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Bridgeway Church  
The Gospel of John #2  
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## Sermon Summary #2

**No Longer a Slave:  
I am a Child of God!  
John 1:9-13  
(Gal. 4:4-7; Rom. 8:14-17)**

If you don't know this about me by now, you should be aware of the fact that I don't do well in the presence of surgical procedures or detailed descriptions of bodily functions or our internal organs. As a result, I was not in the room for the birth of either of our daughters. I know that in today's world it is expected that fathers be present when their wives give birth, but I come from a slightly older generation. After all, the doctor needed to focus on Ann and our newly-born babies and not on trying to revive me from having passed out on the floor!

I've been told numerous times how glorious an event the birth of a human being is. And I don't doubt that for a moment. But just show me the finished product after everyone has been cleaned up and wrapped neatly in white towels. Everything before that is for those of you with stronger stomachs than mine.

But I will say this. As glorious and wonderful as is the physical birth of a new-born baby, it pales in comparison with the spiritual re-birth of a person and the new life in Jesus Christ that they receive by God's mercy and grace. I don't mean to downplay the beauty of physical birth. It is truly a miracle and puts on display God's creativity and power. But the second birth, being born again, as the NT describes it, is greater still. ***Physical birth only gives us physical life. Being born again gives us eternal life as the children of God.***

We have a real challenge before us today, insofar as John 1:9-13 sets its focus on two incredibly glorious and deep truths: ***spiritual adoption*** and ***spiritual birth***. As a result, I'm going to have to be a bit more brief on both of these than I prefer. But the good news is that when we come to John 3 and our Lord's encounter with Nicodemus, we will look in even greater detail at what it means to be born again or born from above or born spiritually.

### *How Does the Word, The Son of God, Give Life?*

Last week we briefly noted one of the seven things that John says about Jesus Christ. In v. 4 he said: "In him," that is, in and through the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, "was life." You might be inclined to ask: "So what? What does that have to do with me?" The answer is: everything! Here in vv. 9-13 John tells us precisely the way in which we receive new spiritual life "in" or "through" Christ and are adopted into God's family as his children.

### *The Reception of Jesus Christ in the World and among his Own People (vv. 9-11)*

Let me come straight to the point. What John says in vv. 9-11 is almost incomprehensible. I want you to feel the force of the response of people to Jesus when he entered this world. Never forget that Jesus created everything in the world. Every human being is the product of the creative power of the Word who, according to v. 1, is himself God. "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" (v. 3).

Wouldn't you expect that the creation would love and honor and give thanks to its Creator? The Word didn't love the world from a distance. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (v. 14). As John says in vv. 9-10, Jesus came into the world. He entered into the dirt and sweat and grit and grime of this world. This world owes its very existence to the Word, the second person of the Trinity. Paul tells us in Colossians 1:17 that the only reason the entire universe continues to exist and doesn't vaporize into nothing is because the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, preserves it in being by his power. Were it not for the Word, the second person of the Godhead, there would *be no* world. And "yet the world did not know him" (v. 10b). The world did not bow before its Creator; it spit in his face! And things have not changed. The world still hates its Creator.

Perhaps you will respond by saying, “Well, I can almost understand how the world could respond in this way. After all, people are ignorant. They are spiritually blind. They are self-absorbed.” But note that in v. 11, it isn’t simply the world at large that rejected him: Israel did too! Jesus was Jewish, a physical descendant through Mary, his mother, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When he entered this world, he didn’t go first to Australia or to America or to Russia. He entered the world of his own people in Israel. And the Jewish people of his own day, by and large, repudiated his claims and spurned his overtures of saving grace and love.

*The Believing Remnant (vv. 12-13)*

But, notwithstanding the widespread rejection of Jesus by his own people, there was **a believing remnant**, a small number of men and women who recognized their Creator and embraced him as Redeemer and Savior! Look in v. 12 at how they are portrayed. They “received” him, which John then explains in more detail as, they “believed in his name.”

