



MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

SoulShare

March 18, 2017, 9:00—10:30 am Breakfast & Discussion:

Nicodemus Among The Persecuted Church

I am Nicodemus - It's strange as I speak to you, I realize how very different it would have been just a few years ago. Oh, yes, I might have stood before a group of followers of Jesus, but only to plead with you to return to the teachings of the Pharisees. A few years ago, after introducing myself and pausing dramatically, I would have listened for murmurs of recognition, even of awe. If I did not hear them, I would not hesitate to detail my credentials. A few years ago I would have felt very uncomfortable speaking among women, fishermen and tax collectors. And yet I now count it a great honor to be with these dear sisters and these dear brothers whose status before our Lord is far higher than mine, for I have been a poor steward of the privileges given me. When I first met Jesus (whom I later came to know as the unique Son of God) I had been aware of his teachings and miracles for some time. I had made careful study and convinced myself that the miracles were real, not the imagination of adoring followers or the deception of a clever trickster. Moses commands us to follow the teaching of true prophet -- one whose miracles are genuine and whose teaching is orthodox. Therefore I came to Jesus planning to examine him. Yet it turned out completely differently. He literally took me apart. A conversation with Jesus is an incredible experience. Some have said that he never gives a straight answer. That's not really true. I've discussed this matter with John and he confirms that Jesus' answers were often oblique to the question but always direct to the real point. I came to Jesus as a collector of truths, feeling I only needed a few more pearls to complete the string. Yet what I really needed was a radical new beginning. Naturally Jesus would not let me control the conversation. He spoke of a second birth that caught me completely off guard. To tell you the truth, I babbled like an idiot. The thin veneer of wisdom was stripped away and my wagging tongue was connected directly to the confusion of my heart. At first I was angry and resentful, thinking that a true prophet would not treat me so harshly. But later as I pondered that evening, I remembered that the prophets often spoke and acted in such a way, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah. I had only been confused to be on the wrong side of the barbs. I had come to Jesus expecting all truth to follow logically from what I already knew. How naive I was to think I could comprehend the ways of the Eternal God. And yet so much of what Jesus taught had already been revealed in the Law and the Prophets. He spoke of believing God as the key to spiritual life and wasn't that exactly as it had been with Abraham? And did not his good works flow from that fact? Later, I defended Jesus to the council, some would say too timidly, and still I was ostracized because of it. I felt that by speaking circumspectly, some of my colleagues would be struck as I was by the powerful evidence that Jesus was a true prophet. Sadly, Just as Jesus had said, men love, darkness rather than light. I was astounded to see esteemed members of the council, completely ignore the significance of Jesus' miracles while they picked them apart for technicalities on which to accuse him. Some of their concerns seemed legitimate, for instance, that no scripture spoke of a prophet coming from Galilee. Yet when I discovered the truth that Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem, they ignored the fact. True, there are a few Pharisees who now follow the way, but it should have been all of us. For we are the ones who know the Scripture most thoroughly. Yet most, including the brilliant, Saul of Tarsus, are totally blind to the truth. Quiet, I hear a soldier. Cover your candles. Now it is safe. I have spoken enough. Only this one last thought. What a distance the Lord has brought me, from ruler to fugitive. Yet I desire that he also allow me to be a servant as he was a servant. John 3:1—21, John 7:45—53, John 19:38—42

John 7 and 19 indicate that Nicodemus became a believer. Why would that be difficult for a Pharisee? How would your feelings have progressed if you were Nicodemus visiting Jesus and having those interactions? Why did Jesus treat him as He did? What other responses could Nicodemus have made after that meeting? Is it possible that Nicodemus prayed for his Pharisee colleagues? For Saul? In the fictional meeting of Nicodemus and the persecuted church, is it believable that his attitude toward people of lesser status could have changed so much? Do we have attitudes that need to be changed? What does it take to get through to us? Does God sometimes seem harsh?