

Passage: John 3: 1-12

Title: The wind blows wherever it pleases /Translated by Emma Choi

## 1. Nicodemus seeks out Jesus

Do you remember the day you were born? I was told that I was born sometime after harvest time in one of the bedrooms of our home, but no matter how much I try, I cannot recall the day of my birth. Indeed, there is no one on earth who could remember the day that they were born – but no one doubts that they were indeed given birth. If you had not been born, then you would not be alive. So what does it mean to be born again spiritually? Do you recall when you were “born again”? To some, there may have been a specific moment in time, or a specific event during when you gave your lives over to Jesus, but for others, it may have been more of a process, such that there is no specific recollection of a one-time event. There may be some of you who are not sure if you have indeed been born again – and some of you may not even be interested in being born again. However, even though we do not recall the date of our birth, we celebrate our birthdays as we cannot deny that we have indeed been born. Spiritual rebirth is similar – only those who have been born again are able to experience the spiritual realities of walking with God, and feeling His presence together with you. If you have had experiences of having walked with the Lord, there is a good chance that you have indeed, been born again. Today’s passage highlights how one can be born again – and it is very simple. It requires you to be born again from above. Let us learn what it means to be “born again from above” through the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

Nicodemus comes to visit Jesus in the middle of the night. We are told that Nicodemus belongs to a group known as the Pharisees. As you are all well aware, the Pharisees were a very pious group of individuals. Not only did they strictly keep to the laws of Moses, they also set up their own rules and regulations and made sure to keep them too. As we’ve discussed before, the reason the Pharisees were so insistent on keeping these rules and regulations in their pursuit of pious living was due to their belief that only then would the Messiah come. They believed that they could only enjoy freedom within the boundaries of the rules and regulations that they had set up for themselves. One major example of such rules and regulations were the system of the Temple and the laws governing cleanliness. First, through an established and set-apart system of sacrifices through the Temple, they believed that they could become the People of God. The political system that they established to this end were a group of 71 members called the Sanhedrin, which we could take to be the equivalent of something like the US Congress, or the offices of the Department of State. Here, it states that Nicodemus was a prominent leader, which meant that he was one of the so-called “Arkons” – a member who stood at the top of the ladder as one of the Sanhedrin. This means that Nicodemus must have been brought up with the very best education that the period could offer him. Indeed, his name Nicodemus is a combination of the terms “Nico” (meaning victory) and “Demus” (meaning people) suggesting that he had also undergone education in the Greek tradition also. So, here is a leader amongst the Jews, who comes to seek Jesus. Why had he sought Jesus out?

## 2. The reason Nicodemus visited Jesus

We can see that one of the main reasons for his visit to Jesus was due in part to curiosity and questioning from the language of verse 2. It seems that Nicodemus had found himself perplexed. He knew well about the reputation that Jesus had had, and also knew about the miracles that Jesus had performed. Jesus had healed the Lepers, and had even healed a woman with a bleeding ailment that no physician had been able to cure. He made a man who had been lame for 38 years to walk again, and even raised the dead to life. Nicodemus also meant that such miracles could only mean that the Lord was with Jesus, as such miracles had been characteristic of the famous prophets in history, such as Moses and Elijah. As such, Jesus appeared to be at least on part with someone like Elijah – and yet Nicodemus could not understand why Jesus, with whom clearly the Lord resided, denied the institution of the Holy Temple. Nicodemus believed that anyone who walked with God must similarly hold the Temple of God in similarly high regard. And so, Nicodemus wanted to find out for himself if Jesus was truly a blasphemer, worthy of death, or whether he was a prophet the likes of which had not been seen since the days of Moses and Elijah.

In the Gospel of John, there are many symbols that are used to convey messages. The night here is also a symbol – Nicodemus, the highest ranking member amongst the Jewish people, visits Jesus in the dark – that is to say, he is a man of the dark. To him in darkness, Jesus the light came (John 8). Again, in John 13:30, it states that after Judas had sold Jesus, it was night-time – to allude to the fact that Judas had joined forces with those in the dark. Nicodemus, still in the dark, comes to Jesus and asks something amorphous. That is when Jesus realizes his intent and answers as follows. In verse 3, Jesus responds “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again.” To emphasize the point “truly,” the term Amen is used here twice. Only Jesus speaks like this in the entire Bible. In the days of Jesus, people used the term “amen” to place emphasis on the veracity of their statements. For example, “I promise to buy you a delicious lunch – amen (meaning truly I will).” And so when Jesus uses this term twice in one sentence, he is stating “very truly,” and tells Nicodemus that he must be born again. And yet the term “again” is described through the term “another” which means “from above.” And so, when we say born again, we should really state “born from above.” So why did Jesus state that one had to be born again – born from above?