We need to be careful when we present the gospel to people, especially to young children, that they are not confused by what it means to “**receive**” Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is far, far more than simply praying a prayer that Jesus might “come into my heart.” **Receiving is believing.** Trusting Jesus for who he is and what he did is receiving him. Treasuring Jesus as the most precious and immeasurably worthy and valuable being in the universe is receiving him. Investing all your hope for forgiveness of sins in him and what he did for you at the cross is receiving him.

In other words, to “receive” Christ and to “believe” in his name does not mean giving tacit consent to him, as if all that is required is the acknowledgment that a man named Jesus once existed and did some wonderful things. John isn’t talking about merely agreeing that God exists. **He’s talking about a whole-souled embrace of Jesus, a deep delight and enjoyment of Jesus, a giving over of your heart, soul, mind, and will to believe him for who he claimed to be.**

So, what does John mean when he says that receiving Christ is the same as believing “**in his name**”? It doesn’t mean speaking his name or placing it on a bumper sticker on your car. The “name” of Jesus is the **person** of Jesus: who he is, the Word who is God, the Word who became flesh. The “name” of Jesus is the **work** of Jesus: the God-man who lived a sinless life that we should have lived but never could and died in our place as the all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins we committed, who then rose from the dead. Don’t ever think that because someone speaks well of Jesus or sings of Jesus or advertises for Jesus that he/she has “received” and “believed” in Jesus. Be diligent in talking with your children that they understand what it means to “receive” and “believe” in his name.

As I said, this is far more than merely “asking Jesus into your heart.” Although that is, in itself, perfectly ok, saving faith in Jesus entails belief in what he did on the cross for me, a sinner, and a desire to follow him as the Lord of one’s life. To receive Jesus and to believe in his name does not mean you consent to a kind of peaceful co-existence where he makes no claims on you and you have no expectations of him.

And what is it that comes to those who “receive” and “believe”? John tells us in vv. 12b-13. First, they are given the “authority” (“right” in the ESV) to become God’s children. Second, they become God’s children by having been born again by the power and grace of God. These are the two truths that we want to focus on in the rest of our time today.

*The Authority to Become the Adopted Children of God*

Let’s get something straight right from the start. Becoming one of God’s children is not a “right” that is yours naturally. You don’t have a “right” to be God’s child simply because you are of a particular ethnicity or because you hold citizenship in the United States or any other country. You don’t have a “right” to be God’s child simply because you exist. **Being born physically of a father and mother and having been created in the image of God does not make you a child of God.** Whereas it is true that all human beings are God’s “children” in the sense that he created each and every one, not all human beings are God’s adopted children who will inherit eternal life. Only those who have been born again spiritually by the power and grace of God and thus have received him and believed in who Jesus Christ is and what he has done are members of God’s spiritual family.

***It isn’t enough that you were created by God! You must be re-created by God! Being created by God only gives you physical life on earth. Being re-created by God gives you spiritual life now and forever on the new earth.***

So there are two incredible truths here. One is that the people who received and believed in Jesus in the first century and in every century that has followed, including ours, did so because they were re-created by God, they were born again spiritually by the power and grace of God. The second truth is that in causing them to be re-born spiritually he granted them the glorious privilege and authority to be his children, his sons and daughters.

So let's begin by looking at what it means to be a child of God

### *Spiritual Adoption (v. 12)*

Although we should be careful when we compare the goodness of God's gifts, I believe that *spiritual adoption* is near the top of the list. This isn't in the least to slight justification or forgiveness or the indwelling presence of the Spirit. All God's saving gifts are precious and perfect. But next to the love demonstrated by the cross itself, I consider adoption to be the most marvelous proof of God's love for us. I draw this conclusion from what John said in his first epistle:

“See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1).

