

What does following Jesus cost you?— Nicodemus

In John chapter 3 we read about a man named Nicodemus. You should know that he wasn't just any man. He was a well-known and well respected man of God. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, an elite group of community and religious leaders. He had been a secret admirer of Jesus for some time. Listening to the teaching of Jesus, he couldn't help but be inspired. He watched as Jesus worked incredible miracles, but it wasn't just his power that was impressive; it was his compassion and love.

Nicodemus was ready to take his relationship with Jesus to another level, but it wasn't that easy. It never is. There would be much to lose if he went public as a follower of Jesus. What would people think if they found out that Nicodemus was an admirer of this homeless carpenter-turned-rabbi from a nothing town called Galilee? At the very least he would lose his position in the Sanhedrin and his reputation as a religious leader. **Being a secret admirer of Jesus cost him nothing, but becoming a follower came with a high price tag. It always does.**

So, Nicodemus finds himself at what would seem to be a surprising crossroads. He would have to choose between religion and a relationship with Jesus. There is no way for him to truly become a follower of Jesus without losing his religion. This wouldn't be the last time that religion or way of life would get in the way of someone following Jesus.

In John chapter 3:1-6 we read about his first moment with Jesus. The story begins with the time of day it was when Nicodemus approached Jesus:

He came to Jesus at night ... (v. 2).

It would be easy to overlook this detail and dismiss it as insignificant. But ask yourself, Why would he come to Jesus at night? He had plenty of opportunities during the day. Jesus was teaching in public places where it would have been quite convenient for Nicodemus to talk to him for a few minutes. In fact, given his position as a religious leader, the other people would have quickly stepped out of the way for Nicodemus. But Scripture says, "He came to Jesus at night ..."

At night no one would see him. At night he would avoid awkward questions from the other religious leaders. At night he could spend time with Jesus without anyone knowing. If he could speak with Jesus at night when no one was around, maybe he could begin a relationship with Jesus without having to make any real changes. He could follow Jesus without it impacting his job. In fact, his friends and family wouldn't even have to know. **He could talk to Jesus at night and quietly make a decision to believe in Jesus; that way it wouldn't disrupt his comfortable and established life. That sounds like Christians today. Some people are happy to follow Jesus as long as that doesn't require any significant changes or have negative implications.**

Here is the reality that Nicodemus is about ready to have impressed on him: There is no way to follow Jesus without him interfering with your life. Following Jesus will cost you something. Following Jesus always costs something. For Nicodemus it would cost him a powerful position. It would cost him the respect of his co-workers. It would cost him his source of income and

livelihood. It would cost him friendships. It would likely cost him some family relationships. This brings up a very telling question for most fans: has following Jesus cost you anything? I don't mean for that to be a rhetorical question. Take a moment and jot down what following Jesus has cost you. How has following Jesus interfered with your life? Maybe a Job, friendship, old habits, family, relationships. Maybe following Jesus hasn't cost you anything, but maybe it should be costing you something. Maybe you need to get rid of those negative influences in your life that are holding you back from becoming a committed christian. Like Nicodemus and his religious group.

Most of us don't mind Jesus making some minor change in our lives but Jesus wants to turn our lives upside down. Fans don't mind him doing a little touch-up work, but Jesus wants complete renovation. Fans come to Jesus thinking tune-up, but Jesus is thinking overhaul. Fans think a little makeup is fine, but Jesus is thinking makeover. Fans think a little decorating is required, but Jesus wants a complete remodel. Fans want Jesus to inspire them, but Jesus wants to interfere with their lives.

Nicodemus begins his conversation with Jesus by making it clear that he has decided that Jesus really is from God. He had come to a point of belief, but where would he go from there? Jesus doesn't waste time but gets right to the heart of why Nicodemus is coming to him at night instead of in the openness of the day. He tells Nicodemus in verse 3 that he must be born again. That would have been hard for this religious leader to hear. He had spent his adult life building a religious resume. But Jesus makes it clear to Nicodemus that his righteous acts and religious rituals are not the measurements he is using. Nicodemus must humble himself and be born again into a whole new way of life.

As we continue reading in v.3 (read)

"born again" The word translated 'again' in greek is *another* may mean either 'from the beginning,' or 'from above.' By itself it cannot exactly mean 'again.' , John uses the same word John 3:31; John 19:11; John 19:23. In all three places, (see especially John 19:11), it means 'from above,' which is perhaps to be preferred here: 'from the beginning' would make no sense. To be 'born from above' recalls being 'born of God' in John 1:13. Of course being 'born from above' is necessarily being 'born again;' but 'again' comes not so much from the Greek word, as from the context.

