

John 3:1-17

Slide 27

Here's a picture of a butterfly (for the reader, it's a caterpillar...) What's the problem?

It's not a butterfly, it's a caterpillar. But surely it must be a butterfly because it's been born that way?

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That's how it was born, but that's not how it is meant to remain. Butterflies aren't born once, in essence they are born twice. They hatch from the egg, then they are born again after become chrysalis's.

Slide 29

The caterpillar and the butterfly are made up of entirely the same stuff but a caterpillar can't fly until it has been transformed. The whole point of a caterpillar is that it becomes a butterfly and until it becomes a butterfly then it can't show the world it's beauty.

Being born again is not just important, it's vital and it's what it is called to do.

This is early on in John's gospel, so he's setting out what he wants people to understand. We shouldn't necessarily expect the gospel's to be chronological accounts of what happened, they are more theological accounts. They tell us what happened but they also want to give us a structure for understanding who Jesus is and what it means for us.

So here we have Nicodemus, an important guy, a member of the ruling council, coming to Jesus late at night. He's coming at night because he wants a private chat with Jesus and his understanding of who Jesus is was maybe slightly controversial for someone of his position, "We know you are a teacher who comes from God for no-one could perform the miracles you are doing if God were not with him."

Fine, says Jesus, if you believe I'm from God then let me tell you something else, "No-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again." And with that, Jesus gives the line that so many people in churches have struggled with. It is probably one of the least favourite sentences that has come from Jesus's mouth – you must be born again. "Born again Christians, think they know it all, think they're better than everyone else..." "Born again Christians" is used by some people as a kind of insult.

Now, Nicodemus doesn't understand this, "how can that possibly be true? Physically, biologically that doesn't work!"

"You've missed the point, says Jesus, "We are all born physically - we all come from our mummy's tummies – but to be in the kingdom of God something else needs to happen, you need to be given new life through the Holy Spirit – it's like being born again"

But to be "born again" requires something of us. We aren't just given the Holy Spirit, it's not like a birthday present that's given out universally. No, being "born again", being born of the spirit requires us to believe in the son of God who came and died for us.

This is a bit of a bomb shell for Nicodemus. As an important Jewish man he must have thought he was absolutely fine and on good terms with God. To be told he had something missing puts him out of his comfort zone. But we can be the same...

- Volunteer – A Christian is someone who is part of God's kingdom

You're in church – does that make you a Christian?

Holding a bible – does that make you a Christian?

Wearing a cross – does that make you a Christian?

Praying (hands together) – does that make you a Christian?

Singing a hymn – does that make you a Christian?

Giving money – does that make you a Christian?

What makes us a Christian, what enables us to enter God's kingdom?

Being born again – making that decisive step across the line – believing that Jesus died for us and following him. That word, "believe" isn't a passive word, it's an active word.

None of these things make us a Christian, that are all (in a roundabout way!) things that Christians do in response to being born of the spirit, being born again, being part of God's kingdom.

Jesus came and died because he loved us and wanted us to be part of his kingdom. Part of being born again is loving the world in the same way as Jesus and wanting others to know and understand how much Jesus loves them so that they too can be born again.

Slide 30

God didn't create us to remain as caterpillars. God has a wonderful plan for all of us to be born again as beautiful butterflies to his glory.