

Text: John 2:18-3:15

Review of Major Points from John 1-2:17

1. Jesus Christ is God. Both the Old and New Testaments identify Him as such, and He Himself claimed Divinity, taking for Himself the Divine Name I AM. (John 1:1-3, John 8:54-59, Isaiah 9:6)
2. The Bible teaches that there is only One God, but also teaches that God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son or Word, and the Holy Spirit all are God. While this is to a large extent beyond our understanding, theologians have explained this as best they can in the doctrine of the Trinity, which can be succinctly explained by the following three statements:
 - a. There is one Being/Essence/Substance that is God.
 - b. God eternally exists in three Divine Persons/Subsistences.
 - c. These three Persons/Subsistences are coequal and coeternal.(Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Genesis 1:26-27, Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 3:16-17)
3. Jesus Christ made Himself subject to God's Law, and fulfilled its requirements perfectly. As a perfect, unblemished Sacrifice, He gave Himself up to be tortured, crucified, and killed, and thereby paid the full penalty for the sins of everyone that would believe in Him. Because of His propitiation, or appeasement or satisfaction, God views the penalty for the sins of those that believe in Christ to be completely paid, and because Christ rose again from the dead, those that believe in Him also have the promise of a future resurrection, and eternal life in an idyllic Paradise. Those that do not repent of sin and believe in Christ can only look forward to eternal punishment, not merely because they rejected Christ but because their sins remain unpaid for, and a just and holy God demands that sin be punished. (Matthew 5:17-18, John 14:6, Revelation 20:1-15, Romans 1:18-32, Isaiah 53:1-12, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Romans 10:9-10)
4. When God saves a person, it is because of His mercy, His grace. In our own selves none of us even has the desire to embrace Christ—we like our sin and want to remain in it. When God draws a person to Himself it is powerful, just as when Jesus called the disciples and, later, the Apostle Paul, and permanent—once a person is truly saved he can never be lost again. Christians are to proclaim the Message of salvation through Jesus Christ to everyone. (1 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 2:8-9, John 6:37, John 6:44, Acts 9:20, Mark 16:14-16)
5. Jesus' first miracle occurred at a wedding, an event He honored with His presence because He was invited, and to demonstrate that marriage is an estate ordained and honored by God. God commanded that man and wife become "one flesh," and in doing so declared all other sexual activity (and even thinking about such) to be an act of rebellion against His created order. (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:1-12, Matthew 5:27-28)
6. The right consumption of alcoholic beverages is allowed by God, and is even encouraged in the Scriptures when doing so might help to correct a physical ailment. Drunkenness, however, is decried as sinful. (1 Timothy 5:23, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)
7. Mary was honored with being chosen by God to bear His Son. However, she was, like all of us, a sinner in need of God's grace for forgiveness. The Roman Catholic views of Mary in some sort of meditative and in some cases co-redemptive role with Christ are not supported by the Biblical text. Thus, at the wedding, she subjected herself and her request to His judgment. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)
8. Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover because the Jews were all commanded by God to do so. When there, He found men engaging in business—probably even dishonest business—within the Temple itself, thus denying some people a place to worship and polluting God's Temple with greed, usury, and deception. Jesus therefore drove these men out of the Temple. He was not Himself attacked for this because, as God, He was not going to be attacked, arrested, or otherwise stopped unless He allowed Himself to be. Thus, when Jesus was crucified, he willingly allowed Himself to be arrested, questioned, tortured, and killed so that He could take the sins of His People upon Himself to purchase their salvation. (Deuteronomy 16:1-8, Mark 11:17, Deuteronomy 14:22-26, Deuteronomy 25:13-16, Deuteronomy 23:19, John 19:10-11)

Section 1

So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.
(John 2:18-22)

Jesus here predicted that He would die and rise again on the third day. Was this also predicted in the Old Testament? Consider Isaiah 53, which we also read last week, and which predicts that Jesus would die for the sins of His People. After discussing Jesus' death, Isaiah tells us how God will **prolong His days** and **divide Him a portion with the many**. The Old Testament very much told us that Christ would die for our sins and rise again.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no

beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.
(Isaiah 53:1-12)

Why did Christ die, and why is it important that He rose again? Christ died, satisfying God's just wrath for the sins of everyone that believes. Sin must be punished if God is to remain holy and just. That punishment was either borne by Christ for us, or will be suffered by us for all eternity. Christ's resurrection demonstrates that He will indeed be able to make good on His promise to grant resurrection and eternal life to everyone that believes on Him.

