



Almont Vineyard Church

Week 12 The Sandals of Jesus - The Life

August 29, 2026

Opening Monologue

Welcome to the AVC App. This is where we go deeper into the sermon. Here you'll find spiritual reflections and commentary that take us further into the topic of the week. Dive in and enjoy as we navigate this difficult world together.

For the last several weeks in our series The Sandals of Jesus, we have been unpacking John 14:6, where Jesus says: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Look carefully at His words. He is not presenting Himself as one option among many. No. He is the way, the truth, and the life. And He did not merely claim these things—He demonstrated them while He walked the earth. He was crucified. Then He laughed in the face of death through His glorious resurrection. On the cross He triumphed over Satan and made a public spectacle of the powers of darkness. (Col.2:13–15) Now He offers everlasting life to all who put their faith and trust in Him.

This week we focus on this truth: Jesus is LIFE.

We will meet Nicodemus in John 3. This religious leader recognized that Jesus had something he had never seen.

Jesus told him plainly:

"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." (John 3:6)

Humanity's problem is that we have been trying to save ourselves since the beginning of time. Jesus came to restore us—to reverse the curse and offer everlasting life beyond this world. But make no mistake: He also came to give us life here and now. He said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the fullest/abundance." (John 10:10)

This Sunday we will walk through many passages about life. We will also briefly consider why Christianity stands above every other world religion. We are not saved by enlightening ourselves, working our way out of karma, or following the five pillars. We are saved through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—the everlasting King of kings and Lord of lords.

Come join us this Sunday.

In Christ,

Rev. Pastor Brad

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "Week 12 Summer Series: The Sandals of Jesus/The Life" Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

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Key Sermon Text

John 14:5-6

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2014%3A5-6&version=NIV>

John 3:1-8 & 16-17 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203%3A1-8%20&version=NIV> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203%3A16-17%20&version=NIV>

John 10:10 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2010%3A10%20&version=NIV>

John 5:39-40

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%205%3A39-40%20&version=NIV>

John 5:24 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%205%3A24%20&version=NIV>

Romans 6:23

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%206%3A23&version=NIV>

Ephesians 2:4-5

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%202%3A4-5%20&version=NIV>

Commentary, Spiritual Applications, and Theological Reflections

LIFE

Jesus Is the Way, the Truth, and the Life

A Theological Reflection • John 14:6

The Tree Taken in Love

In the Garden of Eden the tree of life was taken away. Why? Not because God is mean. Not because God is vengeful. Because God loved humanity too much to leave us trapped forever in a fallen state. After Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, death entered the world. The sting of death was now in us. If they had then reached out and eaten from the tree of life, they would have lived forever in that broken condition.

"The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the Lord God banished him from the

garden and placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22–24)
That is not a cruel God. That is a loving Father protecting the people He made in His image and likeness. He would not allow Satan to lock His creation into everlasting death. From that moment on, the story of Scripture is God making a way back to life.

Humanity Has Been Searching Ever Since

Since the fall, humanity has been searching for something beyond itself—searching the heavens, searching for answers, searching for a way to fix what is broken. What happens beyond this world? Is this all there is? How do we deal with the dilemmas and wounds of life?

What man has done is create a buffet of world religions with false claims, false doctrines, and made-up revelations. People are looking for life in all the wrong places.

Islam

Islam claims roughly 2.1 billion followers. In that system, everlasting life may be granted if Allah chooses to give it. You must believe that Muhammad is the last true prophet—who, by his own account, received his revelation of the biblical story from an angel he called Gabriel in a cave. You follow the five pillars. You do good deeds. You live righteously. Then Allah may grant you everlasting life, but only by his mercy. The bottom line, you do your best and hope you have worked your way far enough.

It is also a religion whose foundational texts include commands of warfare against those who reject it. Many are reluctant to say that out loud. That is not the gospel. That is not grace. That is not Jesus.

A side note. Muhammad claimed to have had a visitation by an angel who called himself Gabriel. Perhaps something happened in that cave; but was it really Gabriel? Hmm...we must listen to what God's Word actually says:

“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” (2 Corinthians 11:14)

Think about that...A Cave and an angel appeared to Mohammad and gave him a true divine translation of God's word. Is that that possible- absolutely... but rather than an angel, how about a demon or Satan himself. (Masquerading as an angel- 2 Corinthians 11:14)

Hinduism and Buddhism

Hinduism claims about 1.2 billion followers. Buddhism claims about 500 million. Together with Islam, those three systems account for nearly half the world's religious population. Their answers to the search for life sound like this: work off your karma, enlighten yourself, escape the cycle of rebirth, achieve Nirvana.

It is mind-blowing when you set it next to the gospel. In those systems, you climb. In Christ, Life comes down to you.

Even the Religious Experts Missed It

Sadly, even the Jewish leaders—the Pharisees and the Sadducees—were lost and led astray. The Sadducees did not even believe in the resurrection. If there is no resurrection, what is the point? The

Pharisees at least believed in a resurrection that leads into everlasting life. That is where we meet a man named Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was a devout man who had studied the Scriptures. In our language, he would have held the equivalent of a Ph.D. in religion from the top school of his day. He hears of a man doing supernatural miracles no one can explain. Then he sees Jesus with his own eyes and is astounded. He had only read about this kind of power in the Old Testament—Yahweh parting the sea, splitting rocks, opening the skies. Now he watches a man named Jesus do the kinds of things only God does. It grabs him in his soul. He does not know what to do except this: I have to go meet this man.

A Conversation in the Night

John 3 tells us he comes at night, afraid of what the other religious leaders will think. He says, in effect, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Jesus does not ease him in. He goes straight to the heart of humanity’s question since Eden:

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (John 3:3)

Nicodemus is perplexed. He is thinking in natural, human terms. “How can a man be born when he is old?” Then Jesus opens heaven and gives him a revelation he was not ready for:

“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” (John 3:5–6)

Natural birth is real. God created it. But beyond this world, a person’s soul must be transformed supernaturally by the power of God Himself. Jesus is saying, “I am the One—the Messiah sent by Yahweh—to redeem humanity.” Then He gives Nicodemus, and the whole world, the most famous sentence in the New Testament:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

People Still Refuse the Life Standing in Front of Them

Jesus talked about this refusal. Stubborn hearts will study the Bible and still miss the point.

“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” (John 5:39–40)

They were trying to give themselves life. The religious leaders treated the text as a ladder. Jesus said the text is a witness—and the witness points to Him. Life is not found in the page alone. Life is found in the Person the page reveals.

In that same section of Scripture Jesus makes the promise as clear as it can be:

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24)

Notice the tense. Not “will one day cross.” Has crossed. The one who hears and believes has already passed from death to life.

