

John 3:2

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to John chapter 19, and we'll read there verses 38 to 42. John chapter 19, from verse 38.

Later, Joseph of Adimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews.

With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds.

Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it with the spices in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.

Because it was the Jewish day of preparation, and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. And perhaps especially the words in verse 39 concerning Nicodemus.

[1 : 20] Because this morning, I would like to think for a few minutes about what we know of the life of Nicodemus, and particularly what we know about his progress to faith in Jesus Christ.

Now so often, someone becoming a Christian is presented to us as an event that is perhaps rather sudden.

And perhaps the thing that springs to mind right away is the conversion of the Apostle Paul. There we have a conversion that seemed to be quite striking and dramatic and sudden.

And sometimes that type of conversion is taken as the type for all conversions. And that can lead to a great deal of problems. It can cause people who really are Christians themselves to wonder if they have not had that kind of experience themselves, a dramatic sudden experience, to wonder if in fact they really are Christians.

And perhaps it can cause also misunderstanding among people who are not yet Christians, looking for or waiting for some such dramatic or sudden occurrence as happened to the Apostle Paul.

[2 : 48] Now of course, the Bible does not lay before us the conversion of the Apostle Paul as the only type of conversion there possibly can be.

It nowhere does so. The book of Acts simply gives us a record of the various experiences of various people, and one of them happens to be the Apostle Paul.

A great and important event in the early history of the Church. But nonetheless, it is one among many pieces of information we're given about the great truth of conversion.

Now I'd like to look with you this morning at a very different kind of conversion, that of Nicodemus. Because Nicodemus coming to faith was a very slow process, and indeed it spread right across the whole of John's Gospel, from where we began reading about Nicodemus in chapter 3, right on to what we're reading here in chapter 19.

And I'd like to look with you at the various stages by which Nicodemus came to real and complete faith in the Lord Jesus.

[4 : 11] First, we must look at what we read about Nicodemus in John chapter 3. In John chapter 3, in verses 1 and 2 there, we discover how Nicodemus first came in contact with Jesus.

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 that 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.

In other words, we see the very first stage in Nicodemus' interest in Jesus here. He was obviously interested in Jesus because he comes to see him.

He comes to see him, perhaps to hold some kind of discussion with him, perhaps to find out things from him. But the first thing that we discover is that he has something to say to Jesus.

And that strikes us as being the most important thing straight away. He has something to say. He says, Rabbi, we know. Rabbi, we know who you are.

[5 : 25] We know that you are a teacher come from God. Now, of course, there is something encouraging in what we have here concerning Nicodemus.

It shows that he was aware of Jesus and some of the things he was doing and saying, and he had come to some conclusion about Jesus.

But if we may put it in a slightly more negative way, we could put it like this. At this stage in the life of Nicodemus, he wanted Jesus on his own terms.

He wanted Jesus on his own terms. You see, he comes to Jesus and he says, Rabbi, we know who you are. In other words, he wasn't coming to Jesus to really accept what Jesus had to say about himself.

He had already had formulated some kind of idea about Jesus. And he was going to be treating Jesus and looking at him in the light of that conclusion that he had come to.

[6 : 36] Now, that stage in the experience of Nicodemus is a stage that I'm sure is very common for a lot of us.

At some stage in our spiritual experience, we want Jesus. There is some kind of attraction, some kind of interest, but we want Jesus on our own terms.

Anyone who has any awareness of who Jesus is, of what he said, of what he did, anyone who has that kind of knowledge, has some kind of attraction to the Lord Jesus.

It is very difficult for anyone to read the Gospels and not find something attractive in the Lord Jesus. Even people who belong to other religions, they will always say, yes, we believe that Jesus Christ was one of the greatest men who ever lived.

Even they may say that he is the greatest man who ever lived. There is enormous respect for the person of the Lord Jesus. From anyone who has actually sat down and read about the kind of man that he was.

[7 : 55] And so any one of us, maybe being brought up to know what the Bible teaches about Jesus, there is, I believe, an initial kind of attraction to the Lord Jesus, an interest in him.

Because we know that he is a unique person. And there are so many surprising and surprisingly attractive things about him as we read of his life in the Gospel.

