

(Re)born into a Family

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[0 : 00] It would be great if you could turn in your Bibles back to John chapter 3, or you can use the reading that's on the back of the sermon outline, which should be an insert in the bulletin.

Speaking of the bulletin, the first notice says there's a choir item on the 25th of May. We're not that forward thinking. It's the 25th of August.

But I do wonder what sort of family you were born into. For example, were you born into a family with lots of brothers and sisters, or perhaps an only child?

Did you get your own room, or did you have to share a room? Why don't you take a moment just to find out from the person next to you. You might need to introduce yourself firstly and ask them whether they had to share a room growing up.

You've got 37 seconds. Go. All right, that'll do. I won't ask you to do them in.

[1 : 09] But growing up, I had three siblings, two brothers and a sister, and I did have to share a room with my brother, which was a bit frustrating because he was messy, and I have a bit of OCD.

I think I was tidy. And so it got to the point where I actually got some masking tape and put masking tape down the middle of the room and divided the room in half. He had that side.

I had that side. It wasn't very nice of me, I realized. But the families we are born into can be messy or tidy. They can be big or small. They can be rich or poor. And sadly, sometimes they can be dysfunctional or functional.

And so perhaps for some of us here this morning, there are times when you wish that you were born into a different family because of some difficulty in your own family. Perhaps you would have wished to be born into a family with more money, like the al-Niyan family of Saudi Arabia, or sorry, Abu Dhabi.

After finding oil, they became the royal family of Abu Dhabi with an estimated fortune of \$305 billion. And their house, just a measly little palace there.

[2 : 24] I'm guessing none of them have to share a room. Of course, we don't get to choose the family we are born into, do we? And yet, there is another family we can choose to belong to if we want to.

A family that is even better than the al-Niyan family. For if we believe in Jesus, then God gives us new birth into his family.

This is what we see in our Bible passage today, where Nicodemus meets Jesus and discovers that he's actually not yet in God's kingdom, in God's family.

And so we're at point one in your outlines and verse one in your Bibles or sheets, but I'll put it also on the screen for those online. So now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

He came to Jesus at night and said, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.

- [3 : 29] Here, Nicodemus meets Jesus. We're just going to call him Nick for short. And it's worth noticing a few things about Nick. First, he's very religious. He's a Pharisee, verse one. They're a group of Jews that took their religion very seriously. And in fact, he's also a part of the ruling council, end of verse one, which means he's a religious leader. And so Nic is very religious. And second, Nic seems like a nice guy. I mean, he shows respect in the way he speaks to Jesus. He says that he's sent from God, perhaps like a prophet. And later on in John's book, Nicodemus even tries to defend Jesus. But thirdly, Nick hasn't really got Jesus. That is, he doesn't really see who Jesus is. John deliberately tells us that Nick comes at night, probably because Nick was worried about being seen with Jesus because the other Pharisees, his colleagues, didn't like Jesus.
- [4 : 36] But John often uses darkness as a metaphor, as a symbol for spiritual blindness. And Nick does seem blind to who Jesus is. You see, on the one hand, he acknowledges that Jesus has performed many signs at the bottom line there, at the end of verse two, that is miraculous signs, miracles. And in case you think John is making this up, we have other historical sources that confirm it, like the ancient Jewish historian called Josephus, whose writings we actually have here today. I've got a book of his writings here. And Josephus says, at that time, there was a man called Jesus, a wise man, and he was a doer of wonderful works. And we know Josephus means by that, miracles. In fact, if Jesus was more than just an ordinary guy, you'd expect him to do more than just ordinary things, wouldn't you?
- [5 : 41] Like miracles. And it's why John calls these miracles signs, because they point to Jesus being more than an ordinary guy. I mean, that's what signs do, don't they? They point us to things. Perhaps a bit like this sign that tells us, it's called the ooh-ah point. It points us about to do when we look at the view, to ooh and ah. Or here are a few signs. The top one points us to the fact there's a state prison down the road. And then the man sign says, I will not kill you. You've got to be very cautious about picking up anyone who has to hold up a sign to say they will not kill you. Well, these miracles are like signs that point us to something. And in this case, to the identity of Jesus. In fact, this is what John tells us at the end of his book. You see, John walked and talked with Jesus. He heard and saw the things done by Jesus. And he recorded them for us, that we may know the identity of Jesus.
- [6 : 45] These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ. A title that means King. The Messiah. That he's no ordinary guy, but God's Son. And Christ, which as I said, is not his surname, but a title like Your Majesty. And like Your Majesty, Christ means King too. This is who Jesus is. But despite Nick seeing the signs, what does he call Jesus in verse 2? Not King, but Rabbi and Teacher. Which both mean the same thing. Despite the signs, despite the evidence, Nick thinks Jesus is just another teacher. Which is like so many others in our world, isn't it? And many people today would say, oh yeah, Jesus was just a teacher who taught good morals. Like the golden rule and so on. But he's more than that. And Nick is blind to the signs that point him to this.

