

# Believe in the Gospel (John 3:14-21)

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Date: 05 April 2026

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Amen. Happy Easter, church. I've got to catch my breath. That was amazing. And what a wonderful day it is to praise God. Children, we are ready for Children's Church. You may make your way to the back. Thank you so much, Praistine, for leading us well in those songs as we proclaim who Jesus is.

Oh, what a day to celebrate. I am so glad that you are here to worship with us today. We are here to celebrate that we serve a risen Savior. Amen? Amen. We serve a risen Savior. And that is the greatest news the world has ever heard.

We are here to celebrate the good news that Jesus left the glory of heaven. He humbly lived a perfect life among us. He went to the cross to take your sin and my sin, to nail it to the cross. And because of that, God no longer sees us as an enemy, but He sees us as His children.

He no longer sees your sin. It has been thrown into the sea of His forgetfulness to be remembered no more. Because of this, we are no longer an enemy, but we are a child of God. And if this were not reason enough to celebrate today, then maybe this will get us fired up.

Peter in Acts 2. Amen. It was not possible for death to hold Jesus. And because of that, if you are a child of God, I have good news for you. It is not possible for death to have a grip on you either.

[ 1 : 46 ] This is why we celebrate. This is why we celebrate. This is the good news of the gospel. Every year at Easter, we have this focus on the resurrection. We celebrate with great excitement the fact that Jesus is no longer in the tomb. If you go to Israel today and you ask them to take you to the tomb of Jesus, they'll take you there.

You can walk inside the tomb. And guess who's not in the tomb? Jesus. There is not a body in that tomb. This is what everything hinges on. This is what our hope is based on. This is the most important thing of Christianity.

This is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 3. He says, For I deliver to you this as of first importance. In other words, although everything in the Bible is important, and everything in the Bible is completely true, not everything holds this weight.

For example, we may disagree on the method of baptism. We may have differences of opinion on pre-meal, post-meal, and ah-meal. We may differ on our understanding of God's sovereignty and man's free will.

And you may care less about any of those things that I just said. But the gospel is not something we waver on. It is the most important. It says, And that is what everything hinges on.

[ 3 : 29 ] In fact, Paul goes on to say this, And if Christ has not been raised, He says, Then our preaching is in vain, and our faith is in vain. If Christ is not raised, then what I'm doing today is in vain.

Then what we are building our lives on is in vain. This is why Easter is such a big deal. Because everything is riding on this truth.

You see, Christianity stands or falls on the historical bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. No resurrection, no Christianity.

But if the tomb is empty, if this is true, then it changes everything. Then it changes everything. On this Easter Sunday, I want us to look at a passage of Scripture that is incredibly familiar.

It is probably one that many of us have heard many times. In fact, it may be one of the most familiar passages in all of Scripture. Or at least it contains the most familiar verse in all of Scripture.

[ 4 : 35 ] I want us to take a look at John 3, verses 14 through 21. And it is important to note that as we look at this passage, we are jumping into the middle of a story.

We are jumping into the middle of this story. And the story may be familiar. It is a story that I have been thinking a lot about this week and in the past few weeks. As we remember this story of

Nicodemus coming to meet Jesus at night.

And I think it is important for us to understand who Nicodemus is and the significance of this to really understand this passage. You see, Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

He was a Pharisee who understood the Old Testament as good as anybody. He knew it forwards and backwards. And as a Pharisee, he had most of, if not the entire Old Testament memorized.

And because of his standing of who he was, we can almost take it to the bank that he knew everything in the Old Testament and had it memorized. Because in this passage, we're also told that Nicodemus, in addition to being a Pharisee, he was a ruler of Israel.

[ 5 : 47 ] So in other words, he was probably one of the 70 members of the Sanhedrin, the rulers of Israel, who there were 70 Pharisees that made up the Sanhedrin.

And he was a part of this. And so he ruled over Israel. But then Jesus also tells us that he was the teacher of Israel. He says, are you not the teacher of Israel?

And so Nicodemus was incredibly well-respected. Not only was he brilliant, but he was also a pillar of the Jewish community who is coming to Jesus by night.

And most likely, he's coming to Jesus by night to avoid being seen. He understands the significance of who Jesus is. And so he's coming to him to kind of test the waters.