Now Nicodemus was obviously interested in Jesus. Jesus had come to his attention as one who was clearly giving teaching that wasn't like the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees.

He taught as one who had authority. He had something new, something different to say, although it seemed to be firmly founded upon the Old Testament Scripture. It was also reported of him that he was able to perform miraculous signs, as, in fact, Nicodemus refers to here.

No one could perform the miraculous sign you were doing if God were not with him. So there were all these reasons why Nicodemus should be interested in him.

[9 : 09] But the point at this stage is that Nicodemus was only prepared to go so far. He was prepared to say, you are a teacher who has come from God.

You see, Nicodemus had kind of come to a conclusion. He had decided that he could come and see Jesus, but it was on his terms. He had decided that Jesus was a good teacher, that Jesus was a teacher come from God.

Now, of course, we know that that is the kind of opinion that many people have of the Lord Jesus. Many people have of him to this very day, that the Lord Jesus is a teacher come from God, perhaps a great teacher or the greatest teacher come from God.

But that is not all that the Lord Jesus is. That is not all that the Lord Jesus says concerning himself. And that is not all that he says is required of us, simply to recognize that he is a teacher from God.

Even in this conversation with Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus shows that there is something much more radical required than simply to think that Jesus is a good teacher and to listen to him.

[10 : 31] There must be a radical transformation of life. And the great question is, how is that radical transformation to be brought about? So the whole idea of Jesus simply being a good teacher, a teacher from God, is insufficient.

It doesn't do justice, first of all, and most importantly, to the words of Jesus himself. Time and again, the Lord Jesus doesn't just claim to be a teacher come from God.

But if we may put it this way, the teacher come from God, the one who has come into this world, being sent into this world to show the will of God.

But more than that, on various occasions, and as particularly recorded in John's Gospel, he claims equality with God himself. He says, I and the Father are one.

He says, before Abraham was, I am taking the name of Jehovah upon his own lips. I am that I am. [11:37] Now, of course, as we know later on in John's Gospel, it becomes clear to the Pharisees and others that in their way of thinking, this man is claiming equality with God.

He is blaspheming. And therefore, he has got to be got rid of. So the idea that Jesus is simply a good teacher will just not fit the facts.

We cannot simply accept him on those terms and say, that is all that Jesus is, as perhaps Nicodemus here was wanting to do.

Perhaps Nicodemus at this stage maybe had heard a little bit of the surprising things about what Jesus had been saying and doing. And perhaps he wanted to kind of cool things down, to calm things down a bit.

And perhaps if Jesus would just be a good teacher, then that would be fine. But of course, the Lord Jesus was not content with that because, of course, that would not be for the salvation of the world.

[12:41] What the world requires is for a divine, all-powerful Savior to come into this world and to take away sin by dying on the cross.

So then, it wasn't enough that the Lord Jesus should be simply a teacher. And it wasn't enough also for another reason. It wasn't enough because of the depth of the mess that we are in.

And again, it would seem here that Nicodemus didn't recognize that because the Lord Jesus went on immediately to talk to him about the necessity of a deep and a profound transformation in his own life.

I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus was perhaps thinking along the lines that, well, maybe the kingdom of God is coming.

Maybe Jesus is the teacher of righteousness. Maybe he is the one who is going to lead us into this new kingdom. Maybe he was thinking already in those terms. But Jesus had to draw to his attention that the state, the condition of man is so bad that it has got to be radically altered by this profound transformation which he can only call a new birth.

[13:58] So radical that it's a new birth, a new beginning, a total new life. That was something, again, that Nicodemus obviously wasn't prepared for at that stage.

It was something totally new that had entered his horizon. So Nicodemus obviously had got his own ideas about who Jesus was and he was coming to him at that stage simply on the basis of that, on his own terms.

And of course, it is so easy for us all to do that kind of thing. So easy for many people today, as I mentioned, to try to accept Jesus, to try to come to him on the terms of Jesus.

Jesus is simply a great teacher. People may also do it in the sense that Jesus is a great example.

People may take the life of Jesus as a great example of how to live. And of course, it is that.

But the life of the Lord Jesus Christ is something much more than an example. He said that he came into this world not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[15:08] Now that ransom, that redemption is something actually accomplished, actually done that is not an example. The serving, yes, that's an example.