[7 : 51] And it means then Nick is not part of God's kingdom, part of God's family. A lot of people say that to go to heaven or to be on the right side of God, we need to be good people and a bit religious.

Go to church every now and again. Or temple or mosque or whatever it is. But if even Nick, who is both a nice guy and very religious, if even he is not in, then it's not about being good or religious, is it?

Rather, we get in by being reborn through believing in Jesus. Nick needs to be reborn spiritually. Point 2, verse 3.

Jesus replied, Now, being in God's kingdom is like being in God's family.

And this family is worth being part of because it comes with life eternal. This life eternal includes new spiritual life that starts the moment we believe and lasts an eternity where God becomes our heavenly father who will never leave us nor forsake us and whose sovereign rule as God works for our true good and to grow us like Christ, a plus to guide us in life, to grant us our needs, to graft us together as one family who will more and more love one another and to give us strength to get through life's ups and downs in this world.

[9 : 32] Being in this family means new spiritual life that starts the moment we believe and continues for eternity such that God is always our father. I mean, what other family has the God of the universe as their dad?

Can you imagine being a kid at school and on Parents' Day where you introduce what your father does to the rest of the class and there's this competition, particularly between the boys because us guys are kind of obsessed with competitions.

And so the kids go, well, my dad is a doctor. Or my dad is a teacher. My dad is a pastor, which didn't work too well for our kids, I must confess. But we can say, no, no, my dad is God.

Beat that. But wait, there's more. Being in God's family also comes not just with new spiritual life, but also will come with new physical life that starts later in the world to come, but will also last an eternity.

New physical life with a resurrected perfect body in a renewed perfect world where there'll be no more downs, only ups. A perfect life with God and each other that will never get old.

[10 : 42] And we know God will do this because he's already started this. He's raised Jesus from the dead with a resurrected perfect body.

And so this gives us certain hope in the face of death. In 2019, the president's eldest son in the Al-Nayan family died at a relatively young age.

They didn't disclose his age, but you can tell from the photo he's not that old. And so despite his father's billions, he could not guarantee life again for his son.

But our heavenly father can. And we'll see more about this next week. But the point is being in the Al-Nayan family may look appealing with the palace, but not even their billions can give us life eternal.

Yet being in God's family can. And so it's worth being in it. By being reborn into it. And not physically, but spiritually. Verse 4.

[11 : 48] How can someone be born when they are old? Nicodemus asked. Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born. Jesus answered, Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit.

Nick is right. You cannot be born again physically. But Jesus is talking about being born again spiritually. That's what water and spirit refer to here.

It's what God promised in the Old Testament of the Bible. Notice the first line, number 25 there. God says that he will use water to cleanse us from all impurities and idols.

And then he will give us a new heart, a new spirit. And number 27, even his own spirit to work in our conscience, helping us to live for God.

This is a picture of the new spiritual birth that God gives. You see, our natural inclination is not to live God's way.

[13 : 01] For example, God says to be patient and forgiving. But as I've said before, when someone cuts us off the road, our natural inclination is not to say, Oh, bless you. No, no, it's to say, Oh, curse you.

Or think some other impure thought about them. And nor is our natural inclination to treat God as God. Here, Israel replaced God with idols.

