

Life-Giving Encounters with Jesus

John 3 – 4



Nicodemus

Henry O. Tanner, 1899

John 3:1-21

Narrator: There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said,

Nicodemus: *“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.”*

Jesus: *“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”*

Nicodemus: *“How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”*

Jesus: *“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is 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. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*

Nicodemus: *“How can this be?”*

Jesus: *“You are Israel’s teacher and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but still you do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so love the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”*

Questions for Reflection

Keeping in mind the “essential question” running throughout John’s gospel, *“What do you want?”*

1. Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus? What do you believe he wanted?
2. What is surprising about this encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus?
3. What did Jesus offer to Nicodemus? Did Jesus give him what he wanted?
4. What is the life-giving message of this story?

NOTES: A Life-Giving Encounter with Nicodemus: John 3:1-21

1. Only in the Gospel of John do we read about Nicodemus. His appearance raises questions, not the least being why did he come to visit Jesus?
 - a. Was he an Israelite simply trying to find out more about Jesus?
 - b. Was he an Israelite who was a “secret believer” in Jesus; a “closet” Christian?
 - c. Was he a man at a dead-end in his life; someone looking for a new meaning in life?
2. What John tells us about Nicodemus:
 - a. He was a Pharisee, an expert in Mosaic law; a member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin (the Supreme Court in Jerusalem).
 - b. He was a well-educated Israelite; a “teacher of Israel”; a top theologian of Israel.
 - c. He was an older man and well-to-do Israelite; an older man; undoubtedly wealthy.



Woman at the Well
Carl Heinrich Bloch

John 4:1–42

Narrator: The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground

Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her,

Jesus: *"Will you give me a drink?"*

Narrator: His disciples had gone into town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him,

Woman: *"You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"*

Narrator: Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus answered her,

Jesus: *"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."*

Woman: *"Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"*

Jesus: *"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give will become a spring of water in a person, welling up to eternal life."*

Woman: *"Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."*

Jesus: *"Go, call your husband and come back."*

Woman: *"I have no husband."*

Jesus: *"You are right when you say you have no husband. You have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."*

Woman: *"Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."*

Jesus: *"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come*

when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

Woman: *“I know that Messiah (Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”*

Jesus: *“I who speak to you am he.”*

Narrator: Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking to a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,

Woman: *“Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”*

Narrator: They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

Jesus: *“I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”*

Narrator: Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

Jesus: *“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest?’ I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying, ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”*

Narrator: Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So, when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman,

Samaritans: *“We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”*

Questions for Reflection

Keeping in mind the “essential question” running through John’s gospel, “*What do you want?*” –

1. What is surprising about this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman?
2. What is your interpretation of the “*living water*” Jesus offers?
3. What was the outcome of the woman’s encounter with Jesus?
4. What is the life-giving message of this story?



Healing the Royal Official's Son
Joseph-Marie Vien, 1752

John 4:43, 46-54

Narrator: After the two days he left for Galilee. . . . Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

Jesus: *“Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.”*

Royal Official: *“Sir, come down before my child dies.”*

Jesus: *“You may go. Your son will live.”*

Narrator: The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.” Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and all his household believed. This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

Questions for Reflection

Keeping in mind the “essential question” running through John’s gospel, *“What do you want?”* –

1. Why did the royal official come to Jesus? What did he want?
2. What is surprising about this encounter between Jesus and this royal official?
3. What was the outcome of the royal official’s encounter with Jesus?
4. What is the life-giving message of this story?

NOTES: Life-Giving Encounters with a Samaritan Woman & a Royal Official (John 4:1-54)

1. The miracle at the wedding in Cana (2:1-11), the evening conversation with Nicodemus (3:1-21), the Noon meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well (4:1-42), and the mid-day encounter with the Royal Official (4:43-54), are intentionally set together by the gospel writer John. They are individual stories that John links together in order to paint a larger picture of Jesus and particularly the ways a diverse array of people responded to Jesus when they encountered him. In each encounter, Jesus offers the life-giving power of God’s Word and God’s presence . . . an offer that promises new life, abundant life, eternal life. In each instance, the way people respond to the promises Jesus offers is what John challenges us to evaluate about ourselves and our faith response or lack thereof.

2. Comparing Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the Royal Official:

<u>Nicodemus</u>	<u>Samaritan Woman</u>	<u>Royal Official</u>
Jewish male	Samaritan female	Gentile male
Distinguished religious leader	Despised foreigner	Despised Roman(?) official
Well-known, well-educated, well-to-do, well-respected	Unknown, uneducated, a social outcast, unworthy	High-ranking official, well-to-do, powerful, a loving father
Comes secretly to Jesus at night	Meets Jesus unexpectedly at noon	Approaches Jesus during the day
Speechless in the presence of Jesus	Engaged conversation with Jesus	Persistently demanding of Jesus
No idea how or if he responds openly in faith to Jesus, neither that evening nor in the other two appearances he makes.	She does what Nicodemus did not do and bears witness to Jesus. As a result a whole village comes to faith.	He, too, does what Nicodemus did not do and bears witness to Jesus. As a result his entire household comes to believe in Jesus.

3. This is the longest recorded conversation Jesus had with anyone in the gospels! Sadly, her portrait has been tainted by interpretive litter. The details of her marital history are fodder for preachers and teachers who wrongfully paint her character. One scholar says, *“The treatment of the Samaritan woman in the history of interpretation is a textbook case of the trivialization, marginalization, and sexual demonization of biblical women.”*
4. In fact, the Samaritan woman embodies one of the primary marks of discipleship in the Gospel of John: bearing witness to Jesus. Because of her witness, *“Many Samaritans from (her home) city believed in (Jesus).”* The same is true about the Royal Official.