

**Good Morning!**

**You know this is the first message to be preached in this new service.**

And I wanted to say something that would encompass what we are about.

That would set out our vision

So I'm going to talk about what Jesus talked about at the beginning of his ministry.

**I want to talk about the Kingdom of God.**

'The Kingdom of God' is a strange phrase.

It's not something we use in everyday language.

*It sounds like it should be some sort of Religious shopping centre*

*Did you go into Brighton today – yes, I went to the Kingdom of God*

*Got some great bargains!*

*Closing Down Sale at the Kingdom of God...*

It's not something we talk about much.

Yet, I want to suggest that it IS something that most people **want**...

They won't call it that, but it IS still what they want.

Anyone who has ever felt **insecure**

*perhaps because they're feeling lonely, or that no one cares, or they are ill*

yearns for security - the Kingdom of God

Anyone who has ever felt **injustice**

*perhaps because they are treated unfairly, or someone has got away with something hurtful, or they are just aghast at the inequality in the world*

longs for justice - the kingdom of God

Anyone who wonders what their **purpose** is all about

*why am I here, surely there is more to life than this*

longs for the kingdom of God

**The Kingdom of God**

is a place where God is Sovereign. where God reigns, where God is God

And because God is loving and compassionate and wise and powerful

it's a place of security, a place of justice, a place of fulfilment

And everybody is looking for those things!

Everyone is looking for the Kingdom of God, even if they don't call it that.

its what Jesus preached about most,

it's what we want in our lives,

it's (actually) the thing that we're all about in this service.

The Kingdom of God. 3 ideas.

Where to look for it, how to recognise it, what we have to do to enter it.

I want to tell the story of Nicodemus, a man who was searching for the Kingdom of God

- where he looked for it,
- how he caught a glimpse of it, and
- what Jesus told him he had to do to enter it,

You'll find the story on these white sheets

## 1. Nicodemus was looking for the Kingdom of God.

### 1.1 But I think initially he was looking in the wrong place

John chapter 3 v1 we read: *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus a member of the Jewish Ruling council who came to Jesus and said "Rabbi" ...*

In those 24 words we know a lot about where Nicodemus looked for fulfilment in his life.

#### **We can guess that he was a Popular guy.**

His name (Nicodemus), it means "People Winner".

He was a politician,

He was a Politician whose name meant "people pleaser" which means *if he lived up to his name he was not unused to kissing babies and smiling for the Camera's*

He was a popular guy

#### **We know he held a Position of Power and Responsibility.**

He was one of the 70 statesman who formed the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish ruling council – so he had power.

He was an Elder amongst the people – so he had prestige

Jesus called him teacher – which meant he had influence

Nicodemus had Power and Prestige and Influence,

He was popular

#### **We also know he was a Pharisee.**

He was a Jew of Jews

Which meant he 'did' Religion,

He had religion flowing out of every pore of his body

He had given his life to fasting, prayer and philosophy.

He was religious.

He was a powerful guy.

He was popular.

He was one of life's winners.

#### *principle*

So if you're looking for security in popular acclaim – then he had it – he had respect

If you're looking for the power to make justice happen – to make sure life was fair – to make sure life was smooth – then he had that too - he was influential

If you're looking for an eternal purpose – then where better to start than the hardest of all hard-nosed religions.

Yet for all of this – it didn't work

Look Politician's know people are fickle

Rulers know that only have influence so long as their army is the biggest and Romans had just rolled into town

And for all his hard-baked Religion – something was missing.

Nicodemus had it all – yet it didn't satisfy –

there was something more,

something missing.

something that really made life worth living!

So he went to Jesus.

#### *apply*

We can look for security and justice and purpose in all sorts of places  
We can look for it in love, in money, in status, in challenges.  
We can spend all our time looking for it in this world

But we'll never find anything that is **life-proof** (that can stand the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune)  
We'll never find anything **death-proof**  
We'll never find anything that will really **deep down** satisfy (we'll find hints of it, echoes of it, shadows of it)  
but we won't find IT until we go to Jesus.

That's what Jesus preached  
That's what we stand for.  
Everything that we yearn for (what Jesus calls the Kingdom of God) is found in Him.

## 1.2 *v2 Nicodemus went to Jesus at night!*

perhaps because he was busy in the day,  
perhaps because he wanted an unhurried conversation,  
but actually, I think because he didn't want to be seen.

I reckon he was embarrassed  
He was worried about what his friends might think,  
what his fellow elders and Pharisees might say,  
what the newspapers would print.