Life Is a Gift, Not a Wage

Friends, salvation is a gift from God. It is not based on your righteous deeds. Every other major system hands you a list and says, “Climb.” Jesus hands you a cross and says, “Receive.”

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

Wages you earn. A gift you are given. Sin pays a wage, and that wage is death. God gives a gift, and that gift is life—in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Where does that life come from? It comes from God’s love for us.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:4–5)

It is Christ who makes us alive. We were not mostly dead. We were dead. Dead people do not improve themselves into heaven. Dead people need resurrection.

Nailed to the Cross—and Triumphant There

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Colossians 2:13–15)

The record that stood against you was nailed to the cross. Satan was disarmed. Jesus made a public spectacle of the powers of darkness and triumphed over them—not in spite of the cross, but by the cross. Then He laughed in the face of death through His glorious resurrection.

He Did Not Just Say It. He Did It.

Jesus did not merely talk about life. He came down from heaven, took on flesh, allowed Himself to be hung on a cross, and overcame death by being raised from the dead. God raised Him—and then the risen Jesus showed Himself to more than five hundred eyewitnesses at one time.

Paul knew what he was talking about. He had been a murderer of Christians. Then the living Jesus stopped him on the road, and the murderer became a believer. From that man we receive this gospel:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:3–6)

“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.”

(1 Corinthians 15:19–23)

In Adam, death. In Christ, life. That is the whole Bible in four words.

The Life He Came to Give

Make no mistake. Jesus came to give everlasting life beyond this world. He also came to give life here.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

The devil comes to drain life. Jesus comes to give it—abundant life now, eternal life forever.

Christianity Stands Alone

Friends, Christianity stands alone above every other world religion, man-made system, and cult. We are not saved by enlightening ourselves. We are not saved by working off karma. We are not saved by following the five pillars. We cannot save ourselves.

We are saved by Life Himself—spelled J-E-S-U-S.

He is the everlasting King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the way. He is the truth. He is the life.

What Are You Searching For?

What are you searching for? Do you have the answers? Do you know where you are going?

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Come to Him. Follow Him. You shall have everlasting life.

Sources: 1-5

Commentary on Main Passages

John 3

NICODEMUS VISITS JESUS AT NIGHT / 3:1–21

It would be difficult to find any other portion of Scripture as well known as John 3:16 or any other statement of Scripture more applied than “You must be born again” (v. 7, nkjv). When Jesus revealed the necessity of the new birth to Nicodemus, he exposed mankind’s ultimate hope.

This evening interview is the first of a series of individual encounters between Jesus and persons who fit the description given at the end of chapter 2—those who approached Jesus with an inadequate faith. Nicodemus (vv. 1–15), the Samaritan woman (4:1–42), and the nobleman from Capernaum (4:43–54)

illustrate a certain view of who Jesus was and what he could do. But meeting Jesus face to face changed their views. It also changed their lives.

Wherever Jesus went, changes occurred. He challenged systems, powers, and individuals. He helped people see that they couldn't see. He invited men and women to follow him as if he expected them to drop everything and do just that. To our surprise (not his) many of them did follow. The invitation to transformation is still open. If we are listening, we can hear it in the darkness as did Nicodemus. Or it comes to us at noon, when we, like the woman at the well, are slipping through life, desperate to avoid any more troubles than we have already gotten ourselves into. Or it comes to us with shattering directness in the face of death or suffering around us, as the nobleman discovered. When the invitation comes, trust Jesus and follow him.

3:1 There was a man. Each of the next segments of the Gospel revolve around Jesus and one other person. From his collection of Jesus' memorable conversations, John chose several to highlight the character of the Lord.

PROMINENT JEWISH RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL GROUPS

Name and Selected References/ Description /Agreement with Jesus/ Disagreement with Jesus

PHARISEES Matthew 5:20 Matthew 23:1–36 Luke 6:2 Luke 7:36–47

- Strict group of religious Jews who advocated minute obedience to the Jewish law and traditions. Very influential in the synagogues.
- Respect for the law, belief in the resurrection of the dead, committed to obeying God's will.
- Rejected Jesus' claim to be Messiah because he did not follow all their traditions and associated with notoriously wicked people.

SADDUCEES Matthew 3:7 Matthew 16:11–12 Mark 12:18

- Wealthy, upper class, Jewish priestly party. Rejected the authority of the Bible beyond the five books of Moses. They, along with the Pharisees, were one of the two major parties of the Jewish council.
- Showed great respect for the five books of Moses, as well as the sanctity of the temple.
- Denied the resurrection of the dead. Thought the temple could also be used as a place to transact business.

TEACHERS OF THE LAW Matthew 7:29 Mark 2:6 Mark 2:16

- Professional interpreters of the Law—who especially emphasized the traditions. Many teachers of the Law were Pharisees.
- Respect for the Law. Committed to obeying God.
- Denied Jesus' authority to reinterpret the Law. Rejected Jesus as Messiah because he did not obey all of their traditions.

HERODIANS Matthew 22:16 Mark 3:6 Mark 12:13

- A Jewish political party of King Herod's supporters.
- Unknown. In the Gospels they tried to trap Jesus with questions and plotted to kill him.
- Afraid of Jesus causing political instability.

ZEALOTS Luke 6:15 Acts 1:14

- A fiercely dedicated group of Jewish patriots determined to end Roman rule in Israel.
- Concerned about the future of Israel. Believed in the Messiah but did not recognize Jesus as the One sent by God.
- Believed that the Messiah must be a political leader who would deliver Israel from Roman occupation.

ESSENES (none)

- Jewish monastic group practicing ritual purity and personal holiness.
- Emphasized justice, honesty, commitment.
- Believed ceremonial rituals made them righteous.

Though John seems to shift from the summary description of Jesus as the center of interest in Jerusalem to the interview with Nicodemus, there is a connection between 2:23–25 and 3:1. Nicodemus is spotlighted as a person who was either a typical example of someone to whom Jesus could not entrust himself (2:24) or he was an exception to the rule—a person to whom Jesus could entrust himself. Both these possibilities have been defended. But, in the end, neither is as important as the clearer indication of John's immediate purpose: to illustrate the truth that Jesus “knew what was in everyone” (nrsv). Jesus did not endorse every gesture of belief in himself, but he did nurture those with weak faith. Because Jesus knew what was in every person, he knew exactly when to confront Nicodemus. His knowledge of us is just as intimate.

Of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. Nicodemus was one of the Pharisees—the most strict, conservative, and traditional Jewish sect of those times. The Jewish religious leaders were divided into several groups. Two of the most prominent groups were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees separated themselves from anything non-Jewish and carefully followed both the Old Testament laws and the oral traditions handed down through the centuries. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were the elite priestly class who freely mixed their political agenda with the power they wielded as religious leaders. John the Baptist criticized the Pharisees for being legalistic and hypocritical, following the letter of the law while ignoring its true intent. Jesus' cleansing of the temple was a direct affront to the power of the Sadducees, who profited from the marketing of religion.

