

What Do You Know About the Gospel?

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Daryl Brown, if you've noticed in the bulletin, and I am the director of the Wichita Archer Clay Baptist Association. And some of you may not know what that is. Those of you who are older will recognize what a Baptist Association is. It's a voluntary association of the Southern Baptist churches in a particular area. In this case, it's the three counties of Wichita Archer and Clay. We have about 54 churches, and I have the privilege of serving as director. Now, what that means when people ask me, what do you do? Well, basically, I am a resource person for our churches. I provide resources. I help churches get connected to resources that they need to remain strong and healthy and move forward. And I'm also a consultant. So if a church has a question, either a church leader or a pastor has a question and needs help thinking through something, then typically I get a call in that particular area. So I only come in when I'm invited.

There is no hierarchy in the Southern Baptist Convention. I don't have any authority over any of these churches. I functionally serve our churches in our association. So for pastors, that's reflected in training, like the preaching conference that we just had and the seminar on burnout in ministry that's coming up on this Thursday, and encouragement. And for churches, it's more practical things like making sure that there's a pulpit supply list. If churches need somebody to fill the pulpit in the absence of a pastor or an interim pastor, if the pastor search team needs to be trained, I'm able to come in and do that. Deacon training, deacon ordination. Occasionally we have churches that will come to me and say, you know, we've had a great group of deacons for a very, very long time, and we need to ordain some new deacons, but we haven't done that for 20 years. Would you come in and help us kind of walk through that process? And so I come in and just give, really just give them assurance about what they're doing. Everybody wants to do it the right way, do the right thing. Give them some of those assurances. I help churches with bylaws and also help churches with revitalization. And probably the trickiest thing for me to navigate is a church which needs help in revitalization because then I have to come in and ask them, of all the things that you are doing, which are the things that you're willing to sacrifice and give up in order to reach more people? And that's a hard question to ask. What is it you're willing to give up? And sometimes the answer is no to that question. And unfortunately for churches who are unwilling to change anything that they're doing, you can't keep doing what you're doing and expect to get different results, right? That's just kind of the way the world works. And so that's who I am. That's what I do.

That's a little bit about me. Now, NAM, the North American Mission Board, which you saw on the video today for the Annie Easter. So all the money that collected through the Annie Armstrong Easter offering goes directly to the North American Mission Board to do the kinds of things to reach the kind of people that you see on the video. So I heartily encourage you guys to participate in that offering. But they've been promoting this idea of preaching John 3.16 on March 16th. So 3.16 on 3.16, right? And so I decided to take that challenge today since it's been a number of years since I preached on John 3.16.

[3 : 45] I've quoted a lot, as many of you probably do, but it's been a while since I've preached on it. And so to start that, we're going to start down in verse 10. So we're going to be in John chapter 3, by the way. So if you have your Bibles with you, if you'll open up your Bibles, if you're using a tablet, let me just recommend that you turn off your screensaver and keep your Bibles open, guys, because we're going to walk through this passage almost verse by verse when we get down to verse 10. But before we get there, there's a few things that I need to put in front of you. And one of those is that Jesus is having a conversation with a Pharisee. So there was two religious groups in Jesus' day. You had the Pharisees and the Sadducees. These were the religious leaders in Jesus' day.

And he's having a conversation with Nicodemus, who's a Pharisee. Now he comes to Jesus at night, probably because he's not sure that he wants to be seen in public with Jesus yet, but he's intrigued.

There's something about Jesus that's going on with him, and he can't quite put his finger on it. So Jesus tells him that he needs to be born again, and that where and how the Holy Spirit works, you know, cannot be explained in human terms. Jesus actually says, you know, the wind blows, but we don't know where it comes from, and we don't know where it's going, right? That's how it is with the work of the Holy Spirit. And Nicodemus, as one of the few theologically trained people, they didn't really have seminaries back then, but one of the few theologically trained people in Israel, okay, he interprets what Jesus says about being born again in a very simplistic and materialistic way. You know, how can I, a full-grown man, crawl back into my mother's womb and have a second birth? Now, so you have a person who grew up reading the Old Testament as their Bible, who spends their days talking about God and how God works, right? What God's doing, what God is about, all right? And he gets lost with a simple metaphor about spiritual birth. So let's just stop there for a second, because this is going to be key to what we're talking about. What does Jesus mean when he says, you must be born again? What does it mean to have a spiritual birth? And I think the primary idea behind that, that I want you guys to walk away with today, is that it means that faith has to have a starting point, a conversion, if you will. But we just, we're not naturally in relationship with God. We're not naturally in a life of faith. You'll hear people say all of the time, well, you know, I've always believed in God ever since I can remember. Or if you ask them about what they believe, you say, well, you know, I was a member of such and such a church, even as a little child. When I was five or six years old, I became a member of this church. Or I've always been part of this denomination. I've always been a Baptist. Or I've always been a Methodist. Or I've always been a part of the Christian church.