For us, our idols we replace God with are things like work or money or family or health. Those things that take number one priority in our life.

When God is supposed to be number one priority. I mean, is that not the definition of God? You know, the top? The Bible calls all this sin and it stops us from entering in to God's kingdom.

Belonging to God's family. Receiving life eternal. And so we need to be washed clean or forgiven for our sins, which is what the reference to water is here.

[14 : 05] Given a new heart. In other words, we need to be reborn spiritually. That's how we enter God's family. And there's a certain logic to this.

Verse six. Jesus goes on to say, look, flesh gives birth to flesh. But the spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again.

We know this, don't we? To enter a physical family, we need physical birth, right? Flesh gives birth to flesh. We see with babies, you know, when your kids were born and grandkids and so on.

Well, so too, if we are to enter God's spiritual family, then we need spiritual rebirth. There's a certain logic to it, isn't there? And so Nick should not be surprised by it.

Though to be fair, it can sound all a bit weird, can't it? You know, a bit out there, a bit unreal. And if you're sitting here this morning thinking this, then let me tell you, Jesus gets that.

[15 : 09] Because in verse eight, he gives us an example to help us know that it's real. He says, 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. Like the spirit, we cannot see the wind either. We don't know where it comes from or where it will blow to next, nor can we control it.

The way that people have enough trouble predicting it, don't they? And so the wind could seem a bit weird to us, a bit, you know, out there, a bit unreal. But we all know it is real, don't we?

Why? Well, because we've seen the effects of the wind, haven't we? We've seen it blowing in the trees, or we hear it rushing past the window, or we feel it on our faces.

Well, so too the spirit. We may not be able to see the spirit or where he comes from, where he goes, or how he brings new birth to people. But we can know it's real because we can see the effects of it in our world.

[16 : 12] In the changed lives of people who are now part of God's family. People like Peter and many others in this room.

Now you might think we're all pretty ordinary sort of people. I should say, speaking for myself, surely, you know, really clever people. Perhaps scientists, they would never be Christians. Because isn't science against Christianity, right?

Well, wrong. Christians actually invented science, did you realise? And there are many scientists in our church, and many top scientists in our world have become Christians.

For example, Dr Francis Collins, who led the team that discovered human DNA. I mean, can you imagine that kind of breakthrough being part of that?

He's got to be a pretty clever guy, right? Or perhaps Joan Centrilla, who was the former director of astrophysics at NASA, and now works at the West Virginia University in the States.

[17 : 12] You know her specialty? Black holes. I mean, that's above my pay grade. Or MIT professor, Jing Kong, who was a professor of engineering at MIT.

None of these grew up as Christians. All of them became Christians later in life. Here are the effects of the spirit in our world, you see.

And so this spiritual rebirth into God's family is real. As real as the wind. And yet Nick does not get it. And worse, he does not believe in Jesus to receive it.

For the way to be reborn spiritually is by believing in Jesus' identity. At point three, verse nine. How can this be? Nicodemus asked.

You are Israel's teacher, said Jesus. And you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen. But still, you people do not accept our testimony.

[18 : 16] As one of Israel's teachers, Nick should have understood this stuff. But the real issue is that he doesn't accept Jesus for who he is. Verse number 11 there.

Jesus and John the Baptist, that's the we, I think, have testified earlier to who Jesus is. When John the Baptist saw Jesus in chapter one of John's book, he said, Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He's testifying to who Jesus is. And yet Nick, along with the other Pharisees, do not believe these things. Do not accept these things.

As Jesus goes on to say in verse 12, I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe. How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?

Jesus has spoken of earthly things. That is, things that happen on earth, which we can see, like the wind blowing in the trees, like flesh giving birth to flesh, you know, babies being born. We can see that.

[19 : 19] Or even the Spirit giving birth to Spirit. We can see people becoming Christians. We've heard a testimony from Peter today. All these things happen on earth.

We can see them even today. Jesus has spoken of earthly things, but Nick doesn't believe these earthly things. And so how will he believe if Jesus speaks of heavenly things, things we cannot see?

But again, the real issue is Jesus' identity. Verse 13. No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man.

