

# The Gospel of John, Chapter 3, Verses 1 to 21

A Guide for Reflection and Discussion

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**Meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus**

Text of John 3:1-21 (NRSV-CI)

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.

<sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “**Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.**”

<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?”

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “**Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.**

<sup>6</sup> **What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.**

<sup>7</sup> **Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’**

<sup>8</sup> **The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”**

<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?”

<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, “**Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?**

<sup>11</sup> **“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony.**

<sup>12</sup> **If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?**

<sup>13</sup> **No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.**

<sup>14</sup> **And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,**

<sup>15</sup> **that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**

<sup>16</sup> **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.**

<sup>17</sup> **“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

**<sup>18</sup> Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

**<sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.**

**<sup>20</sup> For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.**

**<sup>21</sup> But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”**

## Introduction to this Study Guide

As Catholics, we are people of the Word. And as the Gospel of John tells us at its very beginning, Jesus is the Word, and the Word is with God, and the Word is God. Before Moses and before the law, there was the Son, and all of Scripture was written to tell us about Him. We know that all human history – past, present, and future – points to His incarnation. We know that the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament and perfects God’s covenant with us. We know that the Risen Christ established His Kingdom, which is represented here on earth by the Church. We know that God set apart the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to prepare the way for Christ, for His new creation, and for how we would come to glorify Him in worship. And we know the victory that Jesus won for us, once for all, in His death and resurrection.

Early in His ministry, Jesus chose to share much of this Good News with Nicodemus, a man of status and influence, of knowledge and law, who came to Jesus in faith and goodwill, hoping that Jesus might be the Messiah who at last had come. We might consider the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus that John recounts in John 3:1-21 as the first Christian Bible study lesson – perhaps a warmup to the full reveal that the Risen Christ gave to two of His followers on the road to Emmaus (“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” Luke 24:27).

This brief study and discussion guide is based on a simple idea: the idea that the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus as set forth in John 3:1-21 captures the full essence of Christ’s message for us and how that message connects the dots of Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments. This guide takes each of the 21 verses, one by one, and attempts to link what’s said in those verses with the broader context of Christ’s teachings and with passages from throughout Scripture. The reader is encouraged to find additional connections and to share their thoughts and discoveries with others. After all, this is the Good News.

This guide is not intended to be comprehensive, but merely to offer food for reflection, prayer, discussion, and further study. I hope and pray that you find it nourishing.

Verse 1: Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.

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The Pharisees formed the largest and most influential religious-political party in the time of Jesus. They are consistently depicted in the Gospels as antagonists of Jesus Christ and the early Christians. The name 'Pharisee' means 'separated one.' The Pharisees separated themselves from society to study and teach the law, but they also separated themselves from the common people because they considered commoners to be religiously unclean.

The Pharisees probably got their start under the time of the Maccabees, around BC 160, emerging as a scholarly class dedicated to the teaching of both the written and oral law and stressing the internal side of Judaism (see, for example, 1 Maccabees 3:38-60; 1 Maccabees 7:33-50; 1 Maccabees 10:1-89; 2 Maccabees 2:1-18; 2 Maccabees 6:1-17). The Maccabean Revolt was a time of rededication to Jewish law, and the Pharisees for their part sought extreme accuracy and precision in all matters pertaining to the law of Moses (See Matthew 9:14; 23:15; Luke 11:39; 18:12).

Among the Pharisees' beliefs were life after death, the resurrection of the body, and the importance of keeping ritual cleanliness. Compare those beliefs with their contemporaries and rivals, the Sadducees, who focused more on temple worship and animal sacrifice, and who did not believe in an afterlife or the resurrection of the body ("That's why they were sad, you see?"). Because the Pharisees taught that the way to God was by obeying the law, the Pharisees' influence gradually changed the focus of Judaism from sacrifice to legalism.

*Lectio divina:*

- † And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. (Deuteronomy 4:1)
- † And they taught in Judah, having the Book of the Law of the Lord with them. They went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. (2 Chronicles 17:9)
- † The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip. (Psalms 37:31)
- † "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." (Matthew 23:13, 27-28)



Verse 2: He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

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Two questions come immediately to mind by this verse: (1) why meet at night under the cover of darkness; and (2) how do we know that Jesus comes from God.