But the thing about faith, and the thing that Jesus points out very clearly, is that faith in God, a relationship with God, has to have a beginning point. It has to have a starting point.

It's not something that you're born with. It's not something that, that is naturally part of who you are as a human being. You have to come to a place where you put your faith and your trust in God.

[7:17] And that is being born again spiritually. Now, Jesus threw him off because Nicodemus expected Jesus to talk about the law. So the Jewish teachers in Jesus' day, they had reduced all of the work of God, all of the work of God, they had reduced down to the law.

And they understood the concept of using a metaphor, right? I mean, Isaiah 41, you rise up with wings like an eagle, right? They understood metaphor. And if you were to ask them and say, well, you know, did God create the world in six days? Absolutely. Did God bring those 10 plagues upon the land of Egypt? They would say, absolutely. God did that. Did God spare his people in the Passover and protect them from the death angel that came through? They would say, absolutely. Did God part the water so that the people of Israel could go through and get to the other side safely and be protected from Pharaoh's army? They would say, absolutely. But if you ask them, what is it that God is doing today? They would simply say the law. Okay? And so Jesus threw them off a little bit. Now we can be just as guilty, guys. Let me just step back for a second and say this. We can be just as guilty as the Pharisees and the religious leaders in Jesus' day by trying to draw a box of some kind, of any kind, whatever it is that we picture in our head and say, this is how God works. God only works this way. All right? So we talk about God being, and it might be a biblical box. It might be something that we find in scripture, but it's still going to be a box of some kind. And here's the deal about God.

We talk about God as being all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present. And those three ideas, what they really do is sum up the idea is that God is bigger than what we can picture in our mind. He's bigger. He's more powerful than we can picture. He is more knowing. His knowledge is greater than what we could understand His knowledge to be. And even the fact that He is present, present here this morning, not just because we're a group of believers who are assembled, and He is with us here today. I thought, I'll just keep getting louder, and I thought, that's a bad idea.

But He's present in the world in ways that we don't understand as well. And so because God is this way, because this is the God that we serve, I think in the same way that no temple, it says in the Old Testament, could contain God, I think we would all agree today that there's no box, there's no framework that we could conceptualize that would contain everything who God is and everything that God does.

All right? The wind blows, and we don't know where it is coming from, and we don't know where it is going.

[10:12] We can't read God's mind, and God doesn't explain everything to us that we don't understand. Now, nevertheless, there are some things. The Bible does give us a clear picture of many things that God is doing, and they are clearly spelled out, and one of these is the gospel. Okay? And so that brings us to our text in John chapter 3. And I'm going to, like I say, keep referring back to this again, so please keep your Bibles open. I'm going to start reading in verse 10, and I'm going to read through verse 21. If you'll follow along with me in your translation, I'm reading from the CSB this morning, but you follow along in your translation. So Jesus starts, and he says to Nicodemus, he says, are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things? Jesus replied, truly I tell you that we speak what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony.

If I have told you about earthly things, and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. So just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God loved the world in this way.

He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will 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. Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. Now this is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God. Now, Jesus prods Nicodemus in verse 10 by asking him, he says, how can you be a teacher? How can you be a teacher in Israel, someone who's responsible for knowing these things, and not know these things? And if Jesus were to appear here today and ask this question of us, it would probably be something like, have you grown up in the church all of your life, and you don't know these things? You know, the title of my message this morning is, how do you know, how much do you know, or what do you know about the gospel? How many of you guys are familiar with the show, Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader? Have you all heard of that show? Yeah. I have no desire to be on that show, by the way. I have this fear that my ignorance would be revealed, because the honest truth is, is that my fifth grade teacher was trying to teach me some things that I didn't, I don't think I valued them at the time.

