

We are living in a fast paced society. We no longer have a long attention span. Television has taught us to expect a break, a commercial, every few minutes. We have microwave ovens. We have drive through windows at fast food restaurants. We no longer wait to get home to make phone calls or get messages on the answering machine, we have cellular phones. The newspaper has a page of news capsules, so that if you do not have the time to read the whole article, you still can get caught up with the headlines. TV has news briefs every so often, so that we can be kept up to date. Since the whole world seems to be so fast paced, desiring only the highlights or summary, Christians have used one of the verses before us this morning as the summary of the whole Bible. And it is a very good summary of everything found in the entire Bible — what we often call the gospel in a nutshell. If you watch any major sporting event on TV, I am sure you will be able to pick out in the background a sign which says, “John 3:16.” That brief verse contains all of the vital information found in the Bible. And that is the verse we want to take a closer look at this morning. As we do so, we shall be again reminded, ALL WHO BELIEVE IN JESUS SHALL BE SAVED. I. The Son came to save the world, and for that reason, II. The Son reaches out to all.

There is a good reason why the Son came into this world to save it. That reason is because we deserve to be punished. As you heard in the OT reading earlier, the children of Israel were being led through the wilderness when they became impatient with God and began to grumble and speak against God. Because of this sin, which really was a lack of trust that the Lord could and would keep them safe, God sent poisonous snakes among them. Many were bitten by these snakes and died.

Many times in our lives, we may have felt that the Lord God was doing the same thing to us today — that He was punishing us for some sin which we have committed. After all, it does not take us long to remember something which we have done which goes directly contrary to what God demands of us in His holy law. Like the children of Israel, we often complain against God, grumbling that He does not take care of us in the way which we would like to see Him do it. Frequently we doubt whether He is really in control of things, or that He really takes an interest in the way that our lives are going. And when we realize what sinful things we are doing, we almost want to duck the thunderbolt which we are expecting to come our way from heaven to strike us down for our sins.

But that is not the way the Lord God treats us. When He sent His Son into the world, He did not send Him down here to exact from us some portion of payment for our many sins. If we were to stop and think about it for a moment, Jesus could have come to earth and seek to make us cower before His almighty power. After all, we deserve it. But He did not come down here to gloat over the fact that He told us that we were sinners who were going to be punished. John tells us very clearly, **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”** (17)

God’s love shines through so beautifully when Jesus came into this world. His whole purpose in coming was to do something for us, to save us from all of those sins which we have committed. We may still need to suffer the pains associated with our sins in this life, but their eternal sting of hell has been totally removed for us. Even when God sent the snakes to the children of Israel, He provided a way of escape for them. He had Moses set up a bronze snake, and all who looked at that bronze snake in faith would not die from their snake bite. **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”** (14-15)

In His perfect justice, the Lord could not just overlook our sins. Those sins needed to be paid for. But instead of exacting that payment from us, He sent His own Son into this world to lay down His life on the cross to wash us clean from all of our sins. Like the snake in the wilderness, all that is required to make those blessings your own is faith in what the Lord says. Trusting that Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross was sufficient to pay for the sins of all mankind, we can truly begin to appreciate God’s great love for us. He could have just sent us to hell, but instead, through His own great sacrifice, He did everything necessary so that we could live forever with Him in heaven. In Jesus, God’s love truly does shine through.

And the blessings which He won for us on the cross are meant for all. Using a word picture, John calls Jesus the Light of the World. By nature we were bound in darkness because of our sinful deeds. We could never see what the proper way to eternal life might be. But now Jesus has come, and shines into every heart with the Light of the Gospel message, that all who believe shall be saved. He shows them the one and only way to enjoy eternal life in heaven, and that is through faith in Him.

But what still happens: **“Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”** (19-20) Wicked and corrupt people prefer to do their work under the cover of darkness so that others do not witness their evil deeds. In much the same way, those people of this world who do not want what Jesus offers to them so freely, turn their backs on Jesus, and spurn everything that He offers to them. They would much prefer to continue their lives in sin, than to come to Him in faith and have Him totally change their sinful lives. Jesus has come to save all, but not all will be saved, for they reject what Jesus is offering to them. They would prefer to remain in their sinful ways.

But that is not the case for those who believe in Jesus. When we recognize all that Jesus has done for us in atoning for our sins, and the tremendous price which it cost Him, then a profound change will happen in our lives. Those sinful things which we enjoyed before will no longer be of interest to us. The Holy Spirit will work in our lives so that we will begin to think and desire to act in accordance with what would be pleasing to our Father in heaven. We will change our lives, but it will not be us who is doing it. John says, **“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.”** (21) All of the changes in our life, as we no longer live in the darkness of sin and wickedness, will be seen by others. They will recognize that there is a new force which is driving us. And that force is the working of the Holy Spirit within our hearts. We will show our love for Jesus because He has shown His love for us so wonderfully and clearly.

So these verses do provide us with the Gospel in a nutshell. It is a wonderful verse with which to do mission work. It recognizes that we have sins which need to be taken care of. But instead of us having to do that for ourselves, we are told that God’s love was revealed to us in that He sent Jesus into this world to lay down His life so that our sins would be washed away forever. As we receive that love and forgiveness, The Holy Spirit will help us to turn away from the deeds of sin and darkness, and conform our lives to His holy will. That will be the visible evidence of the faith that is within our heart. All who believe in Jesus will be saved, for Jesus truly does reach out to all with His love.