

# Vicar's Sermon

**Date :** Sun 17/02/2008  
**Title :** Nicodemus  
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**Subject :** Jesus teaches Nicodemus, the Jewish Councillor, what being "born again" means.

Nicodemus, a leading member of the Jewish ruling council, comes to Jesus by night. Why does he visit during the night? The answer is that he doesn't want to be seen because he's aware that Jesus is a controversial figure and so it might be bad for his reputation and standing in the community. Nicodemus is aware that Jesus is someone very special: "we know" he says "that you are a teacher who has come from God for no one could do the things you do unless God was with him." He is not saying that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, but he does acknowledge that Jesus is particularly blessed and filled with God's wisdom and power. And, in thinking this, he's not on his own and comes as the representative of others.

There are a couple of things to recognise here: firstly, he comes by night and, secondly, he recognises Jesus as someone special and inspired by God. But, the reply of Jesus is very telling. He is not in the least flattered or impressed by what Nicodemus is saying but replies, "Unless a person is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

What does it mean to be born again? **The starting point is recognising and accepting Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah: acknowledging Jesus as your personal Saviour.** Jesus is not simply a good man or a God inspired teacher and miracle worker but the Son of God. The term "born again" has got an unfortunate reputation as describing people who get very excited and exuberant in their worship but this is to completely misunderstand the term as used by Jesus. It describes not the form of worship but the relationship that you have with Jesus. Is it personal? Is it real? And is it based on a true understanding of who Jesus really is? It is all a question of vision and who you perceive Jesus to be hence His comment "unless a person is born again they cannot **see the Kingdom of God.**" Does your inner vision convince you that Jesus is your one and only Saviour?

Because, if you don't, then you have much more in common with Nicodemus than with a true follower of Jesus. It is not enough to recognise Jesus as a good man or God inspired prophet and teacher.

And I believe that this has serious implications within the Church of England and is, in fact, the major factor contributing to its slow but steady demise. The majority of people are not born-again Christians but are good God-fearing people who do not yet have a personal relationship with Jesus as Lord and Saviour. And it is this question that the Archbishop of Canterbury and all the other leaders within the Church of England need to urgently address and to begin by looking at themselves.

How often when filling in a form have you answered the question "religion?" with the letters C or E? That is not the right answer: the correct answer is Christian or, more precisely, born-again Christian. How many of you would be willing or able to answer in that way? How many of you would see yourselves as born-again Christians rather than as members of the Church of England?

Jesus did not come to establish the Church of England or any other church but, rather, the Kingdom of God.

I had a man come into church the other day whom I like and respect very much indeed and he looked at those hangings at the back of church and said "I don't really like them! They remind me of one of those happy clappy churches!" My heart sinks when I hear people talk like that because it demonstrates so clearly that we're still so tied up with religion rather than with Jesus.

It seems to me that we're living in an age when we're encouraged to "come out" and declare what we truly are. Many gays have done it including many ordained ministers: isn't it about time that we

did it and declared ourselves to be “born again Christians” with a joyous belief in Jesus as our Saviour.

If not, then we’re really rather like Nicodemus who preferred to visit Jesus by night so that he wouldn’t be seen and judged by day. And so the nation still waits for the church that bears its name to come out from the shadows and to declare itself “born again”:

Amen.

*Peter*

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