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
(Romans 5:8)

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.
(1 Corinthians 15:1-26)

Section 2

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.
(John 2:23-25)

Christ was, at this point, beginning to be thronged with people. Why did He not trust them? First of all "belief" can be and often is fickle. Even Satan and his demons have a kind of "belief" in God and Christ, yet they will spend eternity in Hell.

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder!
(James 2:19)

Christ knew, for one thing, that people in their natural state do not accept Godly, spiritual things, and once their worldly appetites are no longer satisfied through religious observance they move on. By some standards, Jesus Christ was a failure as a minister, because

once His ministry was established the crowds following Him became progressively smaller as the "harder" truths of God's Word were proclaimed to them. Even the disciples themselves fled in terror when He was arrested.

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 Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

(John 6:61-66)

And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard." And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." And they all left him and fled.

(Mark 14:43-50)

Jesus knew that whenever the Gospel was preached the hearers could be divided into four groups. One of the groups of people rejected Christ immediately, and one was truly saved. Two of the groups, however, gave an appearance of saving faith for a time, but later fell away.

And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.' Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience." "No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

(Luke 8:4-18)

Taking this parable as a very loose statistical analysis, what proportion of professing Christians will turn out to be false believers?

Two thirds. Three of the four groups of people described here made a profession of faith in Christ, but two of those three fell away. While it would be irresponsible to say with authority based on this passage that precisely two-thirds of professing Christians are false converts, it may not be irresponsible to suggest that a majority of professing believers are, indeed, false. This is a frightening truth, one that exhorts us to follow the admonition of 2 Corinthians 13:5:

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

(2 Corinthians 13:5)

How do we test ourselves? First of all, do you truly love God with all of your being, and your neighbor as yourself?

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

(Matthew 22:36-40)

How do we know that we love God? It's not just a feeling—actions are involved. Do we keep His commandments? Do we love His People, the Church?

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. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.
(1 John 5:1-3)

Does the “fruit” of our lives exhibit **the works of the flesh** or **the fruit of the Spirit**?

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
(Galatians 5:19-23)

Furthermore, we can't just look to a past “spiritual” event, or how we behaved at one time, or anything like that as evidence of real saving faith. The Bible says that saving faith only exists in those that persist in faith.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved.
(Matthew 24:13)

So, are you saying that a person that is really saved never sins, or that sin means you're not saved? Not necessarily, while a truly saved person will not sin regularly and repeatedly as a pattern of life, all Christians still struggle with sin. Even Christians must confess sin and be forgiven on a regular basis—the “we” in the following verse refers to believers in particular, not people in general.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.
(1 John 1:5-10)

What do I do if I am not saved? Cast yourself on Christ's mercy, turn away from your sin and embrace Him as Savior, Lord, and Master. He will save all that truly call upon Him in repentance and faith.

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.
(Romans 10:9-10)

Section 3

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, 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. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."
(John 3:1-8)

So, Jesus has just caused all of this commotion at the Temple, and one of the religious leaders of the Jews sees something in Him, and wants to know more. But, he comes at night. Why? It is possible that either he or Jesus—or both—were too busy during the day to make such an interview possible. It is also possible that he was afraid of the consequences of such an act—he would undoubtedly be ridiculed by the other leaders, probably be removed from his position, and possibly be persecuted more than that. Hopefully, the latter was not the case. Jesus told us, though, that there can be no “secret Christians.” If we want to be accepted into Heaven, we must be willing to acknowledge Him publicly, to be persecuted, to give up all that we have, and to be killed if necessary.

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.
(Matthew 10:32-33)

**And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."
(Matthew 19:23-24)**

**Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,
(2 Timothy 3:12)**

The book of Hebrews gives us a long list of God's People that endured all sorts of evil rather than renounce their faith, and commands us to read their examples and take courage, knowing that the reward we will receive in Heaven is great.

**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. 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, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-- who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated-- of whom the world was not worthy--wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.
(Hebrews 11:1-12:3)**

Fortunately for Nicodemus, by the time of Jesus' death he was willingly to openly declare himself a follower of Christ, spending a great amount of money on spices for burial and taking part in the preparation of the body himself.

Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the

Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. (John 19:39-42)

John Gill, an English Baptist who wrote the first verse-by-verse commentary on the entire Bible, gives us a report of what happened to Nicodemus because of his faith. This report is a bit speculative (and Gill admits this), but if it is true Nicodemus, who had been a wealthy leader of the Jews, wound up persecuted and destitute.

frequent mention is made of "Nicodemon ben Gorion", the brother of Josephus ben Gorion (p), the writer of the Wars and Antiquities of the Jews; and there are some things which make it probable, that he was the same with this Nicodemus; for the Nicodemon the Jews speak so much of, lived in this age; as appears, not only from his being the brother of Josephus, but also from his being contemporary with R. Jochanan ben Zaccai, who lived in this time, and until the destruction of the temple; since these two are said (q) to be together at a feast, made for the circumcision of a child. Moreover, he is represented as very rich, and is said to be one of the three rich men in Jerusalem (r), and who was able to have maintained a city ten years (s); and they speak of his daughter, as exceeding rich: they say, that she had for her dowry a thousand thousand golden denarii, or pence; and that her bed was strewed with (i.e. the furniture of it cost) twelve thousand golden denarii; and that a Tyrian golden denarius was spent upon her every week, for a certain kind of soup (t); and the wise men decreed her four hundred golden denarii, for a box of spices every day (u); and it is elsewhere (w) said, five hundred: and this our Nicodemus was very rich, as appears from his liberality at the funeral of our Lord, Joh_19:39. Moreover, the Nicodemon of the Jews, is said to be a counsellor (x) in Jerusalem; and so was this, as seems evident from Joh_7:32 and it may be further observed (y), that the right name of Nicodemon, was Boni (z); now Boni elsewhere (a), is said to be one of the disciples of Jesus, as Nicodemus was secretly, and perhaps at, and after his death openly, as his associate Joseph of Arimathea was; to which may be added, the extreme poverty that his daughter is by them said to be reduced unto; for they report, that R. Jochanan ben Zaccai saw her gathering barley corns from under the horses' hoofs in Aco (b); or as it is elsewhere said, out of the dung of the beasts of the Arabians; when she asked alms of him, and he inquired of her, what was become of her father's substance. Now to this low estate, the family of our Nicodemus might be reduced, through the persecution of the Christians by the Jews.

Evidently, Nicodemus's fears regarding the results of coming to Jesus openly were well-founded. However, he **counted the cost**, and was willing to be counted a disciple of Christ and reap the eternal rewards of doing so no matter what the temporal costs were. Each of us must do the same thing. If you want to follow Christ, are you really willing to give up everything you have, maybe even your life for it? Am I?

Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
(Luke 14:25-35)

Moving on, Jesus talks about being *born again...of water and the Spirit*, and He says this is necessary in order to get into God's Kingdom. Let me repeat: if you want to be saved from sin now, and enter Heaven when you die, you MUST be born again. God gives us no other options. Now, the word Spirit is referring to the Holy Spirit, but water is most likely not referring to baptism. Rather, He is referring to a passage in Ezekiel in which God discusses **sprinkling clean water on** His People and cleansing their sins. In other words, He is speaking of "water" metaphorically referring to the Spirit's work in cleansing people from their sin.

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 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. 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. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations.

Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel. "Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. (Ezekiel 36:22-33)

Before we get to the question of how one is born again there is an even more important question: Why is anyone born again?

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son." And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad--in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory-- even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." (Romans 9:6-28)

Why is anyone born again? To bring glory to God. Why are some people not born again? As difficult as it is for us to handle or like, the passage in Romans 9 is clear—ultimately, even the death of the unsaved brings glory to God (not pleasure, don't confound the two, we'll discuss that in a minute). We must understand that God's first priority is not our salvation, or our happiness, or even the growth of the Church. His first priority is to bring glory to Himself.

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (Psalm 46:10)

So, people are born again in order to glorify God. Now, how is a person born again? Contrary to much modern Church belief and practice, we are not born again when we "make a decision" or pray the "sinner's prayer" or anything like that of our own volition. In John 3 Jesus said that the Holy Spirit does everything here. He works in our hearts to bring about a change in our volition, our emotions, and our intellect so that we will understand and accept the things of God. Just like we don't know *where [the wind] comes from or where it goes* we likewise are, to a certain extent, unaware when the Spirit first moves in us to grant us this spiritual "rebirth." Yet, without His sovereign work, we will never be born again. If we are not born again, we can never confess Christ and be saved.