You see Jesus had been drawing to himself, had been talking to, associating with, and gathering... sinners,  
Jesus was the champion of Tax Collectors, prostitutes, lepers, the poor and the lame and women!  
What culture would call – the losers.

Nicodemus wasn't a loser.  
He was a winner.  
He didn't want to be associated with someone who was associated with losers.

He didn't need a crutch in HIS life  
*I can remember within a few days of me announcing that I was leaving work to begin training for the Anglican Ministry.*  
*I must have had a dozen head hunters phone me up and greet me as if I was their long lost friend.*  
*And the conversation always began with "Is it true? wow and gosh"". And it always ended with "and ummm can we meet for lunch and pitch to find your replacement?".*

*And it was over lunch with one of these Agents that he said to me "You know we just can't believe you're doing this - you've always seemed so... "together" - we never thought you would need Jesus ?".*

And it became apparent that they saw Jesus as a crutch  
for weak people,  
for the odd balls of society.  
for the weak ones.

Well that may or may not be right...but the question is NOT  
"is Jesus a crutch for the weak people?"  
the question is surely: "is Jesus someone who can show you how to find the Kingdom of God?"

For if that's true then he is for: the weak and the strong, the odd balls (whoever they are) and the regulars (whoever they are!!),  
those with Prestige and Power and Popularity – yes  
those with real issues and challenges in their life - yes  
those who are mere mortal like us! - yes

Nicodemus had it all – but need more  
He came to Jesus at night – because although he didn't want to be seen –  
he wanted to know what these other people had found.

How do you find the Kingdom of God?

## **2. Well, Jesus said You Can't even SEE the Kingdom of God unless you are born again.**

*Nicodemus said v2 "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him"*

And Jesus replied –

*v3 "I tell you the truth, no-one can even see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again.*

I love it!

Nicodemus says "Jesus you're performing all these miraculous **signs** that speak of the Kingdom of God – you know the deaf can hear, the blind can see, the lame can walk, the poor are fed" we see the signs of the Kingdom all around you.

And Jesus replies –

You can't even see the Kingdom unless you are BORN AGAIN.

### **2.1 The Kingdom of God is NOT found where Nicodemus had been looking...**

The Kingdom of God is NOT about being good, and religious, and respected, and cultured and having status. That will come as a shock to most people in this country!

Instinctively we think church is full of people who are trying to be good, and religious, and respected, and cultured

But let me tell you

these things have about as much to do with Christianity as  
*red paint and white stripes have to do with the speed of a car.*

*Sure, many fast cars can have glossy red paint and go-faster white stripes but those things have absolutely NOTHING to do with its top speed.*

Sure I hope Christian's are good, up-standing citizens worthy of respect, (as to the cultured bit – I think that's just snobbery)

But being good has about as much to do with entering the Kingdom of Heaven  
*as Red Paint has to do with the speed of a car.*

"Nicodemus, you come to me with all  
your Power and Prestige, your Popularity, your Piety (*and anything else I can think of beginning with "p"*)  
and you can't even SEE the Kingdom of God from where you're standing.

If you want to see the kingdom of God – don't look for it in being good – look for it in me – in a relationship with ME.

### **2.2 "You have to be born again".**

Now I guess we all have baggage with this phrase BORN AGAIN

For many

it has associations of money grabbing TV Evangelists,

of scary fundamentalists,

of Christians with a sense of humour bypass.

Earnest, Scary, Manipulative Christians.

*Apparently 80% of Americans would NOT want to live next to a Born Again  
They are about as popular as Haemorrhoids in the Tour de France.*

Certainly Nicodemus didn't understand what Jesus was saying

He said *v4*

*How can a man be born again when he is old – surely he cannot enter a second time into his Mother's womb!.*

Nicodemus didn't get this picture of being "born again"

This is what it means

IDEALLY when we are born

we are born through love

### **2.2.1 To be Born Again is to begin a new life through the love of God**

if how much you love something can be measured by what you'd be willing to sacrifice to keep it –

Then God loves us more than we can imagine because Jesus sacrificed his life for us.

*What would I give up to keep my dog safe? – pretty much anything I own*

*What would I give up to protect my children? – everything I won, including my dog, and even my life.*

*What does Jesus give up to love and save you – everything!*

if being loved gives us confidence, security, balance –

then to be loved by God –

to be loved by the Creator of the Universe

to be loved by the only one whose opinion counts at the end of the day

and to know that he will never stop loving us

is to be born into a life

of utter security and confidence and balance.

