

**Amazing Love – Overview**  
**Pastor Ty Blackburn**  
**John 3:14-15**  
**June 12, 2011**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 3. It's really good to be back this morning with you worshipping. We were glad to get back on Wednesday night for the service, but the first time back teaching in three weeks, and it's always a joy to be back studying the Word of God, to prepare the Word of God, to preach it. It's a great privilege to do it in a congregation like this who loves Christ and loves His Word. We were pretty well rested and it was a good vacation. Thank you for your prayers for us, and it's good to have, when we're gone, to know that the Word is being brought by men like Steven Gaines and Ken Temple, and that you were well cared for, edified, and encouraged as they preached the Gospel to you.

I had planned this morning to look at John 3:16, the most widely-known in all of holy Scripture, and as I was preparing, I told Barry Malarcher, our webmaster, he sends out the emails, if you get the emails each week, that tell you what the message is going to be about. If you don't, and you'd like to, just let Carolyn know and she'll forward it on to Barry, and he'll get those to you. You'll know what's coming up and you might be able to send it to a friend as a way of spreading the word, and getting them to our website possibly to listen if they don't come to church. But anyway, I told him that we would go on to John 3:16 and I had intended to do that, and so that was the plan, but as I studied and prayed the last couple of days of the week, I felt like the Lord wanted us to go back over some things. I know that's a shock to many of you, that I would ever think a review was in order, but I do feel like that partly because I think I really did not get to the bottom of Verses 14 and 15 anyway last time, and then also because John 3:16 is such a wealth of treasure that I want the table to be properly set when we get there.

So we're going to kind of review the passage with a little slightly different angle. It's something we talked about some, but I want us to think about it a little bit differently. What I want us to ask this morning is, I want us to think about this from the standpoint of evangelism. What is the message and the methodology of Jesus here in this passage? Because what we have is Jesus evangelizing Nicodemus, and really through him the Nation of Israel. We see later in the passage, we taught this in previous verses, when Jesus is saying to him, "You do not understand," in Verses 10, 11, and 12. "You will not receive. You do not believe." He changes from the singular, "Are you the teacher and you (singular) do not understand?" Then later He says, "You (plural) will not receive. You (plural)



will not believe.” He’s looking beyond Nicodemus to the other Pharisees, and all of the Jews of the 1st Century, and He’s saying to them, “You’re in the dark!” And so He’s evangelizing all of them, and I think it’s instructive to look at how He does this, and to step back and look at the forest as well as the trees. What I think you see as you look at this is that you can really look at the evangelistic endeavor in terms of five questions that you’re trying to lead a lost person to ask so that they might find the answers, and you might provide them the answers. Five questions:

### 1) What is Your Predicament?

The first question is: What is your predicament? What is the predicament of fallen men? You are wanting the person to come to understand what their predicament is. What?

### 2) How Can I Be Saved?

The second question that we want them to see is: How can I be saved? How can you be saved? You want them to be asking that question.

### 3) Who Can Save You?

Thirdly, you want them to see the most important question to begin with once you’ve asked *How?* is: Who can save you? Or to whom must you look for salvation?

### 4) Where Must You Look?

Fourthly, where must you look?

### 5) Why Would God Do What He’s Done in Christ?

And fifthly, really, John 3:16 is answering the question *Why?* Why would God do what He’s done in Christ? That’s of course His great love. We’re going to look at that, Lord willing, next week.

I want us to look at the first four questions this morning—*What? How? Who?* and *Where?* The *What?* is mostly a quick review of the first part of this passage. The *How?*, the *Who?*, and the *Where?* is more of an explication of Verses 13-15, really preparing for next week, Lord willing, Verse 16, and *Why?* But asking the question: What is it that must happen in the heart of a person for them to be

saved? What truths must they grapple with? Jesus lays it out for us. There are a lot of different opinions about how evangelism should be done. In recent years, in recent decades, it has become more and more of a soft sell approach to evangelism in Christian circles. Accent the positive, you know, focus on the all the good things, come at felt needs that people feel, show them how Jesus is the answer to that. That's the way that people have been arguing, really for the last, since I was in seminary it was really heavy, the '*Seeker Movement*', now the '*Emergent Church Movement*', both really doing the same thing just from different angles. The '*Seeker Movement*' was saying, "How can you speak to the world in such a way that they will appreciate it?" It was marketing, find out their felt needs and meet them. The '*Emergent Church Movement*' saying basically the same thing differently, "How will a post-modern people like to have the Gospel brought to them?" Go with less certainty, more ambiguity, have a rap session instead of a sermon, all this kind of stuff. It's all about packaging it.

