

## **“How Can It Be?” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent 2 – March 5, 2023**

- I. **John 3:14-16** – <sup>14</sup>And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.
- II. **Our most quotable Bible verse...**
  - a. John 3:16 is the reference that is found all over the place – remember when every NFL game had a person in the stands who would hold up a John 3:16 poster in the air, so whenever a ball went toward the uprights, you were reminded of it?
  - b. I haven’t seen that in awhile, but I think if you just asked random strangers on the street what John 3:16 is, most of them would get at least part of it.
  - c. We have a little craft that Rich Zahursky showed me – two halves of a walnut shell with a small cross put in one half... it’s called, the Gospel in a nutshell.
    - i. John 3:16 is the true Gospel in a nutshell – as it helps us to understand the incredible love of the Father.
  - d. Even when the world is such a mess, and we struggle against so many forms of evil, we are still assured that God loves us through it all.
  - e. I often remind you all, just as I did in last week’s message, that Jesus defeated sin, death, and the devil for us.
    - i. Yet, you may be saying in your head, “yeah right Pastor Jim, sin causes me all kinds of trouble, satan and his evil is constantly harassing me, and I’m still going to die in the end!”
    - ii. You are right, so we should consider the story that’s behind John 3:14-15 to help us with why we still deal with these struggles – while at the same time win the victory.
- III. **In the Book of Numbers, Moses has led the Israelites out of Egypt.**
  - a. As the people failed to trust God’s deliverance into the Promised Land, they were wandering in the desert for 40 years... and in Numbers 21, they start complaining and “speaking out against God and against Moses.” (vs 5)
  - b. They just couldn’t stand the food – they wondered why they even had to leave Egypt (and its horrible slavery) just to be taken into the desert to die.
  - c. So God lifts the veil of His protection, about 2 inches, and snakes are able to get through.
    - i. What a strange turn of events... snakes begin to bite the people... and some are sickened, while others die.
    - ii. As they come to terms with their sin against God and Moses, the people seek the Lord’s deliverance to get them out of this awful mess

- iii. So Moses seeks God's guidance on what to do... and he's told to make a bronze serpent, put it on a pole, raise it up, and those who look at it trusting in God will live. (vs 8)
- d. Now, the story doesn't say that the snakes will stop biting, or the misery in the forty years of the desert gets easier... it just ends with, "if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live." (vs 9)
- e. First of all, I'm sure that bronze snake wasn't all that appealing to look at – it was a symbol of how Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent – but it also just didn't make a lot of sense to look at this ugly thing and live.
- f. Secondly, the snakes didn't necessarily go away!
  - i. The people kept getting bit, but if they looked at the bronze serpent, they would live.
  - ii. When we think of God's deliverance, we think of no pain, no more bad things, no more trouble... but His deliverance is much bigger than all that.

IV. **Let's consider John 3:16 again...**

- a. I know we often say the verse like "God loved the world so, so, so much..."
  - i. However, it might be better to say it "God loved the world like so... or in this way..."
- b. Then we say, God gave His only Son.
  - i. It probably means more like, "handed His Son over"
- c. We might then say John 3:16 a little different than we've memorized:
  - i. For God loved the world like this: He handed over His only Son (to the world) so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.
- d. Jesus, our Savior, was handed over to a world where sin, death and satan seemed to have the upper hand.
  - i. His fate was to be conceived, born, suffer, die by crucifixion and be buried.
  - ii. It was not a victory won by force and dominance in defeating the enemies... it was humiliation, suffering, and loss.
  - iii. The Father handed over Jesus to be crucified by sinful men – to die the horrible death we deserved...and through Jesus' loss and sacrifice He defeated the sin that condemns us, the devil who slanders and accuses us, and the death that claims us.
  - iv. Yes, Jesus was bitten by the serpent, but that old evil foe's head was crushed by the surrender of Jesus upon the cross of Calvary.
- e. How can it be?
  - i. How can it be that God saved us, by handing His own Son over to die our death?
  - ii. How can God's amazing love include such a great sacrifice on His part?

- iii. How can it be that the only thing God requires to receive all the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation is faith or belief in Him?
- iv. I cannot answer to the depth of God's love for us, but simply point to the handing over of His Son to the cross – which I gladly look up to and live!
  - 1. I may not live forever in this body – but I rest secure in the hope of an eternal life and a resurrection of the dead!
  - 2. I trust in God's work – His love for me – and His promises.

V. **Isn't that the benefit of being a believer in Jesus Christ?**

- a. No matter how much we get bitten – trials and struggles come at us – we continue to look to Jesus in the storm.
- b. Not even Jesus Himself bypassed the storm – He went through it with more trials than any of us could endure – and we go through it too.
- c. We are on a journey to the Promised Land of heaven, and these 40 years in the desert can be incredibly difficult.
- d. Let me leave you with some encouragement from the Book of Hebrews, as the author describes all the “heroes of the faith” in chapters 11 and 12.
  - i. 22 people are named in Hebrews 11, including Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph – along with Moses, Joshua and Elijah to name a few.
  - ii. We could certainly add Paul, Peter, John and the other Apostles to this list.
  - iii. Now, you might be able to remember another person in your own experience who walked in faith during their lives – and they are in your “heroes of the faith” category.
    - 1. These people might be Sunday School teachers, pastors, parents or friends... and what did they all have in common?
      - a. Each one struggled with trials and difficulties – but, as Hebrews 12:2 reminds us, they kept their “eyes fixed upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”
      - b. They looked upon the cross and trusted... they kept going with endurance as they looked above the trials creeping and crawling on the ground below – to the Savior, Jesus.
- e. We are all, through the love of God, walking together in victory.
- f. Encourage one another with this truth, and support one another in the trials... but more than anything keep your eyes on Jesus, the one who was handed over to save us, Amen.