

Look and Live!

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[0 : 00] Please open up your Bibles this morning to the Gospel of John. Some of you may be here for the first time and think that we just happened to pick John 3:16 because it's Easter Sunday, but we've actually been walking through the Gospel of John for a few months now together and in God's providence.

As I laid out the preaching schedule, I realized that here on Easter Sunday, we'd have the opportunity to preach from one of, if not the most cherished, beloved, summary verses of the Gospel message in the entire Bible.

So if you would, open up your Bibles to John chapter 3. We're going to read from verses 13 through 16. If you didn't bring your own Bible with you, we have a few Bibles there in the seat backs in front of you, and you can find this passage on page 835 of those Bibles there in front of you.

Either way, I encourage you to have the Bible open because we're looking to the Word of God and not just listening to what I had to say this morning. So if you would, John 3 verses 13 through 16. Follow along with me as I read.

Jesus says, No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

[1 : 29] For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

This is good news. This is the Word of God. Let's bow and pray once more. Father, we thank you for your perfect Word.

That is inerrant, it's infallible, it's living, and it's active. And we pray now as it goes forth, would it accomplish the purposes for which you send it. We pray in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Friday evening, we gathered here for our Good Friday service just a couple of evenings ago as we reflected on the death of Christ on the cross.

And the text that we considered here was 1 Corinthians 1 verse 18, which says this. It says, There is an eternal difference here between those who are perishing on one hand and those who are being saved on the other.

[2 : 44] And the difference is how you view the word of the cross, the message of the gospel. Is it foolishness to you or is it the very power of God for your salvation?

I love the story of Gaylord Kambarami. Maybe you've heard this story before. Mr. Kambarami was the general secretary of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe.

And he tells the story of how he once tried to sell a copy of the New Testament to a man who, at least on the surface, appeared interested in what he was selling. What turned out to be the case was, in fact, the man was not interested in the message of the book.

He was actually interested in the paper. To his natural eyes, this word of God was just another book. And he had a bad habit of smoking.

And so to his natural eyes, the size of the pages and the texture of the paper was just the right size and material for rolling up his cigarettes.

[3 : 52] And so Mr. Kambarami, he was confident that he wouldn't be able to change this man's mind, but even more confident in the power of the message of the gospel, he made this man a deal.

He said, I will give you this book for free on one condition, that you read every page before you smoke it. 15 years went by.

People didn't see each other, speak to each other, didn't know what had happened. Mr. Kambarami attended a convention in Zimbabwe where the speaker was a church evangelist. And to his surprise, the speaker looked out and singled him out from the audience.

And he said, this man doesn't remember me, but I remember him. About 15 years ago, he tried to sell me a New Testament. And when I told him that I would just use the pages to smoke and roll cigarettes, he said, I'll make you a deal.

You read each page before you smoke it. Well, I smoked through Matthew. I smoked through Mark. And then I smoked through Luke. But when I got to chapter 3 of John, verse 16, I couldn't smoke anymore.

[5 : 10] He said, my life was changed forever. The message that that page proclaimed. Friends, the message of the gospel is powerful to save any who would believe it.

This is what we profess this morning. So I will make you a deal that if you will listen intently for the next 30 minutes or so to what I have to say from this book, from what we're about to hear from the chapter that we're talking about in John, if you will truly believe the message of the gospel this morning, then I guarantee that you too will be changed.

We're jumping in the middle here to a conversation that Jesus is having with a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus, and he's laid out for him the one necessary condition for anyone to enter into the kingdom of God.

Jesus gave this requirement to Nicodemus, and he gives it to us here this morning. A humanly impossible requirement. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus' last recorded words to this requirement, you see it there in John 3, verse 9. He said, how can these things be?

[6 : 35] How can these things be? Our passage this morning, our verses that we're going to see here in just a few minutes, is Jesus' response to this question.

He says, it's not by your goodness, not by your heritage, it's not by your works. It is only by believing the message of the gospel.

By believing the good news of Jesus Christ. And we see that good news here this morning in four parts. If you're taking notes, this is going to be our outline this morning.

We see four life-changing truths of the gospel. Four life-changing truths of the gospel. We'll see the problem, the provision, the power, and the proof.

The problem, the provision, the power, and the proof. First, we see here our great problem.

[7 : 37] How can these things be? This was Nicodemus' question. Well, Jesus says in chapter 3, verse 13, that he is the one, he is the only one who has ascended up into heaven.