Well when you look at how Jesus did it, I think that's where we should start anyway, shouldn't we? How did He evangelize? When we look at this, there is really a two-fold application. One is, "What should my message be in evangelism?" But also, as I care for my own soul, "How do I appropriate these truths for my own soul, to make my calling and election sure?" Ken preached on that passage last week. We saw in Colossians earlier, you may have heard at the end of that passage, which reflected the glory of Christ, when Paul says, "You have been reconciled if (Verse 23) if you hold fast your profession, if you are not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, then truly you are saved." That is, are you going to continue? Well, we're to nurture our souls to continue. Now if once you are truly saved you are always saved, let me be clear on that, but many think they are saved who are not. Time will tell.

Those who have a rocky soil conversion can fall away later. Parable of the four soils, remember the rocky soil? That's the one who receives it with great joy, it springs up quickly, but it has no root. It dies because there was no depth of soil for that seed to germinate in? It appeared to be saved but it wasn't. The idea is how do you care for your own soul? How do you make your calling and election sure? This passage speaks to that. "I wonder am I born again?" What do you do? The passage answers that question as well, these four questions that we should help men to pose, and then to answer from Scripture. What is the predicament of fallen men? What I want to do is begin reading, we'll read the entire passage, at Verse 23. Remember John 2:23 starts really this passage, it introduces it for us. We'll read John 2:23 through John 3:15.



*John 2:23-3:15 ~ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. 24 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, 25 and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.*

*1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” 3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

*4 Nicodemus \*said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

*9 Nicodemus said to Him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. 12 If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. 14 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.*

Let’s pray.

*Our Father, we ask that You, by Your Spirit, might enlighten our minds, open our hearts, grant us understanding, grant us more faith, and more repentance as we see Your Son. We pray in His Name, Amen.*

## 1) What?

Now, the questions *What? How? Who? and Where?* The first thing Jesus does is spends a great deal of time helping Nicodemus come to understand exactly what his predicament is. Nicodemus is not expecting to be confronted with his predicament. I had wondered about how different this conversation must have gone than he expected. I mean, he was excited about what God was doing in Jesus. He knew that He was sent from God, as he said. He was taking some personal risks, laying some of his capital on the line to go have a meeting, though it was at night, with Him. He expects to learn some things from Jesus, but perhaps he expected to have more of a theological conversation. Let's talk about what '*Messiah*' means in the Old Testament, and how you are the fulfillment of that.

Let's consider some biblical exegete. Let's talk about some of these things, and yet what Nicodemus finds as he meets with Jesus is that what was exegeted was in reality his own heart. He finds himself laid bare before the One with whom we all must do. Jesus, in this passage, basically confronts him with the reality that he must be born again. That's His message in the first three verses, the necessity of the new birth. "Nicodemus, though you are a teacher of the Jews, though you are a Pharisee of Pharisees, though you are a ruler of the Sanhedrin, though you are in every way what a Jewish man aspires to be, though you are a people of the select people of God, the covenant people of God who possess the law, and the tabernacle, and the covenants. You are the one who possesses all these things. You are at the top. You are *crème de la crème*, yet you are lost. You need to be born again." He exposes for him the nature of the new birth, that this is an act of God, in Verses 4-7. It is instantaneous. It is something that only God can do.

Verse 8 we saw the effects of the new birth which are evident. The wind blowing where it wills it leaves its effect. Then Verses 9-12, Jesus takes this teaching about what his predicament is, "Though you are knowledgeable in the truths of the Bible, the Old Testament, you are lost." He shows Nicodemus in pointed fashion in Verse 10, He says, "You do not understand." In Verse 11, He says, "You do not accept, or you do not receive." In Verse 12 He says, "You do not believe," and we saw that He was showing the darkness of the unregenerate heart, that a person who has not been born again, though he may have an informed mind, and read doctrine and theology, like Nicodemus. If he's not been born again, he still is in the dark spiritually. This three-pronged assault of Jesus, remember we talked about the heart, the Bible speaks of the heart as possessing the thinking, the affections, and the will, are really all functions of the heart. He is saying, "You need a new heart. The mind of your heart is darkened. You can't understand the things of God. The

affections of your heart are alienated. You don't even want the things that you ought to want. You are averse to the things that you ought to love, and you love the things you ought to hate. That's the nature of the unregenerate heart. Not only are those things true, but your will, the will of your heart, the deciding power, the volitional element of the human soul is bound so that you are utterly and in every way, helpless and hopeless." What he'd expected to be a theological discussion, an enjoyable excursion into deep biblical truth was really a painful exposition of his own barren soul. Jesus, like a military commander, this three-pronged assault has demolished, utterly demolished the strongholds of Nicodemus' self-reliance, self-righteousness, and self-satisfaction.