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)

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. (John 6:37)

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

So, the Father chose those that would be saved and, through the Holy Spirit, draws him to accept and confess Christ. But, doesn't the Bible say that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved? Yes, it says that very clearly.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'
(Acts 2:21)

So, you're saying that God chose certain people to be saved, and draws them to Himself so they will be saved and doesn't save anyone else. But, doesn't the Bible say that God doesn't take pleasure in punishing people? Yes it does, and that He is joyful when sinners repent. Pleasure is not the same as glory, however. When unrepentant sinners are punished, God gets glory in the display of His justice. He does not, however, receive pleasure from this—that would be monstrous. Conversely, even though sinners only repent because God draws them to Himself, He still derives both glory and joy from this.

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?
(Ezekiel 33:11)

Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."
(Luke 15:10)

We will continue to discuss all of this below.

Section 4

Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.
(John 3:9-15)

Here Jesus once again reiterates through His rhetorical question that we are dependent upon God for even the ability to believe. Further, He speaks of Himself in the plural—*we speak of what we know*, etc. Who or what is He talking about here? He is talking about the three Persons of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bearing witness together.

So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." Jesus answered, "Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." They said to him therefore, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also."
(John 8:13-19)

Now, what about this serpent in the wilderness? This refers to an event where God punished the Israelites for their complaining and unbelief by sending snakes among them. God's prescribed cure for this was interesting.

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.
(Numbers 21:4-9)

This event is referenced in the symbol you sometimes see for the profession of medicine, with a serpent wrapped around a pole. The actual serpent was probably mounted more like this [DRAW FIGURE OF A CROSS]. Just as the Israelites looked to the mounted serpent to be healed of the poison, so sinners need only look to Christ, who was Himself *lifted up* on a cross and killed for our sins, for salvation.

We've gone over quite a few things today, some of which seem contradictory at first. The Bible says that for people to be born again is a sovereign act of God—we are not reborn because we choose God or confess Christ. We confess Christ and are saved because we have been born again—the terms "born again" and "saved" describe separate events which always occur together (everyone that is born again will repent of sin and confess Christ and be saved), but are nevertheless separate events. So, if God is the one that

regenerates people, why do we have to evangelize? First of all, He told us to do so. Secondly, God has ordained or designed things so that the preaching of His Word is the primary means by which He draws sinners unto Himself for salvation.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
(Matthew 28:19-20)

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.
(Romans 10:17)

But, isn't this Doctrine of Predestination a reason for fatalism? If God has already chosen some and not others, do we need to bother to seek their salvation, and why? Again, we must bother, because God has commanded us to do so and, hopefully, because we genuinely love and care for others. Consider these words from the Apostle Paul, who, in the middle of setting forth all the teachings about election and predestination in Romans 8-9, goes so far to say that if he could save all the Jews by giving up himself, he would. That doesn't sound like a fatalist!

I am speaking the truth in Christ--I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit-- that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.
(Romans 9:1-3)

I would add that the fact that God is the One that elects, and God is the One that draws, and God is the one that saves is not a reason for fatalism, but a reason for hope. Because God is the one that does this, when we have friends or family members or coworkers OR STUDENTS that are unsaved we don't have to just share the Gospel with them and depend on our own powers of persuasion—rather, we can plead with Him to bless and enable our efforts, to change their hearts, to give them the New Birth so that they will be saved.

Lastly, if you are not saved, or not sure that you are saved, or even if you are saved but have doubts, you may be worried about whether or not you are one of God's elect. Perhaps surprisingly, I'm going to tell you not to worry about that. This is what you need to ask yourself: "Do I know that I am a sinner? No, really, do I understand just how filthy and deplorable and unlovable my sin is before God, a God that has provided my life and everything that I have and I have responded to Him only with rebellion and rejection? Does that bother me? Am I convicted by this? I'm not talking about just a desire to "not go to Hell," but does it bother me that my sin has offended the God of the Universe? Do I want to be saved from my sin? Again, not just a desire to "go to Heaven," but a desire to turn away from everything sinful and evil and instead serve God? Am I willing to make Jesus Christ my Lord, my Master, my Savior, my Friend, and my King?" If the answer to these questions is yes, I have good news for you. Look to Jesus. Confess Him as Savior and Lord. Fall upon Him and rest upon His mercy. He will save everyone that truly comes to Him in repentance and faith—the fact that you want to do so demonstrates that you are one of His elect People.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
(Matthew 11:28-30)

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.
(Romans 10:9-10)