

7th Grade New Testament (Gospels)

Lesson Plan: Jesus and Nicodemus

Learning Goals: Students should be able to describe the concept of being “born again” and its importance to Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom.

Question: What separates Christianity from every other religious group in the world today?

Prayer.

Discuss question on board. (5 minutes)

Read John 2:23 - 3:21

Who is Nicodemus?

- name from Greek words *nike* = “victory” and *demos* = “people” (“victory of the people”)
- Pharisee (review): These folks numbered about six thousand during the time of Jesus. Their name means “separated ones.” They were a strict, legalistic group, whom Jesus battled with on a regular basis. The two pillars of Pharisaism were Torah and the oral traditions. The oral traditions preserved the judgments of the scribes as to how the law should be applied to virtually every area of life. The oral traditions were like a hedge around the law.
- Was a member of the Sanhedrin (Jewish ruling council). This group was composed of the chief priests, elders, and scribes. Rome gave them a good deal of authority over Jewish affairs.
- Was probably a wealthy man (tradition names him one of the three wealthiest men in Israel)

When did he come to see Jesus? Night

Why might that be important? Secrecy, he was very busy during the day (it was Passover), symbol of the darkness of the world and Jesus is the light, because of the climate (hot wind in daytime) many people would meet at night

Entering the Kingdom of God

- You must be “born again.”
 - What does this mean? Not another physical birth, but a spiritual birth (awakening).
 - For a Jewish person, how would they get into the kingdom? Genealogy. Keeping the law doesn’t get you into the kingdom, but was how members of the kingdom lived in relationship to God.
- You must be “born of water and the Spirit” (vs. 5).
 - There are at least four possible meanings for “born of water”
 1. Physical Birth (amniotic fluid) - you must be physically born before you can be spiritually born
 2. Symbolic of washing or cleansing of the soul - forgiveness, ritual cleansing
 3. Water is sometimes used to refer to God’s Word (see Ephesians 5:25-26) - the Word and the Spirit work in tandem with one another
 4. Water refers to baptism - non-Jews would become Jewish through baptism; problem here because Nicodemus is already Jewish
- Spirit (vs. 8) - in Greek the word translated as “spirit” is the same word for “wind” or “breath” - *pneuma*
 - connection to Genesis (God breathing into Adam the “breath” of life), being born of the Spirit means that we need God to breathe into us the breath of life.

- Illustration: We might wish faith was like a motorboat (going where we want it to go), but it more like a sailboat (we hoist the sail and use it to guide the boat, but are dependent on the wind which blows where it wants).

Connection to Moses in the Desert (Numbers 21:5-9)

- All humanity has been smitten with a deadly disease - the only cure is the Son of Man on the cross
- Jesus is lifted up (literally and figuratively) - lifted on the cross, lifted in glory to heaven, lifted in putting our focus and attention on him (depending on and trusting in him).

For God so loved...

- God sent his son not to point his finger at humanity but to embrace them.
- Love is who God is (1 John 4:15-16) - this is the heart of God's character and Jesus is the manifestation of that heart/character
- In Jesus, God is working to save the whole world
- Jesus didn't just come for a few people, but for all people. Not just the Jews, but the whole world. The idea that God's love is wide enough to embrace all people is distinctively Christian.
- It is not God's plan that people should perish, but God will not force us to love him. God will not force anyone to be in the kingdom (heaven). Hell is God's way of letting us have our own way. (God doesn't send people to hell, but won't force them to be in heaven against their will.)

Light as Judgement

- Dualism in John -
 - Good/Evil
 - Love/Hatred
 - Life/Death
 - Salvation/Judgment
 - Truth/Falsehood
 - Light/Darkness
- vs. 19-21 - The light (Jesus) exposes everything about us. If we love God and realize that God loves us, we will be happy to have our deeds exposed to him. When we believe, we come to Jesus just as we are (warts and all) and we find that God loves us right there.

Lesson Summary/Review:

Students should review and highlight the following vocabulary terms and concepts from this lesson in their notes:

- Nicodemus
- Born Again
- Pneuma
- Pharisee
- Sanhedrin
- What are the four possible meanings for being "born of water" ?
- Compare contrast the characters of Nicodemus and the woman at the well.
- What were four shocking features of Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman?