

Series: TRANSFORMATION

Sermon: Nic at Night

Text: John 3

Discussion Questions:

We live in a culture that creates heroes out of entertainers, athletes, musicians - anyone who is able to find the media spotlight. These individuals are held up as bright and shining examples of how to live our lives. They wield a great deal of influence - especially in the minds of the younger generations.

You might know that I spent ten years pastoring at a church in Akron, Ohio. During this time, a young (but not so little!) middle-school-aged basketball player caught the attention of the media. His name...Lebron James. As a high school sophomore, young Lebron made the cover of Sports Illustrated and was the talk of ESPN. It was interesting for me, because Lebron lived on the top floor of what I believe was a government subsidized apartment building that I drove by every day on my way to and from work. His was a very difficult home life - in fact, he spent several years living with and being raised by some of his coaches.

Now fast-forward fifteen years, I am on a missions trip in Shanghai, China. I turned a corner in downtown Shanghai, there before me was a Nike advertisement on the side of a building featuring a mural of Lebron that had to have been more than a hundred feet tall. It was an odd moment for me. Here was a kid who, fifteen years earlier, was living in the projects of Akron and sleeping on his coach's couch. Now here he is a cult hero - larger than life - immediately recognizable (and dare I say worshiped?) by millions if not a billion people halfway around the world.

Take a few minutes to discuss this phenomenon of "media gods and goddesses." Is this idolatry? Is it worship? Is it a religion? Is it a form of spiritual formation? How has it permeated our culture? How are younger generations being "indoctrinated"? Are there any Biblical stories or passages that come to your mind as you think about this? What are some things we, as followers of Christ, can or should do about this?

Examination:

- Read **John 3:1-21**

This passage contains one of the most well known verses in the Bible - John 3:16. But before we even come to that particular verse, there is a lot going on in this story. We find a man named Nicodemus seeking Jesus out under the cover of darkness. We are given two pieces of information about Nicodemus that actually tell us quite a bit about him. He was a Pharisee - and a member of the Jewish ruling council. As we read our Bibles now, we tend to form a very negative opinion about the Pharisees. These were the people who were constantly opposing Jesus, and who wanted to see Him killed. But if we lived in that day, I believe we would have held a different opinion about them. The Pharisees were basically an elite club. I've read that there were typically only about six thousand Pharisees at any given time. It was no small thing to become one. And the Pharisees prided themselves in their code of ethics. They may not

have always been liked - but I can assure you that they were highly respected. The other thing we know about Nicodemus is that he was on the Jewish ruling council - also known as the Sanhedrin. There were only 71 members of this group and the equivalent of our Supreme Court.

- Given these two pieces of information, what are some other things we can surmise about Nicodemus?
- Based on what we know about Judaism, it is well within reason to think that Nicodemus would have been viewed in his culture the same way that we view LeBron James in our culture. Imagine a hundred foot tall mural of Nicodemus on the side of a downtown Jerusalem high rise! How does thinking of him this way effect the way you read this chapter?
- Why do you suppose Nicodemus would have come to visit Jesus at night?
- Given that Nicodemus referred to Jesus as a Rabbi, and acknowledged that Jesus must have come from God based on the miracles Jesus performed, what do you think his attitude was toward Jesus?
- What do you think his bottom-line motive was for seeking Jesus out?

Now focus in on the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus (verses 3-21).

- What metaphors does Jesus use with Nicodemus?
- Jesus states that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit (v. 5). What do you think this means? What is the water referring to?
- Notice in verse 6 that the "Spirit" gives birth to "spirit." Do you notice the difference? Why is the first capitalized, and the second not? What does this mean? Why is Jesus making it very clear that our flesh and our spirit are two completely different things - and one does not produce the other?
- Nicodemus would have been a very intelligent - and very educated man in the things of God. Jesus basically calls him out on his being surprised by the rebirth metaphor (v. 7). Why do you think Jesus said this to him?
- Jesus compares the Spirit's work to that of the wind. What do you think He meant by this? Do you think people might find this confusing? Did Nicodemus find this confusing?
- What does it mean that the Son of Man came from heaven (v. 13)?
- What is Jesus referring to in verse 14, when He mentions Moses and the snake being lifted up?

Application:

What does John 3:16 mean to you? Why is it such a precious verse (and Truth) to so many? What is it about this verse that cause many to call it "The Gospel in a nutshell"?

Take time this week to truly meditate on this verse - and the five verses after it. Thank God that He didn't send His Son into the world to condemn you, but save you!