## 2) How?

I think there is an unspoken question on Nicodemus' heart that he dare not voice. Earlier he is asked two questions in the middle of this discussion. Twice he said, "How can...?" The word '*can*' translates to a word which means '*possibility*'. "How is it possible," Verse 4, "for someone to be born again?" "How is it possible for a man to be born when he is old?" Then he asks another question in Verse 9, "How *can* these things be? How are these things possible? How is it possible?" Then after the three-pronged assault in Verses 10, 11, and 12, it's as if he is now speechless. He can't utter the words, but the right question would be: "Given how these things are, how can I be saved?"

That's the second point, *How?* When evangelism has started where it ought to, a person that is being evangelized and being moved by the spirit to consider their own soul in truth, is left barren with that question. "How can I be saved?" Jesus is modeling for us that you don't start with, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." You start with what the Puritans called '*law work*'. You must, by God's grace and His Word, demolish what people are trusting in. We don't have the ability to do that. What we're supposed to do is bring the Word. That's what He's done. He said, "You have to be born again." It's not about religiosity, it's not about church attendance, it's not about baptism, it's not about being a Sunday school teacher, or being a deacon or an elder, or even a pastor. It's not about any of those things, it's about being born again. In expositing what it means to be born again, He takes this man who knew the Old Testament law, and He says, "Nicodemus, do you understand? You are trusting in righteousness, and there is no hope for you. You are utterly, and in every way abjectly weak and unable before God." That's what must happen. That's why, when we evangelize, we need to start with helping people see how they stand before God. So using the law, and other things, is helpful to that end, and you have to discern where someone is by God's

grace. You do that as you present Christ. You lead them to the question: “How can I be saved? How can you be saved?”

That’s what you want them to be asking. Nicodemus must be wondering, at this point, totally bewildered by all that has happened, “I can’t believe how this conversation has gone, but suddenly now I see that I am spiritually undone.” He must have felt something of what Isaiah felt, “Woe is me.” He came thinking everything was all right with him, but he now knows that nothing is right with him. Jesus doesn’t pause to leave him there, Jesus has demolished his self-reliance, and He’s been somewhat strong-handed in that. The three-fold approach in Verses 10-12, “You do not understand. You do not accept. You do not believe,” has been really a firm blow to Nicodemus, but it brought him exactly where the Savior wanted him to be because you cannot be saved until you are first lost, and he has to know that. At this point he does, and what happens is, Verse 13, Jesus doesn’t leave him wallowing in his misery and despair, He immediately begins to transition to the good news. Verse 13 is the beginning of the presentation of the good news because Verse 13 he doesn’t leave him with the *How?* He’s dealt with *What?* What is your predicament? You are lost and hopeless apart from Christ. How can you be saved? Yes, *how* can you be saved? How can I be saved? How can any of us be saved? What Jesus basically does in Verse 13 is says, “Basically, it is not so much how that you need to be asking, it is who?” *Who?* is the question.

### 3) Who?

When I first looked at Verse 13 in studying it, reading this passage, it’s so important for us to consider the flow and the logic. At first glance, Verse 13 seems a little out of place. It almost seems as if Jesus has digressed to talk about an obscure theological point. He almost sounds, in this passage, a little bit like a woman later we meet in the Gospel, the woman at the well. Remember where Jesus is talking to her, and beginning to deal with her heart, and she says, “Hey, are we supposed to worship here or in Jerusalem?” She’s trying to do everything that she can to distract from her heart. It almost seems like Jesus does that here, if you don’t stop and think about it. Of course He doesn’t, but it seems like that. Look at Verse 13:

