

# John 3 v 1 - 21

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Lovely. I was beginning to think you were Welsh then, you sung that so well. Lovely. Okay, so wonderful hymn, isn't it? Wonderful verses of the work of God, following through on the work of the cross. Now our second reading is from Numbers 21, and so we're going to be reading from verse 4 through to verse 9. You will see immediately where we're going, having had the John 3 reading. So Numbers 21. And of course, just a note to the children, because I'm a mathematician, we've had lots of maths references, and so Numbers is very appropriate for us today. So then, the children of Israel, verse 4, they travelled from Mount Haw, along the route to the Red Sea to go round Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way.

They spoke against God and against Moses, and said, why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread, there is no water, and we detest this miserable food. Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them. They bit the people, and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, we sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us. So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, make a snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. Let's just pray.

[ 2 : 1 1 ] Father, we thank you, Lord, for your word. As Peter said, Lord, to whom shall we go? For you have the words of eternal life.

And we thank you, Lord, that your words are given for our good, that we might know you, and Lord, that you might make us like Jesus. So we thank you, Lord, for your word. Please help us to understand it through your spirit.

And bless it to us, we pray. Save, we pray, through your great grace. In Jesus' name. Amen. Okay. Okay. Okay.

The complaining people. You will note, of course, this is not the first time that the children of Israel complained. In fact, they tested God severely at least ten times.

But the story is one, of course, of redemption. Of God rescuing, of redeeming His people from slavery in Egypt.

[ 3 : 1 6 ] Of bondage. In fact, if you read Ezekiel, it mentions it also in Joshua, that the Israelites had become idolaters. They had actually adopted the idols of Egypt when they were in Egypt.

But God sent a deliverer. He heard the cries of His people in bondage. And God did some of the most awesome miracles that the world has ever seen.

Of course, outside of the cross. But the miracles that He did was so that God could get a name for Himself. Because the nations had gone after idols.

Worshipping things made by human hands. How offensive is that to God? The God who made us and who loves us. And then we turn around with our own hands.

And with lumps of wood, metal. We make a shape. And we say, You are our gods. Deliver us. How do you think God feels? Towards idolatry.

[ 4 : 1 8 ] But yet, in God's mercy, He rescued His people from Egypt. And He made a name for Himself in front of the entire world. By judging the world power, Egypt.

And of course, as scholars will tell us, God judged the gods of Egypt. So they worshipped the Nile. They worshipped the God in the shape of a frog.

And so on. And the firstborn was important. Because when you died, the firstborn was needed to pray for your safe passage into the afterlife. So God totally decimated the false religion of Egypt.

And He brought out His people, the children of Israel, to worship Him in the wilderness. And so you see an awesome redemption enacted by God.

An awesome act of salvation. Please note that the Israelites didn't have to lift a finger. The only thing they had to do, the only thing, was to take the blood of a lamb and put it over the lintel of their doorposts.

[ 5 : 26 ] That's the only thing they had to do. And yet, God in His almighty power, judged the gods of Egypt. And He took out the people of Israel.

Now then, the people of Israel thought, well, this is easy. God's going to take us into the promised land. We are just going to sit back and God's going to do it all.

He's brought us out of Egypt. He's going to take us into the wilderness. And we're just going to waltz into the promised land. And when they come out of Egypt, what does God say to Moses?

He says, Moses, get my people into army. Into an army. I want everyone age 20 and over.

And then the people start thinking, well, hang on a sec. I didn't know I was going to have to do any fighting. I thought God was going to do it all. You know, God rescued us from Egypt. He's really taken us out.

[ 6 : 26 ] And He expects us to fight. But yet, the test of faith had to come for the Israelites. Was their faith genuine? Did they believe that this God who showed awesome power in delivering them from Egypt, did they believe that this same God could take them into the promised land and holding a sword and six foot from the enemy, could the Israelites have believed that this same God of awesome power could enable them with sword in hand to defeat the enemy?

It's easy, isn't it? We love to say, well, God has done it all. But when our faith is tested to see if our faith is genuine, whether or not we will continue to obey God and trust Him, that's when sometimes things fall apart and our faith is shown to be no faith at all.

And this was the case with the Israelites. Time after time, after God had displayed His awesome power, they refused to trust Him.

They refused to obey Him. They refused at times to go face to face with the enemy and with the mindset, well, hang on, if God can turn the Nile into blood, if God can turn day to night, then I know that this same God is going to help me with sword in hand to defeat these people in the land of Canaan.

But they refused to trust in God after all that God had done. And so what does it say about them? Again, they started complaining.

[ 8 : 11 ] They used to complain against Moses and Aaron. And they would complain against the Lord. And notice what was this standard phrase. So they complained against God and Moses.

And they said, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? What an accusation against the love of God. Can you see that?

Imagine God's done everything to redeem you to Himself. And you turn around. Because things are difficult, you turn around and say, God, you don't really love me. It's all a lie.

