

TO BE BORN AGAIN



To look at Nicodemus you'd wonder what more he could want. He was a man of importance. He had a beautiful family. He appeared to be deeply religious. He was a teacher in Israel. If there was any man in the city of Jerusalem who seemed to be living a well-rounded God-pleasing life, it was Nicodemus. But Nicodemus knew better.

Like more than a few people reading these words who give the impression that they have the answers and have found "the good life", Nicodemus knew that his fine exemplary, religious exterior was hollow.

Inside was an emptiness, an emptiness that he rarely admitted even to himself. All you had to do was look into his eyes and you could see that his soul had its shades pulled down.

- Something in there wasn't right.
- Something was missing.
- Something was crooked.
- Something was sick.

So he covered the windows so nobody could look in.

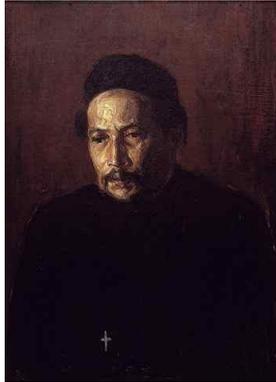
Meanwhile, Nicodemus kept going through his act.

- He sat down to breakfast every morning like a king.
- He nodded graciously to the multitudes that made way for him in the temple.

But how long can you live your life going through an act? How long can you go on pretending that you have the answers when you know very well you're as confused as anyone? How long can you wear that phony smile, pretending that you're happy when inside you're weeping? How long can you keep hardening your heart when you know the living God is calling you and calling you and calling you to draw near?

What keeps us from breaking down, admitting we need help, and going wherever we have to go, doing whatever we have to do to get this heart healed?

It's our pride.



- We don't want anyone to know what a mess we are inside.
- We don't even want to admit it to ourselves.
- We're so proud we don't even want to confess it to God who sees it all quite clearly.

Pride – that poisonous weed, planted (with our permission) in our hearts by Satan himself. We love it so much. It looks so beautiful to us we'd rather lose God and let that weed go on growing. We let it grow on and on until it has poisoned everything about us – blinded us to the truth and turned our hearts to granite. Until there's nothing left of us but that hideous monstrosity growing in our desert-dry hearts, killing every good thought that comes into our minds and marking us for the harvest day of God's judgment.

Nothing in us will ever change until that poisonous weed of pride is pulled up by the roots, even if everything else in us has to come with it.

Nicodemus, like so many of us, wouldn't admit the shape he was in until Jesus came to town. As he stood on the edge of the crowd and listened to Jesus speak,

- it was like fresh water coming into a desert,
- it was like day breaking forth in the middle of the night.

Suddenly,

all his importance,

all his fancy religious ideas,

all those flowery prayers he could pray, showed up as so much filth.

Nicodemus looked at himself and saw an empty, wasted life.

A lot of people, when they get a dose of truth, simply can't stand it. They turn and run. They hide their faces until they are buried in darkness. Or, they run to a church where nobody will ever bother them with truth. At least Nicodemus didn't run.

What can I say when I look at Jesus and see God in everything He does, and hear God in every word He speaks, and then look at my dried-up, shriveled, fruitless life?

What else can I do but admit that I need help?

But Nicodemus tried what so many of us try, instead of surrendering all the way. He went furtively to Jesus with his mask still on, hoping to keep all the goodies of this world and have God too. Hoping that Jesus would give him God without making him pull up that hideous poison plant of pride. Hoping the conversation would run something like this:

"Rabbi, we know you're a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

John 3:2

"That's right, Nicodemus. I'm glad you recognized that. Now what can I do to help you?"

"Well, teacher, there's something missing in my life. I thought maybe you could give me that extra touch I need."

"Of course I can, Nicodemus. All you need is to think more positive thoughts. When you wake up in the morning just repeat this sentence: 'God is in everything, God is in me.' It will make a great difference. And then, Nicodemus, go out and get involved in the great challenges of our day. Join hands with the forces of good and your life will be fulfilled."

And Nicodemus would have gone home a twofold child of Hell, more blinded by pride than ever.

But the conversation didn't go that way. Jesus loved Nicodemus. He understood the battle the man was having with his pride. So He told Nicodemus the exact truth he needed to hear:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.'"

John 3:3 &6-7

You don't need improvements, friend, you need life! A whole new life.

Patching will never do it. There's nothing in your life that can be patched.

It's no good. Leave it behind and be born anew.

Nicodemus, like so many of us, really thought he had something.

- He knew it wasn't enough.
- He knew there was an emptiness.

But he was rather proud of his life as it was. To him, and to all of us who are in his shoes, Jesus says,

"Dump it, and be born again."

That fancy life of yours is flesh, and flesh can neither see nor enter the Kingdom of God. You must be born of the Spirit. The Spirit of Jesus Himself has to come in and replace that flesh-life and take over and rule. And this is the miracle that has not happened in a good many lives reading these words because you refuse to let it happen.

You want to go on patching, patching, patching.

And what do you have for all your patching?

Underneath the facade of piety and happiness that you show to the world, you are the same mess that Nicodemus was, until Jesus told him, as He's telling you now, ***"You must be born anew."***

This new birth is something that God will gladly give you,

- if you will reach out and receive it,
- if you'll turn your heart away from flesh and lift it to the Spirit of God who is with you now.

To the Spirit of the Christ who is knocking on the door of your heart at this moment.



To be born anew is to withdraw your heart from everything else and fix it on Jesus.

Nicodemus wanted to drag his pride with him, just as many of us are trying to do. He wanted to keep all the fine accomplishments he had achieved for himself in this world.

But Jesus said,

*"You have to be born out of all that into God.
Take your eyes and heart off those things and get them on me."*

It's so simple, so uncomplicated.

Yet how few are willing to give up their abominable pride – let go of everything and take hold of Jesus!

"How can a man be born again when he is old? I've lived this way all my life."

How can I change now?"

He will change you ... He will amaze you ... He will work miracles in your life.

It doesn't matter how old you are, how set in your ways you are, how enmeshed in this world you are.

- Turn your eyes on Jesus.
- Fix your heart on Him.
- Call on His name.

And Jesus will visit you in the power of His Spirit – bring you to life.

Your rebirth will begin today..

And to stay alive in God, you draw your life daily, hourly, no longer from the flesh, but from the Spirit.

"Whoever drinks this water will thirst again. But whoever drinks the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become, in him, a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 4:14

"It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail. The words that I speak to you, they are Spirit and they are life."

John 6:63

Prayer- Lord we turn our hearts away from our pride, from clinging to this life, from clinging to our ways. Help us to let them go. We need you, we need the promised life you offer us. We fix our hearts on you, we call your name...Jesus, Jesus. Birth us anew into your Spirit so we may have your well of water springing within us that gives life now and eternally. MM

*Original: REB...Unknown date ... found in the booklet- Inner Connection to the Unseen God (available for the asking)
Featured Art: By Henry Ossawa Tanner 1859-1937 To Be Born Again, Bishop Tanner, and Self Portrait all in the Public Domain*

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THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN

