

An Appointment with Nicky

John 3:1-17; Numbers 21:4-9

Oh, the games people play! We are experts at the game of hiding our true self behind illusions that mask the REAL us. This is what happened one night with Jesus and a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews (a religious Pharisee) that had a burning question for Jesus but didn't want to make himself too vulnerable. Sound familiar? Sure! We all have a tendency to be like that. Jesus has a way of eliminating all our carefully designed masks to speak to us face to face.

1. The Pharisee Mask

John 3:1-2

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

² This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

This is "Doctor Nicodemus;" religious expert Nicodemus. Hey, Jesus, I'm a religious guy. You're a religious guy. Let's talk about our mutual views of the Kingdom of Heaven!

2. The Senator Mask

John 3:4-8

⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus recovers quickly and reappears with his rational, ruler of the Jews mask securely in place. I'm gonna go back in my mother's womb? I'm an old man! Gimme a break, Jesus!

3. Jesus meets Nicky.

John 3:9-14

⁹ Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

¹¹ Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

¹³ No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

At this point in the conversation, Nicodemus is no longer "Dr. Nicodemus" or "Senator Nicodemus," He's just "Nicky". All of the masks have been removed and Jesus shares the simple truth that all of us must receive to fill the deep longing of our heart.

It's All About the Cross

Jesus now shares an incident from Israel's past (Numbers 21) that, at first glance, would seem to have no relation to the truth He has shared thus far. It has to do with some snakes and a stick.

Our Common Problem

Numbers 21:4-7

⁴ Then they journeyed from Mount Hormah by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way.

⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."

⁶ So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.

⁷ Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So, Moses prayed for the people.

Israel enjoyed a unique relationship with God, but they were still, after all, only human. They enjoyed the provisions of a loving, Heavenly Father, but somehow managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory on a regular basis. On one of these numerous occasions, God chose to remove His covering and allow them to experience the consequences of their choices.

God's Eternal Solution

Numbers 21:8-9

⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live."

⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so, it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

God's cure for snakebite was a replica of the poisonous serpent attached to a pole and set up in the center of camp. If you were bitten, all you had to do was look at the snake on a stick and you would be healed.

John 3:16-17

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.