

Sometimes, people find out you are a Christian; and, normally, that is a good thing. They see us going to church, wearing a cross, doing good in the community, or reading something like Modern Christian Theology on the T. A few comments may be exchanged, some questions, and then we go about our day, most of the time. Sometimes we end up having more unusual conversations.

There was this one time at the hair salon. Now, I'm always nervous about getting my hair cut, I don't want it being cut too short, but the stylist was nice and talkative. She asked what my plans were for the rest of the day, and I told her I had to go to church. Normally, people nod and the conversation moves on, but she got really excited. "Oh you're a Christian?" She asked me. I nodded, while eying how high her scissors were going on my hair. She told me all about her church and how much she enjoyed going and we started having a nice chat. Then she asked me something.

"So, have you been born again?"

How are you supposed to respond to that question? Better yet, what in the world does being born again mean? We have heard this term before. Several branches of Christianity use the term 'born again' frequently. We've heard the phrase "born again Christian." And maybe we are tempted to dismiss the phrase because we associate it with Christians we don't agree with. Christians across the spectrum are going to understand things differently, and that's fine.

I could tell this woman was asking me to tell her that one time when I decided I simply and sincerely trusted Jesus and became saved. A conversion moment.

I fumbled around for an answer and finally squeaked out.

"I was baptized." It was a good answer, but I clearly didn't fully understand this concept of born again.

It's alright when we find something in the Bible that we don't quite understand. The Bible itself is filled with people who don't always get the message. Poor Nicodemus. He approaches Jesus, at night, perhaps he didn't want the other Pharisees to see him talking with Jesus, a man who wasn't exactly popular with the other Pharisees. Nicodemus has plucked up the courage to come talk to Jesus. Imagine him taking a calming breath before looking at Jesus and proclaiming that he, Nicodemus, believes Jesus has come from God. This is big for a Pharisee. Maybe he is shaking, not just from nervously confronting this man, but also from excitement that he recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

Do you ever notice, that when we think we have something figured out, we eventually realize that there is actually a lot more to learn. Nicodemus had more to learn. Jesus responds to him by saying, "very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus, stands there, blinking in confusion, rubbing his chin, his eyebrows squish together and he finally says,

"What?"

"How can anyone be born again?"

Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. You must be born from above." Nicodemus, in his line of work, focused on the physical world, specifically the law and order of this world. This is not the answer he wants to hear.

He can understand part of the answer. For him, a Jew, when an adult wanted to convert to Judaism, it was the custom for that person to be baptized with water. After they were baptized they were thought of as adopted into the family of God. This was one outward sign would help mark conversion.

Christianity kept this ritual. We use water to symbolize the beginning of our lives in the church. The water is a sign of both our commitment and God's grace. But, Jesus was talking about more than just the waters of Baptism.

The Bible tells us that we are created in God's image. Despite how often we may mess up, all of us are still created in the image of God. When we were created we were given this little thing called free will. We can choose to stand. We can choose to fall. We can stumble around or trip. At the end of the day, we are responsible for our actions. At the end of the day we are still made in the image of God. If we are going to be born from above, we acknowledge that we are created in this image of God, and we choose to be in relationship with God.

We don't have to understand exactly how this is done. Jesus points out the limits of human knowledge and understanding. "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." We aren't going to get an exact answer to a lot of our questions. The nature of new birth means we change because we let God work in our lives. We aren't going to know exactly how, but we do find our understanding deepen as we are in relationship with God.

Jesus was not one to simply encourage people to add a few virtues to their lives, or subtract a few bad habits. He sought nothing less than a transformation in a person's life.

Faith is not a one time action or event of a Christian, but instead it is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Being born from above is accepting this ongoing work as an integral part of our lives, and accepting the image of God as part of us.