

Bible on Balloons!

- Who likes balloons?
 - blowing them up.... playing with them?
 - who can come and help me blow up some balloons I've got here?
- Blow them up, spell out verse, get congregation repeating verse, then pop balloons to make sure they've learned it:
 - *"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." (John 3:16)*
- *Going to be learning about the time when Jesus said this, and to whom, and why*

Nicodemus wants a fresh start

- What first drew you towards the things of God?
 - what made you want to get to know him?
 - to find out about him?
 - to get behind what made the Christians you knew tick?
- For Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, it was Jesus and his miracles (John 3:2)
 - there was something about Jesus himself, and there was certainly something about what he was doing, that attracted Nicodemus...
 - first of all his attention, but more than that, his interest, himself
- But he came at night (v.2)
 - most commentators reckon this would be to avoid others, perhaps others in authority, his peers on the Jewish ruling council, seeing him come to Jesus
- He didn't exactly say so, but Jesus knew he wanted to know more about God:
 - he wasn't just looking for neutral information - he could have got that by asking questions when Jesus was speaking to the crowds
 - he was exploring commitment - was what Jesus was offering for him? Was it worth pursuing himself?
 - he wants to know more about the reality of God behind the person and work of Jesus
 - he wants a fresh start
- And so Jesus replies in v.3: his words about the kingdom of God, and being born again
 - Jesus is answering the question of Nicodemus' heart, his real reason for being there, rather than simply acknowledging his summary of Jesus origins and ability!
- But his answer perplexes Nicodemus! (v.4): "how?" asks Nicodemus
 - and so Jesus begins to explore with Nicodemus how a fresh start with God involves the combined work of God, Father, Spirit and Son - that's what v.5 is pointing towards
 - and we'll explore each dimension just now...

God reigns

- Nicodemus already recognised God as supreme:
 - his upbringing had given him this much
 - and observing Jesus' miracles he knew that Jesus must be from God - for only the God who made, ordered and sustained the universe could act in these ways
 - God is in charge - and Nicodemus recognises that in Jesus' control and rule over the natural world
- But Jesus moves the discussion on...
 - the Kingdom of God isn't just about physical control over the natural world
 - its about knowing God himself, and about his kingship in our lives
 - its about God who gives his Spirit to bring us life (vs.5, 8) and who sent his Son, Jesus, so that we can live (vs.16-18)
- Nicodemus recognised that God was supreme, that he was in control:
 - Jesus helps him begin to see the fuller implications and ramifications of a God who is supreme
 - and invites the question: who reigns in me?

The Spirit brings new life

- Wind - can't see it directly, only "see" it when it affects things - trees, grass, etc
 - same Greek word - *pneuma* - means both Spirit and Wind
 - Jesus plays on the double meaning to draw out something of mystery of God's work in our lives

- we can't always tell from the outside - it is what God is doing on the inside that brings the new life - and that is by the invisible work of his Spirit
- its the Spirit that brings the new birth, the new beginning, the fresh start (v.6)

Jesus, God's Son - the way to life

- God reigns and his Spirit works in our lives...
 - ...but new life in God is only possible because Jesus gave his life for us (vs.14-16)
 - the acknowledgement of God's reign, the welcoming of the Spirit's work in our lives are only possible because Jesus has already made the critical move
- Jesus, here prophetically, compares his death with the raising up of the bronze snake by Moses in the desert:

Snake in Desert

- *Recap the story from Numbers 21:4-9*
- Jesus raised up on the Cross has the same life-giving, judgement removing effect that the bronze snake did:
 - people who God made to know him have instead rebelled, rejecting him and his ways - in the desert, and today
 - God's judgement comes against them, and death has the upper hand - in the desert, and today
 - but God has compassion on his people and sends rescue - in the desert, and today
 - and all who look to God's rescue are saved - in the desert, and today
- Then it was a bronze snake, and the limited rescue of protection from snake bites
 - that models what is more widely true...
 - look to Jesus and believe in him, and we will be saved from God's punishment against sin

Our part...

- God has done his part:
 - made possible salvation through Jesus, he yearns for us to know his kingdom in our lives, and sends his Spirit to draw us to himself...
 - but we need to respond!
- Somehow God has left us free to reject him, to turn our backs on his offer, as well as to accept and welcome him
 - we have a choice - light or dark, life or death, truth or falsehood
- Which will it be?