***John 3:13 ~ No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.***

I mean, he's brought Nicodemus to the point of personal despair. "You're completely in the dark without remedy." Why this? What is the point for Nicodemus to know that nobody has ever ascended into Heaven and come back? The great need of Nicodemus, and the great need of all fallen men, it's not a digression, it's a progression. It's the next logical step in the argument. The great need of Nicodemus and all fallen men is to obtain the new birth. Remember to be born again we saw literally translated, the Greek word means 'born from above', 'anothin'. To be born *from* above. It's the life of Heaven coming down into the soul of man. In this passage, Jesus has said it means 'to be born of the Spirit'. So this is not a digression. What He is saying is: "Is there any man who has ever been able to go into Heaven and to bring back, to lay hold of the resources of this new birth, and bring it down? Is there anybody who has done that? Look back through the halls of history. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David—has anyone ascended and come back?" And the answer is, "No." What is He saying? He's saying, "You can't look to anybody else, there is only one Person to whom you must look. There is only one Person who has laid hold of the resources of Heaven, and can bring them down. It's not one who ascended and came back, it's One who came down, the Son of Man." How can we attain the new birth? "Nicodemus, you are hopeless and without any help in yourself. What must you do, you must look to the Son of Man." To whom must you look? The Son of Man. How can we obtain new life? Who can give it? Only this Person Jesus speaks of, the Son of Man.

We've mentioned before that this is Jesus' favorite self-designation, it's the favorite way to refer to Himself, the Son of Man. He refers to Himself some as the Son of God, the Son a lot in John as well, but His favorite designation, when you look at all the Gospels, is the Son of Man. What is He saying? He said, "The only One that can bring this new birth to you, a fallen sinner, Nicodemus, and behind you all of Israel..." If Nicodemus and all Israel are condemned before God, every one of us Gentiles is filthier, and more lost as it were. Really the same, but it's kind of like a million miles away versus a million and ten. We're a million and ten. We've got nothing on the Jews. They are ahead of us. The reality is they don't have anything on us either because they are still in need of the new birth, but how can we attain it? What He is saying is, "The Son of Man." He uses that phrase twice and it's emphatic in the word order in both verses. The last words in both verses are the phrase, "The Son of Man." You see that in Verse 13 and Verse 14 it is also the last phrase, though the word order is more malleable in Greek, we can't do that in English. But in the Greek, the last words are emphasized. So Son of Man is the emphatic position in both places. **...He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. ...even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;** What does that phrase



mean? I think it meant two things. It meant first, accessibility. Two sub-points under this point *Who?*

A) Accessibility:

Son of Man. The reason He used that term, it emphasized first the accessibility of salvation. The Son of Man means first and foremost *'true man, true humanity'*. Jesus used that term to emphasize continually that He was fully man. He wasn't, as some heretics have thought through the centuries, only seeming to be man, a ghost, like the docetic Gnostic believed. No, He was very man of very man. Not only did He call Himself man, but the Son of Man. True humanity. In that, what we see is, He has come all the way down for the new birth to reach you or me, God had to bring it all the way down to us. It couldn't be stopped just out of our reach, He came all the way down into humanity, and He's brought the resources of Heaven all the way down. That's what 1 Timothy 2:5 emphasizes when Paul says, listen to what he says:

***1 Timothy 2:5 ~ For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,***

Do you see that emphasis? The man. Humanity.

A professor in seminary, Doug Kelly, I remember one of the days he was teaching systematic theology and he got to really preaching. He often was dealing with such complex realities, and concepts, and we were just straining our minds to keep up with what he was saying. I mean, things like the co-inherence of the two Persons of Christ. That's what he was talking about this day, how two natures, the two natures in one Person. The hypostatic union, it sounds like an exciting thing to get up and go to class for, doesn't it? It really is. It's the fact that Jesus is fully man and fully God. As he began to unfold this for us in that hour, in Jackson, Mississippi, in that seminary class, and he got more and more filled with the joy and the wonder of this. How God has come all the way down, to reach down to the very depths of our need, so He could lift us up from where He is, to bring us back to where He is. I remember at a moment toward the end of the class he said, "Do you realize," and he quoted, I think this was an original with him, he said, "Do you realize that in Jesus Christ, now resurrected, ascended, seated at the right hand of God, the Father, do you understand that the dust, the very dust of the earth, think about this," Dr. Kelly said. "The dust of the earth sits enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high." The dust of the earth! That's what Christ has done!

Humanity enthroned, and because He is, we will reign with Him. He came all the way down so He could take us all the way up. True Man, that's what Son of Man means. So He says, "Look to the Son of Man. You need to be saved. You need to have someone who can bring it all the way to where you are, Nicodemus. It's Me, the Son of Man." Accessibility. Who? *The Son of Man*, first emphasizing His accessibility. *The Son of Man* also emphasizes not just accessibility, but also:

## B) Authority:

Nicodemus, schooled in the Old Testament, no doubt knew immediately about Daniel 7:13 and the messianic title the Son of Man was. In Daniel 7:13, Daniel seeing the vision of Heaven, sees One coming on the clouds of Heaven, and the only One who comes on the clouds of Heaven is God, and Daniel is bewildered to see that the One coming on the clouds of Heaven is a Son of Man. And it's that Son of Man who comes before the Ancient of Days into the very throne room of God, and He's not cast out. This Man coming on the clouds of Heaven comes before the Ancient of Days in purity and holiness, and is accepted. He's not only accepted, but given dominion, given authority so that all peoples from everywhere worship Him.