Nicodemus was also a member of the Jewish ruling council. Although the Romans controlled Israel politically, the Jews were given some authority over religious and minor civil disputes. The Jewish ruling body was the council (sometimes called the Sanhedrin) made up of seventy-one of Israel's religious leaders. They functioned in a way similar to the Supreme Court in the United States, handling civil and religious issues. Thus Nicodemus was a very prominent figure in Israel, representing the “cream” of the nation; in fact, Jesus called him “a teacher of Israel” (3:10 nrsv).

3:2 He came to Jesus. What motivated Nicodemus to come to Jesus? Very likely Nicodemus was both impressed and curious about Jesus and chose to form his opinions about him from firsthand conversation. Most Pharisees were intensely jealous of Jesus because he undermined their authority, challenged their views, and threatened their tenuous position under Roman rule. But Nicodemus tracked

down Jesus and met him personally. It is even possible that their conversation was witnessed by both Jesus' disciples and students of the Jewish leader.

AT LEAST HE CAME

The meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus was not by accident. Nicodemus did not stumble over Jesus, but sought him out. He made it a point to find and be with Jesus. Often we are guilty of allowing our relationship with God to degenerate into occasional chance meetings where God has had to seek us out. Do we only turn to Christ in crises, finding little place or time for him in our daily lives? How often at night, when the hustle of the day settles down, do we think of Jesus in the silence and seek him out in prayer?

At night. Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus by night? It is possible that he did not want to be seen with Jesus in broad daylight because he feared reproach from his fellow Pharisees (who did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah). But it may not have been fear that brought Nicodemus at night; it is also possible that he chose a time when he could talk alone and at length with the popular teacher who was often surrounded by people.

NECESSITY OF A SEARCHING HEART

Nicodemus was searching, and he believed that Jesus had some answers. A learned teacher himself, he came to Jesus to be taught. No matter how intelligent and well-educated we are, we must come to Jesus with an open mind and heart so he can teach us the truth about God. A searching heart is marked by several characteristics:

- Humility in seeking and admitting personal need.
- Perseverance in overcoming obstacles that may keep us from finding and following Christ.
- Insight in recognizing that the gospel message relates to our lives.
- Willingness to submit to the lordship of Christ.
- Obedience in going beyond mental assent to active dependence on God's promises and guidance.

"Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God." Nicodemus respectfully addressed Jesus as a teacher (a rabbi) who had come from God. While true, the title reveals Nicodemus's limited understanding of Jesus. He was far more than just another rabbi. Yet Nicodemus's complimentary start gives us little idea of what he intended to ask Jesus. It is to his credit that he at least understood that Jesus came from God, as opposed to many of his fellow Pharisees who attributed Jesus' power to Satan (Matthew 9:34). Instead, Nicodemus identified Jesus' miracles as a revelation of God's power.

QUESTIONS/ANSWERS

It is quite common to find people treating spiritual questions as if asking them was a perfectly valid pursuit, even if they had no real hope of getting an answer. That kind of treadmill leads to despair. If we are not serious about answers, questions—even hard questions—are a waste of time.

We don't know exactly what questions Nicodemus planned to ask Jesus, but we do know he went to the right source. If all we want to do is ask questions, any ear will do. But if we are hungry for answers, God will be our source. He has provided his Word, his presence, and the freedom of prayer to place any question before him. Others who have brought their questions and quests to God can also provide

valuable help to us. Jesus wants to be more than just an item of discussion. He has answers for the heart and soul.

Nicodemus's expression indicates that he saw himself representing a significant number of Jews (thus his use of we), the people over whom he was a leader and teacher. But no sooner did Nicodemus get this compliment out than Jesus responded with a statement that must have rocked the Pharisee back on his heels. With one stroke Jesus reversed the flow of discussion from his identity as a God-sent teacher to the crucial question of the destiny of each person. Jesus made it clear that his own qualifications were not up for debate, but that Nicodemus ought to be concerned about where he stood before God.

3:3 “No one can see the kingdom of God.” Jesus' words are unmistakable: No one—that is, not the Jews, not the pious Pharisees or Sadducees. No one who is relying on his or her own merits can see the kingdom of God.

Although the Bible does not explicitly state what the kingdom of God is, Jesus made it very clear what it isn't: “My kingdom is not from this world” (18:36 nrsv). God's kingdom is the sphere of God's rule in heaven and on earth. The Old Testament does not use the term kingdom of God, but it clearly refers to the kingship of God. When the last of the judges, Samuel, was an old man, the people of Israel decided they wanted a new form of government. They approached Samuel with the demand that he appoint a king. God's response to Samuel about this request is instructive: “And the Lord told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king’” (1 Samuel 8:7 niv). This tension between the recognized or rejected kingship of God and its final resolution cannot be missed in the Old Testament (see also Exodus 15:18; Psalm 93:1; 103:19; Isaiah 9:6–7; Daniel 2:44).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Statement/ Scripture

To enter you must confess and repent of sin. (Matthew 4:17)

Those persecuted for the faith will receive rewards there. (Matthew 5:10–12)

Not all who talk about it belong there. (Matthew 7:21)

Small beginning but great results (Matthew 13:31–32)

Worldwide impact (Matthew 13:33)

Priceless value (Matthew 13:44–46)

Cannot judge who will be in it (Matthew 13:47–49)

Good news to all (Luke 4:43)

Equally available to all (Luke 10:21)

Must be the believer's top priority (Luke 12:31)

The door is now open to all, but one day it will close. (Luke 13:22–30)

To enter you must be born again. (John 3:3)

So, what could Jesus expect Nicodemus to know about the kingdom? From the Scriptures he would know that the kingdom would be ruled by God, it would eventually be restored on earth, and it would incorporate God's people. Jesus revealed to this devout Pharisee that the kingdom would come to the whole world (3:16), not just the Jews, and that Nicodemus wouldn't be a part of it unless he was personally born again (3:5). This was a revolutionary concept: the kingdom is personal, not national or ethnic, and its entrance requirements are repentance and spiritual rebirth. Jesus later taught that God's kingdom has already begun in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21). It will be fully realized when Jesus returns again to judge the world and abolish evil forever (Revelation 21–22).

During Jesus' earthly ministry, the kingdom of God was present with him (Luke 17:21). To "see" the kingdom of God means, in part, to have a special perception or insight concerning God's absolute control. But a sense of belonging, or citizenship, is also included. The "seeing" is not simply for purposes of examination; it represents participation. Part of this picture is clarified by the description of vital faith in Hebrews: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth" (Hebrews 11:13 niv). The image here is of people, stranded in a foreign land, whose citizenship is elsewhere. Paul wrote, "Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:12–14 niv). To "see," then, is to be a citizen without yet being able to exercise all the rights and privileges of that citizenship. Nicodemus was being taught that Israel was a chosen people to be a vehicle of God's message to the world, not to be the only beneficiaries of that relationship.