And because I didn't value them, I didn't, I didn't remember them, I didn't latch on to them, and then these fifth graders, they bring in all fresh and smart, would probably just know all these things I'm supposed to know. But I had knowledge that I was supposed to know that I went to the, that just went to the wayside, and I think sometimes we have that attitude in church. So think about it yourself. How many sermons have you sat and listened to, right, but you can't remember anything about? It's kind of scary. So how many of you guys were here when Randy was pastor? Raise your hand.

[14:12] Okay, how many of y'all were here the entire time, 15 or 16 years, Randy was here? Several of you. All right, so for those of you who raised your hand on that last one, let me ask you a question.

How many of you remember everything that Randy taught from this pulpit? A few, yeah? But not quite a bit fewer hands. Because that's how it is. That's just how our brains work. If somehow during the process of a sermon or a Bible study or Sunday school or whatever it is, if we determine that whatever this is we're talking about doesn't actually apply to me, what do we do with that information? We just flush it. It moves on and our brain creates space.

But if we think we're supposed to know it, if we think it's valuable, if it happens to be one of those times when we're sitting there and we feel like, man, God is really speaking to me, what do we do with that information? We store it. And that's the thing that God uses to shape and grow our character. Now, does that mean all the other things that Randy said through those years that you don't remember weren't important? No, not at all. But our brain just works in funny ways that if we don't think the information is really for us, if that information that the pastor or the preacher is talking

about, if that's for somebody else sitting on the pew and not for me, then we stop paying attention. Now, look what Jesus says in verses 12 and 13. He said, if I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? If I, if I tell you, talk about earthly things, about the wind blowing, how are you going to believe when I start talking about the supernatural things? All right, the stuff that God does. Everything God does is supernatural, by the way. Don't, don't get freaked out by that word. We live in the real world. We live in the physical world. God operates in the supernatural world. What God does is the supernatural. All right, so how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things, about supernatural things? Verse 13, no one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the son of man. Now, this is the first supernatural thing that Jesus tells Nicodemus in our text today. All right, Jesus is calmly refers to himself as the son of man. He didn't walk around calling himself the son of God. He called himself the son of man. And what it sounds like in the casual reading, if you look at that, that Jesus is saying, well, you know, there's God and there's man. I'm the son of man. This is the side of the equation that I'm on. I put my pants on just like you do. But look at verse 13 again. Who is the only one who can ascend into heaven? He says, it's the one who came from heaven, the one who descended from heaven, the son of man. So where did Jesus come from? Okay, not earth. Now, that's actually an Old Testament reference in the book of Daniel, but we don't have time for that this morning.

[17:07] But just mark it. You just write Daniel on the side over there in your Bible or on your notes. So Jesus is not just a man, guys. He's not just a good man. You'll hear people say all the time, well, Jesus was a good man or he was a moral teacher or he was a great prophet of God who came in and tried to get people stirred up. But look at verse 16, right? It says that God loved the world so much that he sent his moral teacher. No, that's not what it said. God loved the world so much that he sent his mighty prophet. No, that's not what 16 says either. God sent his son, his one and only son, right?

So Jesus is not just a good man, not just a moral teacher, not a prophet. He is God's son. And even defining that a little bit better, folks, Jesus is not an angel. He's not an angel who descended from heaven, right? He is the son of man. Angelic beings are completely different than humanity. Jesus is fully God, but he's fully human as well. Jesus is a man in the same way that I'm a man and human in the same way that you're human. He's not an angel or a divine messenger. And let me tell you something else that Jesus is not. He's not a demigod. He's not somebody who's semi-divine, okay?

So how many of you guys have seen Moana, right? A bunch of young people perked up there. Okay, in Moana, Maui is a demigod. So there's the powerful gods, there's man, and then there's Maui in the middle, okay? That is not who the Bible says that Jesus is. And if you remember anything about that first cartoon movie, Maui bows in reverence to the superior God when he meets face to face, right? Jesus is not a demigod. He's not a semi-divine person. What difference does this make?

Where am I going with this? Because I'm coming back to the question, why would God need to send his son? Not just a good guy, not just a great teacher, not just a really moral person.

