

We are centered on Jesus.

John 3:1-20 (CGS #1)

INTRODUCTION:

The third chapter of John's Gospel contains the most famous verse in all of the Bible, John 3:16. It was probably the first verse that you ever memorized in Sunday school or in church. It goes like this, **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."** This is a wonderful verse, and it is no wonder why it is the first that so many of us memorize. It tells us about God's love for us, his radical action of sending his Son for us, and that if we believe in his Son, we won't perish but instead experience eternal life. Truly amazing in every sense of the word!

But this verse doesn't stand on its own; it has a context, and that context is part of a larger dialogue that Jesus is having with an elite religious leader named Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a Pharisee who was also part of the ruling class in Judea, presumably a member of the Sanhedrin. This implies that he was quite wealthy, and Jesus addresses him as the preeminent teacher of Israel. John points out in his Gospel that "rulers" and "Pharisees" are a distinguished group in Jewish society, suggesting that Nicodemus was a prominent figure within the governing group.

Verse one tells us that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. John uses the term night in both a literal and spiritual sense throughout his Gospel. What we have then is a prominent religious leader who is a distinguished teacher coming to Jesus under the cover of darkness, which tells us both the time of day and his spiritual condition. Nicodemus is in spiritual darkness, and this is only highlighted by his opening statement. He refers to Jesus as Rabbi, teacher, one who performs miraculous deeds, and as clearly sent from God. All of this sounds really good to us, and he certainly meant it with all sincerity. Yet, he gravely misses the true reality of Jesus. Jesus is all of those things, and he is the Messiah. See, Nicodemus should have known and seen Jesus' real identity. After all, he was an expert on the law and a renowned teacher. A fact that Jesus even points out (3:10). However, Nicodemus is in spiritual darkness. Curious and impressed by Jesus, he needs spiritual eyes to see the spiritual reality that is before him.

Jesus challenges Nicodemus, but he doesn't humiliate him. In response to Nicodemus' opening address, Jesus starts talking about being born again, being born of the Spirit, and the bronze serpent that was lifted up by Moses. The "born again" stuff completely threw Nicodemus for a loop, but the bronze serpent and the title "Son of Man" should have landed with exceptional clarity. Nicodemus undoubtedly knew the OT passages these were from and their implications of God's promise to send the Messiah. Jesus was speaking to him in the clearest way possible, teaching him that while he had religious performance, he actually needed new life from above. But good news, the giver of that new life was standing right in front of him! All of this, and then we hear Jesus' words, "For God so loved..." By the end of John's Gospel, we see Nicodemus bringing spices for Jesus' burial. When we meet him, he is in spiritual darkness, and by the end, he has seen the light (19:38-42)!

Here at CCC, our mission is to connect people to life-defining relationships in Christ. Jesus was teaching Nicodemus that day a truth that stands for us. Eternal life only comes through Christ Jesus. That is why we are centered on Jesus. He and him alone grants us eternal life. So what does it mean to be part of CCC? It means that ultimately we are after transformation in the way of Jesus.

GETTING STARTED – As a group, take time to answer this question. When you think of our church, Christ Community Church, what would you say is our primary mission? How does it line up with our actual mission statement?

IN THE WORD – Let's dig back into the passage(s). It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday- Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

Note: Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions.

1. What stands out to you about Nicodemus' story in John 3? How can you relate to him personally?
2. What did it take for you to understand that you needed to be "born again" in your life and spiritual journey? Who were important people, and what were key events along the way?
3. What does it mean to you to follow Jesus in a life-defining way? What values or perspectives are central or most important to that? What are secondary things that can still be important but shouldn't divide?
4. Jesus' words to Nicodemus aren't about accepting (believing) mere facts; they are about the total and complete transformation of the person ("born of water and spirit"). If someone asked you what it meant to be a Christian, would your answer include something like, "It means to become like Jesus in every way possible?"
5. What is the next intentional step of growth that you need to take in following Jesus in a life-defining way?