What he sees is he sees the God-Man, and in this picture, now, Nicodemus is having unveiled for him the eternal plan of salvation. "Do you see, Nicodemus, you need to look to the Son of Man who has made it accessible and who has in Himself authority. One greater than Moses is here. One greater than Abraham is here. One greater than David is here. In the God-Man, God has come all the way down. Since the children share in flesh and blood, He also partook of the same, that through death, He might render powerless him who had the power of death.

What is your predicament? How can I be saved? The question is: Who can save? And Jesus in His glorious person, two natures, one Person, He is the meeting place. He is the One who is able, coming all the way down to share in our infirmities. Made in the likeness of sinful flesh as an offering for sin, He's come all the way down, and yet when He came all the way down, He didn't stop being who He is, the One who possessed all power, who even as He walked on the face of this earth, even as He lay in the manger as a baby, was upholding all things by the Word of His power. The God-Man. The question is: To whom do you look? The Son of Man.

So our evangelism must be Christ-centered. You're not evangelizing to somebody when you just tell them how lost they are and you give them a plan of salvation. A plan of salvation is appropriate and helpful as a memory tool, but there needs to be a focus that you are presenting a Person, and that when you preach, when you evangelize, you are presenting Christ. You're literally hoping that the Person of Jesus is being unveiled before them. So you want to talk about Jesus. You want to talk about their lotness long enough to get them to see their need, and then you want to spend time talking about Jesus. And if you haven't talked about Jesus, you haven't evangelized. I mean, you may have done pre-evangelism, which is important, and sometimes you don't get all the way through it, right? I mean you knock on somebody's heart and they don't want to know, but you don't want to finish a presentation and not have talked about Christ. He is our message.

That passage I read earlier from Colossians 1 where Paul is talking about the glories of Christ, later in that same passage, he says in Colossians 1:28, "What's our message? We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man." We proclaim Him. Our message is not a system, a way of thinking even about sin, and a way of thinking about salvation. No, our message is a Person. It is a Savior, a living Savior. We are presenting Him. We are proclaiming Him. That is how people are saved is they come in contact with Him. It's not that they accept. This is a fine line, but they don't just accept a way of viewing man's problem and a way of viewing how we might deal with that. They come in contact with the Person of Jesus. That's really what's happening in verses like Romans 10:17, where Paul says:

***Romans 10:17 ~ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.***

When you look at that passage carefully, what you see is *Word of Christ* first of all is not a technical term for the Bible. The Word of God is a technical term for the Bible. It's used throughout Scripture. Secondly, the word *Word* is not the normal word *logos*, which also is used as more of a technical term. It's the word ῥῆμα (rhēma), the Word of Christ, the ῥήματος Χριστοῦ (rhēmatos Christou), the word of Christ. What he's saying is faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the particular message – rhēma is a particular message, a tailored message to the moment. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the message about Jesus. That's how people get saved. They hear the message about Jesus. They hear you tell them about Jesus.

I think there's an interesting word play going on, an ambiguity. There are many times where in Scripture the Lord in His sovereignty – He's created everything. He's responsible for languages – there's an ambiguity in the Greek genitive case, the phrase *of Christ*. Does that mean the Word about Christ exclusively, like I just said, talking about Jesus? Some other times it means the Word spoken by Jesus. Do you see that? Word of Christ can be either one. It's kind of like the love of God. The love of Christ constrains you. Is that my love for Him that constrains me or His love for me? I think in that place, it's just like here. Yes, both. First, it's His love for you, but then it's your love for Him that constrains you.

I think when he's saying, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ," what he's saying is, and when you look at it in this context, I think this becomes even more clear, especially when you look at the first part of Chapter 10 – do that on your own later, how salvation comes through the speaking of the Word. But anyway, he says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ, the *rhēmatos Christou*." What he's saying is as you preach about Jesus, as you lift up Jesus, as you point to Jesus, as you marvel in who Jesus is, what happens is Jesus Himself is present speaking to them.

