**Jesus and Nicodemus at Night**

**The Word**

Read together John 3:1-15

**The Big Idea**

In his encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus disrupts everything about Nicodemus’ respectable religious life, and he reminds us that nothing short of a miraculous work of the Spirit is needed in order for us to be a part of his kingdom. We are invited into this posture of total dependence on the Spirit’s work in our lives in order to become the kinds of people our father desires.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. John 3 is one of the more familiar passages in the Bible. What about this encounter with Nicodemus struck you in a fresh way this week?

2. What do you think the average American thinks of when they hear the phrase, “born again Christian?” How does Jesus’ explanation of that phrase conform to what people normally think of, and how does his explanation confront and disrupt what they normally think of?

3. Consider Paul’s question in Galatians 3:3: “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” How does that question connect with your own life at this time?

4. Consider the fact that Christians are to be Spirit people through and through. Prayerfully consider what it would look like specifically for you to more intentionally “walk in the Spirit” this next week? What comes to mind?

**Digging Deeper**

Read Ezekiel 36:24-27

How does this passage add detail and clarity to what Jesus means when he says, “you must be born again/from above?”

**Sermon Outline**

I. Consider who Nicodemus is

A. Pharisee, member of the Jewish ruling counsel (v. 1), Israel’s teacher (v. 10)

 B. Consider what it would take to become a member of the Sanhedrin

- Time, talent, devotion, hard work, relational connections

- He is a venerated, distinguished, mature religious man

C. Yet this conversation with a 30-year-old Jesus turns his world upside down

 D. “We know that you are a teacher sent from God” (v. 2)

1. In John 2 Jesus cleansed the temple (a very offensive and controversial action and performed many “signs and wonders”

2. He is a very controversial figure, and Nicodemus comes representing a group of people who at least intrigued by Jesus and open to playing nice with him

II. Jesus’ deconstruction of Nicodemus’ assumptions

A. You must be born again to see the kingdom of heaven (v. 3)

 1. You can’t even see the kingdom unless God miraculously rebirths you

2. There is a play on words here. The Greek word “anothen” can mean “again” or “from above.” Nicodemus clearly takes it to mean “again” and imagines the impossibility of re-entering a mother’s womb. But Jesus seems more focused on the meaning “from above” focusing on the source of the new birth.

B. You must be born of “water and spirit” (v. 6) clarifies what Jesus meant by born “again/from above.”

1. Jesus is drawing on Old Testament prophecies that Nicodemus should be familiar with

 a. See Isaiah 44:1-5

 b. See Ezekiel 36: 24-27

2. Jesus: this is what I’m talking about. The Spirit of the living God has to miraculously purify your inner being and breathe new spiritual life to give you a new heart with new faith and a new set of desires

3. What’s remarkable is the fact that he is saying this to a religious expert who has dedicated his life to the Jewish religion, and yet even he needs a complete overhaul and a fresh start.

 C. Flesh gives birth to flesh and Spirit gives birth to spirit (v. 6-7)

1. No amount of “Flesh” (= human nature working in its own power) can ever produce the kind of spiritual life God requires

2. Analogy: Imagine God requiring an orange tree, and an apple tree tries its very best to produce the best possible apples it can. But it can never make itself an orange tree.

D. And the Spirit, like the wind, has a sovereign freedom to blow when and where we wishes. You can’t control his movements (see v. 8) and you are totally dependent on him for spiritual life.

E. Jesus is far more than a teacher, he is a savior for desperately sick people

 a. Consider v. 11-15 and the bronze serpent in the wilderness

b. Just like those Israelites dying of deadly venom, Jesus is saying Nicodemus’ situation is desperate, and his only hope is to look to Jesus in faith for salvation.

F. So Nicodemus is confronted with his utter desperate need for the Spirit and for Jesus

III. How does this sit with us today?

A. Jesus confronts us in our way of life: where have our own goodness and religious activities become an obstacle to receiving the grace of Jesus and the Spirit of God?

1. Our flesh tries so hard to perform, improve, and self-actualize, but the life of the kingdom is the total surrender of the flesh to God’s Spirit and faith.

2. Consider Galatians 3:3 in your own life: “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

3. Where do you need to repent of your own fleshly efforts and ambitions? Where have you lost sight of grace?

 B. Jesus invites us into a new way of life: surrender to the Spirit of God

 1. The NT invitation is: “walk in the Spirit/keep in step with the Spirit”

 2. How can you embrace that invitation in your own life?

 a. Consider Carina’s story: living in daily dependence/faith in Jesus

 b. Consider Dave’s story: renouncing fleshly vows you’ve made and embracing the spiritual promises God has spoken into your life