The Core of Evangelism Lesson 8

Today, you may be Nicodemus (John 3).

There are conversations that we remember all our lives. Not because they lasted for hours. Not because they were spectacular. Not because they happened in front of a crowd. We remember them because something changed inside us.

Maybe we didn't even understand everything at the time. Maybe it took days, months, or years before we fully understood what we had heard. But we can still point to that moment and say, "Something started there."

The Bible tells us about one of those conversations. It didn't happen in a temple. It didn't happen during a public sermon. It didn't happen in front of thousands of people. It happened at night.

A man named Nicodemus went to find Jesus. And even though he probably didn't know it, he was walking toward the most important decision of his entire life.

Before continuing, I want to propose something to you. For a few minutes, stop thinking about Nicodemus. Forget about the historical figure. Forget about the Pharisee. Forget about the teacher of Israel. Today that can be you.

Because it's possible to get very close to God and still feel like something is missing. It's possible to know verses and still have questions. It's possible to admire Jesus and not yet have understood all that He wants to do in our life. Nicodemus was a respected man. He was religious, studious, sincere. He was exactly the kind of person most would have considered close to God, yet he went looking for answers.

That requires humility. A lot of humility. There are people who don't ask because they're afraid to find out that they don't know as much as they think. Nicodemus did the opposite. He went, asked questions, listened, and allowed Jesus to challenge some of the beliefs on which he had built his whole life.

Maybe that's where the path begins for many of us. Not when we have all the answers. But when we finally recognize that we still have questions.

Closer than you imagine

In one of the previous lessons, we saw a phrase from Jesus that has always stood out to me: "You are not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). Not being far away does not mean being inside. There is a big difference between the two.

You can be near a door without going through it.

You can admire a house without entering it. You can look at a table without sitting down to eat, and you can learn about Christ without having yet responded to Christ's call.

Nicodemus was close. Very close. So close that one night he decided to seek Jesus personally. What's interesting is that Jesus didn't start by congratulating him. He didn't start by highlighting his knowledge. He didn't start by listing his spiritual accomplishments. Almost immediately he led the conversation to something unexpected.

Something Nicodemus wasn't looking for. Something that would change the whole direction of the conversation.

The question behind all the questions

We often believe that people need more information. Sometimes it's true. But other times the need is deeper. There are times when a person doesn't simply need to learn something new. They need to become something new. That's a huge difference.

Nicodemus arrived as a student.

Jesus began to speak to him as someone who needed to experience something. Nicodemus came seeking understanding. Jesus began to speak to him of transformation. Nicodemus was waiting for an explanation. Jesus pointed toward a new beginning.

This is where this story ceases to be just the story of Nicodemus. Because the same question still applies today.

Not for the Pharisees.

Not for religious leaders.

Not for first-century people.

For us.

Is it possible to have walked for years around the things of God and still need something deeper?

Is it possible to be close to the Kingdom and not yet have entered?

Is it possible to admire Jesus without having completely given one's life to Jesus?

The same challenge: yesterday Nicodemus lived it, today we do.

Many times we read John 3 knowing how the story ends. Nicodemus didn't have that advantage. That night he didn't come out with all the answers. He came out thinking.

And maybe there's something that we struggle with, too. We human beings find it difficult to distinguish what comes from God from what comes from our own work. Nicodemus had studied, he had fulfilled, he had built an admirable religious life. But Jesus spoke to him of something that no one makes for himself: "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). No one gives birth to himself. Birth is received. What God wanted to do in Nicodemus was not something that his effort could produce.

Some encounters with God are like that. They don't produce an immediate conclusion. They produce a seed that begins to grow. A question that can no longer be ignored. A restlessness that refuses to go away.

Nicodemus didn't know it yet, but he would meet Jesus again in his thoughts again and again. We see him later timidly defending him to his own colleagues (John 7:50-52). We finally see him after the crucifixion, bringing the spices needed for Jesus' burial (John 19:39). Something had begun that night, though he still couldn't see how far it would lead.

Because maybe, like Nicodemus, you still don't know where God is leading you, and maybe, like Nicodemus, you're getting closer to the most important decision of your entire life.

If Jesus would sit in front of me today, as He did in front of Nicodemus that night:

"If Nicodemus, with all that he knew, needed to hear Jesus, what do I still need to hear?"

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