

Find Life in the Son: Crossroads John 3:9-21

Introduction

Nicodemus was a sincere man. Well studied in the Holy Scriptures. Disciplined. Separated. Mature. Respected. A leader of leaders. But his heart hungered for more. He went to the right Person to find answers. Jesus. He did so by night to avoid the problems his visit might cause with his colleagues, many of whom already hated Jesus because of how disruptive He was to their prominence and power. He knew many of them were fakes. It's possible Nicodemus also went by night to have time for uninterrupted conversation. Nicodemus was well known and sought after. And Jesus was already very popular.

But Jesus' response to Nicodemus set his head spinning. Jesus talked about a life change that Nicodemus had never experienced in all his long years of devotion. Jesus said, "Unless one is born again he cannot see (experience) the kingdom of God." He had hit upon exactly what Nicodemus was seeking, but "being born again" was a foreign concept. How was it even possible? What steps should he take to experience this life from God?

9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" **10** Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? **11** Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. **16** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. **19** And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. **20** For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. **21** But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly

seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

1. Faith or Unbelief (9-13)
2. Eternal Life or Condemnation (14-18)
3. Light or Darkness (19-21)

1. Faith or Unbelief (9-13)

⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

Nicodemus is still hung upon how these things are even possible. He’s trained in a religious system of how to’s and precise human definitions. The law and how to keep it, how to safeguard it, how to expand it to every particular. But what Jesus has presented is not what any human being can do to be saved, but what the Spirit of God must do. Nicodemus is trying to figure out how being born again works. Jesus is declaring that it works, and that it is the only thing that does.

How can these things be?

Jesus answers with a question, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?"

Nicodemus was among the leading teachers of the Scriptures in Israel, yet his question reveals that he does not know what the Scriptures reveal regarding the powerful, lifegiving work of the Spirit. We expect the pagan world to be ignorant of these spiritual things, but many seriously religious people are, as well. We have our catechisms and service orders and religious disciplines and hymns of worship, but participation in any and all of these does not guarantee that we have spiritual life from God. We must be born again with life from above. *Despite what Jesus teaches here and how the apostles talk about the necessity of regeneration, it is astonishing how common it is for professing Christians, including preachers and leaders, to be utterly blind to the work of the Spirit and the necessity of His movement in our lives if we are to be saved.* You can't quantify the Spirit's movement. You can't achieve it with some formula or incantation. You can't reach Spiritual life through multiplying techniques or religious rules. You can't bring life to people through vision statements, mission statements, core values, and strategic planning. To experience eternal life from God, to experience the kingdom of God, we need

nothing short of a spiritual resurrection, a new creation.

Jesus speaks what He personally knows to be reality. When Jesus says "we," He may be referring to Himself and the OT prophets, or John the Baptist, or even the disciples, although it seems early for them to have been teaching yet.

Jesus is bearing firsthand testimony to the reality of the Spirit's work to which the OT Scriptures bear testimony as well.

But Nicodemus and his fellow Pharisees do not receive Jesus' testimony (the you is plural); nor do they believe it.

The Scriptures talk of the Spirit's work, and the effect of the Spirit on persons is clear for anyone to see who's paying attention. If Nicodemus and his cronies can't accept that, how will they believe the heavenly things Jesus will teach, things you can't verify from earth?

So added to the verifiable testimony of the Scriptures is that of the Son of man, Jesus Himself, who has come down from heaven. There's no one else like Him.

He is the fulfillment of the one Daniel saw in the night visions who will judge the world at the end of the age.

Daniel 7:13-14

13 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. **14** And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Jesus' words bring Nicodemus (and us!) to a crossroads. Will we believe the Scriptures or not? Will we believe Jesus the unique Son of man or not? Both the Scriptures and the Son testify to truth that is verifiable even here on earth. It is the crossroads of faith or unbelief. Nicodemus must choose, and so must we.

John 15:22-25

22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. **23** Whoever hates me hates my Father also. **24** If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. **25** But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: "They hated me without a cause."

On what basis will you relegate what the Scriptures say to irrelevance and lies? Why would you refuse what Jesus Christ, the Son of man, declares to be true?

Why would you not receive what God has revealed through the sacred writings of the prophets? The firsthand testimony to what God has said and God has done.

Why would you ignore Jesus Christ and the historical firsthand testimony about what He taught and what He did? There's never been anyone else like Him.

Isn't it obvious even from an earthly, human perspective that we sinful, mortal human beings desperately need life from God, a new beginning, new birth—if we are to have any hope of escaping the curse of sin and experiencing the eternal joys of the heavenly kingdom? How could anything or anyone but God accomplish such a transformation? And why would we stonewall the united testimony of the prophets, the apostles, and Jesus the Messiah Himself that this life can be ours, but only through the Holy Spirit of God?

Furthermore, what will we do with the centuries full of examples of people who have experienced exactly the transformation Jesus talks about here, changing the trajectory of

their own lives and impacting whole civilizations?

Applications

- Have you received or rejected the testimony of the Scriptures regarding receiving life from God, and why?
- Have you believed or refused the testimony of Jesus Christ regarding the life the Spirit gives, and why?

2. Eternal Life or Condemnation (14-18)

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Perhaps you've noticed on medical buildings the emblem of two snakes intertwined on a pole, called the rod of Aesculapius, symbolic the Greek god of healing. But the emblem of a snake on a pole goes back further than Greek mythology to the days of Moses. And

the healing it speaks of is rescue from death itself.

Numbers 21:5-9

⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." ⁶ Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷ And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." ⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

The only cure for the poisonous bite of the fiery serpents was to look in faith to the bronze serpent on the pole. The only cure for the deadly sin poison running in our veins is to look in faith to Jesus lifted up to die on the cross for our sin. The look of faith. No set of rituals. No list of deeds. No reparations to pay. He has paid it all. All to Him we owe.