[19:29] Why would God need to send his son? Now, Jesus is going to answer this question. He moves right into the Old Testament for Nicodemus, and he pulls up a story from Numbers chapter 21, all right? It's just six verses long. It's not a very long story, but it's pivotal to what Jesus is talking about in this illustration here. It's a story that Nicodemus would know well, and I'm not going to go back and read those verses today. I like to do that, but we don't have time for that this morning.

I'm going to talk about it enough. You're going to find out everything you need to know about those six verses. But let me just encourage you that every time in your New Testament when you're reading, you see a quotation from the Old Testament or a reference to a story in the Old Testament, stop and go back. Look at the note in your Bible or look back to the reference there and find that and read it in the Old Testament in its context so that you can understand what the New Testament is talking about, because the New Testament assumes that like Nicodemus, you already know this story.

And so if you don't know the story, then go back and read it or you're going to miss the meaning of the text. Now, look in verse 14. It says, just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. Now, and I didn't realize this for a long time, folks, but verses 14 and 15 are actually the key to understanding

verse 16. Now, we quote 16 a lot. We memorize 16. We have our kids memorize 16, and we refer to it even as the gospel in a nutshell, which it kind of is. But what it doesn't say, what John 3, 16 doesn't tell us is why God needed to send His Son. And the answer to that is in verse 14. And the short story of Numbers 21 is that the people of Israel, they have rebelled against God, and they've rebelled against God's prophet Moses. And that sets up this scenario in there. And when you think about the Exodus, the time from when the people left Egypt until the time they entered into the promised land, right? We refer to that as the wilderness wonders. When you think about that entire period of history, which was a long period because it was a period that was long enough for an entire generation to die off. And the reason the entire generation had to die off was not because God was not powerful enough to bring them into the promised land. An entire generation had to die off because when they got to the very edge of the promised land to cross the Jordan and to go in and to conquer it, the people looked at God and said, you know what? No, we're not going to do that.

And that rebellion, that original rebellion of God's people against Him in the Exodus, created a set the stage for a series of rebellions. You have another rebellion in Numbers chapter 14 where you have Korah. And Korah says, you know, we're out here. We're going to die. God is actually going to fulfill this promise that He said He's going to leave us out here until we die in the wilderness. And so our problem must be our leader. If we really had a better prophet representing us before God, we could negotiate a better deal. So let's get rid of Moses. And I'll tell you what, I'll be the guy for you. I'll be your leader if you guys will just follow me. And Moses is like, okay, fine. Let's say everybody go stand in front of your tent. And they all went and they stood in front of their tents and then the ground opened up and it swallowed Korah. And all of the people that were going to follow Him, it swallowed them and the ground shut again. And they didn't learn their lesson. And we get to Numbers 21, which is the reference that Jesus quotes in verse 14.

[23 : 20] There is, they're once again, they're murmuring against God. It says that they're murmuring against Moses, their leader. And they're spreading poison with their tongues. And so what does God do?

He sends poisonous snakes into their midst. And people begin to die. Now the people repent when they realize that God is punishing them.

And they ask Moses to intercede for them. And notice the irony here. You know, we're going to complain about you, Moses, but we need you to be here for us. And that's, again, a repeating story there. But God hears Moses' intercession. And this is what God tells Moses to do. I want you to go and I want you to make a replica of this poisonous snake or viper or whatever it was and make it out of bronze. And I want you to put it on a pole and set it up in the midst of the congregation of all of the people. And then whoever is bitten by one of these poisonous vipers can look at that bronze snake on that pole. And they won't die if they do that. Now God could have saved them by simply telling the snakes to go away. I mean, he told them to come and they came. He could have just told them to go away.

He could have made the snakes not have any poison anymore in them. He could have made the snakes not have fangs anymore so that they couldn't bite people so that there was no effect of the poison in there. But that's not what God decided to do. I mean, we don't know where the wind comes from and we don't know where it's going, right? We don't always know what God is doing. And God has Moses make an image out of bronze of this poisonous snake and put it up on a pole and just set it there in the middle.

I mean, they have all of their tents around and the tabernacle sat in the middle and Moses' tent was kind of in the middle and he just sat this snake on a pole there in the middle of the congregation.