"Without being born from above." The Greek word translated here as "from above" can also be rendered "again." It seems that Jesus was speaking of a birth "from above" because he later used the analogy of the wind (coming from some unknown [heavenly] source) to illustrate spiritual rebirth (see 3:7–8). But Nicodemus clearly thought that Jesus was speaking of a second physical birth.

3:4 "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" English translations of Jesus' statement tend to put the conditional clause ("without being born from above") after the primary clause ("No one can see the kingdom of God"), but they are reversed in Greek. Nicodemus either stopped listening after Jesus' opening phrase, or he chose to address the first curious statement he heard. These questions that focused solely on birth—whether spoken sincerely or sarcastically—show that Nicodemus did not perceive the spiritual intent of Jesus' words. He saw only the literal meaning and questioned its absurdity. But with all his learning he should have understood that God can and will give spiritual rebirth. The prophets had spoken about this spiritual regeneration (see Ezekiel 36:25–27; see also Jeremiah 31:31–34; Joel 2:28–32).

STARTING OVER

Most people, at one time or another, wish they could start life over again. But second thoughts usually bring us to the conclusion that another trip through life would involve just as many opportunities for mistakes as the first time. Nicodemus saw only complications and impossibilities in Jesus' challenge. But Jesus later made the point in discussing the possibility of salvation with his disciples that "with man this

is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27 niv). The only way a person can really start over in life is by being born from above—“born again” by receiving God’s eternal life and the regenerating Holy Spirit. Starting over may be naturally impossible; but Jesus makes it a supernatural possibility.

3:5 “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” This statement has perplexed and divided commentators for many centuries. Some traditions have taught that the water denotes physical birth (referring to the “water” of amniotic fluid or even semen) and Spirit to spiritual birth—in which case Jesus would be saying that a person has to have two births: one physical and the second, spiritual. This view builds upon the preceding context when Nicodemus referred to physical birth. It also points to the parallel Jesus makes in verse 6: “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (niv). According to this position, Jesus would have been granting the Pharisee’s point in order to highlight the nature of the second birth as spiritual. Two strengths of this interpretation are that it avoids making the physical act of water baptism a necessity and that it avoids bringing almost a “third birth” idea into the discussion. If water doesn’t refer to natural birth, say its defenders, then Jesus seems to be saying that a person must be born of their parents, born of water, and born of the Spirit.

3:6 “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” This is also written: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (nkjv). Human beings (the flesh) can produce only more human beings; this answers Nicodemus’s question in verse 4. Only God, the divine Spirit, can give the believer spiritual life. At the same time God puts his Spirit into us, we are given a new regenerated human spirit. It is God’s Spirit, not our effort, that makes us children of God (1:12). Jesus’ description corrects human hopes that we might somehow inherit goodness from parents, or earn it by good behavior, church background, or correct associations. At some point we must be able to answer the question: Have I been born of the Spirit?

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

God has revealed himself as three persons in one—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God became a man in Jesus so that Jesus could die for our sins. Jesus was raised from the dead to guarantee God’s offer of salvation to all people through spiritual renewal and rebirth. When Jesus ascended into heaven, his physical presence left the earth, but he promised to send the Holy Spirit so that his spiritual presence would still be among his people (Luke 24:49). The Holy Spirit first became available in this special way to all believers at Pentecost (Acts 2). Whereas in Old Testament days the Holy Spirit empowered specific individuals for specific purposes, now all believers have the power of the Holy Spirit available to them. For more on the Holy Spirit, read 14:16–28; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; and 2 Corinthians 1:22.

3:7 “You must be born from above.” Jesus’ statement to Nicodemus that evening has been heralded to all the world ever since. Both Jew and Gentile have heard the divine mandate: You must be born again. Without the new birth, one cannot see or enter into the kingdom of God. In those words, millions have heard Jesus speaking directly to their hearts. Behind Jesus’ challenge is his invitation to each of us—“You must be born again; allow me to do that for you.”

3:8 “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.” Perhaps at this moment in the evening a soft wind rustled the leaves outside the house or in the garden where they were talking. Jesus used the illustration of the wind to depict the effect of the Spirit in the person born of the Spirit. In Greek the same word (pneuma) can have several meanings: “spirit,” “wind,” and “breath.” God’s Spirit, like the wind, has free movement and, like reviving breath, has power. Jesus used this illustration to show that the reality of the Spirit living in a person is evidenced by the effect of the Spirit on that person’s life. People can control neither the wind nor the movement of God’s Spirit.

“So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” The image Jesus used describes the wonderful experience we can have of realizing that God actually moves in and through us by his Spirit. Just as we do not know the origin or the destination of the wind, we do not know or control the Spirit. What we do know are the effects of the wind and of the Spirit. Life in the Spirit is as radical and unexpected as being born of the Spirit.

DON’T GIVE UP ON PEOPLE

It must have seemed unlikely to the disciples that Nicodemus would believe in Jesus. Are there people you disregard, thinking they could never be brought to God—such as a world leader for whom you have never prayed or a successful person to whom you have never witnessed? Don’t assume that anyone is beyond the gospel. God, through his Holy Spirit, can reach anyone, and you should pray diligently for whomever he brings to your mind. Be a witness and example to everyone with whom you have contact. God may touch those you think most unlikely—and he may use you to do it.

Sources: 6

3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” The entire gospel comes to a focus in this verse. God’s love is not just to a certain group of individuals—it is offered to the world.

ALL THE GREATEST—J. Edwin Hortell

God- the greatest Lover
So loved- the greatest degree
The world- the greatest number
That he gave- the greatest act
His only begotten Son- the greatest gift
That whoever- the greatest invitation
Believes- the greatest simplicity
In Him- the greatest person
Shall not perish- the greatest escape
But- the greatest difference

Have- the greatest certainty
Eternal life- the greatest destiny

God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God's actions defined the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships—when you love someone, you are willing to sacrifice dearly for that person. Sacrificial love expresses itself without assurance that the love will be returned in kind. The timing of that love was highlighted by Paul's words, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8 niv).

Sacrificial love is also practical in seeking ways to meet the needs of those who are loved. In God's case, that love was infinitely practical, since it set out to rescue those who had no hope of rescuing themselves. God paid dearly to save us; He gave His only begotten Son, the highest price he could pay. The term translated "only begotten" (monogene) expresses Jesus' unique value and position as God's only Son. The salvation God offers freely was costly to him.