### 3. The Miracles of Jesus – and His Disruption of the Temple – were all God’s work.

Nicodemus came to Jesus because he could not understand how someone with whom was clearly the Lord could so directly attack and disrupt the institution of the Temple. He sought out Jesus in an attempt to help unite his conflicting understanding. And to this man, Jesus tells him that he must be born again, which may sound odd. The intent of Jesus here is as follows. Jesus is saying that everything He had been doing – including the miracles in Galilee and Jerusalem, as well as how he cleared the grounds of the Temple – were all part of the same ministry. All of this had been for the Kingdom of God. And to understand this reality would take someone to be born again, to be born from above – which is why Jesus states that you must be born again from above. Not only that, this rule applied to everyone – even those who stood at the very top of the echelons of Jewish society. In John 1:12-13, we see that through accepting this Jesus who comes from above, we can be born again – not through human intentions, plans, or good deeds. And the reality of this good news is made clear through chapters 3 and 4 in the Gospel of John. In Chapter 3, Nicodemus, who stands at the very top of Jewish society – and in chapter

4, the Samaritan woman who sits at the very bottom of said society – are juxtaposed against one another to highlight that no matter what one's circumstances or situations are, the constant is that one must accept Jesus to be born again. And this rebirth is necessary if we are to take part and understand the work of the kingdom of God that Jesus came to earth to perform.

Jesus states that clearing of the temple grounds and healing of the lepers are one and same – all parts of the same ministry. Jesus raises a man who had been lame for 38 years to walk again. This alludes to the fact that Jesus will make a lame Israel, a collapsed nation, to stand again and restore them. Indeed, the Hebrew term to walk “halakh” also has another meaning of “to obey.” For example, when it states that Enoch walked with the Lord, it also means that Enoch was obedient to the Lord. The lame man who had not been able to walk for 38 years is a representation of the people of Israel who had rebelled and disobeyed the Lord for 40 years in the Wilderness – and when Jesus raises this lame man to walk again, it is a sign that Jesus has come to re-establish a covenant relationship between Israel and Himself. Similarly, the clearing of the Temple grounds is a sign that Jesus has come to restore the lost connection between His People and the Lord, thereby doing away with a Temple that had become defunct and broken.

Not only did Jesus heal the lame, but he also healed lepers; and the woman with the bleeding disease was healed when she merely touched Jesus' cloak. All these actions served to upset and incense the Pharisees who were obsessed about maintaining religious cleanliness. In their law, to merely touch the unclean, such as those with Leprosy, would also make you unclean. And yet Jesus breaks this system at its fundamental core. The lepers and the woman with bleeding illness – all who should turn other unclean by their proximity, are instead made clean by coming into contact with Jesus. Not only that, Jesus performs such miracles on the Sabbath, a day on which work was not permitted. Jesus did these things to bring to light the hypocrisy of the Jewish religion of the times. Jesus, in essence, completely abrogates the hypocritical and broken religious system of the Jews through His own power, by demonstrating that His presence made even the unclean, clean. By breaking these so-called laws, Jesus highlights the power that is within Him and within the Kingdom of God. And so, when Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, He is essentially asking why Nicodemus cannot believe in Him although he had become witness to the power of “life to the fullest” that could be only found within Jesus. And Jesus answers the question at the same time he poses it, by stating that Nicodemus needed to be born again from above – through water and the Spirit. Without this rebirth, one cannot become co-participants in this miraculous work.

#### 4. What does it mean to be born of water and the Spirit?

To become members of the Kingdom of God necessitates that we be born again from above, through water and the Spirit. Jesus alludes to this and states that it is like the wind blowing wherever it pleases in verse 8. The Hebrew term ruakh and the Greek term pneuma, both refer to spirit and wind at the same time. So what does it mean to be born of water and the Spirit? They are one and the same. When Jesus states water “and” the Spirit, the term “and” is stated through the Greek term “kai,” which means “that is to say.” And so, being born of water is to be born of the Spirit. The Old Testament refers to this reality

in the book of Ezekiel 36: 25-26, where it states “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” This passage refers to the process of being born again, wherein your old self goes away and is replaced by a new identity. The water here refers to Baptism – and when the water is poured on you, the Holy Spirit comes and also make you renewed, reborn.