You have brought into their life the opportunity to encounter the risen Lord, and He Himself, as you've been sharing, stammering around, struggling with what to say next, talking but desiring to lift up Jesus, suddenly He is in your midst, and He is speaking to them, and He is their only hope. They're dead in transgressions and sins. How can they be made alive except the One who said, "Lazarus come forth" come into the room and say to that person, "Sinner, come forth!" That's what happens, but you've got to be focusing your message on Christ, and as you focus it on Him, He speaks and calls them to life when He wills. So it's *Who?* Who is so important? To whom do you look? We don't preach ourselves, but Christ, Paul says, and ourselves as your servants for His sake.

Now, there's more, though.

***John 3:13-14 ~ No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. 14 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;***

Not just what is your predicament, not just how can you be saved, not just to whom must you look but: Where must you look?

#### 4) Where?

We've seen in man's great need, he must look to the Person of the Son of Man, but here Jesus specifies in this discussion with Nicodemus that he must look to the Son of Man at a particular place in time and space. You must look to the Son of Man lifted up. He's talking about the cross. He's talking about Calvary, in that the sinner must look to the Son of Man lifted up on the cross. He emphasizes the phrase lifted up. It's repeated twice. ***Moses lifted up the serpent... So the Son of Man must be lifted up.*** The idea is height, elevation, to make prominent, to elevate, or to exalt. The same phrase is used by Jesus and recorded by John a couple more times. In John 8:28, Jesus said:

***John 8:28 ~ "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He,..."***

In Chapter 12, Verses 31-34:

***John 12:31-33 ~ Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." 33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die (John adds).***

To be lifted up, He's talking about His cross, and that's what He's talking about in John 3 with Nicodemus. "Nicodemus, your only hope for new life, for entrance into the Kingdom of God, is to look to Me the Son of Man and to My cross." He uses a familiar Old Testament passage, an analogy, and just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, referring to Numbers 21:4-9, where the nation of Israel were grumbling, and complaining, and rebelling against Moses and against God as they were so often doing, the Lord sends a judgment upon them. Because of their rebellious hearts, He sends poisonous serpents among them, a plague of poisonous serpents. That's a terrifying thing if you stop and think about that. I mean, it was a plague of poisonous serpents. I hate snakes. I don't like spiders much either. Spiders are easier to kill, though. The only good snake is a dead snake except for a king snake, and the only reason a king snake is a good snake alive is it kills more snakes than you will kill when you kill it. It eats snakes. That was just no charge for that.

They had rebelled against God, God sent this plague of poisonous snakes upon them, they're being bitten, they're dying with this poison, it's coursing through their veins, and people are dying and collapsing all around by the thousands. They see what's happened, and they run to Moses, saying, "Intercede for us on behalf of

us. Ask God to deliver us,” and the Lord says, “Make a bronze serpent, put it on a pole, set it on a standard, and let people look to it and be saved.” *Set it on a standard* is repeated twice in that passage. Set it on a standard means emphasize it, set it on display, make it prominent. I mean, think about the fact that thousands of people are dying in the camp. They have to all look to the bronze serpent. They have to be able to see it. It’s got to be lifted up high, and as the text says, “As they looked to the bronze serpent, they would live.”

What an amazing story. What an amazing event that God brought to pass as a way of delivering the sinful nation of Israel, and how at first glance it must have seemed foolish. I mean, imagine you’re dying, you’re feeling the effects of the poison come over you, you’re seeing people die around you, and somebody says, “Look at that bronze serpent and you’ll live.” Doesn’t that seem rather foolish? *How will that possibly affect me to look at a bronze statue?* Part of that is preparing us for the foolishness of the preaching of the cross. It is Jesus lifted up on the cross. To the world, that would seem like utter foolishness, but to those who believe, it is the power and the wisdom of God.

Jesus is telling Nicodemus, “Nicodemus, you must look to Me and to My cross. That is the way to be saved. It is My cross. It is the Son of Man lifted up who saves.” This tells us the centrality of the cross must be a part of our evangelism. We don’t just preach Jesus, we preach the cross. Our message is Christ and His cross, or as Paul summed up his message in 1 Corinthians 1:23, he said, “If you want to know what to preach, (he did it in two words) we preach Christ crucified. That’s our message.” In 1 Corinthians 2:2, the same passage, he’s reminding the Corinthians. He said, “Listen, when I came, I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” It is the cross. To the world, that must look so strange. We glory in the cross. We sing about the blood. Step back from that for a moment and think about that. We forget, don’t we, how odd that is? I mean, we treasure an instrument of death. We treasure something used for an execution and a painful, agonizing execution, at that. We treasure it, because it is God’s means of salvation, and though it may be foolishness to the world, it is the wisdom and power of God.