The whole of his life in that sense is an example to us. But there is a work that he accomplished that is not an example. It was something that was done for us and it was done to us by what he did upon the cross.

And again, many people may not be prepared to accept what Jesus himself says about that. Maybe we want to come to Jesus on our own terms.

Perhaps there's another way in which we may think about Jesus wrongly, maybe differently from Nicodemus. But perhaps we may have grown up with an impression, perhaps, from very early years, from Sunday school or from maybe the children's books that we read long ago.

And perhaps the impression that has stuck with us and lasted with us. What we may call the idea of gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Now we know that the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed the most meek of men.

[16:19] We know that the Lord Jesus Christ himself said to people, come to me for I am meek and lowly in heart. And we know the great gentleness of the Lord Jesus Christ as he welcomed sinners and as he dealt so lovingly with them in various ways.

But that was never to give us an impression that we could treat the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ lightly. Never to give us the idea that, well, perhaps, after all, perhaps, all that the Bible says about God being just and God's anger against sin, that perhaps all that is outmoded now.

And perhaps we're just left with this impression that no matter what we do, no matter what we say, no matter what's going to happen, it'll all turn out all right in the end because Jesus is gentle and meek and mild.

Well, that is a great travesty of what the Bible is saying. And of what the Lord Jesus Christ himself is saying. The Lord Jesus Christ says it does matter what we do in those very words.

He says, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden. If we do not come to him, then we cannot find rest for our souls. And if we never come to him, we will never find rest for our souls.

[17 : 48] The Lord Jesus Christ must be accepted not on our terms or our ideas that we have about him, but on his terms. We must accept his words and believe what he says to us and do what he commands of us.

The Lord Jesus Christ not only speaks in great words of invitation, but he also speaks serious and solemn words of warning concerning the darkness and the separation from God and the anguish that awaits sinners who do not turn to him and repent.

The gospel speaks as indeed also the book of Revelation, which is the revelation of Jesus Christ, speaks not only of the great invitation of the gospel, but also of the wrath of the Lamb.

But the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb of God, who died to take away sin, is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and he is the one also who will judge this world justly.

These things also we have to bear in mind as we think of the Lord Jesus, and as we think on our own standing before God at this moment.

[19 : 09] Where do we stand with regard to the invitations of the gospel? Have we accepted them? Or have we pushed them away? Perhaps pushing them away to another time, another place.

But make no mistake, we cannot come to the Lord Jesus on our terms. It must be on his terms. And we must accept what he says to us.

Whether it is now or at some later time, it will be those very terms that we will have to accept. So why not accept them now? Why not accept them now in all their fullness and all their freeness?

He wanted Jesus on his own terms. But secondly, we see that he wanted Jesus to answer his questions. When he came up against these difficult statements of Jesus, when he realized that Jesus wasn't going to just fall in with his idea of who Jesus was, Nicodemus starts asking questions.

In verse 3 of chapter 4, 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. Now, of course, here we see that Nicodemus is sort of misunderstanding what Jesus is saying.

[20 : 20] We don't know whether deliberately misunderstanding it or not, but at any rate, he hasn't really grasped what Jesus is talking about, this great radical transformation, a new birth, a new life.

He's thinking in terms, the physical terms of someone entering their mother's womb again, and he's saying, that's impossible. Now, you see, questions like this can be asked in two kinds of ways.

They can really be asked, as they are so often asked, as a kind of defense for ourselves. You see, Jesus had immediately gone on the offensive to Nicodemus.

Notice the sort of different ways in which he deals with the Samaritan woman and then with Nicodemus. With the Samaritan woman, he is also going on the defensive, trying to get her to think about things, but he does so, we might think, in a rather more subtle way in which he does it with Nicodemus.

With Nicodemus, he immediately sort of goes on the offensive, goes on the attack, and he says, I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. In other words, the Lord Jesus cuts through all the sort of false ideas and all the formalities that there may be, and he cuts right through it, and he comes down with this straight, dogmatic statement that really does make Nicodemus sit up and think.

[21 : 49] And so Nicodemus has to try to put up some kind of defense against this, so he uses the one that we all tend to use, and that is, but surely that doesn't make sense.