[25 : 27] And Jesus told Nicodemus that the Son of Man also had to be lifted up. And we understand from the New Testament that the pole that Jesus was going to be lifted up on was the cross that they crucified him on.

John 3.16 tells us that God so loved the world so much that he sent his one and only Son. It doesn't tell us why, but that's in the story in Numbers 21.

It doesn't tell us why, but that's in the story in the middle of the world. Guys, because we are all snake bit. And we're responsible. It didn't happen by accident.

We just didn't happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. We didn't accidentally cross paths with that snake. We are snake bit because of our choice to rebel against God and do things our own way.

And that's what sin is. That's the bottom line basis of sin. Sin is not really just a list somewhere. Sin is an attitude that says, you know what? Talk to the hand, God.

[26 : 39] You go take care of your God business. You do your God things, but I've got me under control. I will make all of the choices for my own life. I know better than you how to run my life.

So you mind your own business, God, and I'll mind my own business. That's rebellion, and that's sin. And we've all been bit. And verse 15 is the second supernatural thing that Jesus tells Nicodemus.

He says that everyone who believes in the Son of Man will have eternal life. Now, the Israelites in Numbers 21, they got their old lives back, right? So if they looked at the bronze snake, they didn't die from the poison of the snake, and they got to get healed back up again, and then they lived their normal lives until they died in the wilderness.

But Jesus is offering eternal life. Now, I don't know if Nicodemus had any idea what Jesus meant when he said eternal life or not.

But the Pharisees did believe in the resurrection of the dead. They believed that everybody was going to be resurrected at the end of time, whenever that was, and that we would all stand before God and we would be judged.

[27 : 46] Now, and they believed the basis of this judgment was going to be how well you kept the law. Now, the Gentiles didn't have the law. They were all certainly condemned to eternal punishment.

But the Pharisees were only about 10% of the Jews, of God's people. And the Pharisees believed, when you go back and you read their writings out of the Talmud and the Mishnah and those kind of writings which had survived from the first century, they believed, well, they had doubts.

Let me just say it that way. They had doubts that the average Jew kept enough of the law in order to successfully pass this judgment which was going to happen at the end of time. Jesus says again, look at verses 16 and 17.

It says, For God loved the world in this way. He gave his one and only Son so that everyone who believes in him will 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.

So whoever believes in Jesus, whoever believes in God's Son, will not perish but have eternal life. Why?

[29 : 01] Because God loved the world enough to send his one and only Son so that every person who's bitten by sin might look upon him and believe in him and be saved.

Now John wrote a gospel and that's kind of at the beginning of the New Testament and he wrote three letters. First John, second John, and third John.

And those are at the end of the New Testament. In one of those letters, in first John chapter 4, John wrote that God is love. Now I think there's a lot of misunderstanding about God's love today.

There's people who say, well, you know, if God really loved people, why in the world would he send them to hell? Let me just talk about God's love for a second. Okay? God is love, but God doesn't generically love us.

And what I mean by that is that God just doesn't, because he loves everybody, well, we're part of everybody, so God must love us too. It's not really personal, but, you know, God loves everybody. So God loves me and he loves you too.

[30 : 10] If you're sitting out there, yeah, God loves you. Right? That's kind of generically God loving us. God doesn't love us generically. And let me say also that God doesn't love us genetically. Okay?

It's not like it's hardwired inside of him so that he has no choice. He just has to love us. You guys know what a kleptomaniac is? Right? A kleptomaniac is a person who steals.

But they don't steal because they need something. They don't steal because they're hungry. They don't steal because they want something or they want to resell it for money. They don't steal it for their own benefit. In fact, they would rather not steal, but they can't help stealing because it's a compulsion that they have inside of them.

It's something broken psychologically inside of them. And so a kleptomaniac steals because they just can't help it. And I'm here to tell you this morning, folks, God doesn't love us out of compulsion. He doesn't love us because he can't help not loving us. It's not like it's something he can't control. God loves us because he chooses to love us.

[31 : 17] It's personal. You go to John 10 and what is it says? He knows his sheep and he calls them by name. It's personal.

God loves us because he chooses to. And God loves us today, even though the tense of the verb is past tense. God so loved. God loves us. He chooses to love us the same way today that he did 2000 years ago.

And honestly, the same way that he did 3000 years ago in the time of Moses. God loves us. So why do people end up going to hell if God really loves us that way?

