of his soul's salvation. Jesus takes care in telling Nicodemus how he can be saved, and we have one of the most beautiful chapters in the Bible concerning the subject of salvation.

I. NICODEMUS.

1. Nicodemus was religious; yet he was not saved. He was a Pharisee. (This was a religious group.) The Bible warns over and over again about religious people being unsaved. Matthew 7:15, 16, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

Also note Matthew 7:21-23, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." So often in the Bible, the subject is brought up about someone who is religious but is not saved.

In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus told about two people who went up to the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee, and the other, a publican. The Pharisee stood, prayed with himself, and thanked God that he was not an extortioner, unjust, an adulterer, or even like the poor publican. He told the Lord that he fasted twice a week, gave tithes of all he possessed, and was careful to keep the ceremonial laws and religious ritual to the letter of the law; and yet the Bible says he went down to his house a sinner.

In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus talked about a fellow sowing wheat in a field. Then at night an enemy came and sowed tares. When the tares came up, the servant said, "Look at these tares! Shouldn't we pull them out?" The householder answered, "No. Do not root up the tares or you may get the wheat also." God will send angels at the end and gather them and cast them into a fiery furnace. These tares represent people who claim to be Christians but are really not converted.

Then in Matthew 25, we have the foolish virgins who had lamps but no oil, and in this passage, John 3, we have Nicodemus: religious, but not converted.

2. Nicodemus was separated, but he was not converted. The Pharisees were very strict in their behavior. They did not participate in anything that was questionable; yet that does not mean that one is converted.
3. Nicodemus was doctrinally sound; yet he was not converted. He was very strict in the outward form of his Jewish religion. The boys were circumcised when they were eight days old. The Pharisees thought if they kept the feast of the Passover once a year; if they kept the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday; if they attended the synagogue; if they did not eat pork; and if they did not do other things forbidden in the Jewish dietary ceremonial laws, they would be all right. Nicodemus was one of the chief Pharisees; yet he was not saved.
4. Nicodemus was a religious leader, but he was not saved. He was a ruler of the Jews. Notice John 3:1. What does the Bible mean by his being a ruler? Was he a governor, mayor, pastor of a church, president, congressman, or what? There were seventy elders selected as religious rulers in Israel. The Roman Empire allowed these Jews to have their own local laws and local leadership. On major matters they had no authority; but on most matters of local leadership, they were in authority. The Sanhedrin was not usually allowed to put people to death, but they could recommend to the Roman Empire that the death penalty be given to someone. On rare occasions they were given special privileges to exercise the death sentence.

These seventy leaders were rulers in religious matters, and religion had precedence over other matters. They were rulers on all matters of morals. Nicodemus was one of these rulers, but he was not converted.

5. Nicodemus was a Bible teacher; yet he was not converted. Notice in John 3:10 that Jesus asked, "Art thou a master of Israel...?" The word "master" here implies that he was a teacher of the Bible.
6. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Why did he come at night as is told us in John 3:2? He came at night perhaps because he was afraid for folks to see him, but he did want to know something more about salvation.
7. Nicodemus believed that God was with Jesus; yet he was not saved. Notice in John 3:2 that he said, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God."
8. Nicodemus believed in the miracles. Notice John 3:2b. In spite of this, he was not converted.
9. Nicodemus was, however, a seeker. He was sincere. He wanted to know the answer concerning salvation. Of course, this is the first step toward being saved.

II. THE PLAN OF SALVATION.

1. Jesus taught Nicodemus that he must be born again. Read John 3:3, 5, 7. Three times in different words Jesus teaches him that he must be born again. What does the term "born again" mean? It is simply this: Man in the Garden of Eden was made body, soul and spirit. When he sinned, he died spiritually. That spirit must be revived, quickened, or "born again" before man can go to Heaven or even fellowship with God. The body and the soul cannot fellowship with God; it is only the spiritual that can live forever and have fellowship with its Creator. It matters not how good the body and soul are, how much they have improved, or how moral they are. A man must be a new creature if he fellowships with his Creator and goes to Heaven. This is why the new birth is essential for salvation.

(Teacher: Use the illustration here about the caterpillar and the butterfly. Show how the caterpillar cannot fly until a miracle takes place one day, and he becomes a butterfly. Without this miracle, flying cannot take place. Being a good caterpillar is not enough. Being a nice caterpillar is not enough. A person must be born again.)

2. Jesus explained to Nicodemus what one must do in order to be born again. Notice John 3:9-15. Nicodemus could not understand what our Lord was talking about when He said that a person must be "born again," so Jesus had to talk to him in his own language. He told him a beautiful story from the Old Testament. The Israelites had been complaining to God. As punishment, God sent fiery serpents. These serpents bit them, and the Israelites began to die. Moses came to God to seek the answer or cure or prevention; and God gave to Moses instructions to get a piece of brass, make it into a serpent's likeness, put it on a pole, lift the pole high and tell the Jews that all who looked at that serpent on the pole would be saved from death. All a Jew had to do was look. Then Jesus explained to Nicodemus that this pole and serpent pictured the cross and Jesus. Nicodemus is the one bitten by the serpent, Satan. Jesus is the One on the pole. If Nicodemus will look to Jesus and trust Him as the Jews trusted God's remedy in their day, he could be saved.
3. Jesus then gave Nicodemus the greatest sentence ever spoken on salvation. Notice John 3:16. Luther called John 3:16 "the miniature Gospel." It is the best-known verse in all the Bible. It is the one best-known sentence in all literature of any language or country. "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." God's love is shown in this verse: "God so loved the world." The greatest gift is shown in this verse: "that he gave his only begotten Son." The virgin birth is shown in this verse: "his only begotten Son." The scope of salvation is shown in this verse: "whosoever." The way of salvation is shown in this verse: "believeth." Escape from Hell is shown in this verse: "should not perish." Heaven is shown in this verse: "but have everlasting life."

The key word here is "believe." It means "to roll upon," "to cast one's self upon," "to rely upon." When a person realizes he is a sinner and that he is condemned because of his sins; when he realizes

that Jesus went to the cross and paid the penalty for his sins and then relies upon that payment for the penalty and upon Christ as his Saviour, he is God's child.

4. Jesus gave Nicodemus the great assurance verse. Notice John 3:36a. Here it is in black and white, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." In other words, realizing what Jesus has taught him, if a person would believe on Jesus as his sacrifice and hope for Heaven, he has everlasting life. What a wonderful assurance!

- III. NICODEMUS LATER. When Jesus died on the cross, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathæa came to beg the body of Jesus. See John 19:38-40. They buried Him in Joseph's new tomb. Hence, we have good reason to believe that Nicodemus had heard the words of Christ, believed Him, and was born again!