Surely, surely, surely our human mind just can't accept that kind of thing. Surely that's unreasonable. Now, of course, again, that is what we all tend to do when we're presented with the claims of Jesus Christ.

So many ways in which we can point at this part or that part of the gospel and say, but surely that doesn't make sense. And what we really mean is not that it doesn't make sense, but what we really mean is that doesn't fit in with my thinking.

That's really what we mean because you discover that when you follow through the teaching of the Christian gospel from beginning to end, it is the most perfect and it is the most reasonable philosophy and system of thought that there ever has been in this world.

but what we say, what we mean when we say that something doesn't make sense, we're really saying it doesn't make sense in my way of thinking. It doesn't make sense of my view of the world.

[23 : 06] It doesn't fit into that. And that, of course, is what Nicodemus was saying. He was thinking always in this worldly terms. He was thinking in terms of birth, well, that's when you're born into the world.

And so he's saying, that can't happen again. We can't have a new start like that, going back to the beginning as a baby and being born. You see? And so he was kind of putting up a defense and saying, well, that can't be right.

Now, sometimes we can come to the scriptures with questions like Nicodemus is coming here, but yet maybe they're not just as genuine as they ought to be.

Maybe they're just trying to hold God at arm's length, trying to keep him away a little bit by saying, well, you can't answer this question I've got.

I've got this big question. I've got this big problem. You know, I've got this big intellectual doubt. And all the time, it's really a way of keeping God away, keeping God at arm's length.

[24 : 14] we discover that if we do really wrestle with that problem and if we do really listen to what the Lord Jesus has to say concerning it in his word, we discover there are answers to those questions, even as Nicodemus discovered here that there were indeed answers to the questions that he was raising.

But also, it seems quite clear that Nicodemus' questioning of Jesus showed a very definite interest. It may have begun with this idea of defending himself, but it leads on in verse 9, as we can see, to a genuine, well, amazement and an interest.

He says simply, how can this be? How can this be? He's just lost. He's out of his depth and he just wants to know what Jesus is all about.

And Jesus goes on to explain some of these things. He goes on to explain that the radical transformation he's talking about is going to take place in someone when they believe in him.

John 3, verse 16, the most famous statement of the gospel, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

[25 : 35] Have eternal life. Here and now in this world there will be a transformation. a spiritual rebirth. The person who believes in Jesus Christ. The person who accepts him as the one that God has sent into the world as his one and only son, his only begotten son.

So, Nicodemus was beginning to get answers to his questions. He had perhaps not thought that he was going to get answers to some of these questions.

perhaps he's suddenly feeling now he's bitten off more than he can chew. He's got so much to think about and as we can see from some of the subsequent history of Nicodemus, he no doubt thought very carefully over those things that Jesus had to say to him.

And in the same way, we may have questions, we may have doubts, we may have troubles, but let us bring those things definitely and genuinely to God's word to the Lord Jesus Christ and ask him to show us the answer to those things and he will do so.

That is why the Bible is so full and so profound. There are depths here that are yet to be explored by the greatest of human minds.

[26 : 55] There are depths here to answer all the most profound questions of the human heart. But then, thirdly, and as we move on through the Gospel of John, we discover that Nicodemus wanted Jesus to get a fair hearing.

This is the next stage we see in John chapter 7, the other passage that we read. John chapter 7 and especially verses 50 and 51. Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?

Now, that question, it was a very reasonable one and it would seem to me that it was put in a very quiet and a very genuine way by Nicodemus.

He wasn't sort of trying to stir up trouble. He doesn't seem to be that kind of person at all. But yet, here was a man who was concerned for truth and for justice and for what was right.

And there, as a member of the council there that were discussing these things, he simply pushed forward this question. Again, we notice it's a question.

[28 : 14] He's a good man that questions this Nicodemus and sometimes questions are very good things. They can show a lot of truth even in themselves. And here he's asking this question which is a kind of rhetorical question.

He's really just stating a point of view. He's saying, does our law condemn a man without first hearing him? In other words, surely not. Of course, our law would demand that he be heard first of all, that we investigate this properly.

so he wanted Jesus to get a fair hearing. Now, we don't know how much has taken place within the heart of Nicodemus by this stage. You see, we can't look into the heart.

