

Weekly Bible Study for Highcliffe and Bransgore Methodist Churches

Encounters with Jesus: “The Religious Leader” John 3: 1-21 by Norman Bonnett, March 2021

I invite you firstly to think of leaders you have had to experience in any part of your life; at church, at work, in a discussion group or a club you have belonged to. How many were bad? How many were good? I remember when I worked as a teacher in Cambridge, it seemed that there was a preponderance of bad head teachers, but thankfully that has not been true for me overall.

Read the passage and think especially of Nicodemus, the leader.

Q1: What do we learn about him (see also John 19 v39), how was he employed, how important was he (in whose eyes)?

Q2: Why did he come to see Jesus at night?

When you have considered about what the Bible tells us about Nicodemus, I hope you will feel as I did, that you are beginning to know him pretty well. As such, I think that he had a problem. He was an important public figure and wanted to meet this very impressive teacher who was always mixed up with the ordinary folk. I am sometimes amused by politicians who tell us that their politics are “perfectly clear”. Do you think that Jesus’ message is “perfectly clear?” He is quite forceful in verses 3 and 7, telling us that one must make a fresh start (to be born again) in order “to see the kingdom of God.”

Q3: How do you react to this firm uncompromising declaration from Jesus?

Q4: What about the reaction from Nicodemus, how does he react and why?

Trying to justify himself he brings up a red herring. He “sends up” Jesus’ teaching by asking about how he, as a grown man, can again experience human birth (verse 4).

Q5: Are there people you know, perhaps in your family or even within the church who bring forth a red herring when you speak to them of the gospel?

We have a friend who finds the Trinity to be a red herring -an excuse to avoid the direct challenge of the new birth.

Q6: Jesus emphasises the role of the Holy Spirit in this new birth, how do you personally associate with verse 8.

When I felt really challenged by the gospel, I was 22 and very keen on dancing and the arts generally. I felt that there were Christians around me who had no time for such “wayward activities”. It delayed my decision before I realized that my primary concern was to put Jesus and the new life first. The starting point for me had to be new birth and from there my priorities in life fell into place.

Q7: Discuss with a Christian friend or within the group (if you attend one) what “New Life” means to you.

If you feel at all confused or unsure about this teaching – which really goes to the heart of Christian belief, do please speak to someone and as I believe Nicodemus was to do, think it out and pray it out again and again. Yours because His, Norman.