



Scripture focus: Jesus teaches Nicodemus

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.'

³ Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'

⁴ 'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'

⁵ Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." (John 3:1-7 NIV)

Imagine the Scene: For Nicodemus

The sun is setting, Nicodemus has just finished helping with tidying up in the Temple. It is not something he did normally for Nico was one of the teachers at the Temple, a Pharisee who taught the Law of Moses, History, Poetry, Wisdom and Words of the Prophets. Nor was he just one of the teachers, but a leader of the Jewish Ruling Council. Cleaning and tidying the Temple was not his duty.

And yet, here he was helping with this after a very surprising and tumultuous day. Why? Well, as you may have heard, Jesus came into the Temple today and, oh boy, was he full of zeal – a real intense passion for God's house. He's been before and has been gaining quite a reputation since. As a boy he came, a child genius who both listened well and gave reasoned arguments to the adults studying the scriptures.

'Wow! that was amazing' Nico had thought at the time but slowly the memory faded as this boy seemed to disappear off the face of the Earth.

'Well God must have a sense of humour' Nico said out loud, to no one in particular, letting out a little chuckle at the same time.

'Turns out I was nearly right – he did sort of disappear because it turns out he lived up in Galilee. In fact, if my sources are to be believed even one of Jesus followers had said, 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?'' (John 1:46 NIV).

'I wonder if it could' Nico mused. A couple of the others were finishing up at the same time – they took Nico's muttering as being a sign that, like them, he was still churning over why Jesus had made such a mess, turning over the tables and casting out all the traders, sheep and cattle from the Temple courts. They were still seething and grumbling about the loss of trade, the upset relationship with the traders -a lucrative form of income for the temple and, of course, why they were still here into the evening having to clear up because the traders, who normally did it, refused to come back in tonight!



However, Nico was not grumbling about the clearing up, nor was he grumbling about what Jesus has done or said. Nico was curious. He was bemused at what had happened and, being a man of open mind and heart decided he'd go and see this Jesus this very night!

He resolved not to tell the other leaders, they'd only accuse him of being taken in by a false prophet or worse, get him kicked off the council if they thought he was turning against them.

'No' Nico said to himself, 'I want to know more about this Jesus. I've seen and heard too much simply to dismiss him.'

So, here he was, night had fallen but Nico has found Jesus. Time for some answers,

'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.' (verse 2, NIV)

A good start thought Nico, I want him to know my respect for him, his knowledge and teaching.

Nico had not actually asked a question yet, but Jesus replied anyway,

'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' (verse 3, NIV)

That surprised Nico, again! In response to Nico just saying that he has seen what Jesus is doing Jesus upgrades the conversation straight awa. To Nico's ears Jesus basically said, 'let's go large! Never mind what you are seeing now, did you know that you can see nothing of the Kingdom of God... Unless you are born again'

'ooh, I'd love to see the Kingdom of God' thought Nico, but before he could imagine more about what they would be like, it was the last bit of what Jesus said that made him spurt out his reply,

'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!' (verse 4, NIV)

Context

Nico has got a point, no mother, no matter how great they are can have the same child again, especially when they've grown up and are probably even taller than the mum!

The very thought makes mothers wince! A super-sized, 'go large' baby is not what they want. If we remember what the Hebrew mid-wives told Pharaoh back in the days of being slaves in Egypt,

'Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.' (Ex.1:19 NIV)

It seems Hebrew mothers had got the whole mothering thing sorted, right from the beginning!



There was something ingrained into Nico's view of life, something ingrained in all the Hebrew people... that they are born into a tribe of Israel and can prove it; 'what mattered was being a child of Abraham.'ⁱ

Jesus gives Nicodemus an explanation

Jesus answered,

'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." (John 3:5-7 NIV)

The horizon of Nico's understanding and spiritual imagination were being stretched wide. About what Nicodemus is learning Tom Wright says,

'Jesus is saying, God is starting a new family in which ordinary birth isn't enough. You need to be born all over again, born 'from above''ⁱⁱ

It is God who does this birthing, by His Spirit. We should not be surprised. Our Lord Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit and was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is just as able to birth new life itself.

Mothering...

As we celebrate Mothering Sunday there is so much more meaning and celebration in this festival than celebrating that we all have, or had mothers, that mothers among us can celebrate the gift of motherhood that they have received and that others, both ladies and gentlemen who are not mothers can share in their joy.

Additional meaning is breathed into the celebration as we celebrate the giver of life and of being birthed by the Holy Spirit into new life as a child of God, a child in his Kingdom.

Not everyone here has yet experienced being birthed by the spirit of being born again but there is opportunity now to ask Jesus to bring new birth through his spirit.

Q: Have you discovered God, through his Spirit, giving you a new birth into his family?

If not, ask him to give you re-birth now. If you have already, thank Father God for this once again

New birth is not simply for our own personal sake but joins us to Father God. Therefore, what should our reaction be, day-by-day?

And Covenanting ...

Here, we reach a touching point today between the concept of Mothering Sunday, of being born again and, as a result, our response of covenanting with the Lord.

A mother naturally forms a covenant with their child, to look after them all their days and, the child's response is to covenant with mum; even though such formal terms are



not said nor contracts of paper signed. It is in just such a natural way that the response of the spirit-born child is to covenant with God.

You see, covenanting is not about rules but relationship. The relationship between the child of God and God is super special and super-natural. In it, the covenant is formed where, for our part, the child seeks to show their honour of God by following Jesus' ways and teaching. This includes the giving of time, skills and finances back to him and his family, Jesus' family. Not because we have to, but because we want to, a sacrifice of praise and thanks.

Action: Commit your life back to the Lord and ask Him, though His Spirit, to help you follow in the ways of Jesus, day-by-day.

ⁱ Tom Wright, *John for Everyone: Part 1 Chapters 1-10* (London: SPCK, 2002), p.29.

ⁱⁱ Wright, p.29.