The only one who has descended from heaven. So if we would learn anything about what it means to be born again, anything about what it means to enter the kingdom of God, we must come and listen to him.

Listen to his authoritative voice. And here's what he says, verse 14. Look there. I love this. Here's this Pharisee who has spent his entire life devoted to the Old Testament scriptures seeking to understand God's word.

And Jesus here sums it up in a sentence. 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.

What is he talking about? This is a reference that Nicodemus would have understood, but it's probably less familiar to us. He's referring a story from the book of Numbers chapter 21.

[8 : 45] So I'm going to read that story to us. You can turn there if you'd like. Numbers chapter 21. And we'll see what Jesus is saying. Here in Numbers 21, the people of Israel have come out of Egypt.

They've come out of their slavery in Egypt. They're wandering in the wilderness. And here's what happens starting in verse 4. It says, Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people.

And they bit the people, so that many of the people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you.

Pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people, and the Lord said to Moses, Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, And everyone who is bitten when he sees it shall live.

So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole, And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. Now, I would be willing to bet that most of us in the room this morning Have not been attacked by a big brood of fiery serpents like this event here in Numbers.

[10 : 29] But I want us to see several lessons here from this account Because we share the same essential problem that the Israelites had here in the wilderness.

This is an illustration of our sin. So lesson number one, sin is foolishness. Sin is foolishness.

There is nothing rational. There is nothing logical about sin. And since we are here on the outside of this story, We can, from the outside looking in, See all of this very clearly.

That it's foolish. Do you see what was going on here? These people are complaining that their deliverance from slavery is taking too long. How foolish is this?

It says verse 4, Numbers 21, They became impatient on the way. God has just brought them out of their harsh slavery. He's brought them through the Red Sea. He's brought judgment on their enemies.

[11 : 30] And in their foolish sin, they get impatient. And what was their complaint? They don't like the food. They're hangry.

Verse 5, look there. The people spoke against God and against Moses. Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, And we loathe this worthless food.

Do you hear that? There is no food, And we hate this food. This is foolish. That's not really true. What is true is that they are simply not content with God's plan, Not content with God's provision, Not content with God being God.

This is sin, And this is foolish. Lesson number two. Sin brings disastrous consequence. Sin brings disastrous consequence.

What happened? Verse 6, Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, And they bit the people, So that many of the people of Israel died.

[12 : 40] This is quick and immediate consequence for sin. Some of y'all I know don't mind snakes. I've seen some of you move towards snakes before.

That's not how we roll in my house. That's not how we handle it. There's no such thing as a good snake in our house. A few years ago I was in the garage with one of my sons, And he was digging through the toys, And he picked up a helmet that had been there for who knows how long.

I'm not sure. He picked it up off the ground. He tipped it up over his head. You see where this is going? And the snake came out of the helmet on top of his head, Bounced off his head onto his foot, Slithered away.

This was the judgment of God. I'm not sure who sinned in that moment. This was our worst nightmare. My wife didn't go outside the whole summer.

I think we realized that summer that the water behind our house was prime territory for an abundance of serpents in our backyard. I think I might have killed 20 or 30 snakes that summer.

[13 : 47] If you're snake friendly, I don't even feel the need to apologize to you. My wife did not go outside. It was terrible. But that was not even a fraction of what's happening here in numbers.

Of what this must have been like. Fiery serpents, Venomous, Deadly, Dangerous, Not just a few, But enough to come upon the whole people of Israel. Angry, Ready to strike.

This is clear, Immediate, Visible consequence for the people's sin. And it says many of the people of Israel died. This is shocking to us when we read it.

Why? It's because we don't often see sin and consequence this closely together. In fact, we often act surprised when we read scripture and we see punishment for sin.

This seems severe to us, but we have to realize the seriousness of sin. And until we do, This will never make sense to us. The cross will never make sense to us.

[14 : 58] Sin is rebellion against God. And we're told the wages of sin is death. If you have sinned even once, You have earned death for your sin.

Anything short of that is mercy. Sin brings disastrous consequence. And the reason that this sort of quick consequence surprises us is because in God's patient mercy, He often withholds the punishment that sin deserves.

And we are so accustomed to the mercy of God that we're surprised by judgment. But if we truly understood the seriousness of our sin, Church, we would be surprised by mercy.

All of us live in a flood of incredible mercy. But friend, do not be deceived into thinking that God's mercy towards sinners will last forever.