This offer is made to whoever believes. To "believe" is more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means putting our trust and confidence in him that he alone can save us. It is to put Christ in charge of our present plans and eternal destiny. Believing is both trusting his words as reliable and relying on him for the power to change.

Jesus accepted our punishment and paid the price for our sins so that we would not perish. Perish does not mean physical death, for we all will eventually die. Here it refers to eternity apart from God. Those who believe will receive the alternative, the new life that Jesus bought for us—everlasting life with God.

THE CHOICE

John 3:16, along with the rest of the New Testament, assumes that apart from God's intervention, people perish (see Mark 4:38; Luke 13:3, 5; John 10:28; Romans 2:12; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Peter 3:9). The word adds a sense of hopelessness to the fact of dying—"to perish" is to come to a dead end. In this verse, escape from the tragic fate of perishing is promised to those who believe in God's Son. Instead of perishing, they will have "eternal life," or "life in the ageless age." Perishing is not an end to be desired, for it removes from the picture any vestige of what we could call life. But this verse makes it clear that those who refuse to choose Christ and the life he offers have chosen to perish. Eternal life awaits our decision.

One of the distinctives of John's Gospel is its awareness of the reader. John often includes reflective and explanatory statements that help us understand events more clearly. For instance, in 2:17 John explained the insight given to the disciples about Jesus' actions and words in the temple. Further on, in 2:23–24, John summarized Jesus' general ongoing relationship with people. As an eyewitness, John wanted us to know not only the facts of God's human visit to earth, but also the eventual lessons and conclusions that came to light from those facts.

With this characteristic of John's Gospel in mind, some commentators have concluded that Jesus' direct speaking stopped with 3:15, and that John added the following inspired words (3:16–21) by way of further explanation. Either way, no other verse in all the Bible so encapsulates the basic message of the gospel: God so dearly loved all the people in the world that he gave his only Son so that we could have eternal life.

3:17–18 “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world.” Why condemn an already condemned world? All people are already under God’s judgment because of sin—specifically the sin of not believing in God’s Son (16:9). The only way to escape the condemnation is to believe in Jesus, the Son of God, because he came “that the world through Him might be saved.” He who believes in him is saved from God’s judgment. And God wants people to believe: He is patient, “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9 nkjv).

When we consider ways to communicate the gospel, we should follow Jesus’ example. We do not need to condemn unbelievers; they are condemned already. We must tell them about this condemnation, and then offer them the way of salvation—faith in Jesus Christ. When we share the gospel with others, our love must be like Jesus’—willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God’s love.

GOOD NEWS

The gospel truly is good news! It is not always seen as good news because people are often afraid it is too good to be true. Moments of honest reflection usually confront us with the hopelessness of our lives. We know we are far from perfect. The bad news is so bad that we can hardly stand it. So we try to protect ourselves from our fears by putting our faith in something we do or have: good deeds, skill, intelligence, money, possessions. Since perfection is far out of reach, we are tempted to settle for effort. We end up living barely a step ahead of despair. To those who can see their predicament, the gospel is welcomed good news. Only God can save us from the one thing that we really need to fear—eternal condemnation. We believe in God by recognizing the insufficiency of our own efforts to find salvation and by asking him to do his work in us.

Sources: 7

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 & 19-23 Proof of Christ’s Resurrection

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The truth never loses its power. People, however, often lose their grip on truth. The struggles in the Corinthian church made it clear to Paul that they needed to refocus their attention on the gospel. He brought his letter to a close with a vigorous proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were wandering; Paul called them back to the center. Like the Corinthians, we can’t afford to stray from Christ. Every claim about Christianity has roots in his resurrection. What we believe about this life and the afterlife depends on what Jesus did with death. God’s Word calls us back to the center.

15:1–2 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. In this final section of the letter, Paul gave a masterly defense of the resurrection of Christ and its importance to the Christian faith. The gospel message that he had preached to them, that they had received, on which they had taken their stand was the message that had saved them. Paul wanted to remind them of that gospel, because apparently some

(probably false teachers) had been distorting it. In fact, some of the Corinthians had come to believe that there would be no resurrection of the dead (15:12). Not only was the church in Corinth having problems with unity (as Paul tried to clear up in the previous chapters), it was also dealing with basic problems of theology. This, too, would tear apart the church. As an apostle who had himself seen the risen Christ (15:8), Paul took these Corinthian believers back to the basics of the message that they had welcomed and received. Because acceptance of that gospel had saved them, they should hold firmly to it. To do otherwise would mean that they had believed in vain. If they could be so easily swayed to other messages, tangents, and untruths, then perhaps what they claimed as belief was not belief at all. If the faith they thought they had could not assure them of salvation, then that faith was worthless.

WHY BELIEVE THE RESURRECTION?

The Resurrection is the central theme of the gospel message. 15:2–4

The Resurrection is a fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. 15:3–4

The Resurrection was attested to by many eyewitnesses. 15:5–8

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ could not have been raised. 15:13–16

If Christians will not one day be resurrected, then their faith is useless. 15:14–17

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then the apostles were all liars. 15:15

If there is no resurrection, then the Christian faith is only for this life. Why believe something that is good only for this life but brings only trouble in this life? 15:19, 30–32

The resurrection of Christ is a factual, historical event. 15:20

The resurrection of believers is an actual event to occur when Christ returns. 15:23.

The resurrection includes a resurrection of physical bodies, not just spirits. 15:35–49

Resurrected bodies will live for eternity, never to die again. 15:50, 53–56

Because of the promised resurrection, nothing done for Christ is done in vain. 15:58

15:3–4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Paul had received the gospel message from Christ himself, as had all the other apostles; then he passed on to all his listeners that same message. These words indicate the careful and literal way that Christian teachers passed on tradition from one generation to the next.

The central theme of the gospel is given here. It is the key text for the defense of Christianity. The three points that are of first importance are as follows:

1.Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Without the truth of this message, Christ's death was worthless, and those who believe in him are still in their sins and without hope. However, Christ as the sinless Son of God took the punishment of sin, "dying for sin" so that those who believe can have their sins removed. The phrase "according to the Scriptures" refers to the Old Testament prophecies regarding this event, such as Psalm 16:8–11 and Isaiah 53:5–6. Christ's death on the cross was no accident, no afterthought. It had been part of God's plan from all eternity in order to bring about the salvation of all who believe.

MIXED HARVEST

Paul restated the gospel because there were unbelievers in the Corinthian church. Most churches contain people who do not yet believe. Some are moving in the direction of belief, and others are simply pretending. Impostors, however, are not to be removed (see Matthew 13:28–29), for that is the Lord’s work alone. The Good News about Jesus Christ will save us if we firmly believe it and faithfully follow it. The preaching of the gospel, then, accomplishes two purposes: (1) The message offers salvation to those who have not yet responded; and (2) the message challenges believers to remain faithful.

