

"You must be born again." I wanted to see Jesus, but I was nervous, I was scared. He had just shut down the whole temple, the whole sacrificial system. He had saved all the **animals** from sacrifice and he had shut down the work of all the **bankers**. We had **never** seen anything like it. It was bold, daring, and fearless. So much so, that it caught all of us off guard. Who would even **dare** do something like that? We were paralyzed and frozen, unable to act in response to Jesus, even though we thought we should do **something** to protect our temple and its sacrificial system. The temple was the center and engine of our whole **economy** and Jesus had just turned it all upside down. But I knew in my gut that there was something special about Jesus. On top of **seeing** his bold actions in the temple with my own eyes, I had also **heard** about what had happened at the wedding in Cana—that water had been turned into **wine**. These signs convinced me that Jesus must have been sent by the Creator. I knew no one was able to do such things unless **"the Creator was with him."** So I wanted to learn more. I wanted to **"see"** this Jesus and what he was about for myself. So before Jesus left Jerusalem following the Passover, I went to find him. I came to Jesus during the **"night."** I wanted to see him, but I didn't want anyone to **know** that I was meeting with him. I was on the **Sanhedrin Council**, I was a **Pharisee**, I was a powerful authority in Jerusalem. I could not afford being seen and associated with Jesus. He had just made too many enemies of people who were incredibly powerful. It could ruin my political career to be seen with Jesus. I could lose everything I had if I didn't play this carefully. So I needed to hide this meeting under the cover of **"darkness."**

I started off by telling Jesus that I trusted that he was indeed from the Creator and that the **signs** he was doing were impressive. I did not know what to expect from Jesus, but his response shocked me more than I anticipated. Jesus said, **"Unless someone is born again, he is not able to see the Creator's Kingdom."** Born **"again"**? What on earth was Jesus talking about? And why was he saying this to **me**? I **saw** the signs he was doing. I **saw** that he was from the Creator. Was he saying that I was not really **seeing** the Creator's Kingdom? I was immediately thrown off balance and out of my comfort zone. I usually controlled and guided all the conversations I was in. But this conversation immediately flipped and I was backpedaling and lost. I said to Jesus, **"How is a man able to be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb a second time and be born!"** It was absurd. What did he mean about being **"born again"**? Then Jesus said to me, **"Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he is not able to enter the Creator's Kingdom."** I was still lost. But Jesus went on, **"What is born of flesh is flesh. What is born of Spirit is Spirit."** I felt like I was starting to understand just a **little** of what Jesus was saying. So when I came out of my mother's womb, that was my birth of **"flesh."** But he was suggesting there was **another** birth that needed to happen, a **"Spirit"** birth. And he said it was accompanied with **"water."** Maybe he was referring to the **baptism** that John had been doing in the Jordan River, preparing people for the arrival of the Kingdom.

Then Jesus said to me, **"Do not be surprised that I say, you must be born again!"** Well I was surprised. I had never thought about a **second** birth. I had been **born** into Israel, into the Creator's people. That **birth** was all that mattered to me and to our people. But Jesus was saying that the birth of the **"flesh"** was nothing without a second birth, a **"Spirit"** birth. Then I said to Jesus, **"But how is it possible for these things to happen?"** I could see Jesus beginning to be frustrated. I was supposed to be a teacher of our people, a leader of the chosen people of Israel. I was supposed to be ready to receive the Creator's work. But I was lost, confused, and blind. Jesus said, **"You are not hearing what I am saying."** Then Jesus said to me, **"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. Then everyone trusting in him may have eternal life."** Now Jesus was beginning to speak my language. I was of course deeply familiar with this story of **Moses**. Our people had been in the wilderness after leaving Egypt behind, but they had fallen back into the **idolatry** of Egypt. And **snakes** were attacking and killing our people. The Creator had Moses make an image of what was killing us and raise it on a pole for all the people to see. Those who faced the **truth** and saw their idolatry for what it was, were **saved**. Jesus was saying that he was going to do the same for the whole cosmos. He himself would be lifted up to show us the true depths of our **selfishness** and **idolatry**. And only if we **faced** that in faith would we be saved from the judgment we had brought on ourselves.

Then Jesus said to me, **"The Creator loved the cosmos so much that he sent his only Son so that everyone trusting in him would not be destroyed, but have life eternal."** He said this **faith**, this **trust** was everything. Those who **trusted** would be saved, just like the Israelites who looked at the snake that Moses had put on a pole. Those who did **not** trust would be destroyed by what they had brought upon themselves. Jesus stared at me and said, **"The light has come into the cosmos and men loved darkness rather than the light because their works were harmful. Everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light so his works will not be exposed. But the one practicing the truth comes into the light."** I was floored. Jesus was talking about **me**. He had been talking about **me** the whole time. He was wanting **me** to face the snake lifted up on a pole. Jesus was wanting me to confront the **"truth"** about myself. But I didn't want my life exposed to the **"light."** I liked the safety of my life, my cozy dark corner I was hiding in. I did not want to face the **"truth"** of who I was and the idolatry and selfishness that was slowly killing me and hurting all those around me. I wanted my old life **and** I wanted to **"see the Creator's Kingdom."** But I couldn't have it both ways. I couldn't live in both the **"light"** and the **"darkness"** at the same time. I was overwhelmed and I was unwilling to face the **"truth"** and step into the **"light"** and leave my old life behind. So I walked away from Jesus filled with **sadness**, under the cover of **"darkness."**

"You must be born again." Are we here today under the cover of **"darkness,"** like Nicodemus? On the one hand, Nicodemus wanted Jesus and the **"light"** he brings, but on the other hand, Nicodemus wanted to hold on to his life in the **"darkness."** But we cannot live in two worlds at once, we cannot serve two masters. To **"see"** and **"enter"** the Creator's Kingdom we **"must be born again."** We must leave our old lives in the way of the cosmos, in the Way of Civilization, in the ways of arrogance, fear, and violence behind. When a child is born it leaves the old world of the mother's womb behind forever. No one can go back into their mother's womb. So it is the same with us. If we are to **"enter the Creator's Kingdom"** then we must be willing to walk away from our old lives, completely and totally, never going back. Jesus's cross is the moment when the snake is lifted up on the pole. When we crucify Jesus to silence his **voice** and his **demands** on our lives, we are finally faced with the depths of our selfishness and idolatry. When the Creator himself comes among us through Jesus, we reject him, hate him, and nail him to a cross. We truly want nothing to do with the **"truth,"** with the **"light,"** with Jesus. We hate the **"light"** and run away from it because we are addicted to our habits and practices of selfishness—we don't want to expose the truth of who we are, we don't want to truly change. But Jesus urges us to look at him, lifted up on the cross that we put him on and face the **"truth."** He urges us to step into the **"light"** and **"be born again"** through his love.

"You must be born again." When you came out of your mother's womb you were born of **"flesh."** But this birth is not enough. You must have a birth of **"Spirit."** You must face your selfishness and see how strongly you reject the Creator in your life. You must die to yourself and follow Jesus into the Creator's Kingdom. Do you want to **"see"** what the Creator is doing? Do you want to **"enter"** the Creator's Kingdom? Then step into the **"light,"** face the **"truth"** of your darkness and addictions, turn to Jesus lifted up on the cross, and **"be born again."** Amen.