If anybody was going to be able to pick up on who the Messiah was, surely it would be Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, who understood the prophecies, who understood the Old Testament.

[ 6 : 48 ] And so he's coming to Jesus to try to figure out who he is. But he's not sure enough, so he wants to come to him at night. And then after a conversation about the necessity of being born again and of not being able to save yourself, Jesus tells Nicodemus these words.

And this is where I want us to pick up today as we look at this passage. And so if you have a copy of God's Word with you, I want to invite you to open with me to John chapter 3, starting in verse 14. And this is what the Word of the Lord says. It says, Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and people love darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

[ 8 : 30 ] Again, much of this passage that we just read is very familiar to us. It's a story that we've heard over and over again. In fact, it's so familiar that there's the possibility that we may overlook the significance of what is being stated here.

But I want us to see a progression of three truths in this passage. I want us to see a progression of these three truths in this passage that I hope will help us to clearly look to Jesus and believe.

I want us to see this progression of looking to the cross, of seeing God's love, and believing in the gospel. So to begin with, this text tells us to look to the cross.

The text tells us to look to the cross. It says, 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.

This may be one of my favorite parts of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus here. After having this deep theological conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus tells him, He says, 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.

[ 9 : 52 ] Again, Nicodemus knows very well this story that Jesus is telling him. He says, As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.

This story comes from Numbers chapter 21. And in Numbers chapter 21, the people of Israel have left Egypt. God has provided in miraculous ways for them.

He's provided over and over again for these people. And yet now they're coming and they're complaining. They're complaining about the deliverance that God has provided. And if we think back on it, God has provided in some big ways.

We see the ten plagues in Egypt that God showed Pharaoh to let the people go. From the Nile turning to blood, to darkness being on the land, to the frogs, to the locusts, to the cattle, the livestock being killed, to the darkness of the land for three days, and then finally the death of the firstborn.

And so we see God providing, but God doesn't stop providing there. He continues to provide in the wilderness. He continues to protect them. He continues to lead, guide, and direct them.

[ 11 : 03 ] He continues to give them food and water and everything that they need. And now the people are complaining. They're upset about the deliverance that God provided. He saved them.

And now they're complaining about the salvation that He provided. And so God sends these snakes among the people. And this is where we pick up in Numbers chapter 21.

It says, 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 may 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. Now you may recognize this symbol, this picture that is being painted for us here in Numbers.

[ 12 : 08 ] You may see it at the doctor's office or on a prescription or something like that because this symbol of a serpent being raised up on a pole has now made its way into the medical field so that it represents this medicine, these doctor's offices, this healing.

And it's kind of ironic when you think about it. Without the context of this story, this would be difficult for us to wrap our minds around. Why would you use this as a symbol for healing?

And again, now in light of what Jesus is coming to do, it helps us understand it in an even greater way. Because even when you look at the story in the Old Testament, you don't get to see the fulfillment of it yet.

And the story in the Old Testament is interesting. The people were being bitten by these snakes. The curse that God has sent is biting them, and many people are dying.

And then what he tells Moses to do is to take the curse, take the serpent, and put it on a pole so that when people look to the curse, they will be healed from the curse.

[ 13 : 15 ] And it's kind of strange for us to think about it in this context until we get to the New Testament, until we get to Jesus, and until we understand, as Paul tells us, that Christ redeemed us from the curse by becoming what?

By becoming a curse for us. He made him to be sin who knew no sin. He made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin. And so Jesus becomes a curse for us.

And so when he tells Nicodemus, 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. He's telling him a story that he knows.

He's telling that the people of Israel were to look and believe. They were to look, believe, and be healed from the curse. Now Jesus is telling Nicodemus, hey, remember that story?

Yeah, it was paving the way for me. People must look to the cross, must look to the Son of Man being lifted up, who becomes a curse for the people, who takes their sin on himself.

[ 14 : 20 ] They must look to the cross. And so as we think about this, he brings it home for Nicodemus. So the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes may have eternal life.

We must look to the cross. But as we look to the cross, I want us to see something very clearly today. As we look to the cross, I want us to see God's love.

I want us to see God's love. We look to the cross and we see God's love. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. This verse right here, John 3.16, may be the most famous, well-known, and most loved verse in the Bible.

