

# The Tale of Two Rabbis

John 3:1-8

Nicodemus had every advantage you can dream of. He was a strict Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews as a member of the Sanhedrin, (1) and the teacher of Israel (10). He believed that Jesus was a miracle worker (2). And yet, those qualifications still left him outside God’s kingdom. Like us today, Nicodemus needed to learn that *simple belief is not enough. You must be born again to get into heaven.*

Sadducees	Pharisees
Upper class	Middle class
Liberal	Conservative
Politically accommodating	Nationalistic politically
Anti-supernatural – no angels or resurrection	Believed in the supernatural
Old Testament was authoritative	Scripture plus tradition of the elders

John 2:23-25 points out that people believed in Jesus because of his signs. They had shallow, sign-based faith. Nicodemus was apparently in that group as well.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night (2). Since Jesus was always surrounded by people, a nighttime visit may have been a logical choice for a private, uninterrupted conversation.

Nicodemus addresses Jesus as Rabbi and Teacher, not as Messiah or the Son of God or his Lord. This indicates the extent of his faith at this point. He expressed belief that Jesus came from God because of the signs/miracles he performed.

Jesus makes an abrupt, dramatic statement (3). It cut to the heart of the matter. One cannot see the kingdom of God without a second birth from above.

The word “again” also means “from above.” Nicodemus understood it to mean “again” and concluded Jesus meant a second physical birth. Jesus refers to “above” in verses 6-8.

Kingdom of God refers to the earthly messianic kingdom that will be the earthly phase of God’s eternal heavenly kingdom. To enter the kingdom means to obtain eternal life.

Nicodemus asked Jesus to clarify what he meant by being born again (4). His question can be wistful—“Can human nature really change? Can we really start over?” or it can be cynical—

“And should I return to my mother’s womb? I don’t think so.” It shows that Nicodemus is outside the kingdom and cannot penetrate its deeper truths.

Jesus reaffirmed his statement (5).

Being “born of water and the Spirit” is synonymous with born again. The Old Testament used water, metaphorically, to symbolize spiritual cleansing and renewal. God’s Spirit in the Old Testament represents God’s life. God would bring cleansing and renewal as water, by his Spirit. Unless a person experienced spiritual cleansing and renewal from God’s Spirit, he or she cannot enter the kingdom. Nicodemus understood that no one can enter the kingdom without repentance and the work of the Spirit.

Jesus clarifies that there are two types of birth (6), one physical and one spiritual. “Flesh” refers to human nature. The Holy Spirit gives people spiritual life.

Nicodemus did not understand Jesus’ point and marveled at this statement (7). He had apparently viewed acceptance by God like so many of his Jewish contemporaries did. He thought his heritage was adequate to get him into the kingdom and make him acceptable to God.

Jesus used “wind” to illustrate how the Spirit regenerates (8). Man cannot predict or control either the wind or the Spirit as the both operate sovereignly.

## **Application**

- **Believe the Message**

It’s about new life, not new religion

You have to experience the supernatural, not just affirm it

- **Humble yourself**

Admit your need

You must repent and be changed

- **Allow the Spirit to transform you**

We must be born of the Spirit