Jesus is saying that he has come from heaven, which not only qualifies him to speak of heavenly things, but more than that, points to him being more than just an ordinary guy.

Back in verse 2, Nick said Jesus was from God. That is inspired by God like a prophet. Well, Jesus is now saying he's literally from God, from heaven.

[20 : 18] He's more than an ordinary guy. In fact, he's the Son of Man, which is another title for king. The one through whom God rules and gives life eternal for this king would die for our sins.

Verse 14. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

Verse 14 is a reference to our first reading, where Israel sinned against God, and the punishment for that was death. Sin is much more serious than we often think.

Unless, of course, it happens to us when people sin against us. It's very serious. But we forget how serious it is against God. But God told Moses to put a snake on a pole, and whoever looked to it would live.

Well, in the same way, we face punishment for our sin. We stand condemned. Because we've not always lived God's way, nor treated God as God. But Jesus was lifted up on the cross, like the snake was lifted up on the pole.

[21 : 25] And there he took the punishment for our sins, so that everyone who looks to him, who believes in him, can be forgiven.

Given new birth into God's family, with life eternal. And this is how God shows that he loves us.

Verse 16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world, to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

God loves you deeply. So, he doesn't want you to miss out on a place in his family, with life eternal. And so, God's love sent God's son into the world, not to condemn us, but to save us from the punishment our sins deserve.

To save us from perishing in hell. That's how much God loves you. I mean, how much would you have to love someone to give up your only child or grandchild to die for that person?

[22 : 35] As many of you know, I have an only son myself, and as nice as you all are, and as crazy as he sometimes drives me, I would still not give him up for you.

How much would you have to love someone to willingly take their punishment for them, as Jesus did? I mean, maybe if you got a parking fine, and you needed help, I would pay that for you.

Don't all send them to me at once. But to suffer hell in your place for your sins, I'm sorry. I think you're on your own.

But God lovingly gave. And Jesus willingly went. Which is why it's Christ alone that we're to believe in.

You see, it's not about being good or religious like Nick. It's about believing in Jesus. That he's more than just a teacher. That he's the king who really died to pay for your sins.

[23 : 38] Who really rose to prove he can give you new life. And since it's about believing in Jesus, then anyone can do it. Everyone can believe.

And then receive new birth into God's family. And so the choice is, believe and receive new life in God's family with eternal life and everything else we've mentioned.

Or don't believe. And stand condemned, ready to pay for your own sin. You see verse 18? Whoever believes in him is not condemned.

But whoever does not believe stands condemned already. Because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only son, the only way they can be forgiven. You know Shakespeare's famous quote in Hamlet, right?

To be or not to be, that is the... Yeah. Well, for us this morning, it's to believe or not to believe. That is the more important question.

[24 : 39] And so will you believe in Jesus? Don't be a Nicodemus who is spiritually blind and refuses to accept the evidence. Rather be like Peter. Be like those others in this room and do believe.

Or at least consider Jesus. Ask the person who invited you or ask me to help you meet Jesus more by reading the rest of John's Gospel.

We've got these little books. There's one here as well where you can catch up and read bit by bit and meet Jesus more in the book of John from the Bible. And for us who already believe, then firstly, thank God for his grace, for the new birth he's given us in his family.

Where we're united together to love and care for one another. Where he's our heavenly father whose sovereign rule works for our true good and will bring us to new physical life in the world to come where there'll be no more downs, only us.

Firstly, thank God. And secondly, live out. Live out our life as members of God's family. Like, you know, following God's rule by reading his word and living it out in our lives.

[25 : 52] Or like meeting together regularly as family, even when the weekends are busy. Or like caring for one another in the family. It's been encouraging to see people do that.

Giving meals or money to those in need. Calling or texting those alone. Helping and encouraging those in difficulty. And we're to keep doing that more and more.

We're to give thanks for our new birth in his family. And live out our life as members of his family. I don't know what sort of family you were born into.

But you can be reborn into God's family. If you want to. With life eternal, which is even better than the Al-Nayan family. And so if you want to, I'm going to give you a chance to do so in a moment.

But first we're going to sing of God's deep love for us.