John's tone and terms virtually bristle with urgency and excitement. “Come quickly and see! Look! Listen! You can't imagine what I have to tell you!” I like that. Here's an elderly man nearing the end of life who still gets excited about the love of God. And he did so because he knew that God's love has bestowed on us the greatest of all blessings: *sonship*. Here is the measure of God's love. Here is the test of how deeply he treasures us. J. I. Packer sums it up well when he writes:

“God receives us as sons, and loves us with the same steadfast affection with which He eternally loves His beloved only-begotten. There are no distinctions of affection in the divine family. We are all loved just as fully as Jesus is loved . . . . This, and nothing less than this, is what adoption means. No wonder that John cries, ‘Behold, what manner of love . . .!’ When once you understand adoption, your heart will cry the same” (*Knowing God*, [Downers Grove: IVP, 1973], p. 196).

If we are to properly understand the glorious truth that we are the adopted sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, there are **four things** we need to keep in mind.

**First**, the biblical doctrine of adoption and the love that accounts for it makes sense only when we remember that *we are not naturally God's children*. As I said a moment ago, it is true that God is the Father of all men and women insofar as he is the Creator. But many such “children” of God will spend an eternity in hell. *One does not become a spiritual child of God by being born, but by being born-again*.

We are all born *spiritual orphans*. Apart from Jesus Christ we are abandoned, stricken with a fatal disease called sin. We have no family, no father, no future. Here is where God's incalculable love makes its appearance:

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, *through faith*” (Galatians 3:26).

You become a son or daughter of God “through faith” in Christ. Furthermore, being “sons” of God has nothing to do with gender. Women can be “sons” of God even as men can be the “bride” of Christ! It refers to a place of spiritual privilege, a relationship of intimacy and affection, irrespective of physical gender.

This declaration of Paul's makes it inescapably clear: *there is no saving relationship to God as Father without a living faith in Jesus Christ*. Being a child of God, therefore, is not a universal status upon which everyone enters by natural birth. It is rather a supernatural gift one receives by believing in Jesus. Adoption is wholly and utterly an act of God's spontaneous and uncoerced love.

J. I. Packer reminds us that in the ancient world,

“adoption was a practice ordinarily confined to the childless well-to-do. Its subjects . . . were not normally infants, as today, but young adults who had shown themselves fit and able to carry on a family name in a worthy way. In this case, however, God adopts us out of free love, not because our character and record show us worthy to bear His name, but despite the fact that they show the very opposite. We are not fit for a place in God’s family; the idea of His loving and exalting us sinners as He loves and has exalted the Lord Jesus sounds ludicrous and wild – yet that, and nothing less than that, is what our adoption means” (*Knowing God*, p. 195).

**Second**, the reality of our spiritual adoption is made even more explicit when we contrast it with physical adoption in human relationships. Today many adoptions, perhaps most, occur without the adoptive parents first seeing the child. But it didn’t use to be that way. When couples would visit an orphanage with a view to adopting, they invariably based their choice on physical beauty and intellectual skills. Rarely did one hear of a child with Downs syndrome being adopted. Rarely did the orphan with spina bifida go home with new parents.

Prospective parents wanted to know about a child’s natural father and mother. Was this child the product of rape? What is his ethnic origin? Did she come from “good stock”? What is her IQ?

But God’s choice of us is utterly and eternally different. He didn’t make us his children because we were prettier than others. Divine adoption isn’t concerned with physical health or financial wealth or potential or a person’s past history. ***God loves the unlovely and unappealing.*** That is why you are his child. Because he loves you.

I rejoice in the fact that I’ve been justified and forgiven and granted eternal life. But to know and experience God as my Father, Abba, Daddy, is greater still. When you are *justified* by faith in Christ, you stand before God as Judge and hear him declare: “Not guilty! Righteous through faith in Jesus!” Praise God! But in ***adoption*** God the Judge steps down from behind his legal bench, removes his stately robes, stoops down and sweeps you up into his arms of love and says softly: “My son, my daughter, my child!”

I relish the experience of every divine blessing. I thank God daily that I am a member of the body of Christ and a citizen of the kingdom. But nothing can quite compare with knowing that when I was homeless, helpless, and hopeless, God rescued me from the gutter of sin and made me his child. Nothing can compete with the thrill of being adopted as a full and coequal heir with Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:17).