*Lisa Meadows last Sunday told us how her life has changed – no longer sitting on the sofa crying everyday from depression and her past. But now released to live through the love of Jesus for her.*

To be Born Again is to begin a new life in the love of God

IDEALLY when we are born

we are valued UNCONDITIONALLY

### **2.2.2 To be Born Again is to be valued by God unconditionally**

You see God doesn't judge you

on whether you are a winner or a loser

on whether you are able and less able

on even whether you are good or not so good.

He values you just as you are, warts and all, flaws and all, failures and all.

He values you for what in his hands he can make you into.

Your past doesn't value you:

God doesn't value you on what has happened to you

he doesn't write you off because you have made mistakes

he doesn't look down on you because in your past you were abused

he doesn't devalue you because you don't have much to offer.

*Like a 5 year old offering a drawing of mum and dad to it parents*

*It is accepted –*

*not because it is a brilliant piece of still life*

*not because it is accurate scale drawing,*

*not because it displays exquisite selection of colours and shading.*

*even if the picture has mum looking like a Smartie and Dad as a two inches tall with 3 eyes.*

If it is offered in love it is valued.

And because he values us everything will be all right.

Even when things go wrong – God is with us and is working for our good  
Even when we fail – God gives us a new start  
Even when bad things happen to us – it IS NOT God who did it – but it IS God who offers new hope  
To be Born Again is to be valued by God

To be born is to LIVE

### **2.2.3 To be born again is to enter into eternal life.**

God has a plan for you, a plan for your good and not your harm, and plan for your future and hope.

He has plan for you to make a difference, for your life to count, for you to be everything that you were made to be.

For you never to die.

When the golfer Paul Azinger got cancer – Bernhard Langer said to him - "*Zinger, we're not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We're in the land of the dying trying to get to the land of the living.*"

Azinger's life changed when he went to Jesus.

*Brian Fitzgerald on Wednesday told us how **his** life had changed – so much happier now knowing Jesus, so much calmer, so much more peace" he said.*

The power to never die, to live life forever as God intended.

This is what it means to be born again.

It is a relationship with God

to be secure, to be valued, to have eternal purpose through the love of God.

### **3. So how do we enter the Kingdom of God?**

Let me land with this...

*Jesus said v5 "I tell you the truth no-one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.*

*Don't you see that Flesh gives birth to Flesh.*

*But only the Spirit can give birth to the Spirit.*

Jesus gives us two pictures

Being born of Water and the Spirit (v5).

What does that mean?

Well back in John chapter 1.

John the Baptist is described as one who baptises with water for repentance;  
and then a few verses later

Jesus is described as one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says you must have both

you must have repentance – you must have God's Spirit.

It is a two way deal.

### **3.1 We bring nothing to the party but repentance,**

God gives everything to us through his Spirit.

There is nothing we can do, or achieve or acquire that can ever qualify us for a relationship with God

This is great news for those who have nothing!

who feel their weight of their sin,

who see themselves in need of help,

yearning for justice,

looking for a new start – They have nothing to bring anyway

This is great news!

Its tougher for the Nicodemus's of this world.

But for those who think they are “something”

Who have spent their life acquiring Brownie points – only to find that Brownie points aren’t worth anything to God

This is harder to take...

God says we can add nothing, but the water of repentance.

*Sara Lee cakes developed an instant cake mix that was a big flop...*

*The instructions said “all you had to do was to add water & bake”.*

*The company couldn’t understand why a genuinely good product didn’t sell – until their research discovered that the public felt uneasy about a cake mix that required only water... Apparently, people thought it was too easy...*

*So the company altered the formula & changed the directions so that customers had to add an egg in addition to the water...*

*The idea worked & it sold like hot cakes.*

We don’t like the idea of something to which we add nothing but repentance.

Instinctively

We want to add “some good works, some respect, some prestige” of our own.

But nothing is needed except “sorry”.

It is a gift, given out of love, for those who recognise that they don’t deserve it.

**To which God then enters our life by His Spirit and life changes us.**

This is what Jesus preached

This is what we are all about.

This is what we need

A people who know that they are

Secure in God, loved and valued by Him, who have a new life and purpose ahead of them with God.

It doesn’t matter whether we think of ourselves as

a winner or a loser

confident or unconfident

a success or someone who struggles.

The offer is here, the Kingdom of God is near, come to Jesus and let his life, his Spirit live in you.