Nicodemus had made a decision about Jesus, but that's not the same as following him. Jesus would not accept a relationship with Nicodemus where he simply believed; Jesus wanted Nicodemus to follow. Jesus didn't just want Nicodemus just at night; he wanted Nicodemus during the day too.

Story: Not liking the sermon

Well ... whenever I listen to one of the messages I feel like you are trying to interfere with my life.

do you hear what he was saying? He's saying — I believe in Jesus, I'm a big fan, but don't ask me to follow. I don't mind coming to church on the weekends. I'll pray before meals. I'll even slap a Jesus fish on my bumper. But I don't want Jesus to interfere with my life. When Jesus

defines the relationship he wants with us he makes it clear that being a fan who believes without making any real commitment to follow isn't an option.

Are you from Galilee, too? (John 7:51-52)

When Nicodemus meets with Jesus in John 3 we're left wondering what he's going to do. The silence seemed to identify him as a Secret admirer who wasn't even a public admirer, but a secret admirer who never managed the courage to take his relationship with Jesus from words of belief to a life of commitment.

But it turns out this isn't the last we read of Nicodemus. The next time we meet up with him is in John 7. The popularity of Jesus has grown immensely. The religious leaders are overcome with jealousy and fear. We read that the Sanhedrin meet together to find a reason to silence Jesus. Part of their role as the religious leaders was to judge false prophets. They needed to drum up some kind of accusation or charge that would indict Jesus as a false teacher. Nicodemus is sitting among his peers as they conspire to bring Jesus down. **He is just one of seventy-two religious leaders that were part of this ruling body.** Nicodemus believes Jesus is from God, but would he say anything? Would his belief translate into any kind of commitment? I'm sure he sat there hoping someone else would say something in defense of Jesus. Surely he wasn't the only one who believed. His mind is racing with what it's going to cost him if he goes public with his conviction. Then we read in verse 51 that Nicodemus comes to the defense of Jesus:

John 7:51: "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?"

Though he stops short of saying what he believes, he does risk his career and reputation and publicly speaks up on behalf of Jesus. This is no longer a private conversation about what he believes. He allows what he believes to interfere with his work, his relationships, and his financial future. In that moment he stops being just a secret admirer, and begins the journey of a public follower.

When he speaks out in defense of Jesus, we read in verse 52 that the rest of the Sanhedrin responded this way:
"Are you from Galilee, too?"

I know that doesn't seem very harsh, but they are clearly trying to embarrass Nicodemus for associating with Jesus. Galilee was a small insignificant town that no one was proud to be from. Apparently some commentaries say, they even had a saying in those days, "Can anything good come out of Galilee?"* (Kentucky) The Sanhedrin laughed at Jesus because of where he was from, and now they use it to attack Nicodemus. It was meant to be a hard shot to his ego and a threat to his religious reputation that he had worked so hard to establish. It was a reality check for Nicodemus.

I've discovered there is almost always a moment like this for believers. They are put in a position where they have to decide between being a secret admirer or a public admirer.

John 19: 39 “Mixture of Myrrh and Aloes”

At the end of John’s gospel, there is one other brief reference to Nicodemus. In John chapter 19 Jesus has been crucified and his body is being prepared for burial. And then we read that Nicodemus brought “a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds.” This would have been an extremely expensive and costly gesture. And make no mistake; this gesture cost him more than just money. There was no longer any chance of hiding his affection.

In fact, when most others had abandoned Jesus, or were hiding in fear, Nicodemus makes this great gesture of affection and devotion. Things had moved past words of belief expressed in the darkness of night. He was no longer a secret admirer. He wasn’t just a public admirer. It seems he had become a committed admirer, some traditions even indicate he later became a committed christian. That’s the last time we read of Nicodemus in Scripture.

Any hope Nicodemus had that he could follow Jesus without it interfering with his life was shot down with that one question, Are you from Galilee, too? Are you scared to stand up for Jesus, are you afraid of your life changing?

So we have looked at three stages of Nicodemus’ life.

1. Secret admirer
2. Public admirer
3. Committed admirer/ Christian

What has following Jesus cost you? Are you the one that is secretly following so no one will question you or judge you, not wanting any changes? Are you the one that is publicly following him but only wanting minor changes in your life? Or are you the committed christian who is willing to let God change your life for the good. Are you willing to allow that to happen today. We are told in John 3:3 that you must be born again (from above). Maybe you aren't a christian, Are you willing to set aside the things holding you back and be born again in baptism? Or maybe you are a christian but you haven't been willing to change your life for God. There is no better day than today. Do not wait any longer. Come now as we stand and sing.