

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,¹⁵ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“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. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” (NIV 84)

Theme: The Gospel in a nutshell:

1. God’s sent his Son for you.
2. Through him you are saved.
3. For him you live

You see the signs all the time. Mostly at sporting events, but at other functions as well. People hold up signs that say, John 3:16. It is one of the most well-known Bible passages. Many Christians from young to old can recite this passage from memory. Luther called this passage, the “gospel in miniature.” This verse contains everything the gospel is. It is a good summary of the good news of Christ. Others have called this passage, “the gospel in a nutshell.” The reasons are the same—it is a good summary of God and his love. And it is not just John 3:16 that serves to summarize the gospel, our whole text for today summarizes the gospel. So today we look at the gospel in a nutshell: God sent his Son for you, through him you are saved, and for him you live.

Our first lesson for today is about the bronze snake. The Jews were wandering through the wilderness. They started complaining as they often did. This time, they didn’t have enough food or water. Even

though God had already taken care of them by providing quail, they still complained. God also gave them special bread from heaven, called manna, everyday—and yet they still found reason to whine. So finally, God had enough. He decided to punish his people by sending venomous snakes among them. They bit the people who started to die. This caused them to realize their sinful ways and they repented before the Lord.

So God in his mercy told Moses to build a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. God said that if anyone was bit and looked at the pole he would live. And that is what happened. When the people were bit and looked at the snake and believed the promises of God regarding that bronze snake, they lived. Through faith they were saved from death. They weren’t saved because of anything they did. Rather it was because of the power and promises of God.

This bronze snake is a type of Christ. It foreshadows what Jesus did for us. **Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.** In the same way Moses lifted up the bronze snake, Christ was lifted up on the cross. This must happen in order for everyone to be saved. For just as the Israelites were saved as they looked at bronze snake and believed in God’s promises concerning it, so we are saved through believing God’s promises concerning Christ and his cross.

We don’t deserve to be saved; we deserve eternal death. We deserve to suffer with the devil forever. For by nature, we do nothing but sin. We hate God. We don’t obey his word. We want nothing to do with him. We are his enemies by nature. And therefore we deserve to suffer forever. We deserve the full wrath of God.

But instead God shows his love to us. In fact, he showed us the ultimate example of love. He gave up his only Son for us. For us, sinful human beings. For his enemies. For those who constantly fail to do as he commands. For us, God gave him up his Son to die. His one and only Son, he willingly let him die. So that his enemies might live. That is how much love God showed to us. He didn’t look at our sins, but covered them up with the blood of his Son.

That is what Jesus is talking about in John 3:16: **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. Notice who God loves. He loves the world. That means, he loves you. For you are part of the world. That means he loves me, and the person next to you, and the man down the street. How can you be sure that God loves you? Because he said he loves the world. We praise God that he said the world, and that he didn't name us personally. For if he would have said that he loves us by name, we'd always wonder how many people in the world share our same name. But because he loves the world, we know he loves us.

And Christ didn't just love the world, he died for the world. He didn't just die for the Jews. He didn't just die for believers. Christ died for the whole world. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what you have done. God sent his Son into the world for you. Christ suffered and died for you.

But not everyone is going to be saved. Sure Christ died for all. This is not saying that everyone will have their sins forgiven. Or that all will live in heaven. As verse 16 says, **whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.** Those who believe in Jesus Christ as their one and only Savior will be saved. Those who truly believe that Jesus is the one and only God—the 2nd person of the Trinity have saving faith. Those who know that they can't save themselves, but they are saved only through the work of Christ will join Christ forever in heaven. Verse 15 essentially says the same thing, **everyone who believes in him may have.** Everyone—it doesn't matter who you are or what you have done. Christ died to remove your sins, and those who believe this will have eternal life in heaven.