Meeting at night implies the importance of stealth. Perhaps Nicodemus wished to be concealed by darkness out of a concern for safety, secrecy, ashamedness, or reputation. Perhaps the disciples of Jesus suggested meeting at night as a means of protection. Regardless, we often feel like we can hide in the darkness whether from our enemies, from God, or from ourselves. It’s interesting how just a few passages later Jesus comments that the light has come into the world (referring to himself), but that people often preferred the darkness to the light (see John 3:19). At this stage in his ministry, Jesus has barely begun to reveal his light, and yet he is clear that a light once lit must shine brightly for all to see by and not hid “under a bushel basket” (see Matthew 5:15).

We should also remember that those who arrested Jesus in the garden waited for cover of darkness rather than take him into custody in the light of day among the public. Jesus called them out, saying, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me.” (Matthew 26:55) This is not to say that stealthiness forms no part of God’s plan. Indeed, we are often warned that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (see 1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Nicodemus was convinced that Jesus was sent by God because of the signs and wonders that Jesus performed. Indeed, throughout the Gospels, Jesus performs miracles to demonstrate that his authority – not just to heal but to forgive sins – comes from God. In Mark 2:1-12, the Pharisees witness Jesus forgiving the sins of a paralytic. Perceiving that the Pharisees saw this as blasphemy, Jesus responds with a demonstration of authority by telling the paralytic to get up and walk. But the Pharisees’ hearts remained hardened because they could not accept any authority higher than the law. What they failed to understand was that Jesus, as the Word incarnate, *was* the law.

The Pharisees elevated the letter of the law over the reason for the law, and could not accept the paradox that worshipping the law makes God secondary, but worshipping God means keeping the law. Despite being a Pharisee, Nicodemus realized that Jesus came from God, and that is why he was drawn to Jesus. Lest we be too enamored with our own ability to discern what comes from God, we should remember that even the demons recognized who Jesus was (see Mark 1:23-24).

*Lectio divina:*

- † So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night. (Judges 6:27)
- † And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.” (Mark 1:23-24)
- † “But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.” (John 5:36)
- † Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. (John 9:16)
- † “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” (John 14:11)
- † “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:15-16)

**Verse 3:** Jesus answered him, “**Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.**”

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This verse presents two concepts that will continue to be repeated throughout the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, namely, what it means to see the kingdom of God, and what it means to be born from above.

To cut to the chase, being born from above ultimately means being spiritually reborn as a new creature – one that ceases to desire earthly things and instead learns how to desire what God desires. We have a heart that is diseased and dying, and we must let God perform a heart transplant. This new heart is made possible by the incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection of Christ, through which he establishes a new covenant, a new law, a new temple, a new creation, and a new kingdom.

Jesus came to free us from sin and death and to bring us eternal life. To fully participate in this salvation, we are called to be born from above. Thus, God makes us anew so that we can be fully and truly in his presence – so that we can see the kingdom of God. As Jesus tells Nicodemus later in their conversation, we will have eternal life if we believe in him (see John 3:16). And to live that eternal life, we must be transformed. Just like a baby must develop and transform in her mother’s womb before she is ready to see her mother face to face, so we must be transformed before we are ready to see our Heavenly Father face to face.

*Lectio divina:*

- † And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (Deuteronomy 30:6)
- † And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)
- † Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. (Psalms 51:10)
- † But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. (Romans 7:6)
- † Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- † Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)
- † Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I



heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:1-5)

Verse 4: Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?”

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Often, our first reaction to something we don't understand is to poke fun at it, or even ridicule it. Being a Pharisee, Nicodemus believes that man is both flesh and spirit, and so he should be able to comprehend that when Jesus says we must be reborn from above that Jesus is talking about the spirit. But that does not stop Nicodemus from reducing what Jesus said to an absurd statement about re-entering a mother's womb. In his attempt at clever (and maybe nervous) humor, Nicodemus tacitly accuses Jesus of talking folly. But God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom (see 1 Corinthians 1:25).

When Sarah, Abraham's wife, heard that she was to have a son in her old age, her response was to laugh in disbelief at the ridiculousness of it all, much like Nicodemus. Similarly, when Zechariah was told that his wife, Elizabeth, would in her barrenness conceive and bear the child who would become John the Baptist, he disbelieved and was struck with temporary muteness as a result. Compare these to the response of Mary when she was told she would conceive and bear the Son of God despite being a virgin. Mary responded not with silly laughter or disbelief, but with solemnity and complete trust. If we are to be born again from above, we must give our consent. Pray that our 'yes' may be as complete as Mary's.

