

# ***Encountering Jesus***

## ***Nic at Night***

### **March 5, 2023**

**Overarching Theme:** 2023 – Living the Dream

**Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

**Core Point:** 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

**Reflect on this Scripture:** John 3:1-17

*Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone*

*who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

**Commentary:** The fact that perhaps the most well-known bible verse, John 3:16, is part of this philosophical mind-bending conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus never ceases to fascinate. Nicodemus is a respected leader of his faith community, a law-abiding "son of Abraham" and he comes to speak with the upstart Rabbi Jesus in the quiet and solitude of the night. John's gospel consistently contrasts light and darkness, spiritually speaking, so this detail - by night - may indeed be more than a time reference. Nicodemus's complimentary greeting clearly indicates that Nicodemus recognizes that something *is* different about and in Jesus. But when Jesus tells him it takes being born from above (verse 3) in order to be able to see the things of the kingdom of God, perhaps Jesus is reminding Nicodemus of his need for further enlightenment.

Nicodemus's attempts to understand the *how* of Jesus's comments about being born again show our human tendency to try to get at what it is that we are supposed to be doing. Nicodemus's understanding of birth is finitely human and what he is trying to imagine is impossible. Nicodemus is thinking of repeating what has been his experience of birth; the one that comes from a source exactly like ourselves, our mother's womb. But as Jesus affirms, that birth is already done and its impact is playing out. In verses 6-8 each use of the verb "born" is in the perfect tense: being born of the flesh as a physical descendant of Abraham has happened and has significant, but temporal consequences. But being born of the Spirit has eternal consequences. Spiritual birth requires faith in a power beyond ourselves. Like the wind, the Spirit moves and works as the Spirit chooses, reminding us that we humans are not in control. To tap into this spiritual power, we need to let go of our earthly securities (physical ancestry, precise attentiveness to the Law, etc.) and trust in the mysterious mercies of God revealed in Jesus Christ (Cf. John 3:16-17).

-Adapted from commentary by Chelsey Harmon  
([cepreaching.org/commentary/2023-02-27/john-31-17-6/](http://cepreaching.org/commentary/2023-02-27/john-31-17-6/))

### **Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:**

1. Why do you think Nicodemus came to Jesus "by night?" Was he overly concerned about being seen or associated with this controversial rabbi? Could this be a symbolic reference to Nicodemus' current spiritual need?
2. Nicodemus was born as a descendant of Abraham and was a respected, law-respecting Pharisee. Why do you think Jesus told him *'You must be born from above?'*

Jesus then directs Nicodemus to consider the mysterious, uncontrollable power of the wind as a metaphor for the move of the Holy Spirit. How might this metaphor speak to our human tendency to want to be in control? How important (and/or difficult) would it be for Nicodemus (and us) to 'let go and let God'? Explain.

3. Do you remember hearing or seeing a reference to John 3:16 as a child? When did this verse take on meaning for you personally? How does believing in (trusting) Jesus affect your daily life?

### **Activity for the Life of a Disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."* (John 3:16-17).