

I've been asked many-a-time who my favorite character is in the Bible, apart from Jesus. It's hard to name just one, of course, because the Bible has so many awesome characters. But I've always said how much I like characters who are so incredibly human and relatable such as Jonah, Peter, Thomas, and of course, Nicodemus, someone who is maybe not as well known.

This morning, we are introduced to Nicodemus. It is the first time out of only three that he appears in the entire Bible, all in the gospel of John. Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a religious man and leader of the Jews who knew the Torah inside and out. As a religious leader, of course he had been hearing things about this man Jesus

who had been performing signs from God. Jesus unnerved many of the other Pharisees, but not Nicodemus. Nicodemus was curious and needed to know more. So in the darkness and security of nighttime, so as not to be seen by his peers, Nicodemus sought Jesus out.

Now, one of the most fascinating things about John's Gospel is his use of metaphors and symbolism. For example, Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, Jesus as the Bread of Life, and Jesus as living water. Perhaps the most famous metaphor is darkness and light. To John, darkness is evil and light is good, as shown later in the chapter when Jesus said "and this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved

darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil... but those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in Christ."

Darkness also symbolizes unbelief and light symbolizes belief. So it was no mistake that Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night. Nicodemus is in the dark literally and metaphorically....physically and spiritually.

"Rabbi, we all know you're a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the signs that you do if God weren't in on it" Nicodemus says.

Jesus replies "You're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is **born from above**, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to- to God's kingdom."

Nicodemus doesn't get it. He takes what Jesus says very literally. "How can anyone be born who has already *been* born and grown up? You can't re-enter your mother's womb and be born again. I don't get it!"

And I gotta say, many of us are just like Nicodemus. We just don't get it. We may be a step further than Nicodemus in understanding born from above, or in more popular translations, born again, but our perception of "born again" is tainted. And when Jesus tells us that no

one can enter the kingdom of God without being born again...that can make some of us feel uncomfortable.

At least for me, when I hear of a born again Christian, I imagine people who consider themselves to be "Super-Christians"...super cheerful people who never have a weak moment, who speak a great deal about "their relationship with their Lord" and ask if "you've accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior". I know a few people who would consider themselves born agains, and they are indeed admirable...but perhaps some of us look upon born again Christians with skepticism...or get on the defensive about being judged by them...

Methodist pastor Alyce McKenzie wrote on her blog recently:

"I was in the waiting area at our local Discount Tire store last week waiting for my new tires to be put on my car. I picked up a women's magazine and was intently reading an article called, "How to supercharge your metabolism." I became vaguely aware that someone had sat down in the chair next to mine. This seemed odd because I was in the middle of a row of empty chairs. I like my personal space while I'm waiting for my tires. Then a leaflet was put in front of my face with the heading: "How to be born again" and I heard a man's voice ask, "Wouldn't you like to read something of more eternal

significance than this magazine? Have you been born again?"

I looked up into the face of an earnest man in his mid 40s who now sat next to me, looking at me expectantly. When I didn't reply immediately, he asked, "Well, have you?" I said, "I'm glad you asked that question. I've been reflecting on Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John chapter 3 and I don't think Jesus means 'born again' as if it were some emotional lightning strike that once it's over, we speak of our salvation in the past tense, like, that's done, now I have that checked off my to-do list. I think being born again calls for our participation, and I think it's a lifelong process." At that

the man shook his head as if to say "Geez, lady, it's a yes or no question. How hard is that?" He took his tract back and moved on."

I think Alyce hit it on the nail. After tackling this text and the meaning of "born again", I think it's important for us to go back to the text to truly understand.

Jesus said in verse 5, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." To be born of water means to be baptized...to have our sins washed away. Baptism was and is not a one-time deal. We need to be remembering our baptisms daily. The water in baptism reminds us of our need for daily cleansing and washing.

To be born of the Spirit means to have the Spirit of Christ living inside of us and therefore live by and be guided by the Spirit. Your life will show it! You will have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control living inside of you. You let the Spirit of Christ be your guiding force.

Jesus said "no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Yes, it is sometimes translated to be "born again", as how Nicodemus understood it, but Jesus meant it to be "born from above."

Being born from above is letting the Holy Spirit **do what God wants done at the depths of our life.**

According to the Gospel of John, this is not a one time, once-it's-done-it's-done deal. It's a gradual journey from night to day, from darkness to light. It's letting the Holy Spirit come into our soul to transform our lives.

To be "born from above" is a call to a Spirit filled life. It's a **call!** Will we answer? Will we allow the Spirit to come into our lives and transform us? Will we follow in the ways of Jesus Christ and truly be his disciple, no matter what the costs? Will we allow the fruits of the Spirit to shine forth in our lives? Will we remember the waters of our baptisms that washed our sins away? Will we be quote unquote "born again"?

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in him, may not perish but have eternal life.” God loves the world so much, he sent Jesus to us, so that those who put their trust in him, will experience new birth in the Spirit. We will be transformed as we leave darkness and come into the light. It’s not a one-time deal. It’s a daily journey of letting the Spirit in and coming into the light.

So....are you born again? I got an answer for you.

Every day.