

I am a child of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 September 2023

Preacher: Bob Akroyd

[0 : 00] Lord. So keeping in mind those two readings from the Old Testament, that image of God summoning a people, daughters and children from the north, south, east, and west.

Isaiah 45, where God says, look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else. That open invitation that God is giving to all nations and all peoples to come to him, the only true God, the righteous God and Savior.

Let's turn now to John's Gospel, which if you're keeping track probably is my favorite book in the Bible. John's Gospel, and I'd like to read the opening 14 verses.

Just as an aside, if you're considering the person of Jesus, the Gospel of John has a has no predecessor, has no precedent in ancient literature.

It appeared without any parallel. It's written by a first century fisherman. And as you read this book, ask yourself, what kind of influence, what kind of subject prompted a fisherman to write this book?

[1 : 17] It reminds us that as Jesus walks across the page of human history, he walks across uniquely. There is none like him. And the impact that he had then and the impact that he has now is without parallel, without precedence.

You cannot compare him to any other figure in human history. John's Gospel, chapter 1, verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.

He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

[2 : 35] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet, to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Children born, not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The late theologian J.I. Packer encouraged, and to this I have to credit our own minister for pointing these things out to me, J.I. Packer said, there are six things that you should say to yourself every morning.

And maybe I would add to that, say the same six things to yourself every night before you go to bed. I am a child of God. God is my Father. Heaven is my home.

[3 : 46] Every day is one day nearer. My Savior is my brother. Every Christian is my brother. And my sister, too. And that first phrase, I am a child of God, is our theme this evening under the big heading of identity.

So if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are God's child. Jesus, your elder brother, and every Christian brother and sister.

This is a remarkable statement. And in fact, is a fulfillment of those promises that we read.

Promises that were written almost 800 years before the arrival of Jesus.

That a day was coming when God was going to gather his family. But this is no ordinary family. You see, this family is spread throughout the world.

This family is not a small family, but a big family. And God is gathering his family together. He's gathering his sons, and he's gathering his daughters.

[4 : 55] Some of them are near. Some of them are far. Some of them are coming from very unlikely, very unusual backgrounds. And with you this evening, I'd like to explore what we mean when we say that I am a child of God.

And that you, too, are a child of God if Jesus is your Savior, God is your Father. And you, too, are part of this big and growing family.

A word of personal story, which I hope may be illustrative. The 13th of October 1966 was a good day.

On that day, I entered into the world. And I was named, not surprisingly. But my name was Thomas Gilroy. And if you like, I've got a birth certificate that says Thomas Gilroy, born in Atlantic City, the 13th of October 1966.

Now, I have two birth certificates. The second birth certificate, which was dated in March 1967, reads, Robert John Aykroyd was born on the 13th of October 1966.

[6 : 09] His father was Dennis Aykroyd, Jr., and his mother was Ruth Evelyn Spooner Aykroyd. Two birth certificates. Well, many of you who know me will know that I was adopted as a baby.

I was adopted at six months old. And latterly, maybe just a few years ago, we were able to get original copies of the original birth certificate. But it's interesting that this copy has a watermark. So that if you try to photocopy it or if you present it, it says not eligible for legal identification.

Normally, a birth certificate is eligible for legal identification.

You want to get a driver's license. You want to get a marriage license. You want to get a passport. Your birth certificate is a great form of identification. But this document is not valid because the person called Thomas Gilroy no longer exists.

You see, that person doesn't exist because that legal person has been transformed or translated. That actually Thomas Gilroy doesn't exist, but Bob Aykroyd does.

[7 : 18] There's been a change of name, a change of status, a change. So that this old birth certificate is not a legal record because that legal person no longer exists.

So keep that in the back of your mind. I'll refer to that in a moment. As we look at John's gospel, these opening 14 verses, we could take a lot of time to go through each verse. But I'm going to suggest that the key here is the theme of relationship.

In fact, throughout these 14 verses, there's at least four distinct relationships that are described here. The first relationship is the relationship between the Son and the Father.

The Son and the Father. There's a relationship between Jesus, the Son of God, and between God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We see this relationship in the first three verses. That in the beginning, that language of Genesis, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[8 : 21] He was with God in the beginning, and through Him all things were made. Without Him nothing was made that has been made. Well, you can only say that about God Himself, can you not?

Only God is the creator of all things. And if the language of one to three seems a bit puzzling, verse 14 kind of ties it all together.

The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So there is a Father and there is a Son. And there's a relationship here that is the foundation of all relationships. God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son.