Pray for the communicators in your church. Perhaps you are one yourself. Remember that every believer is a living sermon. Pray that the gospel will be heard and understood clearly in your fellowship.

2. He was buried. The fact of Christ’s death is revealed in the fact of his burial. Many have tried to discount the actual death of Christ, from the false teachers of Paul’s day to false teachers today. But Jesus Christ did die on the cross and was buried in a tomb. (For more information on the facts of Jesus’ death, see the Life Application Commentary Mark, in Mark 16:9, the chart called “Evidence that Jesus Actually Died and Arose.”)

3. He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Christ “was raised” permanently, forever; his Father raised him from the dead. He came back to life from being a dead person in a grave “on the third day” as noted in the Gospels (Friday afternoon to Sunday morning—three days in Jewish reckoning of time). This also occurred “according to the Scriptures.” Jesus had quoted the prophet Jonah: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40 niv; see also Jonah 1:17) to show the connection to “three days” as prophesied in the Old Testament. Psalm 16:8–11 and Psalm 110 also foretell the resurrection of the Messiah.

15:5 He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. Jesus made several appearances to various people after his resurrection, some of which Paul included here. He first mentioned the appearance to Peter, noted in Luke 24:34 (see also Mark 16:7). Peter had denied his Lord and then had wept bitterly (Mark 14:72). Jesus forgave Peter and still considered him to be one of his disciples. Jesus had great responsibilities for Peter to fulfill in the church that had not yet been born.

Jesus had also been seen by the twelve apostles. The expression “twelve apostles” was a title for the original disciples—sometimes they are called “the Twelve.” But this title doesn’t always signify that twelve apostles were present. By the time of the Resurrection, Judas Iscariot and another apostle, Thomas, were not present at Christ’s first appearance. These appearances are recorded in Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–31.

REBEL HOLDOUTS

There will always be people who say that Jesus didn’t rise from the dead. Those who seek to deny the Resurrection are neither courageous nor novel in their thinking. They have nothing but hopelessness and despair to offer those who believe them. Their efforts simply highlight the importance of Christ’s victory.

Paul wrote that many people saw Jesus after his resurrection: Peter; the disciples (the Twelve); more than five hundred Christian believers (most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote this, although some had died); James (Jesus’ brother); all the apostles; and, finally, Paul himself. The Resurrection is an historical

fact. Don't be discouraged by doubters who deny the Resurrection. Be filled with hope because of the knowledge that one day you, and they, will see the living proof when Christ returns.

15:6 After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now. This event is recorded nowhere else. It most likely occurred in Galilee, and the sheer number of eyewitnesses, more than five hundred, should cause doubters to stop and think before dismissing the Resurrection accounts of a few followers. All these people saw him at one time, and at the time of Paul's writing, most of them were still alive. Paul could appeal to their testimony to back up his own.

JESUS' APPEARANCES AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

Jesus appeared to:

1. Mary Magdalene Mark 16:9–11; John 20:11–18
2. The other women at the tomb Matthew 28:8–10
3. Peter in Jerusalem Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5
4. The two travelers on the road Mark 16:12–13; Luke 24:13–35
5. Ten disciples behind closed doors Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–25
6. All eleven disciples (including Thomas) Mark 16:14; John 20:26–31; 1 Corinthians 15:5
7. Seven disciples while fishing on the Sea of Galilee John 21:1–14
8. Eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:15–18
9. More than 500 believers 1 Corinthians 15:6
10. Jesus' brother James 1 Corinthians 15:7
11. Those who watched Jesus ascend into heaven Mark 16:19–20; Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:3–9

15:7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. This James is Jesus' brother (actually, half brother), who at first did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:5). After seeing the resurrected Christ, he became a believer (as did Jesus' other brothers, Acts 1:14). James ultimately became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). He also wrote the New Testament book of James. (For more information on James, see the Introduction to the Life Application Commentary James.) This next mention of all the apostles must describe an event separate from that recorded in 15:5, as well as designating the James mentioned here from the two apostles of that name.

15:8 Last of all, I saw him, too, long after the others, as though I had been born at the wrong time. One of the credentials to be an apostle was to have been an eyewitness of Jesus Christ. Paul could call himself an apostle (1:1) because he had seen Jesus last of all ... long after the others. This event is recorded in Acts 9:3–6. The phrase "as though I had been born at the wrong time" (literally, "miscarriage") means that Paul's opportunity to see Jesus Christ was a special case. The other apostles saw Christ before the Resurrection; they lived and traveled with him for nearly three years. Paul was not one of the original twelve apostles, yet Christ appeared to him.

15:18–19 In that case, all who have died believing in Christ have perished! And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world. Christians carry with them, even through persecution and death, the promise of eternal life with God. Yet if Christ was never raised from the dead, and if there is no hope of resurrection, then all who have died believing in Christ have perished! If all the preachers lied (15:15) and no one will be raised, then not only is faith meaningless for this life, it is meaningless in death. Those who believed in Christ believed a lie; those who died because of persecution for their faith perished for no reason. The consequences of believing the lie that there will be no resurrection shake the very foundations of the Christian faith. Paul pointed out the silliness of the argument—if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world. If the only promise of the Christian faith applies to this life, then why believe in it? Why believe in a faith that brought—in this culture and even still in many places in the world—persecution, sorrow, death, ostracism, separation? Without the resurrection, there would be no hope for final judgment and justice or hope for a final dwelling place with God. There would be nothing but death to look forward to. If the end is the same for everyone, why not live like the pagans in sensual pleasure (15:32)? Why deny oneself? Why be miserable if the other choices bring the same result?

EVIDENCE THAT JESUS ACTUALLY DIED AND AROSE

This evidence demonstrates Jesus' uniqueness in history and proves that he is God's Son. No one else was able to predict his own resurrection and then accomplish it.

Erroneous Explanations for the Empty Tomb/ Evidence against These Explanations/ References

Jesus was only unconscious and later revived. / A Roman soldier told Pilate that Jesus was dead, Mark 15:44–45

The Roman soldiers did not break Jesus' legs because he had already died, and one of them pierced Jesus' side with a spear. John 19:32–34

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrapped Jesus' body and placed it in the tomb. John 19:38–42

The women made a mistake and went to the wrong tomb./ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw Jesus placed in the tomb. Matthew 27:59–61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55

On Sunday morning, Peter and John also went to the same tomb. John 20:3–9

Unknown thieves stole Jesus' body./ The tomb was sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers. Matthew 27:65–66

The disciples stole Jesus' body/ The tomb was guarded and sealed./ Matthew 27:66

15:20 But the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again. However, the above argument is moot because the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. The hypothetical "if" statements in the previous verses concede to the certain facts of history. Christians may indeed face difficulty, but the fact of the Resurrection changes everything. Because Christ was raised from the dead, he has become the first of a

great harvest of those who will be raised to life again. The “first of a great harvest” (also called the first fruits) was the first part of the harvest that faithful Jews would bring to the temple as an offering (Leviticus 23:10). Although Christ was not the first to rise from the dead (he raised Lazarus and others), he was the first to be raised to never die again. He is the forerunner for those who believe in him, the proof of their eventual resurrection to eternal life.