You don't care. You just brought us out to kill us. We're better off in Egypt. Imagine how God felt at such an insult from His people. And then that wasn't enough.

They say, Look, we're in the desert here. Where's the water? You know, we want it easy, God. We want an easy time of it. Don't make it hard for us. But of course, the wilderness was the place of testing.

[ 9 : 14 ] To see whether or not God's people, in name, to see whether or not these people would say, Yes, God, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

But only two, aged 20 and over, learned that lesson. And of course, that was Caleb and Joshua. Only two of the men out of that whole nation actually learned, Yes, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

So God acts justly, because He loves justice. And this sin that they've committed, which is to reject God's redemption, was an awesome sin.

It was a very serious sin to say, God, you don't love us, you just want to kill us. So God, in His justice, wants to teach them a lesson.

He had every right to destroy them where they stood. But of course, as we know with God, His mercy triumphs over judgment. And so God sent snakes among them, and only then did they come to their senses.

[ 10 : 28 ] It's only when we get a bit of pain, isn't it? We see our own fragility. We see our own vulnerability. Do we actually come to our senses? And when I say a bit of pain, these poisonous

snakes had bitten them, and now they're crying out to God once people have died under God's justice.

And they said, We have sinned. So this act of God is bringing about a mindset of repentance. Yes, God, we have sinned.

We have spoken against you, God, and your man. The man that you have chosen to stand between us and you. The man to whom you've given your word. Your holy servant, Moses, the meekest man on earth.

We have sinned. We have sinned God against you. Now look at God's solution. This is incredible. He doesn't ask them to climb a mountain.

He doesn't ask them to do some stupendous act of perseverance. God simply says this, to put a snake on a pole, and whoever looks will be healed.

[11:33] Now what is God trying to do in the thinking of the people? Imagine you've just been bitten by a snake. You're in agony because you are dying.

Now people say that when they're bitten by a snake, you can feel the effects of the venom going through your body. Okay? As your body starts to freeze and bits drop off and all sorts of things.

Okay. But the thing is, is that you're dying in agony and then someone says to you, there's a snake on a pole over there. You'd think either one attitude would be, that is so cynical, that is so uncaring, you're just mocking us.

You're mocking us. Why don't you give me some medicine? Help me in some way. I'm dying here.

Why do I want to know about a snake on a pole? But if you say to the person, Moses, the man of God, has put a snake on a pole.

Now the Israelite would know Moses would only do anything if God had told him to do it. Now this is important to remember. Moses, the meekest man on earth, would only do what God had told him to do.

[12:44] He must have done it for a purpose. He has put a snake on a pole. I must see it. And God said, whoever looked to that pole, in faith, it was really an acknowledgement that Moses would only do it because God had told him to.

That snake reminded them, yes, we were suffering justly for our sin. We deserve to die. We'd rebelled awfully against our God who had redeemed us from Egypt.

Our sin was awful. We deserve to die. Yes, God, I deserve your judgment. And one look of faith.

Because Moses had put this snake on a pole, the man of God, because he had done that, they simply were made well.

Just a look of faith. No action at all. Jesus said, now I want to go to the, one of the most neglected verses in the Bible. Well, the most overlooked verses in the Bible, John 3, 15.

Because everyone says, John 3, 16, you jump to 16, you miss out number 15. Now look at this. I want to make this point. Firstly, rarely does Jesus repeat himself.

[14:02] Okay? Now, I know he says, truly, truly, to give emphasis. But rarely does Jesus repeat himself unless he wants to make emphasis. I'll give you one example.

One of the most telling examples, before we come to John 3, sorry, in Luke 12, listen to where Jesus repeats himself. Notice what he says in verse 4 of Luke 12.

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear, talking about God. Fear him who after the killing of the body has power to throw you into hell.

Yes, I tell you, fear him. It's rare that Jesus repeats himself unless it's very, very important and very fundamental.

And Jesus says, yes, I tell you, fear God. Of course, not the fear that causes you to run away from God. The fear of God causes you to flee to God, to get right with God, to honor him as God.

[15:10] But notice John 3, 15, the most overlooked verse, or one of, other than all the genealogies, of course, other than John 3, if we go to John 3, 15, notice what is repeated, and this is so important.

John 3, 15, he's talking to Nicodemus. I'll start from verse 14. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

Jesus speaking. Notice the phrase. You know it very well. That everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Jesus only repeats himself when it is of so much central importance. Now, every word of Jesus is important. But when he gives emphasis, we need to listen especially.

[16:22] And what I want to present to you today is that message where Jesus says, in the same way as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, in the same way must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever looks to him and believes will have everlasting life.

But how is the parallel? Jesus, of course, is talking about his lifting up on the cross. And we know what took place on the cross.

The man who had never sinned. The second Adam. Our forefather Adam sinned and disobeyed God and we have inherited his nature. It is guaranteed that every single person who ever has lived and will live has committed the same sin as Adam.

