

Living the Christian Life

John 3:1–8 NLT

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.”

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”

Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”

What We Believe: Salvation is a free gift of God appropriated through faith, based on the work of Christ’s death and His resurrection.

Genesis 4:6–7 NLT (*God and Cain Talking About Sin*)

“Why are you so angry?” the Lord asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

Matthew 5:17–20 NLT

Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the *writings of the prophets*. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of

Heaven.

But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

Matthew 5:21-22 NLT (*Issues of Anger*)

You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’²² But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

Matthew 5:27–28 NLT (*Issues of Adultery and Lust*)

You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matthew 5:38–39 NLT (*Issues of Revenge*)

You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.

Romans 2:1–6 NLT

You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God’s judgment when you do the same things? Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can’t you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. He will judge everyone according to what they have done.

Romans 3:21–26 NLT

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

The Good News of What Jesus Did:

- 1. Through faith in Him, we have salvation – we are saved from the punishment of our sin and failures.**
- 2. Through faith in Him, we are justified before God. All that is good in Jesus is credited to our account in heaven.**
- 3. We are reconciled into a relationship with God.**
- 4. We are made right with God (we are righteous).**
- 5. We are “born again,” recreated brand new, free from sin.**
- 6. We enter into a process of sanctification where we become more and more like Jesus as we grow and mature.**

Why This Matters: Through the salvation Jesus offers, we move from being at enmity with God, headed towards judgment for our failings, to being a child of God with an eternal inheritance.

John 3:9–15 NLT

“How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked.

Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

What We Believe: As new creations, we are born into the Kingdom of God as infants, and we live our lives becoming progressively more mature in our faith as we yield to the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:28–30 NLT

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.

Why It Matters: Victory over these trials, tests, and attacks is provided to us through our faith in Christ's finished work on the cross that redeems us from the power of the enemy, making us more like Jesus.

John 3:16–21 NLT

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.

Small Group Guide: Living the Christian Life

Opening Question

Have you ever caught yourself mentally ranking yourself against other people to measure how 'good' you are? What does that habit reveal about how we think about sin?"

Something Is Fundamentally Wrong, and Jesus Knows It

There is something fundamentally wrong in the world. And not just in the world itself, but in the people who make up the population of the world. Outside of the human race, the world seems to know how to govern itself. If humanity were to leave it all alone, each ecosystem would settle into a balance, just the way God created it to be. Humans are incapable of finding that balance, though balance isn't necessarily the goal. The answer to "why" is *sin*.

It helps to understand the difference between sin and sins. **Sins (plural)** are the individual failings of each person — the things we think and do that are contrary to the purposes and will of God. **Sin (singular)** is the broken part of humanity that leans into going our own way, doing our own thing, and violating the Moral Law that is part of each of us. Sin is not just a momentary wrong way of thinking. It is a broken bit of us. It is something we can't shake, regardless of how hard we try.

Nicodemus knew this from the inside. As a Pharisee, he worked hard to follow all 613 rules of the Old Testament. He won some battles and lost others, like most of us. And, like most of us, he probably evaluated his "goodness" by comparing himself to the rest of the human race, concluding he was more good than bad. Jesus dismantles that entire framework in the Sermon on the Mount, raising the standard so high that anger becomes murder, a lustful glance becomes adultery, and the impulse toward revenge disqualifies us. He is destroying our "Good and Evil" spectrum and identifying the real issue: sin.

God's standard is perfection, the same as our own laws. If you get pulled over for speeding, the officer is not persuaded from giving you a ticket because of the five good things you did that morning. The good things do not cancel out the failure. And so Paul makes it plain: everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

This is the point where we recognize our need for salvation. Jesus points Nicodemus to the story of the bronze snake in Numbers 21, when poisonous snakes entered the Israelite camp and the only remedy was to look at the snake lifted up on a pole. Jesus is thinking of a different snake: the one in the garden whose bite infected all of humanity. He too must be "lifted up," put on the cross, so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life. He was innocent, perfect, and without fail — the only human who never sinned, and therefore qualified to be a substitute for us.

When we turn to Jesus in faith, something remarkable happens. We are not only saved from the punishment of our sins, but justified before God (all that is good in Jesus is credited to our account), reconciled into relationship with God, made right with Him, and born again as new creations, free from sin. And we enter into a process of sanctification where we become more and more like Jesus as we grow and mature. That process includes trials, tests, and warfare against a spiritual enemy. But in Christ, those things work together for good, helping us become like Jesus.

For Discussion

1. The sermon describes sin as “the broken part of humanity that leans into going our own way” — something we can’t shake regardless of how hard we try. How does that land for you? Does it change how you think about your own struggles?
2. Jesus raises the standard so high in the Sermon on the Mount that no one can meet it on their own. How has that reality shaped your understanding of why salvation has to be a gift rather than something earned?
3. Look back at the six truths in your notes (the “Good News of What Jesus Did”). Which one feels most personal to you right now, and which one do you find hardest to fully receive?
4. The sermon says the Christian life still includes trials, tests, and spiritual warfare, but that God works all of it together for our good and our growth. Where do you see that happening in your own life, even if it’s uncomfortable?

For Reflection

The sermon closed with this truth: through the salvation Jesus offers, we move from being at enmity with God, headed towards judgment for our failings, to being a child of God with an eternal inheritance. Take a moment to sit quietly with this question: *What would it look like to live this week from that inheritance rather than from the weight of the old record?* Share any insights with the group.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are just and fair, and You have made a way to make sinners right in Your sight through faith in Jesus. Thank You that the record of our failings was taken by Jesus, and that what we receive in return is His righteousness, His standing, and Your inheritance. Jesus, You are the Second Adam, and in You we are truly made new. Holy Spirit, lead us into the fullness of that new life. Where we are still carrying the weight of the old record, remind us that it has been settled. Where we face trials this week, help us trust that You are using them to make us more like Your Son. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