We don't know exactly what's going on in his heart, but we know that there's been a little progress here. We know that, first of all, there is just his fundamental sense of fair play.

he wants to see justice done. He wants to see this man getting his due. In other words, they shouldn't be going about the things in the way they have been doing, trying to trip up Jesus or trying to arrest him secretly or whatever.

[29 : 27] They should be quite open and above board about it, find out what Jesus is teaching and see if, in fact, it is wrong. And if it is wrong, then he's to be condemned, but if it is not, then they should believe what he has to say.

Now, it would seem that even at this stage, Nicodemus is coming to the conclusion that what Jesus has to say is indeed right and to be accepted. But there is simply this sense of fair play.

Now, we know that, again, this is something that perhaps every human being has this sense of fair play, particularly with regard to ourselves. We always complain that's not fair if something happens to us that we think is a bit off.

But very often we can do the same for other people as well. We can see that something that's happening is not fair. We have this inbuilt sense of justice as part of our conscience.

And very often such things can be used by God in our spiritual development and in our coming to faith. God using things that may seem to be natural within us, but they are gifts that he has given.

[30 : 35] Using these things to direct us to the rightness or wrongness of particular lines of thought or particular ways of life. And here, this sense of fair play is directing Nicodemus to favor the Lord Jesus and to encourage others to favor him, to give him a proper hearing.

but there's something more than just that in these words of Nicodemus because surely also there is here the deepening conviction in Nicodemus that Jesus has got something worth saying.

He is worth hearing. In other words, he's agreeing with these temple guards. The temple guards were sent out to arrest Jesus and they were out there in the crowd listening to Jesus and suddenly they realized we can't arrest this man.

We can't arrest this man. We can't arrest a man who says if a man is thirsty let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me as the scripture has said streams of living water will flow from within him and so on.

They suddenly realized this arresting is not the thing that this man demands. It's something else. Some kind of reaction. We don't know what but it's not arresting him.

[31 : 53] It's not getting him into trouble but rather we've got to listen to this man. And so they came back and they said to their employers when they asked them what was going on why didn't they bring Jesus back they said in verse 46 no one ever spoke the way this man does.

That's why we didn't arrest him. We've never heard anything like this before. And it's something good. It's something we want to hear. And it's something we want to hear more of. And we're not going to arrest him.

And Nicodemus you see he's a dream with them. He's saying we want to hear what this man has to say. Not just the crowds not just these temple guards but we the leaders of the Jewish community we have got to listen to this man.

We have got to give him a hearing. Now again we know that this can be a very definite stage in our spiritual development. We begin to realize that Jesus is not the kind of person that we can just categorize or pigeonhole the kind of person that we can come to on our terms.

We suddenly realize we've got to listen to him. And we might even go as far as Nicodemus went here and saying to others that very thing that we've got to give him a hearing.

[33 : 15] We've got to listen to him. No one has ever spoken the way this man does. We might even encourage other people to go to church to hear the words of God to hear what God has to say.

We might very well do the same kind of thing with our own children. We ourselves may have been brought up to know the words of Jesus to hear those words and we believe that it's a good thing for our children to hear those words as well.

So important because no one ever spoke the way this man done. Nicodemus was very definitely at that stage of his spiritual development.

But you know there was something that was holding Nicodemus back. And we get this in another passage one that we didn't read. One that doesn't specifically mention Nicodemus but he's in mind there nonetheless.

It's in John chapter 12 verses 42 and 43. Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him.

[34 : 21] But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue. For they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

Now when we read what it says about Joseph of Arimathea and about Nicodemus later on we realize that these at least were two of these men that John is writing about here.

It seems he's a wee bit hard on them isn't he? After all in the end we know that they did a very great thing but yet at this stage what John writes here is true concerning them.

It seemed by this stage that many of the leaders many among that group of people that were the Jewish leaders had come to believe in Jesus but yet it was a secret belief.

It was a secret following of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is said of Joseph of Arimathea in the passage we read in John chapter 19. He was a disciple in secret.

[35 : 29] Now we realize that here we're taking a stage further in the spiritual development of Nicodemus if indeed as I think these verses are about Nicodemus because here we're told that many among the leaders believed in him.

