

# Born Again

John 3:1-10

<sup>1</sup>Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; <sup>2</sup>this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

<sup>4</sup>Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’<sup>8</sup>The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

<sup>9</sup>Nicodemus said to Him, “How can these things be?” <sup>10</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?”

One of (if not the greatest) errors that people make is that they believe they can get to heaven on their own merit. They look at those around them and determine that they are not so bad, that God will accept them because of the good things they have done.

Most world religions are based on systems through which people can work their way into favor with God. The goal is to do more good than bad to earn merit. In this meeting with Nicodemus Jesus blows this theory clean out of the water.

The author gives us a few important insights into who Nicodemus was:

- He was a Jew – he saw himself as an elite member of God’s chosen people.
- His name was Greek – he was likely from a prominent family and had a Greek education.
- He was a Pharisee – the Pharisees were known for their devotion to keeping the law.
- He was a member of the Sanhedrin – an elite group

of 70 who were the ruling body of Israel at this time. He was in our terms a political leader.

- He was an important teacher in Israel – even Jesus referred to him as “the” teacher of Israel. He was a respected and sought after teacher of the law (Old Testament).

If anyone had the right heritage and standing, had done enough good deeds, or was good enough to get into heaven, it would have been Nicodemus. His resume was impeccable.

Nicodemus goes to Jesus at night presumably to avoid publicity about his encounter with Jesus. The Sanhedrin did not like Jesus, and it would have been politically expedient for Nicodemus to avoid a public encounter with Jesus.

Nicodemus recognized something about Jesus, and wanted to have a conversation with Him. He addressed Jesus as Rabbi (teacher). At the very least, he was addressing Jesus as his equal.

Nicodemus fits the description of those referred to at the end of chapter 2: “**many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.**” Nicodemus recognized that Jesus was special, and that He must come from God. But, his faith was superficial, based only on the miracles Jesus had done not on who Jesus was (Son of God, Savior).

Jesus saw right through Nicodemus. “**But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man (John 2:24-25).**” His blunt statement to Nicodemus goes right to the heart of the issue. “**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**”

Jesus introduces a metaphor to show Nicodemus that no matter how impressive his resume, he was still incapable of entering the Kingdom of God. Here was a great man in Israel being told that none of what he had accomplished was good enough.

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Jesus uses the imagery of birth to make it clear that we can do nothing to earn salvation. The phrase “born again” is better translated “born from above.” The birth that Jesus was referring to was heavenly or supernatural in nature.

Central to the idea of being born is the fact that we have no control over it. Just like we do not have any say in our literal birth, we also have no ability to obtain the new birth that Jesus was speaking of.

Nicodemus struggled with this idea because he had spent a lifetime acquiring position, status, and knowledge putting forth great effort to keep the law. He couldn’t stand the thought that it was all for naught, or that he might have to start over. **“How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”**

Jesus’ first response told Nicodemus that the origin of salvation is from above, from God. His answer to Nicodemus here, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,”** tells him what happens during this new birth.

Being familiar with the Old Testament, Nicodemus would understand that water is often used figuratively to refer to spiritual cleansing or renewal. Ezekiel 36:24-27 says: ***For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.***

We, like Nicodemus have a need for spiritual transformation. All the good we do is like “filthy rags,” and leaves us far short of the perfection God requires. We need a cleansing, a removal of our sinful heart that can only be accomplished by the **Holy Spirit** through the Word of God (Ephesians 5:26).

Jesus is conveying to Nicodemus that the new birth is an act of God whereby eternal life is imparted to the

believer. It is not something that he can accomplish himself.

Just like the wind cannot be controlled or understood by human beings, neither can the Holy Spirit. We see the effects of the wind and the Spirit, but we don’t control them. Where the Spirit works there is undeniable proof of new life – a changed life (born of the Spirit v8) .

Nicodemus still struggled with this understanding - “How can these things be?” Jesus reminded him that as a teacher of the law, he should have known these things. He should have known that spiritual cleansing was needed.

Nicodemus needed to move past his self-righteous, works based understanding and come to grips with the fact that he needed cleansing if he was to be accepted into God’s kingdom.

Being born again is a work of God. So, if we must be born again, and we can’t obtain it on our own, what are we to do? **“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:12).”** We must believe in who Jesus is. We must recognize our need for cleansing, for a Savior, and then we must put our faith in Jesus Christ.

Sadly, Nicodemus does not respond in faith at this point. However, later we do see him help with the burial of Jesus. An act that indicates a change in his life.



As you head into the final stretch of elections, I want to let you know that I will be praying for you and your families.

Have a prayer request? Send me an email or give me a call.