15:21–22 So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, Adam, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man, Christ. Everyone dies because all of us are related to Adam, the first man. But all who are related to Christ, the other man, will be given new life. Death came into the world as a consequence of the sin of one man, Adam (Genesis 3:17–19). Adam sinned against God and brought alienation from God and death to all humanity. Sin resulted in death. All human beings are related to Adam and have two characteristics in common: They are sinners; and they will die. By capitulating to sin, Adam allowed the whole human race to succumb to death. Death is inescapable; it comes to every living thing. And the reign of death over creation began because of Adam’s sin. Paul contrasted the roles of two single agents: Adam and Christ. Adam’s sin brought condemnation and death to all; Christ’s sinless sacrifice and resurrection brought resurrection from the dead to all who are related to Christ through accepting his sacrifice on their behalf. Those who believe in him will be given new life. This same idea is explained in Romans 5:12–21.

DEATH AND LIFE

Adam’s sin allowed death to claim every human’s life; Christ’s death challenged that claim and nullified it in the Resurrection. Adam “gave” us all death; Christ offers life to all. In other words, real life can only be found in Christ. At conception, we receive as part of our human inheritance the gift of death; at conversion, we receive Christ’s gift of eternal life. The choice is between death and life. How tragic that so many make the wrong choice. What will you choose—life or death?

15:23 But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised first; then when Christ comes back, all his people will be raised. Paul wanted to clarify, however, that there is an order to this resurrection. It had not already happened, as perhaps some of the false teachers were claiming. Rather, Christ was raised first, three days after his crucifixion, and he is the “first of a great harvest” (15:20 nlt). That “harvest” will be taken in when Christ comes back at his second coming. At that time, his people, those who believed in him as Savior, will be raised from death to eternal life.

Sources: 9-11

Life , Joy & Truth

John 10:10, John 5, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:4-5, Colossians 2:13-14

Life is not a ladder you climb. Life is a Person who comes to the dead and gives Himself.

That is why John 14:6 is the center of the whole conversation.
Jesus is not a path. He is the life.

Thomas asked for a map. Jesus answered with Himself:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6, NIV 1984)

David Guzik is right to press the grammar. Jesus did not say He would show a way, teach a truth, or offer the secrets of life. He said He is the way, the truth, and the life. If you are lost, He is the road. If you are confused, He is reality. If you are dead inside, He is life. The Life Application Study Bible makes the same point in pastoral language: as the way, He is the path to the Father; as the truth, He is the reality of all God’s promises; as the life, He joins His divine life to ours—now and forever.

That last phrase is the joy. Eternal life is not only duration after death. It is Jesus’ own life attached to yours.

The alternative is not “another religion.” It is death.**John 10:10 draws the line with no softness:**

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

Guzik notes that “more abundantly” (perissos) means surplus—life overflowing, not mere survival. The thief’s agenda is subtraction. Jesus’ agenda is gift. World religions, at their most sincere, still put the human self to work: climb, purify, accumulate merit, keep the law, awaken the inner light. Jesus says the problem is not that we are underperforming. The problem is that we are dead.

Paul says it without poetry:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

Guzik’s contrast is devastating and freeing: when you work for sin, you earn death. When God saves, you receive a gift. Wages are owed. A gift cannot be owed, or it stops being a gift. The Life Application note on this verse has always been simple: you cannot earn what God insists on giving.

You can handle Scripture and still miss life.

That is the warning inside John 5:39–40:

“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”

Guzik’s observation is sharp: they searched the Bible and never let the Word live in them. They treated Scripture as a container of life instead of a witness to the Life. The Life Application Bible says the same thing to religious people in every century: Bible knowledge is not the same as coming to Jesus. The leaders were not starved for information. They were unwilling. Life is not in the book as a substitute for the Person. The book exists to take you to the Person.

The gift has already changed tenses.**Here is where joy should rise in the chest.**

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24)

Has. Has crossed over. Not “will one day hope to.” Guzik emphasizes that everlasting life begins now. Belief in Jesus is not a ticket for later. It is a change of address—from the realm of death into the realm of life. The verdict is already in. Condemnation is not pending for the one who has come.

Paul then explains how a dead person can move:

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:4–5)

“But God.” Those two words, as the Life Application tradition has long said, are the gospel in miniature. Dead people do not cooperate their way into resurrection. God did not wait until we were lovable. Guzik: He loved us when we were dead. He shared our death so we could share His life. Grace is not God meeting you halfway. Grace is God doing the whole thing for the helpless.

Then Paul shows the legal side of the same miracle:

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.” (Colossians 2:13–14)

Guzik lingers on the picture. The “handwriting” is the record of debt—every charge the law could bring. God did not file it. He wiped it out, took it out of the way, and nailed it to the cross. The accusation that hung over you was pinned to Jesus. Forgiveness here is *charizomai*—grace in verb form. You were not upgraded. You were raised.

Why this stands above every other system:

Sin pays a wage (death). Scripture points to a Person. That Person is Himself the life. He came to give that life now, in abundance. God, rich in mercy, made the dead alive with Christ and nailed the entire record of guilt to the cross. The whole thing is a gift.

Other religions can offer sincerity, discipline, beauty, and moral seriousness. They cannot offer a Savior who dies in the place of the dead and then is their life. They cannot say, “You have already crossed from death to life.” They cannot nail the record to a cross and call it finished. The uniqueness is not Christian manners. The uniqueness is a risen Christ who claims exclusive access to the Father and then proves the claim by resurrection—public, historical, attested, and still standing.

Guzik’s logic on John 14:6 is the necessary one: if Jesus is not the only way, He is not any way. A man who says “no one comes to the Father except through me” is either Lord, liar, or lunatic. There is no polite middle. And if He is Lord, then salvation cannot be one option among many spiritual technologies. It is a gift that can only be received.

Where the joy is

The joy is not that you finally found a religion that fits. The joy is that you cannot earn what you have already been given.

You do not have to make yourself alive. He already did.

You do not have to erase the record. He already nailed it.

You do not have to find a way to the Father. The Way came to you.

You do not wait for life to start after the funeral. “He has crossed over from death to life.”

You do not receive a thinner, religious version of existence. He came that you may have life to the full. That is why these texts belong together under John 14:6. Jesus does not hand you a map and wish you luck. He gives you Himself. And when you have the Son, you have life.