If you want to round out our understanding of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and He'll be introduced on the page of John's Gospel not too far ahead. The Father and the Son have a unique relationship.

[9 : 21] And it's described here and made clear that the Son now becomes a human being. He makes His dwelling among us so that we can now see God. We see God in the flesh.

We hear God speak. We see God act. We see Him act in power. We see Him act in grace. We see Him act in mercy. We see His miracles. We hear His teaching, His parables.

God in the flesh. So there's a relationship between Jesus and His Father. The second relationship we see here is the relationship between Jesus and John.

They are biologically related. They're within the same family unit. But Jesus and John have a different role. Jesus, we're told, was life and light.

Jesus was light coming into the dark world. Whereas John was a witness or a herald or a signpost. Whenever I am in the west of the country, if I'm ever in the city of Glasgow, the signpost that I am looking desperately to see is M8 East.

[10:38] Because at that point, I'm ready to come home. And I always get lost in the big city. But when I see M8 East, I follow that sign. Because I know the M8 East will take me home.

And that's the relationship between Jesus and John. Jesus is the light. Jesus is the life. And John is the signpost. He is not the light.

But he is a witness. So John has a key speaking role. But he enters the scene and exits the scene relatively early in the ministry of Jesus.

John's role is significant. But John's role diminishes. So that Jesus gets the credit, the glory, the honor. If you look later in John chapter 1, we're told John says of Jesus, Behold, look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

So that's the second relationship we see in these opening verses. The third relationship is the relationship between Jesus and the world. We've already said from verse 3 that the world was made through him.

[11:50] Everything that we see was made through Jesus. If you look at the opening verses of Hebrews, we're told that everything that was made is also sustained by Jesus.

So he's the maker. He's the sustainer. And the Bible tells us that he is the redeemer, the savior, the savior of all things.

So he's created the world. So you would think that there would be a harmonious relationship, would you not? He's the creator. He's the sustainer. Everything owes its origin to him.

But now like any good author, the tension is introduced. The conflict is introduced. The problem is introduced.

And we see in verse 9, the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. And what you would naturally think that the world would welcome the light.

[12:46] The world would welcome the life. The world would welcome its creator, its sustainer, its redeemer. However, he was in the world.

And though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. Didn't get it. Didn't see. Didn't comprehend.

Couldn't grasp who this Jesus was, the creator of all things. The sustainer of all things. The redeemer of all things came into the world that he created.

Back in the 1960s, early 60s, Disneyland was new. So Disneyland originally was only in California. And there was a group of people walking around Disneyland.

And there are huge queues. All the rides, all the attractions. But this group always went to the head of the queue. And they went right on to the rides, right on to the attractions.

[13:49] And at one point, those that had been standing in the queue for an hour said, Hey, who do you think you are? Walt Disney? Walt Disney? And the older man turned back and said, Yes, I am.

That's who I am. I own this place. This is mine. So if I want to, I can go to the front of the queue. I can go, you know, because this is my place. Jesus came into the world that was his.

He created it. He sustained it. And the world looked and did not recognize him. Verse 11 brings it even closer to home.

Because not only is there this cosmic truth that he created the world, but that Jesus was the long-anticipated savior of a people. So you would think of this vast globe and all of its people, that there would be at least one people that would get it.

They're waiting. They're looking forward. He's written on the pages of their book. Look, verse 11, he came to that which was his own, his own people, his own family.

[14:57] You go to your family home and you arrive at the front door and you're waiting for the door to be flung open and the door is slammed in your face. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

So the opening verses of John tell us that there is a tension, there is a conflict. The creator, the sustainer, the redeemer has come, but people don't see.

They don't recognize. They don't welcome. And that's why John says later in chapter 1, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

There is a cosmic tension between the world and its creator. The world in John's gospel is presented wholly negatively. The world is characteristic of sin, characteristic of ignorance, characteristic of indifference.

And Jesus came into this world to save and the world said, we don't know who you are. We don't know where you're from. We don't know why you're here. And you might say, well, that's the end of the story.

[16:01] But not so. Because the fourth and final relationship that is described to us here is where we come into the picture. Because the fourth relationship is Jesus' relationship to us.

Relationship one, Jesus' relation to his father. Relationship two, Jesus' relationship to John. Relationship three, Jesus' relationship to the world. And now, Jesus' relationship to us, to people. Ordinary people from ordinary backgrounds. Relationship three, Jesus' relationship to us. Now, I, when I went to school a long time ago, the subject that I loved most was math.