*Lectio divina:*

- † They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.” Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.” (Genesis 18:9-15)
- † In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Mary said to the angel, “How

can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:26-38)

- ✠ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)
- ✠ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

**Verse 5: Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.”**

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For the second time, Jesus says that we must be reborn to enter the kingdom of God, but this time he specifies being born of water and the Holy Spirit. This is the establishment of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. While Heaven is the eternal kingdom of God, God’s kingdom on earth is the Church, and we are initiated into the Church – reborn into it – through water and the Holy Spirit in our baptism, which we confirm at our confirmation. But Jesus did not call us to undergo mere initiation rites, He called us to be transformed – to be reborn. That transformation is real and begins at baptism, where the physical signs of water, anointing with oil, and clothing with a white garment not only signify cleansing of sin and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, but make these gifts actual. The transformation that begins at baptism is not just symbolic, it is real, and that transformation continues as we grow in faith and holiness in this life.

Baptism is a rebirth out of the death of our old selves. Like the flood waters that destroyed evil and cleansed the earth in the time of Noah, baptismal waters offer cleansing along with the power to sustain the new life reborn within. Likewise, a spiritual cleansing and receiving of the Holy Spirit is required for us to enter as perfected sons and daughters of God into His perfected kingdom.

*Lectio divina:*

- ✠ For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. (Genesis 6:17)
- ✠ For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. (Isaiah 44:3)
- ✠ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. (Ezekiel 36:25 )
- ✠ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalms 51:7)
- ✠ If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you. (Proverbs 1:23)
- ✠ “But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:14)
- ✠ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

✝ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:21)

**Verse 6: “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.”**

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We were made by God as creatures of flesh, but also with a divine spark so that we share in His image and likeness. To be reborn in spirit means to leave behind our status as mere creatures and become God’s adopted sons and daughters. A creature of the flesh is a slave, whereas a creature of the Spirit is free. God is not a master who wants subservient and obedient slaves for the sake of subservience and obedience. God is a dad who wants children that work His vineyard at His side, shoulder-to-shoulder. We can only co-create with Him in this way if we set aside our earthly selves in favor of our spiritual selves.

The desires of the flesh are to be subordinated to the desires of the spirit. As it was under original justice in the garden of Eden before the Fall, concupiscence is meant to be muted and controlled by urgings of the spirit. After the Fall, our flesh and spirit became separated, and must be rejoined with properly-ordered desires. When that happens, we become creatures of a new creation through the power of Christ’s resurrection.

*Lectio divina:*

- † How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure? (Job 25:4)
- † Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. (Psalms 51:10)
- † Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:19)
- † So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Romans 8:12-14)
- † Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- † He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (Ephesians 1:5)
- † But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16)

**Verse 7: “Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’”**

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Jesus was so constantly astonishing everyone with what He said that it’s surprising we don’t hear about all the jaws He had to heal after they dropped on the floor. When Jesus was a child, He astonished His parents with what He said when they finally found Him after three days of searching (Luke 2:48). The Jews were astonished at the authority with which Jesus spoke about scripture, both as a child (Luke 2:47) and as an adult (John 7:15). His disciples were astonished when the wind and sea obeyed His command for calm (Mark 4:41). His disciples were again astonished when Jesus said that a camel would have a better chance passing through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven (Mark 10:26). Many were astonished when Jesus said that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was a God of the living, not of the dead, intimating that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive (Matthew 22:32-33). Some disciples were so astonished by Jesus telling them that they had to eat His flesh that they couldn’t handle it and left Him (John 6:66). The Apostles were astonished when Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection, despite all His prior teachings (Luke 24:38). The examples go on and on.

No doubt Jesus was quite used to people being astonished. At this point, what should be really astonishing is how we keep being astonished about what God has in store for us in His plan for our salvation. In particular and practical terms, we should not be astonished to encounter hatred and persecution by the world when we follow Jesus. Not only should we expect to be hated and persecuted, but we should rejoice in it because we are in good company. After all, Christ was hated and persecuted first.

*Lectio divina:*

- ✠ For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. (Job 19:25-26)
- ✠ Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. (Isaiah 26:19)
- ✠ The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. (Ezekiel 37:1-10)
- ✠ John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.” (John 3:27)



- † Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice. (John 5:28)
- † “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word.” (John 8:43)
- † And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? (Acts 3:12)
- † But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:27)

**Verse 8: “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”**

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It’s interesting to note that the term “spirit” in this passage is a translation of the Hebrew word *ruah*, which means breath, air, or wind.