**Third**, spiritual adoption comes to us at a very high price; indeed, an infinite price that none of us is capable of paying. ***We are the spiritually adopted children of God our Father only because Jesus Christ our brother has endured the wrath of God in our place.*** Paul says it clearly in Galatians 4:4-5,

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

It was redemption that secured our status as God’s children, and redemption was made possible when Christ suffered in our stead on the cross, satisfying God’s wrath and delivering us from our well-deserved punishment (see Gal. 3:10-14).

**Fourth**, it is because we have been adopted by the Father that we now possess the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit:

“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father! So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (Gal. 4:6-7).

The Spirit is given to us to confirm that the legal transaction of spiritual adoption has been carried out by the Father. We don’t receive the Spirit so that we may experience adoption. No, it’s the other way around. We are first adopted so that we might receive the Spirit.

And the purpose of the Spirit’s presence and power in us is to awaken in our hearts a joyful, confident assurance that we are God’s children and to deepen our affection for and intimacy with the Father. The result is that we freely and passionately and joyfully cry out: “Abba! Father!”

And note well: we “cry” Abba. We do not merely draw the logical conclusion that he is our Father. We “cry” Abba! We do not merely affirm theologically that God is our Father. The work of the Spirit is designed to spark and stir and awaken and energize heartfelt affections for God as Father such that we cannot help but “cry, Abba!” We do not merely make a statement of fact that we are the spiritually adopted children of God. We “cry” out through the Spirit: Abba!

We don’t merely infer that we are God’s children. We enjoy it through the Spirit! We do not merely deduce that we are God’s children. We delight in it! “The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to change our slavish fears toward God into confident, happy, peaceful affection for God as our father” (Piper).

Do not overlook the passionate, even boisterous way in which we give expression to this incredible truth: we cry, Abba! Father! Paul isn’t talking about the sort of voice cadence or robotic instructions you hear when you type in an address on your phone GPS to help you find your destination. The monotonous, computer-generated voice you hear telling you where to turn is never to be compared with the heart-felt, loud, exuberant, and joyful CRY of the born-again child of God.

### *Spiritual Rebirth (v. 13)*

As I said earlier, there are two incredible truths in this passage. The first is that we are graciously and mercifully adopted into God’s family as his spiritual children, and as children we are heirs. But John wants to make absolutely certain that you understand who is ultimately responsible for this. And it isn’t you!

He tells us in explicit terms here in v. 13 that entrance into God’s family is on a different plane from entrance into one’s earthly family. One does not become a child of God by the same process one becomes a child of a physical parent. In other words, *spiritual life is not genetically transmitted*.

My earthly father was a Christian. So, too, is my mother. But that isn’t why *I* am a Christian. Your father and mother may not be Christians. But that has no ultimate impact on whether or not you are.

The DNA of one’s parents has nothing to do with becoming a child of God. Your heritage, ancestry, family tree, no matter how glorious and impressive, have nothing to do with your entrance into heaven. The fact that you have descended from noble blood or are the product of peasants is irrelevant. I’m proud of the name “Storms.” But when I stand before God my last name is irrelevant.

It is likely that here John is addressing unbelieving Jews who imagined that natural descent from Abraham was sufficient to guarantee admission into the family of God. Several observations are in order.

First, being born again is not to be thought of merely in terms of moral reformation, a mere exchange of one set of habits for another set. Being born again does not mean you stop smoking cigarettes and replace them with vaping! It does not mean you replace your profanity with slightly less offensive words. It does not mean you move from watching R-rated movies to only those that are PG-13. Being born again entails a radical renewal of the entire inner being of a man or woman. Of course, the new birth most assuredly does result in a changed life, but never think that a substitution of one set of daily habits for another is what it means to be born again.

Second, we must first determine the relationship between the divine begetting (v 13) and the human exercise of faith (v 12). Is receiving Christ (v 12) the prerequisite of the new birth (v 13), as if to say that the new birth is conditioned upon receiving Christ and believing on his name? Or is the begetting by God the root, cause, and presupposition of faith? The latter is surely correct, and for several reasons.

