

‘Follow in my footsteps.’

Nicodemus motioned his approval to one of his staff. The man produced a pouch tied with a leather cord at the top. He counted out the coins which the spice merchant snapped up one by one until the full amount was paid. The bags and jars of spices, which Nicodemus had just purchased, were a lavish gesture of his devotion to Jesus. It took three men to carry it all.

In death Jesus would have the best that Nicodemus’ money could buy, and as a rabbi, he would, himself, quietly preside at Jesus’ burial.

Sundown was fast approaching, and with it the beginning of the Sabbath. With his helpers carrying the load of spices, Nicodemus led the way to the garden where he had agreed to meet Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph had offered his own tomb for the body of Jesus.

As they hurried through the streets leading out of Jerusalem, Nicodemus began to remember his secret night meetings with Jesus. Because of his high position as a rabbi, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, he could not afford to be caught meeting with a man like Jesus. Because of his preaching, Jesus was officially opposed by the government. Nicodemus was part of the government, but he was also drawn to Jesus, and now in this bold act was beginning to take up his own cross and follow Jesus.

He remembered the night Jesus explained that to him: “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that all may believe in him.” And then Jesus had said, “If you want to follow me, you will have to deny your very self and take up your own cross and follow in my footsteps.”

Wide-eyed, Nicodemus imagined himself on a cross, being lifted up with the centurions straining under his weight.

The four men passed through the gate and headed outside the city. In his mind, Nicodemus could see Jesus’ face before him, his eyes burning as he spoke:

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life.”

Nicodemus could now see that God had given up



his only Son. The sacrifice was real. The message was real. There was no denying it. All that remained was for Nicodemus to declare that he believed in Jesus.

“I do!” he blurted aloud.

One of the men carrying the spices, thought Nicodemus had called out to him. He ran to walk at his side.

“What did you say, sir?”

Nicodemus could only shake his head.

“Nothing.”

He was not yet ready to take up his cross for Jesus. It was too dangerous. The price would be too great. He would have to deny himself and give up everything. He had too much to lose.

To truly follow Jesus he would have to become a Christian. Nicodemus knew in his heart that he already was a Christian and that he would soon reconcile this new faith with his action. He would deny his very self and take up his own cross to follow in Jesus’ footsteps.



Jesus asked a lot of those who wanted to follow him. Leave your boats and come. Sell what you have and give it to the poor and come. He had a way of afflicting the comfortable. The rich and powerful, like Nicodemus, had to be willing to join the poor in order to find their way into eternal life. It was hard to do.

The same applies to us. Christianity is not a warm-fuzzy, it’s a hard job. It requires us to move away from the couch and into the community.