Because lesson number three, All of our sin, All of our rebellion, Is an offense to God.

[16 : 08] And it will be dealt with. Ultimately, this event in Numbers chapter 21 is a picture of God's holy wrath against sin.

Some sin carries immediate consequence. All sin carries eternal consequence. God is just. He will judge all sin.

We think that we can hide our sin from God like Adam and Eve hide ourselves in the bushes. We cannot hide anything from God. And the day is coming when all will be exposed.

And we all will give an account. This is a great problem for sinners like me. And like you. Our greatest problem.

We need to see. It's not stress. It's not our jobs. It's not our relationships. It's not our financial situation. It's not whatever political drama happens to be going on this week.

[17 : 08] Our greatest problem. The greatest problem for sinners. Is the wrath of God that stands against you in your sin. Our greatest problem.

Is that we must be born again of the spirit of God. Washed clean by his spirit. Or we cannot enter the kingdom of God.

So where do we turn? We have a great problem. But second. The second gospel truth here is that God has made a greater provision.

Second. God has made a greater provision. The unbelievably good news of the gospel is that God himself has provided all that we need in order to be saved from his wrath against our sin.

Think back again to Numbers 21. The Israelites are perishing. The snakes are biting. The people are feeling the searing pain and consequence for their guilt and their sin.

[18 : 12] Look what he says to Moses in verse 8. Chapter 21. Numbers. He says, 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. The Lord provided a way of escape.

And this is incredible. He does not have to do this. He does not need to do this. He's not compelled or constrained by any external cause to make him do this.

He's not compelled by our goodness, by our deserving, by our earning. It is simply in his sheer heart of mercy and grace towards sinners that he chooses to provide exactly what we need to live.

He provides one effective way to be saved. One effective way. One way. Some people take issue with this.

[19 : 24] They want what they call the freedom of options. To live and to worship how they want to be and to do and to live and to act however they please and all paths be equal.

The Israelites could have chosen any path they wanted. They could have climbed to higher ground. They could have shook the snakes off of their feet. They could have called out the name of any false god of Egypt that they wanted.

And the result would have been that they would perish. There is one path here. One provision. But when you are perishing and someone provides one cure, one cure is all you need.

If it is effective. And we see here that it was. The provision of God here in Numbers is that if any were bitten by this fiery serpent that they might simply look at the bronze serpent and they would live.

Now, do you see the comparison that Jesus is making here for us? Flip back to John chapter 3 if you've been in Numbers.

[20 : 29] Flip back there to John chapter 3. Look at verse 14. Here's the comparison. Jesus says, Just 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.

One effective provision for salvation that sinners like me and like you might not perish. Jesus is showing us that this story of sin and salvation in the Old Testament was a pointer.

It was an indicator. It was a shadow to which Jesus is the reality. He's showing us that he and he alone is the true lasting provision of God for the salvation of sinners.

He and he alone. That there is salvation in no one else. There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved. What Jesus is doing here is he's taking this blurry black and white image of sin and salvation from the Old Testament.

And he's showing us how he magnifies it, enhances it, enlarges it in full color, high definition in himself at the cross. Just as the Israelites looked upon this image of their curse, they looked upon the very image of that which afflicted them.

[21 : 56] They saw it with their eyes. God's provision held up, lifted up. They looked upon this gracious provision of God and escaped the wrath of God. So must we behold the man upon the cross.

My sin upon his shoulders. The call here is to behold the image of our sin lifted up.

We must look to what he accomplished on the cross and see it with eyes of faith. And we will live. Church, the only way that we can be saved from the wrath of God is if Jesus bears it in our place.

This is what Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5.21. This might be my favorite verse in the Bible. No sin will be found in the kingdom of God.

Not a trace. If you have a trace of sin's venom running through your veins, you will not enter.

[23 : 19] How many cures do you need for your sickness? One effective provision. We praise God. The good news of the gospel is that God gave his only son.

Christ became sin for us. That any who look to him in faith might not perish but have eternal life.

Church, this is the power of God for salvation. The power of God for salvation. This is our third truth of the gospel this morning.

We see the great power of salvation. Look to verse 16, John chapter 3. And here we come to this precious and beautiful and familiar summary of the gospel.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

[24 : 30] How can this be? How can this be? How is it true that if we simply believe in this man Jesus that we will have eternal life?

