

# John's Gospel : a study for fellowship groups

Further copies from: Adrian H Reed - Email: [ahr@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:ahr@blueyonder.co.uk)

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## (4) Nicodemus (John 3:1-21; 7:37-52; 19:38-42)

**Q** 1 Some things in life are learned easily and some can take a lifetime. What things have come most easily, and what things have been learned with most difficulty among members of the group?

The third chapter of John's gospel is probably the best known part of the Bible and verse 16 the best known verse. Today's three readings record the life changing experience which receiving Jesus Christ as Saviour should be for everyone. The section in chapter 3 shows what actually happens when a person becomes a Christian.

**Read John 3:1-21** Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being born again and explained to him that this wasn't an option, but essential: "*You must be born again*" said Jesus (Jn 3:7).



Jesus talked about two types of life: firstly he talked about mortal life, or soul life (**Greek *psuche***), saying that this mortal life should not be our preoccupation ("*Then Jesus said to his disciples: 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear*" Lk 12:22). We should not be nurturing that type of life to the neglect of the other ("*Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it*" Lk 17:33). Jesus asked what benefit there was in the long run if soul life was not to be preserved into eternity ("*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*" Mt 16:26)

The other sort of life he talked about was eternal life (**Greek *zoe***, occurring 134 times in the New Testament) Jesus came to bring it to us (Jn 10:10) and indeed has given it to us (Jn 10:28), and it is received through faith (Jn 3:36). It is never earned, but given freely (Rom 6:23) and our lives ought to be a manifestation of it (Rom 6:4)! One day, clothed in new bodies, eternal life will swallow up mortal life (*For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life*". 2 Cor 5:4)

**Q** 2 Has there been a shift of emphasis in our lives since we became Christians, between *soul* life and *spiritual* life, between mortal things and eternal things? Has our understanding and have our priorities changed?

**Q** 3 Jesus gave a beautiful picture to Nicodemus of what being *born again* was all about. Do we get asked by those who know we are Christians, whether we are the *born again* sort, and if so how do we answer?

Both kinds of life have a beginning: birth. One by human seed and by human agency, the other by the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5-6). It's not an option: you must be born again. **Read John 7:37-52; 19:38-42** For Nicodemus there was a **process**, by which he became, unmistakably, a follower of Jesus. At first, perhaps because of his position in society, he came to hear Jesus secretly. Later (Jn 7) he was prepared to openly challenge the unbelief prevalent at the time, even though it brought into question his credentials as a Jewish leader. Eventually, clearly by now a committed follower of Jesus, he was prepared to risk his own life at a critical time in history by retrieving the body of Jesus from the cross and anointing it with a fabulously expensive quantity of Roman perfume. He was also prepared to render himself ceremonially unclean in the run up to the Passover feast, the most important occasion in the Jewish calendar, by touching a dead body. It would put him out of touch with those nearest and dearest at this time of celebration. All of the usual disciples had deserted while he and Joseph alone, took the time and risk to do this special thing. We observe the **process** by which Nicodemus came to faith, not sure exactly when and where that line in the sand was crossed. Perhaps it took a year or two. There must however have been a birth **event** even if Nicodemus ended up unsure when that was. There is a moment when the unborn is born! None of us can remember our own natural birth, it's not possible to do so, and some of us cannot remember with any certainty the **event** of our own spiritual birth occurred (some only remember the **process**). Most do, but the important thing is to be sure that birth has taken place! This eternal life is what Jesus was born and died to make possible for us (Jn 3:16).

**Q** 4 Is our witness to non-Christians limited by our desire not to lose credibility by revealing to them that we are followers of Jesus?

**Q** 5 Can we fly in the face of customs, as Nicodemus did on the eve of the Passover, in order to show to others how important our faith is to us, or do friends (or family) always come first, however that might compromise our faith.