If a person has one verse of Scripture memorized, there's a good chance it is John 3.16. It's probably the first verse that many of us learned as children, but this verse begins with something that is easy for us to overlook.

[ 15 : 34 ] It begins with four. It shows us that verse 16 connects to verses 14 and 15. Jesus says that he must be lifted up in death, and this death is a difficult truth for us to wrap our minds around, but verse 16 gives us the why.

The death of Jesus was necessary because God loved us. And so let's look at this verse in greater detail. It says, For God so loved.

You know, it's easy for us to read this so as the amount of love that God has for us. Much like I may tell my wife or kids that I love you so much.

And when I tell my wife or my kids that I love you so much, what I'm telling them is, is there's a great amount of love that I have for you. And so when they ask me, Daddy, how much do you love us? I love you so much. And it begins to become really easy for us to think of it in an amount of love.

And it is a true statement that God has an unbelievable amount of love for us.

[16:47] But this so is not referring to how much God loves us, but rather to how God loves us. The CSB translates it this way.

It says, For God loved the world in this way. Or the ISV, it says, For this is how God loved. It is true that God loves a lot.

He loves you and me a tremendous amount. But the remarkable truth of this passage is how God loves. God demonstrates for His love for us by laying down His life for ours.

Romans 5, 6 through 8, it states, For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person, one would dare even to die.

But God shows His love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He died for us.

[17:53] This is how God loves, by laying down His life, by sending Jesus, who freely laid down His life. But what is equally remarkable of how God loves is who God loves.

It tells us, For God so loved the world. You know, again, a lot of times when we think of the world, our minds go to how big God's love for us. The world is big.

He is huge. And so we think about God's love and this vast amount of love, this big love that He has for us. And His love is big. It is sufficient for my sins, for your sins, and for the sins of anyone else who believes in Him.

But most of the time that world is used in John's Gospel and in many other places, it is referring to the brokenness of the world. We're living in this world for this world.

The sinfulness of the world. God didn't just send Jesus to die for people who were trying their very best. He didn't just look down and say, You know what? Everybody's doing a really good job.

[18:57] They've turned things around a lot. They're doing pretty good. They just can't quite make it over the hump. And so everybody's trying really hard. So now that they're trying really hard, I'm going to send Jesus.

That's not the picture that we get in Scripture. What we see in Scripture is that we were dead in our sins and trespasses, that we're following the course of this world.

The Spirit, the sons, is now working the sons of disobedience. We're following this world. We're going in the exact direction that Satan wants us to go. We're objects of God's wrath.

And that is when God sends Jesus. This is a beautiful thing. This is a beautiful picture of who God loves.

God didn't just send Jesus to die for people who were trying their very best, who were pretty good and needed a little help. He sent Jesus for those who hated Him, for those who were His enemy, which is all of us.

[19:56] And then verse 17 tells us why God loves in this manner. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

Why did God love in this manner? Why did He love the broken? So that He could provide a way of salvation. To me, what is most remarkable about this display of love in Jesus' life is that He died willingly.

He did this willingly. We've been going through Hebrews on Sunday morning for the last few months, and soon we're going to be finding our way to Hebrews chapter 12.

And in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2, we are told something incredible about Jesus. We're told something that is remarkable about His love. And it's a passage that I've read so many times, but yet it wasn't until recently that this verse really began to come alive for me.

It says this. It's talking about the joy that Christ has. It says, 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.

[ 21 : 20 ] The joy that was set before Him. It says that Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.

And this is a passage, a verse that's easy just to read right over, but it says that He endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him. If you think about it and you think about Jesus' life, what is the one thing that He has on this side of the cross that He didn't have on that side of the cross? He's always had a perfect relationship with the Father. He's always had perfect communion with Him. But what's the one thing that He has on this side of the cross that He didn't have on that side of the cross?

And that's a relationship with you and me. We're the joy that was set before Him. We're the reason He endured the cross. It was love that kept Him there.

The joy that was set before Him. Sally Lloyd-Jones wrote an incredible children's book that I would encourage you to read to your kids and then after your kids are grown, keep reading it for yourself because it is a beautiful picture of how Jesus is all throughout Scripture.

[ 22 : 32 ] It's the Jesus Storybook Bible and when it comes to the cross, when it comes to this story, she says this. She tells it this way. She says, they nailed Jesus to the cross.