Maths. We're here in Scotland, so when in Rome, mathematics, maths was my favorite subject.

And what we have here in verse 12 is a truth that's presented almost as an equation.

Because what does Jesus say, or what does John say of Jesus? Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

[17:07] You see, there are two things that are required here. And those two things bring with them a guarantee. The first one is receive. Yet to all who did receive him.

By and large, the people of Jesus, the people that Jesus came for, his own people said no, but some did. Some did receive him. The outsiders who had no background, no knowledge.

Some of them received him. But to those who received him, to those who believed in his name.

This is the two elements.

You know, A plus B equals C. Receive plus believe equals become. And this is where we come into a relationship here.

If we receive Jesus. So the idea was that when Jesus arrived, his own people said no, thank you. You know, if you get an unsolicited, you know, somebody comes to your door and asks if you want your driveway power washed, or whatever.

[18:10] They come and you say, actually, no thanks. I'm not really interested. You know, you're not receiving them. But if somebody comes to your door, like John Green who's here tonight. John Green came to my door today.

John, come in. I don't leave my friends on the doorstep. I bring my friends in. I receive them. And you see, when we receive Jesus, we don't leave him on the doorstep.

We welcome him in. We welcome him into our home. We welcome him into our heart. To all who received him. The second is to those who believe in his name.

So if you receive Jesus, you welcome him in. And if you believe in his name. And you see, the key here is name in the Bible is not just Robert John Ackroyd.

That's my name. But the name of God captures the nature of God, the character of God. The name of Jesus captures the person and his work. So that's why Paul, when he was summarizing his ministry, he said, we preach Christ and him crucified.

[19:16] Who he is and what he has done. So when we believe in the name of Jesus, we don't just believe that a person called Jesus existed, which he did. We don't just believe that a person named Jesus did certain things, which he did.

But we are placing our faith and our trust and our hope in him. You know, this looks like a, I don't want to stand on it, but you know, this looks like a sturdy piece of wood.

Even there, I've got to be careful because I've put too much forward pressure on it. This will topple. But the idea here is that you put all your weight. Faith is placing all your weight on something or someone.

And by faith, we place all of our weight on him. So you receive Jesus. You don't leave him on the doorstep. You welcome him in. And you believe in his name.

That he is savior. That he is Lord. That he is God. That he is human. That he lived. That he died. And that he rose again.

[20:17] Now here's the promise. He gave the right to become children of God. So when J.I. Packer says in the morning, begin every morning by saying, I am a child of God.

How do you know you're a child? You're a child of God because you've received Jesus. You're a child of God. You've believed in his name. And he says that you are his child.

Age six months, I couldn't speak. Age six months, I had very little awareness of what was going on. But there is a legal document that said Robert Aykroyd is now the son of Dennis and Ruth. I had a change of name. I had a change of address. I had a complete change of life. And that happens when each one of us comes into this new relationship.

You see, this is a relationship which the Bible describes as adoption. Jesus the son is God's only begotten son. There's a unique relationship between the father and the son.

[21 : 23] But when we come to believe Jesus, when we come to receive Jesus, when we become a child of God, we join this family by adoption. John goes on to say, children born not of a natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

When we become part of God's family, two things happen. We have a change of status. We have a new name, a new location. 21 Windwood Road was our family home.

And I never knocked on the door. Never once. Didn't need to knock on the door. That was my home. I opened the door and walked in. If I went to my friend's house, I knocked on the door because it's not my house.

But when I went to my family home, I walked in because that was my family home. I was a member of that family. So there's a change of status, but there is also a change of nature, a change of character.

So not only did I have the name Ackroyd, but I became like my parents. You might say, but they're not biologically your parents. No.

[22 : 32] But you spend enough time in somebody's company, you take on qualities and characteristics. So I can see characteristics of my dad and characteristics of my mom in me and in my sister.

Maybe it's not surprising my mother was a teacher. I'm a teacher. My sister's a teacher. These things get passed on in families, and that's what we were. We were a family. We are a family. And you see, mom adopted me and mom adopted Nancy.

So you know what? Me and Nancy are brother and sister. We don't have a shared biology, but we have a shared set of parents. So therefore, we have a relationship now with each other.

So if you are a child of God, and I'm a child of God, you and I are brother and sister. And whether we like that is of no matter whatsoever because that's a decision that's been taken out of our hands. If we're both adopted into the same family, we better get on now because we're going to spend all of eternity together. I am a child, and you are a child of God if you receive, if you believe, the Bible tells you that you've become.

