

Jesus said, I assure you, unless you are born again, you can never see the Kingdom of God. I used to think being born again meant that you were a Christian and then after falling away from the Christian way of life, you could find your way back and then you could be born again as a Christian.

You have undoubtedly at some point in life found yourself wishing you could begin again. Perhaps you became disappointed in your career, realizing that you had not accomplished all that you would have hoped to accomplish. Perhaps through your life, you discovered that you didn't want to be a secretary, but you really wanted to be a nurse and now you are in the last years of your life, there isn't time to be a nurse and likely, you were disappointed and found yourself wishing you could start over in life.

We age, and aspirations that once glowed brightly fade into distant memories. Training and careers that at one time loomed large on our horizon fade into a past marked with multiplied regrets. It is somewhat amazing to note that wishing to begin again is not restricted to those who have attained advanced age. Youth are perhaps as prone to wish for another chance, a new beginning, as are their elders.

How many times have I heard young people say they wish they would have done better in school, college kids that floated through college when they could have been the best in their class. Life is a flowing stream and the moments go by quickly, never to be repeated. Life is defined by opportunities, many of which we create ourselves. Whether the opportunities are seized or missed is dependent upon our decisions at the time of opportunity. Seldom do we have a realistic expectation of beginning again. However, I am convinced that we can begin again. We can have a second chance. Especially we can have a second chance at life that will fulfil our inmost, often unspoken, desires.

Life is to be lived boldly. When I watch documentaries or television that show young people, between 20 and 30 traveling and always wondering what is over the next mountain, always looking for another challenge, not really caring if they own a houseful of furniture and a great income and all the material things that we consider success. I wonder what I have missed. They seem to be happy with a backpack and a bologna sandwich.

My younger sister has traveled all over the world. I've been happy to plan a vacation through the years and visit California or Kentucky. Maybe if I could go back and be born again, I could start all over and do some other very exciting things.

But being born again doesn't mean we start all over with our present lives. It's our spiritual life that needs to be reborn. I would guess that most of us, in our own way, have been satisfied with the way our lives have gone, as we should be.

The message of our lives has been delivered through the Word of God. We are all marked with a great spirit of adventure as we advance toward Christ's Great Kingdom. My Spirit of Adventure started nine months ago when I accepted the invitation to lead this church.

Was I born again at that time? No, my spiritual life began long before that time. But have you ever wondered how you can really tell if you are a born again Christian? Well, there are some signs that will make you know that you have become born again.

Do you feel a sense of freedom? Do you feel peace with God? Do you feel joy, faithfulness, love and gentleness? Have you felt the experience of love for others? Are you more worried about others than you are for yourself? Do you feel a genuine love for your neighbor? Have you turned your mind and heart from earthly influences to the love of God?

People who are born again feel victory in their daily life. They feel a happiness that they never felt possible. They are winners and feel like God has given them the power to conquer all the evil in their life.

People who are born again have a deep desire to learn more about God's Word. They find joy in reading the Bible. Their Bible becomes their best friend.

Do you feel like you have new thoughts, new feelings and new motives in your life? Have you developed a growing sensitivity to sin? Are you living your life with a renewed sense of morality?

Has your attitude changed toward the obedience to God? Have you developed a whole new understanding to his commandments and the importance of keeping them? If so, you have become a born again Christian.

Do you have an impulse to witness to others? Do you have a desire to share Jesus with others and to let others know what a friend you have in Jesus? If you have experienced any of these changes, then you may have become a born again Christian. Do you have a desire to give back to God a portion of what he has given you?

There was a very large city church that received a gift of \$150,000 from a corporate millionaire. It was used to purchase an organ and at the dedication the donor was recognized with speeches, people patting him on the back, and a plaque of appreciation.

Meanwhile in the same church, there was an elderly woman who was living on Social Security. She had been faithfully putting in her offering every week. Although it was tough to make ends meet, she had budgeted her money to make sure she set aside her few dollars in her tithe for church. She was never honored for her giving and she never received a plaque for her donations.

The sad part of this story is that if I asked you which one of these people would that congregation prefer to have as a member, you would have to answer the rich man, not the widow.

And how sad is it to say that if you want to build a big, successful congregation and be THE church in town, you have to court the rich, the famous, the impressive, successful people. You can't build a big successful church with the poor, the lame, the lepers, the deaf and blind.

Did Jesus think he could waste his time on these kinds of people? Of course, he did.

