

ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS



SUNDAY 5th March 2023

Encounter.

Scripture: John 3:1-17

Have you ever snuck out at night when you were growing up; waiting till your parents had gone to bed and all was quiet then you gently tiptoe out the door – or maybe even climb out a window, because you wanted to do something or see someone and didn't want others knowing and you used the cover of darkness to protect you.

Would you consider sneaking out at night now, as an adult? It is not as silly as it seems because that's just what Nicodemus did?

To understand why and how this relates to the season of Lent, we first need to know who Nicodemus was.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, one of the Jewish leaders and a member of the Sanhedrin – the high council. He was well respected and often sought out to answer biblical questions.

Most of the Pharisees were intensely jealous of Jesus because He undermined their authority and challenged their views.

Nicodemus knew the Old Testament thoroughly but he didn't understand what it said about the Messiah. But he had heard things about Jesus and believed that Jesus would have some answers.

He couldn't just pop out to visit Jesus during the day, what would the other Pharisees think, or the people in the village. Daylight conversations between Pharisees and Jesus tended to be

antagonistic. He was fearful of being found out, so he chose to visit Jesus under the cover of darkness. When Nicodemus came to speak to Jesus, he did so as someone who had spent his life exploring God's Big Story but also out of his own real desire to have a personal encounter with Jesus.

No matter how intelligent and well educated we are, we must come to Jesus with an open mind and heart, so He can teach us the truth about God.

Knowledge is not salvation. We should know the Bible, but more importantly, understand the God whom the Bible reveals and the salvation that God offers.

To believe is more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means to put our trust and confidence in Him, that He alone can save us.

Believing is both trusting His words as reliable and relying on Him for the power to change.

Nicodemus wanted to learn, but he got a lot more than he probably expected – a challenge to a new life. He left from his encounter with Jesus a changed man.

Can you recall encountering someone and coming away changed in some way. Perhaps disappointed that they didn't turn out the way you had thought or perhaps better than you expected.

All relationships are a mix of observation and conversation. When we encounter new people, we observe the way they behave and we chat with them, getting to know their story. We often connect quickly with people whose life stories are similar to our own.

Jesus seems surprised that Nicodemus, one of Israel's teachers, didn't understand what He meant by being born with water and spirit. Jesus' teaching was based on the scriptures which He and Nicodemus knew and shared.

When Jesus spoke of "new birth" it meant a new beginning and a decisive inner transformation of a person's life, involving cleansing and a new law being written on one's heart. The word used meant "from above." Hence being reborn spiritually.

This rebirth had already started when Jesus cleansed the temple of those who had been desecrating it.

The season of Lent is often a time when people choose to either give up something or to give something for the full 40 days, leading up to Easter and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Making a change in your life can take time and be drawn out, however consistently sticking to the plan can lead to success. But it can be so tiring when you are trying to do it on your own.

Just like Nicodemus, none of us could control our physical birth nor can we control our spiritual birth. This is a gift from God through the power of the Holy Spirit who works in ways we cannot predict or understand.

God's kingdom begins in the hearts of believers and will only be fully realized when Jesus returns.

What changed in the life of Nicodemus after his encounter with Jesus?

1. He had a new understanding of both himself and God.

2. He appeared as part of the Jewish high council when they were discussing ways to eliminate Jesus. Unlike his night-time escapade, Nicodemus spoke up, objecting and citing justice. Even though his objection was overruled, he had not given into fear of retribution. He had begun to change.
3. Nicodemus joined Joseph of Arimathea in asking for Jesus' body to provide for its burial. He was making a bold move, risking everything. He was continuing to grow.

God looks for steady growth, not instant perfection.

How well does your present level of spiritual growth match up with how long you have known Jesus?

If you have never trusted Christ, let His promise of everlasting life be yours – and believe.

In eternal life there is no death, sickness, enemy, evil or sin.