

## BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

**Sermon:** “Educating the Educated” (from the “Cross Culture” Lenten sermon series)

**Scripture:** John 3:1-17

### Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of John, we find Jesus being approached by a Pharisee named Nicodemus who is interested in the claims he has heard about Jesus. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, possibly to avoid detection to safeguard his reputation and standing as a Pharisee, member of the Jewish Sanhedrin (the assembly or council in ancient Israel) and teacher of the law.
- Nicodemus begins the conversation by referring to Jesus as “Rabbi” or teacher and acknowledging the presence of God in what He has been doing. Jesus replies to Nicodemus by saying (v. 3) “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus misunderstands this and thinks Jesus is referring to a physical re-birth and not a spiritual one.
- In verses 5-10, there is some debate as to what the meaning of water and spirit when Jesus addresses Nicodemus’ confusion. Some believe that water used here is a reference to John the Baptist’s baptism of water for repentance from the former way in which we lived. Others believe that water signifies physical birth. Being born of spirit refers to a spiritual rebirth or regeneration that comes from the Holy Spirit when we are born again. The idea of God putting in a new spirit in us can also be seen in Ezekiel 36:26-27, which is meant to signify God restoring and purifying His people from idolatry. In verses 9-10, Nicodemus shifts from being confident in the divine nature and power of Jesus to questioning Him in verse 9, and then disappears from the exchange.
- In verses 11-15, Jesus shifts from responding to Nicodemus to addressing the greater audience. In verse 13, Jesus explains that “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.”
- Verse 16 is one of the most popular verses in the Bible, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This statement captures the heart of the Good News of the Gospel and God’s love for us.

### Key take-aways from the Sermon

- The Gospel of John has 11 different conversations between Jesus and others. The discourse that we read today is between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a member of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish supreme court) and Pharisees and was considered a prominent religious elder. As such, he was among those that would define and apply the Ten Commandments to every part of life. Nicodemus was accustomed to have people approach him for spiritual guidance.
- In John 3:2, we notice a hint of faith in Nicodemus during his approach to Jesus. In this verse, Nicodemus acknowledges that “...no one can do these *signs* that you do apart from the presence of God.” For John’s gospel, faith that is purely based on signs is incomplete.
- In John 3:3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that “no one can see the kingdom of God without being *born* from *above*.” From Nicodemus’ teaching and perspective, if you are born Jewish then you are already in the kingdom. Jesus says it is more than heritage...you must be born from above.
- From the perspective of those that were in Wilmore, KY for the revival at Asbury University, the altar was filled with those seeking and offering prayers. It was worship in its simplest form! Those that have dismissed this revival as an emotional experience forget that this was also said of the early Methodist church, the early disciples, and so on. Being Spirit led does not need to look a certain way.
- You do not have to drive to Kentucky to experience the Holy Spirit and that which Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus in today’s scripture verse. The Spirit is here with us now! The question is, what are you expecting or seeking, like Nicodemus.
- We must be willing to let Jesus to intervene and interfere with our lives. We don’t lead the Spirit...the Holy Spirit leads us! Sometimes religious leaders don’t get it and must be re-educated by our Rabbi in Christ!
- In John 3:16, the word *whosoever* includes you and me. All of us! No matter how you label yourself, God’s love is for each and every one of us.
- The final time we hear of Nicodemus in the Bible is of him bringing down Jesus from the cross...in broad daylight. It was his encounter with Jesus at night that changed his “night” into day.
- We are all a part of the *whosoever* tribe. When you get a taste of mercy and love, it’s like night turns into day, and we go from almost to all in...for the glory of God (like Nicodemus).

### **Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion**

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- What does Jesus say is required to enter the kingdom of God?
- What does it mean to be “born again”?
- Why is John 3:16 such an important verse in Scripture?
- Why does God send His Son into the world? What does it mean for us?
- What is the significance of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night?
- What is the Holy Spirit asking of you and your life?