Turn over to 1 Corinthians 1. I just quoted this verse, but it’s worth looking at this passage.

***1 Corinthians 1:18 ~ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.***

The cross is the power of God. Jesus is telling that to Nicodemus. Isn't the Lord so good? This self-righteous Pharisee Nicodemus who came in self-satisfied, ready to kind of give his blessing to Jesus' ministry, he finds out he's got nothing, and Jesus brings him down to the point not so He can make him wallow in it – there's nothing of that in God – He brings him to that point so he can be saved, and He says, "Look to Me," and He unveils for him His whole mission. "I'm the Son of Man who has come down to die on the cross. It's your only hope. Look to Me and be saved." That's what He's saying.

If you wonder if you're born again, you don't know if you're born again, or you're concerned for your soul, keep looking at Jesus and keep looking at the cross. That's what He's saying. Keep looking at Christ. You want to see your children be saved? How do you do that? You keep helping them look to Christ and look to the cross. That's why in our childrearing, we need to work at doing what Ted Tripp expounds so well in his marvelous book *Shepherding a Child's Heart*. He says too often Christian parenting is like behavior modification just with a Christian version, a Christian stand. We just want to get the kids to do right. He says, "No, we should be shepherding their hearts, and shepherding their hearts means leading them to Christ, continually helping them in their disobedience, when we discipline them, not just to say we don't want you to act that way."

Too often it's like this: "I don't want you to act that way because you're irritating me." We may not say that, but that's how we act. That's what comes through. Instead it should be, "Why have you sinned like that? Do you realize you've sinned against God? You keep on doing that because you have a heart that rebels against God." You help your child see that. Why? So that you can say, "Look to Christ. Look to His cross." That's parenting the Gospel, and that should be a part of the way we think in every area of life. Certainly in our evangelism the cross is key. We're not ashamed of the cross. We glory in the cross.

I love what Paul says in Galatians 6:14. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ." There's nothing else to boast in, in the whole world but the cross, and that's what he's saying back in 1 Corinthians 1, the passage we're looking at. Down to Verse 22:

***1 Corinthians 1:22 ~ For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.***

Jesus on the cross, now resurrected and ascended into heaven, but that decisive event, that moment is where you see the unveiling of the power of God, and the wisdom of God, and the glory of God supremely in the cross. So the message, when you want to get people to look at Jesus, it's look at Jesus and look at the cross. It's interesting, back to John 3 – Paul, in that 1 Corinthians 1 passage is showing the paradox. It seems like foolishness to Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews, but it's the power and the wisdom of God. In reality, that's what it is. You see the paradox even in what Jesus has said to Nicodemus.

***John 3:14 ~ ...even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;***

When you look at the word Jesus chose and uses again and again in the Gospel to talk about the cross, as we saw in John 12, Jesus says the same thing. “The Son of Man must be lifted up.” He said this to signify by what death He would die. But Jesus uses the word here that the Spirit has put into the text, which is a word which almost without exception is a word used only in a positive light. What I mean is that to be lifted up means to be elevated. This is how people used it all the time. It's to be elevated, to raise to a position of prosperity, dignity and honor. So it's out of place in a sense of lifted up to the cross. But it's not out of place, because in the lifting up to the horrible death of the cross, Jesus was Himself being lifted to a place of unprecedented dignity and honor and glory. That's the wonder of the cross. There even in the phrase lifted up, that paradox is unveiled.

I mean, think about it. The cross is the instrument of maximum pain. The Romans cultivated it to make it maximum agony on the person upon the cross. It was a place of ultimate humiliation, inescapable, unavoidable death coming, but the agony of the cross. But that place of ultimate humiliation becomes the place of indescribable majesty and unspeakable glory. Think about it. It's the place of utter weakness, Jesus hanging there in utter weakness, but in reality, it's the place of infinite power. It appears to be the place of abject defeat, but in reality, it's the place of absolute victory. It's where He destroyed the works of the devil. It's where He appeared to be defeated, but Colossians 2:13 says He made a public spectacle of Satan and all of his demons, triumphing over them where? In the cross, not the resurrection even. The resurrection is certainly part of the victory, but He triumphed over them in the cross. He took away all of their power.