How can this be? It's because this message of the gospel is the power of God for salvation to any who would believe.

Do you believe? Do you believe this message? Through faith. Through faith. Sinners like me and you are united to Jesus Christ.

You know, faith is not simply believing intellectually. It's just a fact like you believe any other fact to be true that has no bearing on your life whatsoever. Like we believe the Eiffel Tower stands in Paris.

No, this faith, this believing in Jesus Christ is an all-in personal trust in the person and work of Christ.

[25 : 32] An all-in personal trust that unless this Savior bleeds and dies and rises for me, that I cannot be saved, that He has died for me, that He has risen for me.

So now the life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. That is the faith of a Christian.

I think we need to demystify faith. It's such a precious biblical word, a precious Christian term, but culturally it's been so watered down that it just means absolutely nothing.

Just have faith. Just believe. My faith is as good as your faith. Faith is what saves you. That's not what this is.

That's not what Christ is saying. Faith is not the power for salvation. Faith is a channel. It's a power cable.

[26 : 42] It connects you and your life to the resurrection power of Jesus Christ so that if you are connected to Him by faith, the life that He lives is yours, the death that He dies to sin in your place is yours, and the life that He lives through His resurrection from the grave by faith is yours.

Faith trusts Christ alone to be the power of God for your forgiveness, for your joy, for your hope, for your peace, and for your eternal life.

This is what He says here in verse 16. Whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life. Someone asked me this week what my Easter text was going to be.

I told him it was going to be John 3, 13 through 16, and he asked, well, how are you going to tie that into Easter? Here it is.

Apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, there is no power for salvation. If Christ is not risen from the grave, actually, truly, a fact of history that He died and He rose, our hope of eternal life is in vain.

[28 : 06] There is no eternal life apart from the eternal life that Christ offers through the power of His resurrection. The fact that He lives means that we live in Him by faith.

We can no more perish than Christ Jesus can perish again if we are united to Him by faith. The grace, the gift cannot have us because it could not have Him.

Sin will not conquer us because He took its best blow and rendered it powerless if we are united to Him by faith.

That's a big if, church. A necessary if. In this verse, John 3.16, there is both an incredible availability and an undeniable exclusivity here.

People want to emphasize one or the other, pit them both against each other. They are both here and both are precious. Do not pit them against each other. It is undeniably clear that this salvation is made available to the whole world.

[29 : 22] Whosoever would believe. And this is, this is something that would have been just absolutely stunning to Nicodemus. The Jewish understanding was, was that God's love, His covenant love was only reserved for the Jews.

Now, only the Jewish people were included in the love of God. Out of all the peoples of the world, it was the Jews. But here, John tells us, God so loved the world.

Not just you, Nicodemus. Not just the Jews. Not just all and allians. Even some of those people from Mount Pleasant. And Hugee. in McClellanville.

Some of the transplants from up north even might get in on this. Even me. Even you. You see, this provision of God is so powerful that His effectiveness is not drained or lessened or weakened in the slightest by making it available to all the peoples of the world.

Distance is no issue. Any who hear this message and believe from Jerusalem to Judea to the ends of the earth may not perish but have eternal life. Ability is no issue.

[30 : 38] The world would rank and rate you based on your usefulness. But God says, Any who would look and believe in my Son may have eternal life. The weak and the poor to the rich and successful.

Resources are no issue. Stature is no issue. Sinfulness is no issue. This is unbelievably powerful. It does not matter how far you have gone, how deeply you have rebelled, what you have done.

If you would simply look with eyes of faith and believe and trust in this risen Savior, you will be forgiven. You will have eternal life.

That message is proclaimed to all who would hear it. Yet, there is also undeniable exclusivity here.

Only those who believe in Christ will be saved. Only those who look to Jesus Christ alone for their salvation will inherit eternal life.

[31 : 46] Why are not all saved? Not all look. Not all trust. Not all believe. And this type of all in personal trusting and believing does not come from us.

It can't. It's a gift of God. We're saved by grace through faith and this is not from yourselves. It is a gift of God that no one may boast.

The great evangelist D.L. Moody he said it like this. He said written on the outside of the gate of heaven are the words whosoever may come and on the inside of the gate it reads chosen before the foundation of the world.