What is baptism, then? Baptism means to be cleaned in water, and to be submerged in water. As our old self dies in the water, and we rise again out of the water, we become a new creation. Baptism is, therefore, a ceremony of critical importance. If there are those among you who are not yet baptized but have given your lives to Jesus, I exhort you to seek baptism. Baptism is an expression that, although you may live your physical lives on this earth, your views and perspectives are ever towards the Kingdom of God to come. That is to say, you are professing and publicly declaring your intentions to live out a life of one who belongs to the Kingdom of God. To be born again of water and Spirit also means that you become able to willingly keep the laws that the Lord has established for us. To be born again means that you are moved by the Holy Spirit in a way that makes you want to live a life that is concordant with the plans that Lord has for you, and that you are moved to further seek out His Word and participate more and more in his Kingdom work. An open heart is formed. As it states in the book of Ezekiel, you will be given a heart of flesh, not a heart of stone. The Jewish religion of Jesus’ times was a hard religion, a religion of stone. Those who belonged to this religion had to cut themselves off from the rest of the world, isolate away from anyone who wasn’t a Jew, tithe religiously, and fast twice a week – and only then would there even be a chance that the Messiah might come. And so, to someone like Nicodemus who was caught within the confines of this tight, regimented religious system, the concept that the Holy Spirit could come and move someone to bring about definite change was nearly impossible to understand. And yet it is true. The Holy Spirit cares not for your background, your degrees, your limitations or strengths, and He will work as He desires. “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” This is also to say that we cannot tell on whom the Holy Spirit will come! It is only by His Will and movements alone, such that no minister or pastor can guarantee that the Holy Spirit will come to a specific person. And yet it also means that this is totally independent of our efforts or intentions. The wind of the Holy Spirit from a world that supersedes our reality in every way possible – such a wind blows, and makes us to become born again! To those on whom such a wind lands, they become opened to a whole new world. Sadly, despite the wind blowing in his face, Nicodemus could not leave the box he had found himself in, and yet the Samaritan woman entered the Kingdom of God.

##### 5. Walking with the Lord in our daily lives.

As the Holy Spirit may come to us at any time, we must always be ready for Him. Just because we cannot predict when or how He may come, does not mean that we should not be prepared. The passage for today also alludes to the Holy Spirit through the allegory of water. In Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit is also alluded to using the figure of fire. The Holy Spirit has characteristics of both water and fire; we know that water flows from high places to low places. When we observe how water flows, it uses the energy contained within it to flow downstream, filling up any and all empty spaces. Although there may be

things in its way, the water will merely find a way around it, or engulf it all together. Water makes dry places to become verdant again, and flows where it is absent. The wind moves in a similar way – from areas of high pressure to low pressure. To those who are meek in heart, open and ready for the Holy Spirit – those are the people on whom the Holy Spirit is more likely to act upon and fill up. The Holy Spirit seeks out those who have humbled themselves and yearn with a hunger for the Lord. To those who seek after a dying of their old self, the Holy Spirit will come and engulf such old selves, killing them outright, that you may be born again.

The Holy Spirit is also like fire. Fire goes up. It does not burn “downward.” Flames will always rise up. And so, when the Holy Spirit comes on you like fire, our passion for the Kingdom of God rises up to the heavens. When the Holy Spirit comes in this way, you start yearning after the Kingdom of God. You rescind your old self, leaving behind your old desires and wants, and replace them with a desire for the higher things. When the Holy Spirit fills you, the direction of your desires change. A desire that had previously sought out only my own good and worth, now turns to the elevation and seeking of the glory of God. In this way, we can say that to live a life of faith is to be redirected in our desires by the Holy Spirit. We leave behind our old desires of wishing to live a life of leisure, or wealth, or fame, or success – and instead, we escape such ultimately meaningless desires and replace them with a desire for the Kingdom to come. Such a transformation requires that the Holy Spirit start it in you. Only to those who have been born again, will be visible the work needed for the Kingdom of God. You start to realize that your day-to-day life is not so mundane, but that it is the place where the Lord actively works and intervenes to build His Kingdom to come. You start to realize that your workplace is where the Lord is working too. You realize that He is still waiting and working to see on whom He may yet come also. In short, you start to walk with the Lord in your daily life, not just in the Church.

The logic of John chapter 3 is simple. Only the things that come from above can change us, and seek us to look upward in this transformative rebirth process. Like water and wind, we are filled and born again from above, and like fire, we rise up to seek out the Kingdom of God. We seek out a life that is not filled with the desires of this world, but desires for the Kingdom to come. I pray that you will seek out the Holy Spirit, who only Jesus, who sits at the right hand of the Father, can send upon you. And I bless you all to walk lives of faith that are wholly led by and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Sharing: Nicodemus, who was the foremost amongst the religious scholars and leaders during his time, did not have eyes to see the Kingdom of God that Jesus introduced to him. Are you seeing the Kingdom of God that the Lord is building around you in your lives? Why do you think it is important to be filled with the Holy Spirit to recognize the Kingdom work at hand in your day-to-day lives? Let us think and share together on this.