The past is gone and the future is uncertain. All we can do is choose to live the current moment in a holy way. God gives us just enough sight and strength to take the next step. There is no use worrying about the step after that. We must trust in God and place our hope in Him. As such, the analogy between the wind and being reborn of the Holy Spirit is a sign that God’s call to us is a call to adventure. Like Abraham and Moses, we must be willing to take that first step without knowing what God has in store for us, but trusting that it will serve Him.

We can see the effects of the Holy Spirit in the same way that we can see the effects of the wind, but we cannot see either of them directly. Before you knew any better, you would be forgiven for thinking that the wind was caused by the swaying of the trees or the movement of the waves. While we know better now about the wind, we still deceive ourselves into thinking that the Holy Spirit moves because of our initiative. Instead, it is we who only move because of the Holy Spirit.

*Lectio divina:*

- ✠ Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge, you whose garments are hot when the earth is still because of the south wind? (Job 37:16-17)
- ✠ Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind. (Job 38:1)
- ✠ He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything. (Ecclesiastes 11:4-5)
- ✠ Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits. (Song of Solomon 4:16)
- ✠ Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” (Ezekiel 37:9)

Verse 9: Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?”

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What is a stumbling block? It is any idea or circumstance that presents itself as an obstacle, creating difficulty, doubt, or hesitation. Throughout the Bible, we are warned about stumbling blocks on our path, and we are admonished to avoid placing stumbling blocks in other people’s paths. Even Jesus was presented with a stumbling block when Simon Peter said he wouldn’t allow Jesus to be apprehended and executed (“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Matthew 16:23). We are told that the cross would become a stumbling block for Jews and foolishness for Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23). But undoubtedly the biggest stumbling block was when Jesus instructed us to eat His flesh and drink His blood (see John 6:22-71), which we are called to do in memorialization of His sacrifice.

A stumbling block is only a barrier if we let it be so. A stumbling block is not insurmountable, and is usually no more than a nuisance when properly considered in humility. It is the proverbial molehill turned into a mountain. The learned and stubborn are particularly susceptible to stumbling blocks because they are unwilling to admit that they might have to accommodate the obstacle by changing their own behavior or [gasp!] looking at things from a slightly different perspective.

What Jesus was teaching to Nicodemus the learned and wise was not difficult in concept, but became difficult because it challenged his preconceived notions and biases. We often find that the biggest barriers in our lives are our own insurances that things conform to our own will, rather than taking the attitude that “Thy will be done.” If we cannot embrace difficult teachings in faith, trust, and humility, we will continue to stumble.

*Lectio divina:*

- ✠ And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. (Isaiah 42:16)
- ✠ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34)
- ✠ The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (John 6:52)
- ✠ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (John 6:60)
- ✠ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. (John 8:43)
- ✠ Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes! (Matthew 18:7)

- † For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)
- † As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18)
- † For we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

**Verse 10: Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”**

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Jesus pulls no punches in the direct message to the elitists. Too often, a superior intellect prevents the kind of deep and profound understanding that is available only to the so-called “common man.” Wisdom is fleeting because it comes not from strengthening the mind, but from fearing God. The common man understands the most profound truths before the educated man because the educated man cannot accept anything before being able to articulate it, test it, reason it, and prove it. The common man is not so burdened because he already lives the truth – he has a relationship with it and can discern it intuitively better than the learned man can discern it through logic and rationality.

Ultimately, the message that Jesus has for the learned elites like Nicodemus is summed up by, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.” (John 5:39)

*Lectio divina:*

- † Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. (Deuteronomy 10:16)
- † How you have counseled him who has no wisdom, and plentifully declared sound knowledge! (Job 26:3)
- † Listen to me; be silent, and I will teach you wisdom.” (Job 33:33)
- † I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. (Job 42:2)
- † Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. (Psalms 34:11)
- † Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. (Psalms 51:6)
- † Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. (Psalms 111:2)
- † The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)
- † Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5)
- † I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem, applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with. I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind. (Ecclesiastes 1:12-14)
- † Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me? (Jeremiah 32:27)
- † But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29)

**Verse 11: “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony.”**

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God’s great works are there for all to see – in His creation, in His word, in Scripture, and in our hearts. If we have not understood it, it is because we have not received; and if we have not received, it is because we have not accepted. No one is blinder than he who refuses to see. “For if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?” (Wisdom 13:9).