It was necessary for Christ to be lifted up so that everyone believing in Him may have eternal life. There is no other way. Pay attention to why Jesus came. He came to die for your sin to rescue you from death and judgment. If you see Jesus as just a good man or a popular prophet, you've missed the point of why God sent Him to earth. He's not just an example; He's the only Savior God has provided.

God could have let us die from our deadly sin bite, but He loved the world of sin-infected human beings in this way—God gave His *monogeneis*—one of a kind—Son, so that everyone believing in him may not perish—be ruined, destroyed—but have life eternal.

His love does not guarantee that all the world will end up having eternal life, but that all in the world who believe into Christ (leaning the weight of their trust into Him) will have eternal life instead of perishing for their sin.

God sent Jesus His Son into the world not to judge it, but to save it. If all He wanted to do was judge it, God the Son could have stayed in heaven and never gone to the cross.

“Save” means to rescue, to heal, to deliver. In the wilderness those who looked in faith to the bronze serpent on the pole lived. Those who did not die. In the same way, all of us

have suffered the fiery poison fangs of sin. We are already condemned. We are already dying. Our only hope of rescue is to look in faith to Christ. If we do not, the sin poison running in our veins will kill us.

Romans 7:24-25a, 8:1

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? **25** Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Applications

- When did you start trusting in Christ to rescue you from sin's deadly poison by His sacrificial work on the cross?
- If you are not trusting Him to do this for you, what other way do you think you can break free from sin, from death, and from God's judgment?

3. Light or Darkness (19-21)

19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. **20** For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

Judgment—word we get “crisis” from; the decision point

Light has come into the world—a historical fact

John 1:4-5, 9-10

⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The light has shone into our world, so what happened? Why did not everyone come to the light?

Answer is at the level of heart desire:
People loved darkness rather than light.

How is that possible? Why would anyone prefer the darkness to the light?
Because their deeds were evil—injurious, harmful

Everyone who does wicked (worthless) things hates the light, therefore does not come to

the light—lest his deeds be exposed for what they are.

The power of sin poisons our hearts. When we choose to sin we think we are in control. But not so. We make ourselves slaves to sin. Our slavery to sin makes us shrink from the light. We don't want the light to expose how worthless and harmful our life choices are. Sin loves the dark. Righteousness is just the opposite.

John 3:21

But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

God the Spirit has given such persons life. Tim Chevalier prayed, "We would still be slaves to the darkness were it not for the cross." We would still be dead in trespasses and sins were it not for the Spirit's lifegiving work.

If you have heard the truth of the gospel and have refused it, here's why. You love your sin. You love ruling your own life. You don't want to be exposed before God as the sinner you are.

But He already knows. He knows it all. You could get rid of that sin. You could be freed from your guilt. You could enjoy unhindered

access to God. But you must come to the light. If you want it, you can have it.

End your love affair with your sin. Escape the darkness. Choose while you still can. Why face the eternal wrath of God?

Applications

- What are the many ways God has shone the light of the gospel of Christ into your life?
- What sin or sins, if any, are you trying to protect by staying in the darkness?
- If you have life from God through faith in Christ, what activities of truth show clearly that God is at work in you?

Conclusion

So what did Nicodemus decide to do? The last thing he said in our text was, "How can these things be?"

What's the rest of the story?

We have some clues later in John's Gospel.

John 7:45-52

⁴⁵ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸ Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is

accursed.” ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ⁵¹ “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” ⁵² They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.”

It takes courage to speak up in an assembly of colleagues openly hostile to what is right. This group of men are the powerful and influential Jewish leaders of the time, personal friends and associates of Nicodemus, but capable of ruining his life and reputation. He’s taking a huge risk even to suggest their approach to Jesus is ill-advised. But he does so anyway.

Our next clue is after the crucifixion of Jesus:
John 19:38-39

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.

There are historical legends that report Nicodemus was kicked out of the Sanhedrin and banished from Jerusalem because of his

sympathies toward Jesus. We don't know that for sure. But for him to bring spices for Jesus' body was a decided risk that could cost him everything. When those who want to be true disciples of Jesus come to the crossroads, they must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus. That's what Jesus taught. If Nicodemus were standing here this morning, he would tell you without reservation that whatever he gave up to follow Jesus was absolutely worth it. The powerful men who set themselves as enemies of Jesus have been dead and gone for centuries, suffering in hades while they wait the final judgment when they are cast in the lake of fire that burns forever. They gained the world for a brief moment but lost their souls forever.

What about you? Decision time is now. Everyone one of us comes to this crossroads moment. You must choose. See that you choose wisely.

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Closing Song: Come, Look to Jesus

Applications Summary

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- Have you believed or refused the testimony of Jesus Christ regarding the life the Spirit gives, and why?
- When did you start trusting in Christ to rescue you from sin's deadly poison by His sacrificial work on the cross?
- If you are not trusting Him to do this for you, what other way do you think you can break free from sin, from death, and from God's judgment?
- What are the many ways God has shone the light of the gospel of Christ into your life?
- What sin or sins, if any, are you trying to protect by staying in the darkness?
- If you have life from God through faith in Christ, what activities of truth show clearly that God is at work in you?

Additional discussion questions

- When have you seen someone show courage in speaking up for Jesus in a group hostile to Him as Nicodemus did in John 7:45-52?
- What ways of identifying with Jesus (as Nicodemus did in John 19:38-39) have you seen can put His followers at risk?
- When have you seen people make the right or wrong decision at a crossroads in their spiritual life?