Here's the deal, guys. We are already snake bit. Look at verse 18. Anybody who believes in him is not condemned.

But anyone who does not believe is already condemned because he has not believed in the name of the one and only son of God. Guys, we are already condemned to eternal punishment. Anybody who has not believed in Jesus is already condemned.

[32 : 27] It's not like God's going to, at the judgment, make a decision about whether or not to send a person to heaven or hell. If a person has not believed in Jesus, if they have not leaned into God's plan of salvation, then they're already condemned.

God's not sending them anywhere. That's already their destination. I mean, we're dying just like the Israelites in Numbers 21. Now, I don't have any experience in casting bronze.

Like 0.0 experience in casting bronze. But in my mind, I can't imagine God sending Moses into his tent to make a mold and to make it look like this snake and make a mold that you could pour bronze into and then get the bronze and melt the bronze and pour it in there and let it cool and get it up on that pole.

I can't imagine that happening in less than a day. If they're lucky. Maybe it took two days. The Bible doesn't tell us how long it took.

But while Moses is making this mold and making this snake before he could get it up, people are dying outside of his tent and all around him in the camp.

[33 : 34] And he would be able to hear the screams of the people who were dying and the screams of the people who had lost somebody that they had loved to one of these snakes. And this is going on while he's in there working and trying to make this mold in there.

The people who died while Moses was making the mold and making the snake, guys, were already condemned. But he was trying to save them. And guys, when you think about the camp of Israelites, you're talking about hundreds of thousands of people.

And when you have a snake, maybe a two and a half or three foot bronze snake stuck on a pole which was eight or ten foot high, it was a while before the people on the edges of the camp found out that salvation was there.

I mean, literally, word of mouth had to spread that Moses had put this up in the camp. And if you got bit by the snake, you had to go out there and look at that snake in faith, believing that it was going to heal you.

And people died before the word got back to them. And guys, we have to believe in the same way. We have to believe in Jesus in the same way that they had faith in that snake.

[34 : 47] It's not enough to believe that Jesus was really born. It's not enough to believe that he existed or that he was actually crucified by the Romans 2,000 years ago.

That's the historical facts. It's not enough to believe in the historical facts. When they were looking at that snake, it wasn't enough to believe that the snake was really bronze or that Moses had really actually made that snake and put it up.

That wasn't enough. They had to look at that snake and believe what God had told them, God's promise, that if they looked at the snake, they wouldn't die from the snake bite. And we have to trust Jesus in the same way.

Not just that he was a real person or not just that he died on a cross 2,000 years ago. We have to believe that he did it for our salvation and we have to look at the cross in faith. We have to put our lives, our trust in Jesus that he's going to save us from our sin and that we're not going to die.

And we can be saved from the condemnation in which we already stand. And Moses didn't raise up this snake, guys, to remind them of their rebellion. He didn't put a snake on there to say, look, guys, this is a reminder to you of your failure, of your poisonous tongues murmuring against God.

[36 : 00] He put it there to save them. And so that it was the source of the problem, which was fixed to the pole, which is an interesting thing. Because the Bible says, the New Testament says

very clearly that Jesus took not his sins to the cross.

Jesus took our sins to the cross. Look what Paul says in Colossians 2.14. Listen to this. He erased the certificate of debt with its obligations that was against us and opposed to us and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross.

What did the Israelites see when they looked at the pole, guys? The thing that bit them. And so what should we see when we look at the cross of Christ? We should see our sin nailed to the cross, done that by Jesus and his work.

Guys, unlike the Israelites who lived on the edge of the camp, waiting to get the news, we live in a world of people who are snake bit.

They are dying. They're going to eternal punishment because they haven't yet heard that salvation is available.

[37 : 15] There are people out there, guys, who don't even know the name Jesus. And there are people out there who have heard the name Jesus, but they've heard all the wrong things about him.

They haven't yet heard that salvation has been lifted up. They're on the edge of the camp. But the world stands condemned already for their rebellion, even though many have not yet heard the good news.

So why do Southern Baptists have the North American Mission Board and the International Mission Board? Why do we send money to these places? It's because they take the gospel to places that our feet are never going to touch.