Those who fight for God understand that their job is to testify to the truth until all other notions are taken captive: “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10: 5)

*Lectio divina:*

- † Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? (Isaiah 53:1)
- † And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord God. (Ezekiel 39:29)
- † For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14)
- † But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. (Acts 2:16-21)
  - † And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. (Joel 2:28)
- † For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)
- † And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (Revelation 12:11)

**Verse 12: “If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?”**

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The difficulties people had in understanding Jesus were not because His words were big or unfamiliar, but because His words awakened the soul, and people aren't used to that. Jesus often conveyed His teachings through parables. In Mark chapter 4, Jesus tells the parable of the sower, in which we are to understand that the seeds sown by the sower are God's word and the various types of ground on which they fall represent the possible dispositions of the heart.

Later, when Jesus was alone with his disciples, he explained to them why he spoke in parables. Calling to mind Isaiah 6:10, he said, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that ‘they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.’” (Mark 4:11-12) By this, Jesus means that those who rely on their own earthly (mis)understandings will not be able to make sense of his heavenly teachings. As usual, the remedy is humility.

The explanation for the parables Jesus told was difficult for people to discern not because the analogy didn't make sense, but because the underlying message itself was difficult to understand. He was not using analogy to mask the meaning. Rather, he was mirroring the profundity and other-worldliness of his direct message by couching it in the form of riddles that combined very familiar elements (seeds, sowing, harvest, workers and masters, fathers and sons, wine and wineskins, wedding feasts, etc.) with a counter-cultural message derived from the ethos of God's kingdom. Even after explaining this to his disciples, he knew that they still did not understand. So as he did with Nicodemus, he posed the questions, “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?” (Mark 4:13)

We will understand Jesus in time. But we must not insist that understanding comes first. Before we can understand, we are called to believe.

*Lectio divina:*

- ✠ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” (Isaiah 6:10)
- ✠ We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labor; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? (Wisdom 9:16)
- ✠ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:21)



- † The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)
- † But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready. (1 Corinthians 3:1-2)
- † For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness.” (1 Corinthians 3:19)
- † About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (Hebrews 5:11)
- † And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! (Luke 24:25)
- † And he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?” (Mark 8:21)

**Verse 13: “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.”**

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The Son of God became the Son of Man so that men could become sons of God.

He humbled Himself to share in our humanity so that we could be perfected. By first descending from heaven to suffer and die, and then resurrecting and ascending into heaven, Jesus created a way for us to do the same. What we learn from this mystery is that nothing goes up that has not first gone down. The only path to heaven is the path created by Jesus Christ. Following His example, we must also be humbled, descending from whatever heights to which we have elevated ourselves in our own pride, before we can be raised up into heaven.

The manna that God provided to the Israelites wandering in the desert prefigured Christ’s descending from heaven to become the bread of life, our spiritual food. As Jesus Himself instructed us, we must consume the sacrifice of His flesh and blood so that our eternal life may be sustained, just as the Israelites relied on the manna that God provided to sustain their bodies. The manna could not be stored up, and so God provided it every day, teaching his chosen people to rely on Him day-by-day and in every moment. We recall this every time we pray in the Lord’s prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

*Lectio divina:*

- † He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8:3)
- † It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ (Deuteronomy 30:12)
- † Yet he commanded the skies above and opened the doors of heaven, and he rained down on them manna to eat and gave them the grain of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance. (Psalms 78:23-25)
- † Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name? Surely you know! (Proverbs 30:4)
- † “For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” John (6:33)
- † The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:47)
- † In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. (Ephesians 4:9-10)

**Verse 14: “And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”**

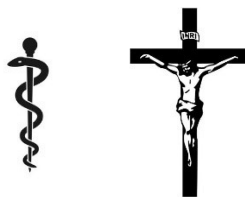
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Like the Israelites who were healed from the effects of the serpents’ poison by looking upon the bronze serpent that Moses lifted up, so we will be healed from the poison of sin by looking at the Son lifted up on the cross.

The snake being lifted up in the wilderness was a prefiguration of Christ 'becoming sin' and being 'lifted up' on the cross. Those who looked upon the bronze serpent lived even if they had the poison of the serpent in them; and in like fashion, those who look upon Christ crucified are saved from the death caused by sin’s venom. To understand what 'looking' means in this case we must consider that to accept the Gospel one must accept 'The Crucified God.' This means accepting the mysterious and paradoxical truth that the victory God won for man looks a lot like defeat through man’s eyes.

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 detest this miserable food.” Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.  
(Numbers 21:5-9)

The bronze serpent raised on the staff represents the pole at the center of the world, the cosmic axis that unites earth and heaven, the tree of life, the cross of Jesus, the shepherd’s crook that guides the sheep, and the pole of Asclepius that the serpent wraps around and that even today remains the symbol of healing.



