

TEXT: John 3:1-2; 7:50-51; 19:39

THEME: NICODEMUS, THE SILENT BELIEVER

1. Nicodemus Met Jesus in Secret at Night
2. Nicodemus Made a Feeble Defense of Jesus
3. Nicodemus Broke His Silence after Jesus Died

John 3:1-2 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

John 7:50-51 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?"

John 19:39 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. NIV

Dear Fellow-Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb:

In thinking about People of the Passion, I wonder sometimes whether Nicodemus might have felt any remorse that he did not do more to prevent Jesus' suffering and death. Did he ask himself later if he could have done something differently to help Jesus?

You remember Nicodemus, don't you? Some people call him the *night disciple*, because the first time he came to Jesus was late one night. Today, however, we choose to call him THE SILENT BELIEVER.

We wouldn't exactly call Nicodemus a *disciple* the first time he came to Jesus. He had seen Jesus and knew about his miracles. He thought Jesus might be "**a teacher who has come from God**" (Jn 3:2). But he had many questions.

NICODEMUS MET JESUS IN SECRET AT NIGHT. Nicodemus came at night because then he could talk with Jesus alone, away from the crowds. He could speak with Jesus teacher to teacher: he was a teacher and leader among the Jews and Jesus was a teacher with signs from heaven. Nicodemus wondered—and he hoped to learn more—whether Jesus was the Messiah.

So, he came to Jesus at night. But choosing the night time was not entirely noble of Nicodemus. He wanted to talk with Jesus, undetected by the other leaders of the Jews who, with him, were members of the Jewish ruling council under the Romans. Jesus was not popular with most of them. They saw him as a threat to their security and hated the way he seemed to flaunt some of their church laws. And they were jealous of the following he was getting.

If the council members knew that Nicodemus went to Jesus, they would likely have turned on him and possibly have deposed him from the council. He did not want to jeopardize his good standing with them.

That night with Jesus changed Nicodemus' life forever. Jesus told Nicodemus things about the kingdom of God and how he needed a new life from the Holy Spirit. He said that God loved the world and gave his one and only Son. And whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Nicodemus did not understand all of what Jesus told him, but the seeds of his faith were sown that night. He had much to ponder. He liked Jesus. But he kept silent about his visit and kept his real feelings to himself. He still had doubts and fears. He did not let on that he knew Jesus personally. On the outside he was quiet, but inwardly his soul cried out to know more.

NICODEMUS MADE A FEEBLE DEFENSE OF JESUS. As time went on, the members of the Jewish council grew more and more hostile toward Jesus. They did not hide their feelings. They opposed Jesus openly. They spoke out against Jesus in their meetings. Nicodemus, however, remained silent.

As matters grew worse, some of the rulers plotted to have Jesus arrested. But those sent to do the job returned empty-handed. When the council pressed them to tell why they failed, they answered simply: "**No one ever spoke the way this man does**" (Jn 7:46).

Imagine Nicodemus hearing them say that. He knew exactly what they meant, but he kept his experience a well-guarded secret. Most of the others flew into a rage. "Nobody who is anybody believes in him," they insisted. "The rulers don't. The Pharisees don't. And the mob knows nothing of the law, but is cursed."

Finally, Nicodemus reacted. He was both a ruler and a Pharisee. He was not ready to say he did not believe in Jesus. And they talked about not knowing the law? They themselves ignored the law in their plotting against Jesus. Now Nicodemus had to say something. His conscience would not let him remain silent any longer.

He gained the floor of the council. He asked, "**Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?**" It was a good legal question. But it fell far short of defending and confessing Jesus. The council ignored this legal challenge. Instead, they ridiculed Nicodemus, wondering if he too were deceived by the Galilean, Jesus.

The meeting no doubt left Nicodemus with a heavy and sad heart. He must have wondered if anyone had guessed his real feelings about Jesus. If they did, it was not because he boldly and clearly confessed them.

He pondered his dilemma. He had tried to help Jesus and had courageously faced his irrational peers. Still, he had failed to press the point, failed to expose their madness, failed to confess Jesus. He needed more understanding and strength.

Nicodemus was on the road to a bold, open faith in Jesus, but he had a long way to go yet. For the time being, probably judging that to say anything more would be fruitless, he remained silent.

Then, about six months later, the high priest Caiaphas convinced the council that Jesus must die. As the judgment was declared, only Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea did not consent. But neither did they strongly object. It was too late and impossible to stop the brewing storm. They kept silent.

Then it happened. Late into the night during the Passover Festival, the council was summoned to meet. Jesus had been captured and was on trial for his life. Everything about it was wrong. The false witnesses, the hurried trial at night, Caiaphas' hatred were all wrong. Yet it happened. That normally august body pronounced the death sentence on Jesus. Nicodemus did not agree. He just remained silent, swept along in the relentless tide of injustice.

NICODEMUS BROKE HIS SILENCE AFTER JESUS DIED. Was it at Calvary that Nicodemus finally realized that he had to break his silence? There was Jesus hanging on the cross in torment. Nicodemus watched, feeling that he had let it happen. He could have spoken out more emphatically. He could have confessed his faith. Maybe he could have prevented the murder of this innocent man.

He marveled to himself how passively Jesus accepted his unjust sentence. He heard Jesus cry out from the cross, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing**" (Lk 23:34). That word of forgiveness had to mean much. In Nicodemus' mind, no one needed forgiveness more than he.

His faith grew stronger. It seems he determined right there not to hide his faith any longer. Although it was terribly late, he would show that Jesus did not die in vain. He would help bury him. He would publicly confess his allegiance to Jesus and to his teachings. Let the rest of the council do their worst. Nicodemus' place was now with Jesus, even a dead Jesus. Nicodemus no doubt faced the wrath of the council. But he did not need them anymore. He had Christ.

The days ahead brought untold joy to Nicodemus. The man he had buried rose from the dead and appeared alive. Jesus' death was not in vain. In death, Jesus won forgiveness of sins and eternal life for Nicodemus and all sinners, including you and me. He did not die because Nicodemus failed to speak; he died because he had a mission to save the world. Now that Jesus was alive, how could Nicodemus help but speak?

Now I ask: Are there any Nicodemuses here today? Do you sometimes stay silent when you should be telling the truth of Christ Jesus? Are you intimidated by bold and threatening unbelievers? Do you strain to express your faith, but hold back in weakness?

If so, I urge you to learn from Nicodemus' example. Remember Jesus on the cross. Remember him in the grave and then alive. Speak up and tell the world about him. If you have hesitated before, don't hesitate any longer. Take the lead to honor Christ. Repent of your weakness and sins. Trust in Christ. Be bold to speak of the crucified and risen Savior, and the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Amen.