And we give, as churches, we all send money to the cooperative program. And you may ask yourself sometime, what is the cooperative program? Why do we send money to the cooperative program? Why are we sending money out of our church when we could be spending it here? Look at all the things we could do in our church if we kept that money here instead of sending it on to missions. We do that so that missionaries and church planners all across the country and all across the globe can tell people the good news.

[38 : 31] And that's great. But these missionaries that we fund, we gladly fund, by the way, these missionaries that we fund are never going to talk to your friends.

They're never going to talk to your neighbors or your co-workers or your family unless your family happens to live in one of these places across the world where these missionaries are at work.

The people that we can touch with our hands, guys, those people are our responsibility. We don't pay anybody to tell them the good news about Jesus.

That's our job. They're snake bit. They're without hope. They're dying and they are condemned already. And they need to be able to see the Son of Man lifted up for their sin.

But here's the tricky part. And this is going to be the part that makes you uncomfortable in this message. Look in verse 19.

[39 : 44] Guys, they may not want to repent when you tell them. Jesus says, this is the judgment. Light has come into the world and the people love darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

Guys, when we share the gospel with people that we care about, and it doesn't matter if it's our neighbor that we've lived across the street from for years or our friends that we hang out with or our co-workers at work or even family members.

Guys, my father is 91. He's never made a decision for Christ. All he'll tell me is he thinks he's got that squared away and I shouldn't worry about it.

But I do worry about it. Not just because he's 91, but because he doesn't know Jesus. We don't know which people are going to say yes.

But the reality of the world that we live in and the reality of the country, thank God for the country we live in, the reality of the country we live in is people have the freedom to say no.

[40 : 54] They have the freedom to say no to me. They have the freedom to say no to God. They can continue to tell God to mind his own business because they want to run their own lives. And we don't know when we share the gospel who is going to say yes.

We don't know where the wind comes from and we don't know where it's going. We don't know who the Holy Spirit has been working on to. So all we can do with the best of our efforts is to share the gospel.

Guys, and not everybody is going to want light shed on what they're doing. But we're not depending on our ability to be eloquent. We're not depending upon our vast biblical knowledge. We're not

depending on our powers of persuasion.

None of that, sharing the good news about Jesus Christ isn't based on any of those things. You don't have to worry about those things. We have fears in all of those areas. We're afraid that we're not adequate, that we won't do it right, that we'll mess it up.

We're afraid that we'll lose this relationship with this person. And we don't want to lose that relationship. But how could you value your relationship with them more than their eternity? The one thing that we do have to worry about, guys, is whether or not our lives are reflecting the gospel or not.

[42 : 10] Because you can't come in here on Sunday morning and act like a Christian and go out in the rest of your lives in the world around you and act like the devil. If they see that kind of inconsistency in your walk, if you're talking the talk, but you're not walking the walk, they're not going to listen to you when you share the gospel with them.

Look at verse 21. But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God. Shown to who? Shown to the world.

Guys, most of the world is going to need to see God at work in our lives before they're willing to consider a change in theirs. Now, there's two main challenges as we close up this morning that's coming out of this passage for us.

And the first is our own personal response to the gospel. You know, one of the differences between the story in Numbers 21 and us today is that there was no doubts in their mind that they were snake bit.

I mean, they got the fang marks and maybe some blood coming out of the wound and some swelling there and they're starting to feel not so good as the poison comes into their body.

[43 : 24] There was no doubts in their mind whatsoever that they were snake bit and that they were going to die. But, you know, there's a lot of people in our world today who don't don't have any idea.

They don't have any conception that they have a spiritual problem in their lives. That not only do they not think that they don't have a relationship with God because the generic kind of God that they believe in doesn't have or require personal relationships.

But they're not sure that they would ever need one. And they're certainly not sure that they're already facing condemnation and death.

Let me just say this morning, if you're here this morning. And the Holy Spirit has been working on your heart as we've talked about Jesus and the need to trust in him.

Let me just say that God didn't send Jesus to die on this cross so that he could condemn you. He did it so that he could save you because it was the only way.

[44 : 30] And how do I know it was the only way? Because in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before Jesus was crucified, he prayed.

And he asked God, he said, Father, if there's any other way that this can be done. Let's do that. And the next day they crucified him on that cross for your sins and for my sins, for the sins of the whole world.