*Lectio divina:*

- ✝ “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:40)

- † So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. (John 8:28)
- † “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32)
- † “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:26-27)
- † For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 (Corinthians 5:21)
- † Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”(Galatians 3:13, calling to mind the following passage from Deuteronomy)
  - † His body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 21:23)

Verse 15: “That whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

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Belief is not just a set of principles that you profess to the world, but more importantly belief is a way of acting and a mode of being. What good is a statement of belief if you don't act accordingly? We demonstrate what we believe by how we live. Belief in Christ is not a propositional acceptance of a set of descriptive facts set forth in the gospels. Belief in Christ is a commitment. To believe in Christ means to hoist your cross and go up the hill.

The bronze image of a poisonous snake that Moses made at God's instruction so that the Israelites could look upon it and be cured was what psychiatrists today might call a pharmakon. The idea of a pharmakon is that exposing yourself to a little bit of the poison that could kill you will redeem you. By looking upon that which you fear, you will grow and learn and become stronger, ultimately becoming less fearful. While belief in Christ will bring us comfort and joy, God's primary interest is not in us being safe and comfortable. God is interested in us growing and becoming better versions of ourselves. He understands that we get stronger in proportion to our willingness to confront what terrifies us. This is why Christ became sin to defeat sin, and why we must look upon the image of him crucified and believe, so that through believing we may pick up our cross and start up the hill – so that we may gain the strength through Jesus Christ to take the next step.

*Lectio divina:*

- ✠ And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him — for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength — he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:5-6)
- ✠ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. (Daniel 3:17)
- ✠ But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)
- ✠ And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.” (John 12:44-46)
- ✠ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

- † Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)
- † Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. (1 John 5:1)

**Verse 16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”**

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This is the most recognized and most cited verse in all of Scripture, and for good reason. From this verse, we learn about who God is, the nature of His plan for us, how that plan is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, how all of human history (past, present, and future) point to Christ’s incarnation, that death is not our intended end, that we are gifted the free will to choose eternal life through our believe in Him, and how we must imitate Him by loving the way He loves – through humility and voluntary self-sacrifice. All that from a simple statement about the nature of God’s love.

God created us to share in His love and His joy. And God so deeply desires for us to share in His love and His joy that He clothed Himself in our imperfections so that through the unmerited gift of His grace we may be made perfect. To demonstrate the lengths to which He would go for our salvation, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. This demanded of Abraham a great faith that God would somehow spare Isaac, perhaps even through resurrection, so that God’s promise to Abraham – that he would father a great nation through Isaac – could be fulfilled. In the end, the testing of Abraham, which took place on the same hill that Jesus would be crucified thousands of years later, was less about testing Abraham’s faith as it was about God demonstrating to us that He will accomplish for us what we cannot accomplish for ourselves.

*Lectio divina:*

- † Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together. (Genesis 22:8)
- † He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” (Genesis 22:12)
- † So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.” (Genesis 22:14)
- † How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:14)
- † By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son. (Hebrews 11:17)
- † And from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. (Revelation 1:5)



† They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful. (Revelation 17:14)

**Verse 17: “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”**

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Yes, we believe that Jesus Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. But His judgement is not about imposing a sentence in condemnation. His judgement is simply telling us the truth – the truth about His word and the truth about our choice. God’s justice honors the truth. Nothing more, nothing less.

God desires that everyone be saved, and the dignity He imparted to us when He created us includes honoring our choice of whether or not to accept His free gift of salvation. The only sin that cannot be forgiven is the sin of rejecting God’s forgiveness.

*Lectio divina:*

- † Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)
- † “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” (Luke 6:37)
- † “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)
- † “Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:21-24)
- † When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” (John 8:7-11)
- † “If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.” (John 12:47-48)

✝ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

**Verse 18: “Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”**

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As C.S. Lewis wrote, the gates of hell are locked from the inside. Those who stand condemned do so willingly and gladly. The deepest desire of a heart that sincerely and emphatically disbelieves in God is to live apart from God, thus affirming its primary state of being – denial. Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, God’s joy is never so great as when a lost sheep is found. More than the resurrection of a physical life, the return to God of a soul that was once lost is the return from eternal death to eternal life.

To borrow again from C.S. Lewis, our eternal fate will work backwards in time, making us realize that we always existed there. Those in heaven will have a sense that they have always been there. Those in hell will feel like they were always condemned. If your heart desires to be in God’s presence, you are already saved. If your heart desires to be separated from God, you are already condemned.