Father, forgive them, Jesus gasped. They don't understand what they're doing. You say you've come to rescue us, people shouted, but you can't even rescue yourself.

But they were wrong. Jesus could have rescued Himself. A legion of angels would have flown to His side if He called. If you're really the Son of God, you could just climb down off that cross, they said. And of course, they were right. Jesus could have climbed down. Actually, He could have just said a word and made it all stop. Like when He healed that little girl and stilled the storm and fed 5,000 people.

But Jesus stayed. You see, they didn't just, they didn't understand. It wasn't the nails that kept Jesus there. It wasn't the nails that kept Jesus on the cross.

[ 23 : 35 ] It was love. Oftentimes, we play this game with God. You know, like you do when you're little and you go out and pick the daisies.

You know, He loves me. He loves me not. And you go all the way around it and a lot of times we play this game with God. You know, I got a promotion, a new job. He loves me. I lost my job. He loves me not. I got married. He loves me. That marriage just crumbled. He loves me not. And oftentimes, we play this game over and over again in our minds of God loves me. He loves me not. He loves me. He loves me not. And it's easy for us to look at our circumstances and second guess God's love for us. I want to challenge you to look to the cross and see God's love and let it be what settles the issue for you once and for all if God loves you or not.

You see, it's an argument from the greater to the lesser. If leaving the glory of heaven, if taking on the sin of the world, if becoming a curse, if the mocking, if the shame and death on the cross didn't keep Jesus from loving you, guess what?

[ 24 : 47 ] Nothing will. If that didn't keep Him from loving you, then nothing will. And that's something you can take to the bank. My hope and prayer today is that we look to the cross.

We see God's love and finally we believe the gospel. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

You see, this passage clearly shows that there is only one way to the Father and it is through Jesus. We mentioned it earlier, the beauty of God loving the world, the sinful and broken world in such a way that He made a way for people to be taken from death to life.

This is a beautiful thing and we are reminded of this in so many different ways that Jesus made a way for us.

But we can also lose sight of it and place that hope on other things. For example, oftentimes there's things that get in the way of us seeing it clearly. We think attendance will help.

[ 25 : 58 ] Well, let me tell you, you can be born into the church. You can be on the cradle roll from the moment that you came into this world. You can be dedicated to church.

You can be baptized in the church. You can put a desk in the church and work every single day of your life in the church. You can get a bed and you can put it in a church. We've got some rooms available if you want to do that.

We don't have a shower, but you can stay there if you want. You can do those things and you can spend every single night in the church, spend every single waking moment. And when you die,

sometimes there's places where you can be buried right next to the church. But let me tell you, those things don't get you any closer to God. Those things will not save you. But no matter how close you are to religion, it will not bring you closer to God. There is only one substitute for your sin and my sin, and His name is Jesus. Whether we admit it or not, each of us are desperate.

[ 27 : 01 ] We are desperate for salvation. We are desperate for acceptance. We are desperate for meaning in this life. And deep down, we know that we're sinners and that we have this need.

And oftentimes, we try over and over again to do things to save ourselves. We try over and over again to cover up this void inside of us because we don't like to feel this desperate. We don't like to feel like we don't have meaning. We don't like to feel like our lives aren't counting for something. And so we try to cover it up over and over again with things. We try to give our lives to things that will make ourselves feel better.

And we think, if we can just do this, then my life will have meaning. My life will have purpose if I can just accomplish this. I've heard it said this way, that the loneliest moment in life is when you have just achieved that which you thought would deliver the ultimate, and it's let you down.

The loneliest moment in life is when you've just achieved, when you've just gotten what you think is going to give your life meaning and purpose, and only to find out it's not enough.

[ 28 : 13 ] It's not enough. We are desperate. We are hopeless. And oftentimes, it is hard for us to understand this hopelessness that we face apart from Jesus.

And what I like to do at times is to think of a real-life situation that seems to be hopeless so we can wrap our minds around this. You may have heard me share a story similar to this, or you may even remember this story from when it was on the news.

This actually came from news about 16 years ago. Many of you will remember watching the news, and all of a sudden, the world's attention was in Chile.

There were 33 miners who were trapped in a mine in the Atacama Desert in Chile. 33 miners that were trapped after the mine had collapsed, and nobody knew if they were alive or dead, and they were trapped underneath the desert, one of the driest deserts in the world, for 69 days.