If the Holy Spirit is speaking to you about your spiritual condition this morning, let me just say to you, this is not the time to dwell on that.

In just a minute, I'm going to have a word of prayer and we're going to have an invitation. I'm going to stand here at the front. And when I walk down to the front, I think you should get out of your pew and you walk down and meet me and we'll talk about this Jesus thing.

It's crazy to put off something that you know that the Spirit of God is talking to you about. Now, there's a second challenge coming out of this text.

[45 : 42] Because some of you here this morning are in the same rebellion, okay, as God's people in Numbers 21. In the same way that they got up to the very edge of the water and God said, now go in and conquer it and just trust me.

You've looked at your responsibility to share your faith and you simply said, no, I'm not going to do it. I don't care. God, I'll do anything else for you.

I'll show up at church. I'll come to Sunday school. I'll even read my Bible. But I'm not going to be the one to tell the sale of somebody about Jesus. Guys, how can you expect God to bless you in your spiritual life as a genuine follower of Jesus Christ and be in direct disobedience to the point of your existence?

God only created the church for one reason, folks. That's so that we could fulfill the great commission and take the gospel to the ends of the earth. That's the only reason we exist. That's the only reason God just doesn't call us up to heaven as soon as we get saved.

We have a task. We have a responsibility. It's not a lot of different things, guys. It is to go and to share the gospel and to make disciples. And that's what we read in Matthew chapter 28.

[46 : 57] It's called the great commission. But guys, let me just speak a hard truth to you that the great commission in Matthew 28 means nothing to you. It means nothing to you if you're not willing to share your faith.

And it doesn't matter what your fear is. Okay? Most of us don't share in that moment when God prompts us because we're afraid. We're afraid we're not good enough. We're afraid we're inadequate.

We're afraid we'll lose the relationship. Moses' excuse was he couldn't speak well. He just taugt straight up when God called him at the burning bush. He says, God, I can't do that. I don't speak well.

I don't even know how to say those kinds of things. You know what God's response to him was? Who do you think made your mouth? Go and be obedient.

Because here's the deal. If you've grown up in church and in your mind God is only going to ask you to do things that you feel comfortable doing, let me just give you a reality check.

[47 : 56] Because there is nothing in Christianity. You're in the wrong religion. There is nothing in Christianity that doesn't require us to be dependent upon God and upon the Holy Spirit.

Not being faithful to him. Not being obedient. Not exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. And certainly not going out and sharing the gospel. It's not dependent upon what you can do.

It's never going to be dependent upon what you can do. You're not going to practice it and get to the point where you don't need God or to trust God in sharing your faith anymore. It's always going to be scary. It's always going to be risky.

But you know what? That is what God has called you to do. And you can stand at the edge of the river and you can look God in the face and you can say, You know what, God? I'm not going to do that. And be disobedient.

But don't expect on the back side of that for God to turn around and to bless you in your Christian life. Or to bless your church through you. The challenge for every genuine follower of Jesus is to go and share the good news with your neighbor, with your friends, with your co-workers, with your family.

[49 : 07] And guys, if you think anything at all about these people, if they mean anything at all to you, you should bend over backwards to make sure they at least get an opportunity to go to heaven.

I saw the slide on the screen as I was sitting here this morning. Who is your one? Man, I hope you take that seriously. Let's pray together.

Father, I thank you. God, you are always so faithful to us, even when we struggle in faithfulness on our end. Father, I pray for anyone here this morning.

Lord, even as they were sitting here, they knew that you are speaking to them. They can feel the work of the Holy Spirit, the conviction in their heart. And Father, I pray that you give them the boldest right now to come forward and step forward and to make a decision to put their faith and their trust in you, God, because you have sent him not to condemn the world but to save the world. Father, we know that Jesus said that if he is lifted up, he will draw all men to him. Father, make it so. We pray that this morning. And Father, for every one of us, Father, who consider ourselves to be genuine followers of you, Lord, we've all been in that moment when we felt a prompting where we should say something.

[50 : 28] We should say something about the gospel to that person. And we backed away because we were afraid. God, don't let that be a habit in our lives. God, give us the boldness to also step forward and to go out and be faithful in telling people about you.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. If you guys would stand with me now, we're going to just extend this invitation for a short time and give you an opportunity to respond to the Lord.