*Lectio divina:*

- † But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken. (Isaiah 8:13-15)
- † For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save him from those who condemn his soul to death. (Psalms 109:31)
- † Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. (Romans 2:1)
- † There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)
- † Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:34)
- † But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. (Romans 14:23)
- † Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. (1 John 5:10)
- † So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.” (1 Peter 2:7-8)

**Verse 19: “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.”**

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What does it mean for deeds to be evil? Since God is the source of all good, and since evil is the depravation of the good, doing evil deeds simply means thwarting God’s will. Even if we have the best of intentions, but we are using good things to get what we want rather than pursuing God’s will, then we are doing evil deeds. This is what it means to love the darkness – to turn our back to God and pursue our own path. In so doing, we cast a shadow before ourselves, refusing to let the light of Christ illuminate our path.

Most of us who are trying to be good people never consider that our deeds might be evil, and so we are lulled into a false sense of security. However, false idols are rarely made out of objectively evil things. Rather, we create our idols by turning good things into ultimate things. Putting any good thing in front of God is eclipsing His light. He who love anything more than he loves Jesus is not worthy of Jesus (see Matthew 10:37-39).

*Lectio divina:*

- † He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit, and my life shall look upon the light. (Job 33:28)
- † For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, “Do not see,” and to the prophets, “Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.” Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, “Because you despise this word and trust in oppression and perverseness and rely on them.” (Isaiah 30:9-12)
- † Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. (Isaiah 52:15)
- † Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? (Isaiah 53:1)
- † In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:4-5)
- † 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.” (John 8:12)
- † “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” (John 12:40)
- † And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. (Luke 12:47)
- † The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30)

† They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. (Ephesians 4:18)

**Verse 20: “For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.”**

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As St. Augustine remarked in his *Confessions*, when we try to hide our sins from God, we only succeed in hiding God from ourselves. We want to hide our deeds from God, but God is the only one who can save us from our deeds. God is our only protector and our only ally, and yet we fly to the embrace of our sin. The very thing that brings us so much shame that we try to hide it is the thing we look to for comfort. But all the darkness brings is eternal death. Sin is already our enemy, let us not also make ourselves enemies of God.

*Lectio divina:*

- ✠ “There are those who rebel against the light, who are not acquainted with its ways, and do not stay in its paths. The murderer rises before it is light, that he may kill the poor and needy, and in the night he is like a thief. The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight, saying, ‘No eye will see me’; and he veils his face. In the dark they dig through houses; by day they shut themselves up; they do not know the light. For deep darkness is morning to all of them; for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness.” (Job 24:13-17)
- ✠ But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. (Proverbs 4:18-19)
- ✠ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” (Ephesians 5:11-14)

**Verse 21: “But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”**

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Hiding from our sin also means hiding from the truth. We are called to live in the truth and in the light. Only in this way can we offer our deeds to God, to join them to His sacrifice, and to let God transform them into the greatest possible good. All our deeds, when humbly offered to God, can be transformed to work for good (“All things work together for good for those who love God.” Romans 8:28). After all, God chose the greatest evil – the suffering and death of Christ on the cross – to do the greatest good, which is the salvation of the world.

*Lectio divina:*

- † Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. (Isaiah 48:10)
- † “I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.” (Jeremiah 17:10)
- † But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold. (Job 23:10)
- † The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests hearts. (Proverbs 17:3)
- † Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalms 139:23-24)
- † For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:12-13)
- † And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (1 Peter 5:10)
- † Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)
- † Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)



## APPENDIX

A scene from *The Chosen*, Season 1, Episode 7

{Jesus and Nicodemus meet in secret at night on a rooftop in Capernaum}

Nico: I don't know where to start, I have so many questions.

**Jesus: Shall we sit first?**

Nico: Oh, yes, of course.

{They sit down}

Nico: The Eastern slums...

**Jesus: Hmm.**

Nico: ...many wandering preachers have succeeded in gathering crowds with their rhetoric and fiery tone.

**Jesus: I've heard a few of them over the years myself.**

Nico: So you know the type. But I have never heard anyone tell a paralytic to get up and walk, much less it actually happened.

**Jesus: So what is your conclusion?**

Nico: I believe you are not acting alone. No one can do these signs you do without having God in him. Only someone who has come from God.

**Jesus: And how is that belief going over in the synagogue?**

{They laugh together}

**Jesus: Which is why we are here at this hour. What else?**

Nico: What have you come here to show us?

**Jesus: A kingdom.**

Nico: That is what our rulers are worried about.