The first 17 days of that entrapment were without any contact to the outside world. They didn't know if people were going to find them. They heard the mine, they heard the drills going all around them, but nothing was coming to the place where they were, the cavern where they were trapped.

[ 29 : 30 ] Nothing was coming to them. For 17 days, they had no idea if people even knew they were alive or dead. And finally, on the 17th day, that drill bit makes its way into the cavern where they were, but yet again, they realized, this isn't big enough for us to get out.

Now they just know that we're down here. And so for the next 52 days, they were completely dependent on the outside world to give them food, to give them water, to pump oxygen down to them.

They were completely dependent on others to find a way to rescue them because they couldn't rescue themselves. And so finally, they were able to bore a big enough hole to lower a basket down and that one person could come up at a time.

And so one person would get in this basket and squeeze in as tightly as they could and take the 30 minute ride it took to get 2,300 feet above where they were.

30 minutes as they're trapped in this where all they can see is rock around them, bringing that, they will make it to the surface. And this seems like a hopeless state to be in.

[ 30 : 37 ] That's one of the most hopeless points that you can imagine yourself being in. But here's the thing. If the Bible is true, and I believe that the Bible is true from cover to cover, if the Bible is true, then those 33 miners had a better chance of finding a spoon and clawing their way out 2,300 feet than you and I do of saving ourselves.

They had a better chance of saving themselves out of 2,300 feet underneath rock in the driest place on earth. They had a better chance of saving themselves than you and I do of saving ours.

You see, when we think about this hopeless state, we're reminded that we need Jesus. I've heard it said like this, there are only two kinds of religion in the world, the one that you carry and the one that carries you.

One tries to tell you what you must do to make yourself acceptable to God and the other tells you what God has done to make you acceptable to Him.

You see, our faith hinges on the good news of the gospel. That verse that Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15, for I delivered to you of first importance what I also received that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

[ 32 : 06 ] You see, because the tomb is empty, because Jesus was resurrected, anything is possible. The resurrection tells us that Jesus has won.

The resurrection tells us that Jesus has won. He is victorious over death, hell, and the grave. And if we place our trust in Him, His victory over death, hell, and the grave becomes our victory over death, hell, and the grave.

Let us look to the cross. May we look to the cross and we see God's love as we look to the cross and believe the gospel message. If this is something that you need to do, today, to put your faith and your trust in Jesus, to look to the cross, to see God's love and believe the gospel, then let me encourage you to get that right today.

What better day than Easter to give your life to Jesus and go from death to life. But the thing is, this isn't just something for new believers, for people who aren't Christians.

This is something that we give our lives to. Maybe we need to look to the cross, see God's love, believe the gospel, and follow Him in believers' baptism.

[ 33 : 28 ] The great news today is in the 11 o'clock service, we have four baptisms. Three of the four are adult baptisms where they have gone through the rituals before.

They've done the different things, but now they've given their life to Jesus and they want to get that order right. They want it to be believer's baptism where they've given their life to Jesus and they're following in obedience to what He's called them to do.

Maybe for you today, this seeing the cross, this looking to the cross, seeing God's love, and believing the gospel is following in obedience there. But this is also a message for every single person.

May we every day look to the cross, see God's love, believe this gospel, and live a transformed life. Because if we claim to enter into a life-changing relationship with a King of kings and Lord of lords, then our lives are going to look different.

And may we see that clearly. May we come to this passage, a very familiar passage. May we look, may we see, may we believe. Father, thank You so very much for who You are and all that You do for us.

[ 34 : 42 ] Lord, we thank You for the cross. We thank You that You took our sin and our shame and our regret on Yourself and You gave us new life. But Lord, today we also thank You for the victory.

Lord, we are grateful that You lived the perfect life, made the ultimate sacrifice, and because of who You are, it was not possible for You to be held down by death.

And Lord, that's a truth that we hold on to, that we cling to, that because we give our life to You, just like it was not possible for death to hold You down, it is no longer possible for death to have the final say in our life.

So Lord, may we, may we look to the cross. May we see Your love and believe this gospel message. We ask all this in Jesus' precious name.

Amen. We're going to invite you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation. And if God is speaking to you this morning, won't you respond in a way that brings His name, honor, and glory?