

## **John 3:1-17**

### **Being born from above**

Life is full of uncertainties. There are few guarantees.

A week before Christmas I was planning to break dad out of Bethany nursing home so he could spend Christmas Eve and Christmas day at home. Yet on Christmas day we were grieving dad's death.

No one knows what's around the corner.

However there are some certainties. For example, every person in this room today was born.

Another certainty is, God has a purpose for your life. Even the fact that you are here today is no accident.

Another certainty that this post-modern, theologically liberal age finds offensive, is that both you and I are sinners.

The scriptures tell us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23) and "the wages of sin is death".(Rom 6:23)

Now I don't want you to think that I am judging you at this point.

I am applying the same measure to myself as to you. I am simply declaring the fact.

From the very beginning of humanity we have chosen to go our own way. Again the scriptures inform us that "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned."(Rom 5:12)

It's almost as if rebelling against God is in our genes yet in a very real sense there is a whole lot of choice about it as well.

There is yet one more certainty in life. Death.

Just as at 12.30 on Christmas day my dad drew his last breath and died, so to one day will you and I take our last breath and come before our God to give an account of our lives.

So we have all been born.

We all have a God given purpose for being.

We have all failed to live up to that purpose by either not doing what God requires or sometimes doing things God would have us not do,

and we will all die and give an account of our lives to God.

These certainties create an eternal dilemma for humankind but God has a plan to save us from our predicament.

The problem of sin is as old as humanity. Have a listen will you, at God's own Chosen people in full flight.

And this is after God has rescued the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. From Numbers 21:4 - 9 we read;

“They travelled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food! Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many of them died. The people came to Moses and said, ‘We have sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.’ So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.”

You’ve got to love the Israelites. Constantly going through the cycle from obedience to disobedience, punishment, confession and repentance only to do it all over again – and time and time again.

Of course we’re not like that, are we? Not much!

I don’t know about you, but the Israelites are a mirror to me and looking at their cycle of rebellion, I only see myself. They sinned against God and God had a plan to rescue them.

All they had to do was take a step of faith and look at the bronze snake to be spared.

And now to the good news for us.

In our Gospel reading this morning we have Nicodemus, a Pharisee, an expert in keeping the law, a member of the Jewish ruling council no less, coming to speak with Jesus.

Coming at night, under the cover of darkness.

We can only assume a man in his senior position didn’t want to be seen taking counsel with this young rebel Jesus.

Interestingly, Nicodemus, a teacher of the law, calls Jesus Rabbi - teacher.

Some might speculate about his cynicism (being a Pharisee) but I think he was genuine.

He came at night, he humbled himself by acknowledging Jesus as a teacher and then confirmed Jesus must be from God because of signs Jesus was doing.

The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus continues with Jesus apparently answering a question Nicodemus didn’t ask.

Nicodemus declares Jesus is from God, based on the signs and Jesus answers “no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again”.

Nicodemus didn’t ask about being born or about the kingdom of God. Or did he?

You could rightly understand Nicodemus as saying to Jesus “I see you are from God because of the Kingdom signs.” To which Jesus says No! – The only way to see the Kingdom is to be born again.

This term “being born again” is a real corker.

*Again* is one of those Greek words that could easily mean one of two things.

You see it could also mean, “Being born from above”.

In the first instance, Nicodemus understands Jesus as saying he needs to be born a second time in a literal way.

Jesus corrects Nicodemus by coming at it from a slightly different angle.

No one can **enter** the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

There are numerous interpretations on what it means to be born of water.

It could be referring to baptism, it could be referring to repentance, but the flow of the story leads us in the direction of it referring to natural birth.

So Jesus is telling Nicodemus that to enter God’s kingdom you need to be born twice.

Born of the water and the Spirit - a physical birth and a spiritual birth from above.

Jesus draws Nicodemus further towards understanding by insisting he ought not to be surprised at this revelation.

It’s a thing as mysterious as the wind. We see its effect but don’t know from where it comes or where it goes.

Spiritual rebirth is indeed a mystery.

At this Nicodemus gives up with the cry “how can this be?”

Jesus responds with a further challenge and begins to head to the finish line.

You Nicodemus are Israel’s teacher and you don’t understand these earthly things what are you going to do with heavenly things?

And now Jesus reveals his true identity to Nicodemus.

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – The Son of man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness so must the Son of man be lifted up that everyone who believes, may have eternal life in him.”

Many scholars tend to think that the last two verses of our text today v16 and 17 are the gospel writer’s comments more than the words of Jesus himself. Either way in v16 you have probably the best-known bible verse in the world.

John 3:16 - Say it with me will you.

For God so loved the world he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Here's the bottom line for today.

Nicodemus came to Jesus as an expert law keeper with the expectation that his Jewish heritage and rigorous law keeping would allow him into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus had news for him.

The only way into the Kingdom is by spiritual rebirth from above.

This mysterious re-birth is God's gift to all who believe in Jesus, and can not be earned by doing good.

God does have a plan to save you and me from our predicament of sin.

His plan is Jesus.

Being born again, being born from above, being re-born spiritually, involves recognising Jesus for who he is and believing in him.

It means receiving by faith God's free gift of forgiveness that is offered by Jesus through his sacrificial death on the cross on our behalf.

The Son of man being lifted up just like Moses' snake on the pole for the Israelites.

All who looked at the snake were spared, so to, all who look to Jesus will be spared.

So now for a couple of questions to conclude.

Have you looked to Jesus? Have you taken that decision, that step of faith to begin believing in Jesus?

If you haven't and would like to, or would like to now more about how, please come and see me at the end of the service today.

If you are already a believer, a follower of Jesus, What is it in your life that you currently depend on more than Jesus? Nicodemus had his heritage and law keeping. What is the issue in your life?

For God so loved the world he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Friends In this life full of uncertainties, having Jesus at the centre of your life on a daily basis is the only sure way to go.

Let us pray.