[23 : 44] And this idea of born of God, born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God.

Jesus picks up this theme a few chapters later. You see, Jesus says to us, we must be born again. We need a new start.

We need a new beginning. The change of status and the change of nature. These are things that God and God alone can do.

He gives us the right. He makes us born again into this living hope. He changes us from the inside out. And if you realize your status, you now have a relationship with God the Father that you never had before.

You have a relationship with Jesus the Son that you never had before, and you have a relationship with all of God's children. And isn't it true that when you meet fellow Christians, different cultures, different backgrounds, different life experiences, when you meet a genuine child of God, you know it.

[24 : 51] You connect. You interact. You realize, okay, we speak different languages or from different cultures, but we have a shared parent. We have a shared father. We have a shared elder brother. And we are part of this big family.

Back in the middle of the 1600s, a long time ago, there was a theologian who was a big deal. He spent most of his time in Oxford.

His name was John Owen. And John, he had a way of unpacking a lot of these truths. And he, in describing the gift of adoption, he said he wanted to highlight five things, and I'll close with these five because I think they're quite remarkable.

In order for adoption to be true, that you and I actually have to be part by right of another family. So I was part of the Gilroy family.

I don't know much about the Gilroy family, but I was part of the Gilroy family. That was my family by right or by birth. The second point that Owen makes is this.

[25 : 57] He said that there is another family to which you have no right to be a part, naturally. So I'm part of the Gilroy family. I'm not naturally a part of the Aykroyd family.

So if Denny and Ruth didn't adopt me, and 20 years later I knock on the front door and said, here I am, they would say, who are you? We don't know who you are. You're not part of this family.

So there's a family that I'm a part of. There's a family that I'm not a part of. The third point that he makes, and this is key, is that there is an authoritative translation, an authoritative change by someone who has the power to take you from the family that you belong to and put you into a family that you do not naturally belong to.

In my case, it was the state of New Jersey. The state of New Jersey had authority to take someone from one family and to legally place them in another.

But Owen said there were two applications or two implications of this, and this is for our benefit and for our encouragement. He said, first of all, when this happens, you're not part of this family.

[27 : 13] You are part of family A. You're not part of family B. Someone with authority takes you from family A and puts you into family B. He says two things happen. The first thing is this, is that any previous debts, any previous obligations that you have to the old family have now been cancelled.

I'm 56 years old. If members of the Gilroy family were to contact me and say, Bob, Thomas, you're part of our family. We've fallen on hard times.

You've done well for yourself. We need you to help us. Well, I would say, I'm sorry, but I'm not part of your family anymore. And any obligations or any debts that belong to the old family have now been released.

I have no debt. I have no obligation. Now, out of the goodness of my heart, if I did meet the Gilroy family and I could help, as a Christian, this morning we heard about the Good Samaritan.

If you find people in need, you should help people in need. But there is no legal obligation for me to do so. We have now been freed from all those debts. But the good news is this.

[28 : 23] We have now become beneficiaries of all blessings that belong to the new family. So when Denny and Ruth died, my sister and I, Nancy and I, became beneficiaries of their estate.

Mom and Dad gave their stuff to their children. And who are their children? The two children that they adopted. We become part of God's family. Every blessing and every benefit that belongs to the children of God belong to you.

Not by right, but by adoption. Eternal life. Joy, peace, abundant life. However you want to describe it. Justification, sanctification, new birth.

All of these privileges belong to all of God's children. Not because you deserve them, but because you have been taken from one family, brought into a new, and given these privileges.

And those privileges are not just for time, but those privileges are for eternity. So this is the beginning of a series where we're going to explore who we are in Christ.

[29 : 33] I am a child of God. God is my Father. Heaven is my home. Every day is one day nearer. My Savior is my brother.

Every Christian is my brother too. I hope we can all say those words together. Let's pray. Father, we come to you in the powerful personal name of Jesus.

We recognize that we have no right to these privileges. We have no right to this access, but you in your grace and mercy and in your power and your authority. By faith in Jesus, by receiving him and believing in his name, we have now become your children.

You have given us a new status. You've given us a new standing. You've given us a new nature.

You've given us a new birth. And in that, we give you thanks. And I pray that you would remind us that the identity that we now possess is not an identity that can ever be lost.

We thank you. We praise you. And we ask that we would now live as your children, that we would love one another, and that we would love this world in which you have placed us, a world that did not recognize, a world that did not receive.

[30 : 48] Help us in turn to be something that we have.