It didn't matter to Jesus who he dined with or who he ministered to. He was in the company of many rich tax collectors and sinners all the time. He ministered to anyone who came to him, but he reached out to the weak and downtrodden. He freely said, "It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick".

Luckily, we live in a very small community where we aren't out to be the biggest and the best, but we pride ourselves on being Christian and taking care of those people who can't take care of themselves. We look out for the sick, the poor, and those who struggle on a daily basis to survive.

Jesus ministered to whoever came to him. One of the very rich men that came to Jesus was Nicodemus. He was one of the leaders of the Pharisees and he played an important part in the last few months of Jesus' life. He was only mentioned in the Bible 3 times. The first time is the middle of the night when he came to Jesus to learn about his teachings which includes being born again and the John 3:16 passage of the Bible.

The next time his name surfaces is John 7 when he spoke up to the guards as crowds were gathering and asked if it was legal to convict a man before he was given a hearing.

The last time he is mentioned is in John 19 when he, along with Joseph of Arimathea went to retrieve the body of Jesus after he was crucified. Nicodemus was

very, very wealthy and donated a large amount of expensive myrr and aloe to coat the body of Jesus. This large amount, was usually reserved for Kings but was given because he realized Jesus was the savior of the world. Nicodemus went against the laws of the pharisees to help retrieve his body because he truly knew this man was the son of God. When the disciples had gone away after the crucifixion, Nicodemus is the one who stepped up, risked his own life and took Jesus to what he thought was his final resting place.

Going back to the first night Nicodemus met with the Lord, The Gospel lesson tells us that Nicodemus came to Jesus in the middle of the night to listen to his teachings. Why did he come at night? He was a Pharisee, a very highly regarded Pharisee who was a teacher of the Law. He kept himself away from Liquor, immorality and anything that would break Old Testament law. He was a member of the Jewish Supreme Court of his day. He was a man of religious position and very popular with the people, but something was missing in his life. Obviously, that is why he went searching for Jesus in the late of night when he wouldn't be seen.

The initial conversation was interesting. He said to Jesus, "It's obvious you are sent here by God. The miracles you perform are the proof."

Without waiting for a question, Jesus responded to him, "Unless you are born again, you will never see the Kingdom of God". Jesus recognized that on the outside everything Nicodemus believed in was good and wonderful, but there was something inside of him that was not right.

Nicodemus didn't even have an opportunity to ask, "How do I get to Heaven". The answer was there. Unless you are born again, you will never see the Kingdom of God. But he was confused. How could he, as an adult be born again from his mother's womb. He didn't understand what Jesus was saying.

Jesus was not talking about the physical birth when we are born the first time, but he was talking about the spiritual birth, being born from above. It is a work of God that is not our doing. It is mysterious and unexplainable. Jesus said the Spirit is like the wind – you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.

But more than being born of the spirit, it is being right with God. It is paying attention to the internal matters of the heart. It isn't doing good deeds all the time, but asking for God's forgiveness. It's coming to God in humility, admitting your failures and your need of God. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All of us must lean on the Grace of God.

We must become right with God and that comes with an ongoing relationship with God. We become right with God when we realize that we don't know it all and are willing to see our great need of God. Jesus said, "You must be born again, born from above, born of the Spirit."

A Christian life is not a set of rules, but an experience. It's an ongoing relationship. It's being filled with Love and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Being a Christian is believing that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Your whole life is centered in that reality. Your complete trust is in Christ so that your life is given completely to him. You live an ongoing relationship with him.

Nicodemus moved from a religious person to a person who had a living, personal relationship with God. The change in him could only be described as being born again.

How many opportunities have we missed in our lifetime because we have done foolish things or because we were in the wrong place at the wrong time. How many times have we taken the focus off of the Spirit when we should have been looking to the Lord for strength and success.

Being born again is not about having a huge religious experience, a kind of revelation in which clouds envelope you and the Lord speaks to you and fills your heart

with love. You won't hear a chorus of music or clanging cymbals but you may feel the Spirit of the Lord come over you.

Today's gospel lesson has one of the most powerful verses in the whole Bible, John 3:16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him would not perish but have everlasting life.

God gave his Son so we could have everlasting life. God gave his son, so we could join him in heaven. How do we do that? By being born again in his spirit and in his love. That awakening in us proclaims that there is more to getting to heaven than just being a daily Christian.

My wish for you today is that you have all met the living Lord, that you have been born again in the spirit of Jesus Christ and that you thank the Lord every day for giving us life and giving it more abundantly, so that if we truly believe, we will have everlasting life. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen and Amen