If you think about what happened on the cross. We know that God poured out His wrath on His Son in our place, but what that looked like is basically He pulled back His hand, and the Bible uses this phrase over and over: *God gave Him over*. God gave Him up. God gave Jesus over and allowed Satan and all of his minions to

pour out all of their venom upon the Son on the cross, and they poured out everything they had, everything that they had that they rightfully had towards those who would believe. I mean, you and I were under a sentence of condemnation.

In Colossians 2 when I said He was triumphing over them in the cross and made a public spectacle of them, earlier it says He disarmed them. Having disarmed the rulers and authorities, He took away their certificate of debt, nailing it to the cross. What happened was they had a claim on every human soul, and Jesus came down, and for everyone who would believe, He allowed all of their claim to be hurled at Him. Satan hurled every bit of the arsenal that he had for you and for everyone who would ever believe, at Christ, and he hurled it at Him, and he hurled it at Him, and Jesus took every blow, after blow, after blow, all of the spiritual agony, the emotional torment, the hatred of the Jews who mocked Him, the Romans who scorned Him, all of that, He took it, and there the One who was seemingly, utterly defeated, uttered the great words of victory.

Finally at 3:00 in the afternoon, “It is finished!” He had taken it all, and He was still standing. He said, “It’s done. I’ve finished with it. Satan is totally empty-handed. He has nothing for the elect. They are defeated and the elect are saved.” The victory happened at Calvary. Utter weakness, abject defeat, in reality infinite power, absolute victory. The place of meanest, lowliest humiliation is in reality the place of ultimate exaltation and dignity. That’s what Paul is saying in Philippians 2 when he says, “Jesus took upon Himself the form of a slave and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” You see that humiliation. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and given Him a Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bow, those in Heaven, those on the earth, those under the earth, and every tongue, will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.

That great dignity, that great glory, came in the cross, and Jesus knew that. In one sense, in His humanity, He trembled at being made the wrath of God and bearing our sins. That’s why at Gethsemane, He was struggling in His humanity, and yet all along He also knew this was the point of glory. There’s an interesting thing and John presents this beautifully in the Gospel of John, in John 13:31. Right after John says Judas had taken the bread and he left the room to go betray Jesus, this was the night before the crucifixion. The events have come together, and now the hour of darkness. Judas gets up from the table. Another Gospel writer tells us Satan had entered into him, and now he goes out to betray Jesus. The next thing the text says is:

***John 13:31 ~ Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus \*said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him;***

“My cross is coming. This is My lifting up. This is My shining moment,” and that is why you and I sing the cross. That is why we treasure the cross, and in treasuring the cross, we’re lifting up our great Savior. We’re lifting up His justice, that He could be just and the justifier of the ungodly only by punishing sin in His Son, that He could outwit all the wisdom of Satan and his kingdom, because they didn’t understand or they wouldn’t have crucified the Lord of glory. But the wisdom of God is greater than the wisdom of man or the wisdom of demons, and so the wisdom of God is put on display in the power of God to reach down to the lowliest depths of the filthiest sinner and to make you spotless. That’s the resources of Jesus Christ. That’s the power of the Son of Man, lifted up so that He could lift us up, and that in dying, because the children share in flesh in blood, He also partook of the same, that He might render powerless through death him who had the power of death, and deliver those from fear of death in held in captivity, and that He might bring many sons where? To glory. That is our great Savior Jesus Christ, and you see, when we share the Gospel, we want to make sure we spend time talking about Him, and as we talk about Him, He will speak to them, and on those He’s chosen, they will come to life. Praise to His Name.

Let’s pray...

*Our Father, we come to You in awe and wonder at so great a salvation, so marvelous a Savior. Lord, we pray that we might live in a manner worthy of the calling of which we’ve been called, that His love might constrain us. It’s no longer about living for ourselves, but for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. And Father, for those that are here this morning who are resisting You, not turning in repentance and faith to Christ, Lord, break their will. Let them see their end. Let them see their utter hopelessness and helplessness, and let them see the glory of the Son of God, Jesus and His cross, beckoning them to salvation. The sinner who wonders, “Would He really love me?” Lord, help them look at the cross and see the eternal Son of God saying, “Yes.” The sinner who says, “I’m too dirty. I’m too filthy. I’ve made too much of a mess. God could not accept me. Does He have power?” Let them look at the cross and see the One who has finished every ounce of wrath for the sins of those who believe, and let them run to Christ in faith. Father, You are our treasure and Your Son is our glory. We pray that He would be exalted in every life, and that He would come quickly to bring us home. We pray this in His Name, Amen.*

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