Sources: 12-13

Resources: (1) Rev. Brad Standfest, (2) Logos Bible Commentaries; [3] Edward D. Andrews, *Is the Quran the Word of God? Is Islam the One True Faith?* (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2017). [4] Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam Hani Walker, *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God* [2 Volumes] (New York, NY: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 525–526. [5] Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Muslims* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 39. (6) Barton, Bruce B. 1993. *John. Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House. (7) Barton, Bruce B. 1993. *John. Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House. Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. (8) *1 & 2 Corinthians. Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House. (9) Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. *1 & 2 Corinthians. Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House. [7] Edward D. Andrews, *Is the Quran the Word of God? Is Islam the One True Faith?* (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2017). [10] Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam Hani Walker, *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God* [2 Volumes] (New York, NY: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 525–526. [9] Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Muslims* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 39. (11) *Scripture quotations: Holy Bible, New International Version*, 1984. (12) David Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary: John 5; John 10; John 14; Romans 6; Ephesians 2; Colossians 2*. (12) *Life Application Study Bible notes on John 5:24, 5:39–40; John 10:10; John 14:6; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:4–5, 2:8–9; Colossians 2:13–14*. (13) Supporting classic citations as used by Guzik: Thomas à Kempis (via F. F. Bruce) on John 14:6; Adam Clarke on Romans 6:23.

Sermon Notes:

Happy Sunday to everyone... Good morning to everyone joining us online... Many cramming last vacations in before fall sets in.

I love you all where you are. May you have a joyous time...

Real quick, here are our AVC Connections... (Baptism / Fall Classes) YouTube, App, Facebook / Website

[Let's Pray]

Over the last few weeks our backbone text has been Jesus' promise and truth claim found in John 14:6.

I'm going to read John 14:5-6 which pulls in Doubting Thomas...

PP John 14:5-6

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Notice Jesus didn't say I am **A** way, **A** truth or **A** life... No. I AM:
The Way, The Truth, and The Life...

No other world religion makes this truth claim... nor comes close...

Thus far we have covered the Way... Last week we covered the Truth... Today we will discuss "The Life." I want to once again bring out the top 4 world religions... so we can understand the truth of Christianity and Jesus... compared to man-made religion...

Islam has 2.1 billion followers.

Everlasting life may be granted if you believe in Allah and in Muhammad as the last true prophet. Allah can grant you mercy only if you do good deeds and live righteously. A person must fulfill the 5 Pillars. Bottom line: You work your way into Paradise... if you're lucky and only if Allah's mercy extends to you.

Hinduism: 1.2 billion followers

The soul is trapped in a cycle of rebirth driven by karma... Everlasting liberation is achieved by self-enlightenment through good karma, devotion, knowledge or yoga in which you escape rebirth forever.

Buddhism: 500 million followers

There is no permanent soul or eternal personal life. The goal is to end rebirth and suffering through the Noble Eightfold Path reaching Nirvana.

Sikhism: 25-30 million

The soul is caught in the cycle of rebirth due to our ego and separation from God. Everlasting life is attained by eliminating rebirth, serving others, living honestly and meditating on God who by his grace will give you liberation from rebirth.

Get this... 46% of our world's population believes in one of those about life or everlasting life... It's not what God has done for you... but what you can do for yourself...

All of these lean into salvation coming from the human.

If you're confused about all this... so were the Jewish people in Jesus' day... You had two primary groups... the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

In very simplistic terms the Sadducees did not believe in everlasting life but the Pharisees did...

One Pharisee named Nicodemus comes to Jesus with his questions... and Jesus delivers the supernatural truth about everlasting life...

Let's open up the Bible and read about this encounter... Read John 3:1-8 & 16-17 (Preach Through)

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."
"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Friends, Christianity stands alone above all other world religions... Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and in Christ is everlasting life

Humanity's problem was and is that we try to save ourselves... It can't be done...

Maybe you have lots of problems... or an addiction...

Maybe it's a health crisis or family issue... You can't deliver yourself... Jesus can...

Listen... Jesus came to give you life... not just in the future but right now...

For the rest of this sermon I am going to saturate your hearts and minds with God's truth for us...

This truth is not based off of wishful thinking... It's not based off of karma or hoping you make it to heaven by Allah's grace... (It's about God's grace and love)

PP John 10:10 says: The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have abundant life and have Life to the full.

Jesus talks about people's refusal... stubborn hearts... Listen

PP John 5:39-40

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. - They were trying to give themselves life

Jesus also said in the same section of Scripture:

**PP John 5:24 **

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

Friends, salvation is a gift from God... not based off of your righteous deeds...

PP Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It's God's love for us and humanity that life comes:

PP Ephesians 2:4-5

Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were

dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

It is Christ who makes us alive.

PP Colossians 2:13-14

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

Can someone give me an Amen!! I feel alive again just by reading those holy words...

I want to conclude today with another impactful word from a murderer to a believer: (Apostle Paul wrote 13 books of the N.T.)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 & 19-23 (Read in Bible)

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Friends, church and Christians, we have broken this down for the last several weeks... There is no doubt.

Jesus is The Way, Truth and Life...

Stand with me in closing.

Devotional Questions:

1. Jesus did not say, “I am a life.” He said, “I am the life” (John 14:6). Where have you been treating Him like one good option instead of the only source of real life?

2. About 46% of the world is still trying to work, earn, or enlighten their way into lasting life. Where do you still live as if heaven depends on your record instead of what Jesus already finished?

- 3. Nicodemus came at night with more questions than courage (John 3:1-8).** What part of “you must be born again” still feels unfinished, confusing, or costly for you?
- 4. Jesus told him God sent the Son so the world might be saved through Him, not condemned (John 3:16-17).** Who in your life is still trying to save themselves? How does that change the way you pray for them—and talk to them?
- 5. “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).** Where does it feel like the thief is still stealing—health, family, habit, fear, or hope? What would “life to the full” look like this week, not just someday?
- 6. The religious leaders searched the Scriptures thinking they already possessed life, yet refused to come to Jesus (John 5:39-40).** What good Christian habit (study, service, attendance, being “fine”) might be keeping you from actually coming to Him for life right now?
- 7. “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life... he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).** Have you crossed over? If so, what still feels dead that needs to come under that new life?
- 8. “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).** What wages are you still trying to pay? What would it look like to receive the gift again today?
- 9. When you were dead, God made you alive with Christ and nailed the written code that stood against you to the cross (Colossians 2:13-14).** What old accusation, shame, or “you still owe” list is still trying to stand against you? Name it, then speak the cross over it.
- 10. If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are to be pitied more than all people (1 Corinthians 15:19-23).** How does the risen Jesus—the first fruits—give you a reason to keep walking in His sandals when this life feels heavy?