So we see that our eternal life is not by something we have done or can ever do. God is the one who sent his Son. His Son is the one who died. And the Holy Spirit is the one who gave us faith. He is the one who works a deep rooted conviction in our hearts. For it wasn't our choice to believe. It was God's choice to bring us to faith. So even faith, which is the hand that receives the blessings of salvation, is a gift from God. Therefore we see that is not a cause of our salvation, rather it is something through which we receive salvation.

Without this gift of faith we won't be saved. Jesus says in verse 18, **whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he**

has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. Christ may have died for everyone. But everyone who doesn't believe in him will not be saved. Those who reject the gospel will be shut out from the Lord's presence. They will suffer forever with the devil. They will suffer because they rejected the gospel. They don't care about the words of John 3:16. They rejected the Holy Spirit and failed to believe that Jesus Christ is God, or our Savior. Instead, they trusted in themselves or some false god for eternal life. And so, they get what they deserve. They receive eternal punishment. They receive what we all deserve—condemnation.

But believers won't be condemned through Christ. He tells us, **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.** Jesus did not come so that he could send us to hell. He came to save us from hell. That was God's plan to save the world. His plan to save the world was to kill his Son. It was to make his only Son suffer through the pain and agony of hell. That we wouldn't get what we deserve. But Christ suffered what we should have.

And how did his Son do this? By living a perfect life. By keeping all of God's laws perfectly. But not once failing to obey a single command. And by willingly suffering and dying. For when he was one that cross he took all our sins upon himself. He became guilty of everything we did wrong. And then he gave us the perfect life that he lived. Because of Christ we are no longer considered sinners. We will not be condemned. But we will live with him forever in heaven. This conversation Jesus had with the Pharisee, Nicodemus, took place at the beginning of his ministry. It would be around three years before Jesus would be betrayed. And yet, Jesus knew that he was going to have to suffer and die. He knew that it was necessary for him to hang on the cross. So he willingly did it. He knew that, like the bronze snake, he would save people from death. Earlier we saw God's love in that he gave up his only Son for sinners. Now we see the Son's love in that he gave up his life for sinners. And the love of the Holy Spirit that he led his enemies to believe in him.

And in response to the love that God has given to us, we show ourselves as Christians. Unbelievers show themselves as unbelievers.

Instead of following Christ, they follow their own wants and desires. Christ brings the light of the gospel. He is the one that leads us to eternal life. He shows us God's will. And he enables us to follow his will. But unbelievers don't care about God's will. They reject the light. As Jesus says in verse, **Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.** Unbelievers don't care about following God's word, they care about the thoughts and the deeds of the flesh.

In fact unbelievers hate the light. They hate the gospel. They want nothing to do with the Savior of the world. They don't want anything to do with the light of Christ. For they are afraid of being exposed. They don't want to be told that they are sinners. They don't want to admit that they did something wrong. And they don't want to change their sinful ways. They would rather sin than follow Christ. So unbelievers show themselves by their actions. They indicate who they are by what they do.

And the same stands for Christians. We indicate who we are by what we do. And we follow Christ. We have been brought to the light of Christ. We have seen that the way to salvation is only through Christ. And so we live according to the light. We follow his will. And obey his word. We hate evil. We no longer live our lives according to our sinful nature.

But we live for Christ. Everything we do is done for our Savior. We do it all to his glory. We live in a way to praise and thank God for what he has done. That is the difference between believers and unbelievers. One believes and follows, the other doesn't believe and hates Christ. There is then a real outward difference between believers and unbelievers. And we show who we are by our actions. We are motivated by the love of Christ to show love to him and to others. We live for him so that others may see our actions and want to learn more about our faith.

That, my friends, is the gospel in a nutshell. God loved us so much that he sent his only Son to die for us. His only Son loved us so much that he willingly suffered and died so that we wouldn't have to and so that we could live with him in heaven forever. That this love motivates us to show love to God and to others. For as believers we

live our lives for him. We live for the one who brought us the light of the gospel. We live for the one who won for us eternal life. Amen.