

25 years ago I attended the Billy Graham School of Evangelism and heard Don Posterski speak
He said something that really stuck with me—
He had us look up a number of passages about Jesus' interaction with people
We were to look for Jesus' pattern in how he talked with people
What "form" did he use?
What became strikingly clear was that Jesus had no form
Jesus met people where they were
The church has made a form out of Jesus' words—a form Jesus didn't use
It's particularly true with Jesus' words to Nicodemus... *"You must be born again"*
Even though I was very familiar with scripture, I had never thought of it
Jesus only told Nicodemus that he must be born again... ***no one else***
We are the ones who have made it a "form" and overused it
Instead it was a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus...

Nicodemus was a respected leader of the Jewish faith— Jesus called him a "teacher of Israel"
In today's world—he might be a professor of Old Testament at a well-known Seminary
loved and respected, wise, well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures
He was a Pharisee—a group of religious leaders known for their commitment to the law of God
And a member of the Sanhedrin—
The highest ruling body and court of justice among the Jewish people
Nicodemus was a wealthy, educated and powerful man—well respected by his people

The next time Nicodemus appears in the Gospel of John, he is cautiously sympathetic with Jesus.
When the Sanhedrin began to denounce Jesus as a false prophet,
Nicodemus counseled the court by saying,
*"Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to
find out what they are doing, does it?" John 7:51 NRSV*

Nicodemus appears a third and final time in the Gospel of John, following Jesus' death
Obviously wealthy, he purchased about a hundred pounds of spices for Jesus' burial
Placed in the folds of the cloth the body was wrapped in—John 19:39

The first time we meet Nicodemus is found here in John 3...
*[Nicodemus] came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has
come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God."
Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from
above."
Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time
into the mother's womb and be born?" John 3:2-4 NRSV*

We often talk about how confused Nicodemus was—Jesus telling him to be born again
But that wasn't Nicodemus' question—Nicodemus knows about rebirth—as did the Jews
When someone converted to Judaism, that person was considered "reborn"
When this occurred, the past was gone and it was a new beginning
The Greeks also knew about rebirth—as part of the mystery religions
Emphasis was on mystic union with god and when achieved, one was twice-born
The ancient world knew about rebirth and regeneration—
They longed for it and searched everywhere for it

Nicodemus had the same question that many of us have asked...

You talk about being born anew; you talk about this radical, fundamental change which is so necessary. I know that it is *necessary*; but in my experience it is *impossible*. There is nothing I would like more; but you might as well tell me, a full grown man, to enter into my mother's womb and be born all over again."

Nicodemus questioned how it was possible to experience this kind of transformation

Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:5-8 NRSV

You can't enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit

The first birth—the literal birth is a water birth as the amniotic fluid sack breaks at birth
Or John's baptism of repentance, but there is more...

Jesus shifts the conversation to Spirit—flesh gives birth to flesh, but Spirit gives birth to Spirit

Spirit is like the wind—it comes and goes—but you can't see the source or see the wind

Yet we can feel the wind and see the effect of the wind—open the windows, let wind in

Jesus was speaking of the same radical change Ezekiel had prophesied (Ezekiel 36:26)

"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you..."

The Spirit blows through us—we don't see the Spirit, but it has power to transform us

Then we shift to John's commentary on the interaction between Jesus and Nicodemus...

He talks about how much God loves us and how he didn't come to condemn or exclude us
For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:16-17 NRSV

For many of us, John 3:16 was a foundational verse, but I want to shift it a bit

It sounds like I need to give mental assent to Jesus—to "believe in him"

To accept some theological understandings about Jesus

To believe that he died and rose again

But I think it is a lot simpler than that...

πιστεύω **pistēuō**, means; to have faith in, to entrust, to believe, to put trust in

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who **trusts** him may not perish but may have eternal life. John 3:16 NRSV*

Jesus didn't come to condemn or exclude anyone—in fact condemnation is our own work

Exclusion was understood—the OT religious faith defined who was in and out

That no longer applies—all are welcome and all are included

Some choose not to step into the Light—by choosing to stay in chaos and evil

Any condemnation is of their own choosing

Jesus came to do this radical transformation of our being

It comes like the wind—we open the windows of our being and let it blow through

The transformation is a God work—God puts a new Spirit within us

It is ours to simply open the windows to the Spirit/wind and trust—even if we don't understand

To open the windows as a first step on this journey and allow God to do the rest

Opening the window also means our "neat and tidy life" might get blown around...