**Jesus: No, not that kind.**

Nico: Then what?

**Jesus: A sort of kingdom that a person cannot see unless he is born again.**

Nico: Born again?

**Jesus: Yes.**

Nico: You mean like a new creature? A conversion from Gentile to Jewish?

**Jesus: No, no that's not what I'm talking about.**

Nico: Then what is born again? I hope you don't mean return to the womb, because that would be a problem for me. My mother, may she rest in peace, is dead.

**Jesus: Truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. That part of you, that is what must be reborn to new life.**

Nico: How can these things be?

**Jesus: Ah, a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things.**

Nico: I'm trying, Rabbi.

**Jesus: I know. I know.**

{Wind blowing}

**Jesus: Do you hear this?**

Nico: What?

**Jesus: Listen. What do you hear?**

Nico: The wind.

**Jesus: How do you know it's the wind?**

Nico: Because I can feel it, and I can hear its sound.

**Jesus: Do you know where it comes from?**

Nico: No.

**Jesus: Do you know where it is going?**

Nico: No.

**Jesus: That's what it is to be born again of the Spirit. The Spirit may work in a way that is a mystery to you, and while you cannot see the Spirit, you can recognize its effect.**

Nico: My mind is consumed with thoughts of what a stir these words would cause with the teachers of the law.

**Jesus: Yes, and I do not expect otherwise. I speak of what I know and have seen, and it has not been received by the religious leaders.**

Nico: It is hard to receive.

**Jesus: So if I have told you of earthly things and you do not believe, how can I tell you heavenly things?**

Nico: I believe your words. I just fear you may not be able to speak many more of them before you are silenced.

**Jesus: I have come to do more than speak words, Nicodemus.**

Nico: More miracles?

**Jesus: Yes. But even more than that. Do you remember when the children of Israel complained against God and against Moses in the wilderness of Paran?**

Nico: Yes. They wanted to return to Egypt and they cursed the manna that God sent them.

**Jesus: And then?**

Nico: They were bitten by serpents, and they were dying.

**Jesus: But?**

Nico: But God made a way for them to be healed.

**Jesus: Moses lifted the bronze serpent in the desert, and people only needed to look at it. So will the Son of Man be lifted up, so whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.**

Nico: But our people are not dying from snakebites. They are dying from taxation and oppression.

**Jesus: Sorry to disappoint you, but I did not come to deliver the people from Rome.**

Nico: Then from what?

**Jesus: From sin. From spiritual death. God loves the world in this way, that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.**

Nico: So this has nothing to do with Rome? It's all about sin?

**Jesus: God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, Nicodemus. He sent Him to save it through Him. It's as simple as Moses's serpent on the pole. Whoever believes in Him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already.**

Nico: When I met Lilith, Mary, that day, I told my wife and my students that she was beyond human aid. Only God could have healed her. And then I saw her. Healed. And here you are. The healer! My whole life I have wondered if I would see this day.

**Jesus: Follow me. And you'll see more.**

Nico: Follow you?

**Jesus: Join me and my students. In two days' time, we leave Capernaum. Come see the kingdom I am bringing into this world.**

Nico: I, I, I can't...

**Jesus: You have a position in the Sanhedrin, you have a family, you are getting advanced in years. I understand, but the invitation is still open.**

Nico: An invitation to what exactly? To lead a nomadic life? To give up who I am?

**Jesus: It's true, there is a lot you would give up. But what you would gain is far greater and more lasting.**

Nico: Is this another one of your born again mysteries?

{They chuckle}

**Jesus: Well, maybe. I know mysteries are not easy for a scholar. Think about it. Take your time. On the morning of the fifth day, we leave. We will meet by the well in the Southern quarter at dawn.**

{They stand}

Nico: Is, is the kingdom of God really coming?

**Jesus: What does your heart tell you?**

Nico: My heart is swollen with fear and with wonder. {Weeping} It can tell me nothing except that I am standing on holy ground. Holy roof, anyway.

{They laugh}

**Jesus: I do hope you come with us, Nicodemus.**

{Nicodemus goes down on a knee}

**Jesus: You don't have to do that.**

{Nicodemus takes Jesus's hand and kisses it}

**Jesus: What are you doing?**

Nico: {Quoting Psalms 2:12} 'Kiss the son, lest he be angry and you perish on the way.'

{Jesus lifts Nicodemus}

**Jesus: {Finishing the quote of Psalms 2:12} 'Blessed are all who take refuge in him.'**

{They embrace a cathartic embrace}