

Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God

Jesus' signs have drawn Nicodemus to Jesus. Evidently he doesn't doubt their reality. Neither does he deny Jesus' goodness (cf. 8.48). Nevertheless his understanding is deficient; he has not understood the signs as they are intended - that he might believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. For this reason I prefer Tanner's painting of their meeting to



the many which have Jesus and Nicodemus huddled together over the Scriptures. Tanner depicts a distance between them. Nicodemus has a way to go, some spiritual darkness to navigate, before he can enter God's kingdom.

Jesus allows Nicodemus the customary courtesy of a flattering greeting, but gives him no opportunity to ask the question which has pressed him to seek a night time audience. Rather, Jesus seizes the initiative and makes a statement which will lead, once more, to the cross and his glorification (13-15).

It's important to remember that Jesus and Nicodemus both know their Scriptures, so allusions to the Old Testament are significant, and five in particular: Ecclesiastes 11.5; Ezekiel 36.24-29; Proverbs 30.4; Num 21.4-9; and Daniel 7.13-14. Jesus' reproachful question in v. 10 indicates that what he is saying is not new, but simply the application of these scriptures in the light of his own revelation. The day Ezekiel spoke of has come and Agur's question (Prov 30) is answered: he is the one who has ascended, descended and created; he is God's Son, his name is Jesus. Surely Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, knows!

Instead of helping him see and know, Nicodemus' religious Jewish mind

-set hinders him. He presumes entry into Gods kingdom depends upon race - fleshly descent from Abraham, and one's own righteousness according to the Law. Jesus refutes this. Those born of Abraham must still be born of water and the Spirit. This is a work only God can do; it doesn't depend upon righteousness under the Law but upon faith in his Son. Strikingly Jesus uses 'us and them' language (11), the same language he will use with the Samaritan adulteress (4.22). Nicodemus and Jesus are both sons of Abraham according to the flesh, but the spiritual divide between them is as great as that between Jews and Samaritans.

The climax comes in 13-15 when Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must look to him not as teacher but as his Saviour and Lord. He is the one who will deliver him from sin and death - when lifted up on the cross; he is Son of Man (of Daniel 7.13-14). We don't know Nicodemus' immediate response, but by the end of the Gospel (19.39) there is reason to hope that he has been born again.

To ponder

What might Nicodemus' journey to faith teach us about evangelism and conversion?

To pray

Heavenly Father, thank you that my salvation depends entirely upon what your Son Jesus has done on the cross. Help me not to put my trust or pride in anything else, and to point others to Christ alone. Amen

Reflection