Church so long as we are here on the outside of the gate our responsibility is to proclaim this message of hope far and wide to any who would hear.

this radical availability of the gospel hope and the confidence that we have that God will save his own ought to compel us to cast our net far and wide and proclaim eternal life to any who would look to Christ and would listen and believe that if you will look to Christ in faith you will live trusting that God will save even as he has saved us who believe this is a powerful powerful message church there's a fourth and final gospel truth here that cannot go overlooked fourth we see the greatest proof of the love of God the greatest proof love of God look there to verse 16 one more time because here we see the grounds the basis for this incredible provision of God and it is shocking for

[33 : 55] God so loved the world that he gave his only son for God so loved the world this world that has spat in his face the world that has rebelled against him in every way the world that would hang his son upon the cross for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life God loves us he does not desire that any should perish John Calvin the great reformer he says of this verse our minds cannot find calm repose until we arrive at the unmerited love of God as the matter of our salvation must not be sought anywhere else than in Christ so we must see whence Christ came to us and why he was offered to be our savior both points are distinctly stated to us namely that faith in

Christ brings life to all and that Christ brought life because the heavenly father loves the human race and wishes that they should not perish there are many unknown truths about God it will take all of eternity for us to to plunge the depths of the mysteries of the wonders of who God is but we do know what he has revealed to us and we can know with certainty without an ounce of doubt that God loves us he proved it on the cross imagine with me for a moment that you were sick going about your life doing what you want to do not thinking of it at all and suddenly you begin to notice the symptoms you become aware of your sickness that you're you're sick and you look around you see it's not just you but it's everyone in your family everyone in your family is sick and not just your family but everyone in your neighborhood not just your neighborhood everyone in your community not just in your community every individual of every nation in the world is sick and it's terminal you don't know how long you have but you know that it's serious and this is a great and terrible problem but you hear a word somewhere there is a great physician who has come on his own dime and developed a cure one effective cure would that be enough for you of course it would the word is that this cure is available it's offered to you free of charge you couldn't afford it if you tried it's simply given freely to any who would come it's available to any who would simply come and receive it why would you not come and receive the cure

I can think of a few reasons maybe you don't trust the cure to be effective you look at it scoff you laugh it off you ridicule the cure and count it as foolishness that anyone would trust this with their life maybe you don't yet realize the depth and the severity of your sickness you assume that maybe you have more time than you really do who could know maybe you've trusted in another cure you think you found another solution to the problem and so you self medicate with other false hopes false cures that will never work but maybe you don't come because the truth is deep down you hate the physician so you rebel against him and you choose rather to die than to come to him for life but now ask yourself what would this tell you about the doctor no one has compelled him to do this he's not under any compulsion and the word is that this cure has cost him a great fortune his greatest treasure that the blood of his own son was spilled to provide this cure for you and anyone else who would come and be made well what could we conclude but that this physician deeply loves those who are perishing friend if you are our guest this morning

I don't know where you stand with God but I know this I know that God loves you and I know that Christ stands now risen and alive ready and able to provide the cure that you need for your sin that in him and in him alone can we have the power of eternal life forever with God so if you're hearing these words and you you don't know if you have that eternal life if you if you don't know whether you've been made right with God would you now turn from your sin and trust and look to the risen Christ and you will live what do you see when you consider the message of the gospel to the perishing world they see foolishness a waste of time a waste of energy worth no more than to be rolled up and smoked away but to those who have been born again by the grace of

God we see the undeniable irreversible irrefutable proof of the love of God for sinners God demonstrates his own love for us in this that while we were still sinners Christ died for us and we know by the grace of God that no matter what comes against us in this life whatever struggle whatever temptation whatever hardship whatever loss whatever suffering we are sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord the cross of Christ powerfully proves God's love for the world and the resurrection of Christ powerfully secures our experience of that love in ever increasing depth and delight for the rest of eternity this is good news church should you ever doubt the depth and seriousness of your sin would you remember the message of the gospel the love should you ever doubt the holiness of God his justice would you remember the message of the gospel will you ever doubt the power of God for the salvation of any who believes should you remember the message of the gospel.

[41 : 48] Should you ever doubt the love of God for a sinner like you, remember the message of the gospel. Look to Christ and live.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you and we praise you for your love, undeserved, unmerited, but given freely to all who come to Christ in faith.

We thank you for this promise of eternal life that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. We pray that if there are any here among us this morning who don't know you, would you give them that gift of eternal life.

And Lord, for those who do belong to you, Father, we pray that we would be moved and encouraged and nourished by the love of God and the hope of the resurrection.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.