I would begin by pointing out that John 1:13 is parallel with John 3:6 (“that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”). The point of the latter text is that all human and earthly effort can do nothing but produce that which is human and earthly. It cannot generate spiritual life. Second, in John 6 coming to Christ (faith) is impossible for a person unless God draws him/her. In other words, John 6 denies to human beings any willingness to respond positively to the gospel apart from effectual grace. Are we to believe that John 1 affirms what John 6 denies? Certainly not. Third, verse 13 says that God imparts life. The emphasis, as in John 3, is obviously on

the divine source, origin, and cause of new life in Christ as over against any human or earthly or physical contribution. Fourth, to suggest that human faith precedes and causes divine begetting (i.e., the new birth) destroys the point of the analogy. The point of describing salvation in terms of “divine begetting” is to highlight the initiative of God in making alive or giving birth to that which was either dead or nonexistent. To suggest that you or I can *act* spiritually before we *exist* spiritually, that we can behave before we are born, is not only ridiculous but also undermines the force of the analogy between physical begetting and spiritual begetting. Fifth, even though the threefold negatives in verse 13 refer primarily to physical begetting or aspects of the human reproductive process, it would seem extravagant for John to speak in this way if, after all, the human will does contribute to regeneration or in some way precedes and conditions the work of God.

What exactly then, does verse 13 mean? In general, the point of verse 13 is that birth into God's family is of a different order from birth into an earthly human family. One does not become a child of God by the same process or as a result of the same causal factors as one becomes a physical child of Abraham. Let us now look at each of the three negations.

First, one does not become a child of God by being born **“of bloods”** (plural!). The plural form of the word blood may be explained in one of three ways: (1) the ancient belief that birth was the result of the action of blood, in this case, the blood of one's father and mother; (2) the blood of many distinguished ancestors; (3) drops of blood. Whichever of these views (or perhaps another one) that you embrace, the point is that spiritual life is not genetically transmitted!

Second, spiritual birth is not **“of the will of the flesh.”** This probably refers to sexual desire, although “flesh” in John does not mean sinful lust. “The ‘will of the flesh’ is that desire that arises out of man's bodily constitution” (Morris, 101). In other words, you were “born” physically because your mother and father willed or desired to join their two bodies; they became “one flesh” and you were begotten. But it is not that way when it comes to entrance into the kingdom of God.

Third, spiritual birth is not caused by the **“will of man.”** Since the word for “man” here is the Greek word for a male rather than a female, the phrase may refer to “the procreative urge of the male,” thus making it a more specific expression of the previous (second) phrase. In ancient days the man was looked upon as the principal agent in generation, with the woman being a vessel for the embryo. On the other hand, it is more likely that John is simply telling us that ***your will did not cause you to be born again.*** Only God's will does that. ***Your will to receive and believe in Jesus is the result of God's will in causing you to come alive spiritually.***

If these three phrases do not rule out all conceivable human causes in regeneration, the final phrase does. If regeneration or the new birth is **“of God,”** with no additional comment, then surely it cannot be of anything or anyone else.

Therefore, in the doctrine of spiritual re-birth or being born again or regeneration we are asserting that beneath and before all positive human response to the gospel, whether faith, repentance, love, or conversion, there is a supernatural, efficacious, and altogether mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. This work of the Spirit is both prior to and the effectual cause of all activity on the part of man. To sum up, the Holy Spirit regenerates a person in order that a person may convert to God.

### *Conclusion*

We now come full circle, back to where John began in vv. 9-11. What is God's answer to the spiritual blindness and death and darkness of the world? His answer is the new birth. His answer is that he has made it possible for you and me to be born again, and in being born again, to be adopted into his family as sons and daughters who will inherit everything that belongs to God!

Can you now feel and sense the excitement behind John's invitation to us in 1 John 3:1? “See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God.” But we aren't merely “called” the children of God. As John goes on to say: “and so we are”! Praise be to God for this inexpressibly glorious blessing!