

# Enjoying Eternal Life

## John 3:1-21

I hope you were able to begin our new Bible reading project, “**Journey With Jesus 365**”. On January 6 Steve Jones, our Fellowship National president, shared a theme verse for 2025, **II Timothy 3:16a**. “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” (vv.16-17).



A daily diet of Bible reading is a growth process. We begin with **discipline**. This leads to **discovery**. But then it can become a **delight**! But God’s Word will only profit us if **engage** with it! And we will only engage if we **value** it.

There is always more to discover in Scripture! Do you ever feel that you know something well only to be surprised by some new insight?

Today we return to our sermon series, “**My Chains Are Gone**”. In 1773, John Newton wrote about salvation this way: “*I once was lost, but now I’m found; was blind, but now I see.*” And 233 years later Chris Tomlin added this bridge: “*My chains are gone, I’ve been set free; my God, my Savior has ransomed me.*”

We are exploring similar salvation metaphors as they are found in the Bible. Before Christmas, we considered five metaphors of salvation. Today we turn to a familiar passage to consider “**from perishing to eternal life**”. We are going to see this through the conversation which Jesus had with Nicodemus. There we find **John 3:16** which is arguably the most familiar verse in the Bible. But we are going to read [John 3:1-21](#).

The setting of this text is Jerusalem. Many had witnessed Jesus’ miracles and believed, though not all were sincere in faith (2:23-25). Was this the case with Nicodemus? He was a Pharisee. He was interested in Jesus as a teacher who seemed to have God’s special presence (v.2). But did Nicodemus see Jesus as the source of salvation? At this point in his journey, he had a **curiosity** about Jesus, but did not **confess** Jesus as Lord!

In this conversation, Jesus gave **three conclusions** to Nicodemus, each containing **two details**.

### A. The necessity of the new birth – vv. 1-8

Dallas Willard wrote, “*The greatest need you and I have – the greatest need of collective humanity – is renovation of our heart. That spiritual place within us from which outlook, choices, and actions come has been formed by a world away from God. Now it must be transformed.*” (**Renovation of the Heart**, NavPress, 2002, 14)



This is the thrust of John 3:18,36. Without faith in Christ, humanity is lost in sin. Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote, “*The essence of the Christian salvation is to say that [Jesus] is good enough and that I am in Him!*” John Owen put it even more succinctly, “*God saves sinners*” (quoted by Tim Keller, **Center Church**, Zondervan, 2012, 30).

The question of Nicodemus betrays the quest for eternal life – pious Jews longed for resurrected and renewed life in God’s Kingdom at the end of the age. Jesus explained that a supernatural transformation had to take place for him to **see** (v.3) the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus reacted with confusion. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was immersed in religion and ceremony. He thought in terms of religious reform. He did not see the need to be **reborn**. Jesus said that in order to **enter** (v.5) the Kingdom of God, Nicodemus had to be born of **water** and the **Spirit**.

Being “*born of water and the Spirit*” (NIV) has several interpretations. It does **not** mean that Christian baptism give new birth. We must note that “*born again*” (γεννηθη ανωθεν) is also translated “*born from above*”. This allows for “*water and spirit*” to refer to but one combined truth: only the Holy Spirit can impart new spiritual life to an individual. One additional way to understand what Jesus was teaching is to see the human and divine roles.

- Born of all John the Baptist's baptism signifies – REPENTANCE – John 1:29-34
- Born of all the Holy Spirit will accomplish in us – REGENERATION – John 1:12-13; Titus 3:5-7

Have you repented of sin? Have you experienced the new birth? Or are you just trying real hard, like Nicodemus? John Newton knew what God's new life was like. God delivered him from a shameful life as a slave trader! About a those who called themselves "Christian" but were not born from above he wrote: "*He may have a name to live among his part, but he is dead...as the stones in the street*" (**John Newton**, Iain H. Murray, 15-16).

## **B. The possibility of the new birth – vv. 9-18**

In their conversation, Jesus was opening new possibilities to Nicodemus! The new birth brings us into a new standing before God. The question is about our believing response. Two conversations are only found in John. On one hand was Nicodemus (chpt 3). A religious leader, well versed in the Law, he practiced **performance based spirituality**.

On the other hand, was the Samaritan woman (chpt 4). She was steeped in immorality and a **self-centered spirituality**. However, both of these individuals needed to receive/believe God's gift of new life in Jesus!

Nicodemus reacted with confusion about the need for the new birth. Jesus rebuked his ignorance. As a Jewish teacher he should have known about spiritual rebirth (vv.10-13; Ezekiel 36:25-27). But the possibility of being born from above is not based on human understanding. The new birth is all about the revelation of Jesus' and His work.

- Jesus came to earth to reveal the Father – CONDESCENSION – John 1:14,18
- Jesus came to earth to rescue humanity – CRUCIFIXION – John 3:14-15; Numbers 21:4-9, cf. John 8:28

## **C. The visibility of the new birth – vv. 19-21**

Did you enjoy the clear, sunny days last week? The intense light of the sun made something clear to me – my car windshield is filthy! Jesus, the Light of world, revealed that humanity is perishing. But further, as the Light of the world He provides for our new birth! (see John 1:4-9). If you have experienced the new birth, it must be visible.

Have you been born again? Is the power of the Holy Spirit active in your life? From verse 8 we learn that the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit can be observed in believers. It appears Nicodemus believed – **John 7:45-52**.

- Followers of Jesus are free from CONDEMNATION – John 3:18; Romans 8:1
- Followers of Jesus are free from taking CREDIT – John 3:21,27-30

The mission of Cornerstone is focused around three ways in which the new birth can be visible. We need to have the kind of love for the world that God has. As Don Carson reminds, "*Christians are not to love the world with the selfish love of participation; God loves the world with the self-less, costly love of redemption.*" (**The Gospel According to John**, Eerdmans, 1991, 205) Here are three aspirations which are foundational to our mission:



- [1] to be passionate followers of Jesus – enthusiasm, engagement
- [2] to be an authentic community of faith – excellence, not perfection
- [3] to extend God's grace by disciple making – multiplication is not optional

**Cornerstone is called to impact our world  
by living and sharing the life of Jesus!**

About our text, Max Lucado wrote, "*If you know nothing of the Bible, start here. If you know everything in the Bible, return here. We all need the reminder. The heart of the human problem is the heart of the human. And God's treatment is prescribed in John 3:16.*" (**3:16 The Numbers of Hope**, Crossway)

Remember, eternal life begins now as we walk with Jesus! If we are not careful, we will be like a beach at low tide. Consider how our individual lives can be like the little tidal pools!

We can try to be complete in ourselves. But we come up lacking! We need to be reborn, and this truth of the Gospel must saturate every part of our lives.

Consider the prayer of Amy Carmichael for God's truth to be active and alive in our hearts (*Mountain Breezes: The Collected Poems of Amy Carmichael*, CLC Publications, 1999, 299).

*Think through me, thoughts of God, my Father, quiet me  
Till in Thy holy presence, hushed, I think Thy thoughts with Thee  
Think through me, thoughts of God, that always, everywhere  
The stream that through my being flows, may homeward pass in prayer  
Think through me, thoughts of God, and let my own thoughts be  
Lost like the sand-pools on the shore of the eternal sea.*