By this stage Nicodemus had heard so much of what the Lord Jesus had to say. He had heard so much of what his enemies said about him that he had come to the conclusion that yes this indeed was the Christ of God and yes indeed he had to listen to him.

Now we know that neither Nicodemus nor maybe any other of the people who were disciples at that time knew completely all that the work of Jesus Christ involved.

Even the disciples themselves even Simon Peter rebuked Jesus when Jesus talked about Jesus dying upon the cross and so on. We don't know how much is involved in the statement that they believed in him but we know that they believed this means that they believed that he was the Christ what he claimed to be.

They believed in him. It wasn't just that they believed certain things about him but they believed in him as a person as the great person sent by God to accomplish God's will in this world the one that the Jewish people had been expecting the Messiah the Christ.

[36 : 56] Christ. But we're told that these men were secret disciples. They had a faith in Jesus but we're told that they would not confess their faith for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue.

In their hearts they really believed in Jesus Christ. Deep down in their hearts they really believed. they had come to that stage in their spiritual development.

Now there may be someone here today this morning who deep down in their heart deep down in your heart you believe in Jesus Christ.

That perhaps if in the right circumstances I was speaking to you alone speaking on spiritual things you would say yes I do believe in Jesus Christ.

There's no getting away from it. Perhaps you could go back through your life and you could trace some of these stages that Nicodemus went through. But you could say that yes secretly privately in your heart you do believe in Jesus Christ as your savior.

[38 : 15] But maybe like Nicodemus there is something that is keeping you back from what we may call a full acceptance of Jesus.

Something that's keeping you back from confessing that faith. And Jesus emphasizes how important it is to confess faith in him. He says that if we confess our faith in him then he will confess us before the angels of heaven.

So important that our faith is complete and full in that sense. The thing that was holding him back was a fear of what his peers would say.

The other people like himself, the other Pharisees, the other leaders, the other rulers, they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

In other words, to put it really in as hard a way as we can, he wanted Jesus less than he wanted the praise of men.

[39 : 25] Now, we have to be honest, at that stage that was the way it looked. That was the reality. He would go a little way in sort of making a speech before them about fair play.

He would go that far, but he wouldn't go as far as saying, I believe that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Christ of God, because he knew the consequences immediately.

He would have been, not only would he have lost face before his peers, but he would have been put out of the synagogue. He would have had no place in the religious system of the time.

Now, our fear may not be of something just as drastic or as dramatic as that, yet our fear may be there, and particularly our fear concerning the attitude of our peers.

The people of the same age, the same interests, maybe the same place of work as ourselves, maybe even members of our family, it doesn't matter, but people around us who know us, people who are important to us.

[40 : 36] It's always those people, really, that are the most difficult to be Christians before. It's easy for people who are not our peers, whether older than us, younger than us, or different group altogether.

It's easier to be a Christian and to make some kind of profession before that. But the people who know us and are right there near us and the people who are the same way of thinking and background and so on as ourselves, it's more difficult there.

Very much more difficult, especially if we, well, we like them to think well of us. And we're afraid that if we make a stand for the Lord Jesus, they will stop thinking well of us.

They'll make fun of us in some way or other. We'll lose face. We'll lose the kind of standing that we had before. Well, that's exactly the kind of thing that Nicodemus had here, surely. This is what was keeping him back.

This was what was really stunting his growth spiritually. This is what was making him really useless in God's service. He was a disciple, but he was one secretly.

[41 : 45] And it was out of fear of what people might think. Now, it might not only be fear of what non-Christians might think. It might also be a kind of fear of what Christians might think of you if you professed faith in Christ.

And I know that this is a kind of drawback among many people within our own denomination. It's not really so much of what outsiders, what non-Christians may think, but what people within the church will think.

Will they think that he's not good enough to really profess faith in Christ? Well, of course, anybody who would think such a thing ought not to really claim the name of Christian at all, because who is good enough to be a Christian?

It is because we are not good enough that we come to Christ and we profess faith in him. We cling to him. We trust in him as the one who is able to save us and to provide for us.

Let no such fear keep us back from the Lord Jesus Christ and from professing him publicly. So then finally, we come to the words that we read in John chapter 19.

[42 : 57] These words concerning Nicodemus. He, that is Joseph of Arimathea, verse 39, he was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night.

Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes about 75 pounds. Now here, we can pass over this very easily, as I'm sure we very often have done. Simply, it's details concerning the burial of Jesus.

But isn't it so wonderful? Isn't it so marvelous? The two people who paid their, we might say, their last respects to Jesus in this way were not his close disciples.

Were not people who had been there with him publicly standing up with him when he was teaching in public and so on. Those who had distributed the bread and fish in that great miracle of feeding of the 5,000.

None of these people at all. But two of those secret disciples. Isn't it strange that when it all came to the crunch, those people who had been close to Jesus, those people who had before been making some kind of public profession in Christ, they all forsook him and fled.

[44 : 18] But those who had before been secret, they now came out into the open. When the going got really tough, they decided this was the time to mail their colors to the mass.

This was the time when there could no longer be any sitting on the fence. The time for all that was past. The times called for a different kind of action altogether.

Isn't it wonderful and marvelous how the Spirit of God was working in these men to bring them out at this time? A time when in many ways they were most needed.

They were most needed, we may say, for the encouraging of the other disciples, the women and the rest of them there. That would have been a tremendous encouragement to that forlorn, forsaken group of people who felt as if the world had come to an end.

And wasn't it a tremendous act in itself? That at that time, really, when it looked as if it was all over, as if any speaking or acting with regard to Jesus was totally pointless because he was dead now.

[45 : 33] It was at that time that they came forward. Isn't it strange? They were prepared to really pay this greatest price when Jesus was really, we might say, at his most unattractive.

When Jesus had been teaching, when Jesus had been performing miracles, when Jesus had been arguing with his enemies, we could have imagined, well, it might have been easier then to stand alongside of Jesus in this great fight, this great crusade.

But now, Jesus had died, Jesus was dead. Jesus at his most unattractive. But yet, they decided, come what may, come whatever the Pharisees or others would throw at them.

Now, because of all that had happened, they could not keep silent any longer. They could not be secret any longer, supposing it was only the dead body of Jesus. They wanted it, and they wanted to give it a proper burial.

Now, surely that act in itself would have marked them off by the Pharisees and the high priests and others. But yet, they didn't care because now they realized which side they really stood on.

[46 : 54] And sometimes it takes a great crisis like that to bring us out, to really bring us to our senses and realize where we do stand. And I believe, my friends, that we are today in a great crisis, although sometimes we don't recognize.

We're in a great crisis today, a crisis that really has been a sort of slow, perhaps a quiet crisis, but it's been developing there all the time. And that crisis is that today in our society, the vast majority of our society have turned away from Christian things altogether.

The churches, by and large, seem to be dead. Churches, by and large, seem to be weak and ineffective. It is a time of great crisis in this country in which we're living.

And the time has come, I would urge upon you, the time has come to decide, to decide which side you do stand on. Even though Christ at the moment may seem to be his most unattractive, even although Christ in his church may seem to be dead, yet surely this is the time when you are called upon to decide for him.

And you are called upon to decide to stand for him and to witness for him in what may be even darker and more difficult times in the future. we do not know.

[48 : 23] But this is the time when we are called upon to take sides and we're called upon to see the importance of confessing Christ. There, Joseph and Nicodemus realized they had to ultimately confess Christ.

It had come to that. They had seen the evil of this world in rejecting Christ and they could not stand on that side. We may see the evil of the world around us in their unthinking, careless rejection of Christ.

But we cannot stand there. Because of all that we've been through, all that we've experienced, all that we know deep down in our hearts, we know what side we have to stand on.

And that is the side of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whose side are we on? are we, like Nicodemus and Joseph here, going to be quite clear that we are going to confess Christ no matter what the difficulty is.

Because we know that he is the most wonderful person who has ever lived. And that he, even although at this time in history, his cause may not seem to be attractive.

[49 : 38] He is the one who is the saviour of the world. He is the one who can transform people and nations and kingdoms. And the one who transforms the history of the world. The one who is coming to judge this world and to transform the whole universe.

Let us pray. So, we pray. You can bear with Olympus of the floor on the earth. Speak. ■ amount of music. And the Madison is the one who loves you.

So many other angels who are talking about speech over the angels who came up with the meditate, child should COME are for himself that she's with limited ability for the