We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. But the second Adam, God himself, his Son, the Word of God becomes a baby and he grows and he never sins and he resists temptation. He's a man. And so because he's a man he can stand in our place. And because he's sinless he can be the substitute. And at the cross God can take our sin and our just judgment and place it on his Son, Jesus Christ.

[17:48] But knowing that will not save you if you just know it. There might be some here this morning who believe that Jesus was a good man.

So did many Israelites. Some of you might believe that Jesus did miracles. So did many Israelites and even the enemies of God.

The Pharisees, they couldn't deny the miracles of Christ. Knowing that Jesus is a good man is not enough. Knowing that he did miracles is not enough.

Knowing that he died on the cross is not enough. How then does the cross of Jesus save me? How do I look in faith and believe that he is the source, he is the way of eternal life?

How can I look to the cross? Well notice with Moses, first of all they had to believe that Moses was God's man firstly and that Moses would only do something because God had told him to do it and it was God's will.

[18:59] And also that what was represented there was God's just judgment. And to look to the cross and be saved is to see Jesus there as God's man.

He did it because God sent him. He is more than just one of us. He is the son of God. He is the word become flesh. He never sinned and he went to the cross because his father sent him.

You have to believe that Jesus was sent of God to die. But secondly you have to believe when you look to the cross that Jesus is taking the judgment that you and I deserve.

He was dying the death that we deserved. The horrific death of the cross is a worthy death for sinners. Think of the sins we've committed. How many of us have blasphemed the name of Christ? Have we said oh my God and just taking God's name in vain? How many of us have lied had lustful thoughts and hateful thoughts? But yet God in his love because God is love he took the judgment he took our sin and he placed it fully and completely on his son the Lord Jesus Christ.

[20:16] He was God's man and unless you believe that he was sent of God unless you believe it was God's perfect will God's perfect plan for him to go to the cross you cannot be saved.

Just believing he's a good man will not save you. Just believing he did miracles. Just believing that he died will not save you but believing that God sent his son to be the saviour of the world will save your soul.

Just one look in faith. Knowing that Jesus has taken my judgment and your judgment. The snake represented God's righteous judgment for sin.

And Jesus became sin for us. The filth of the world was placed upon the Lamb of God. And notice the cry of Jesus on the cross. He said Father forgive them.

Father forgive them. They don't know what they do. What an awesome saviour. What love is this? But please friend notice the urgency.

[21:21] Jesus repeats himself. He repeats himself. Why? Because if you say to God God I don't care about your redemption just like the Israelites.

I don't care that you sent your son to die. I don't care that it was my sin that put him there. I'm going to live my life my way.

When I do evangelism on the streets of Doncaster I repeat that to the young people. And I say to them imagine God punishing or in Christ God in Christ taking the punishment for our sin. And then you saying to God I don't want you and your forgiveness. Where will you go on judgment day? Where do you deserve to go to reject Christ? And they inevitably they will say to hell it's logical it's just it's morally right that those who reject the saviour condemn their own soul because God has done so much for us.

He has done everything he could. Do you know that God has given everything? There's nothing more that God can give. If we reject Christ we have rejected everything of God.

[ 22 : 38 ] The Israelites saw the miracle of God but they refused to believe when their faith was tested. What God is asking of us is to look to Christ and live to say God I deserve that death but you've done it for me.

You've done it for me Lord. You've taken away my sin. God have mercy on me a sinner. I commit my life to you. It's yours Lord.

My life is yours because you made me number one. My life is also yours because Christ died. Lord you died for me. You bought me with your blood. I am yours.

Jesus repeats himself for your sake and for my sake. He is offering eternal life and this is eternal life Jesus said that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

If there are some here perhaps you've been to church 2,000 times like I did before I became a Christian. I'd been baptized. I used to testify about Jesus in school.

[ 23 : 53 ] I didn't swear. I didn't do all sorts of things but my heart inside was full of filth and sin against God. How many times perhaps have you been to church and you haven't committed your life fully to Christ, abandoned yourself to him and his love?

God is speaking to you this morning to get right with God. The God who's demonstrated his awesome love, who just wants to embrace you forever with his everlasting arms is calling you today.

Get right with God. God does not ask anyone to become a Christian. He commands all men everywhere to repent. He says come, follow me says Christ.

It's an invitation you dare not refuse. It's from the king. The king says come to my feast. Come in. You are welcome. It doesn't matter what sins you've committed. Come to me.

Eat with me. Become a member of my family. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

[ 25 : 13 ] death. The wages of sin is death. But the free gift, the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

There was a radio broadcast in London. I heard it and they said phone in and tell me the three words you most want to hear.

In third place was you've lost weight. In second place were the three words I love you. The producer was shocked. He thought I love you was going to come top of the list.

But it didn't. But the three words that people most wanted to hear was all is forgiven. Isn't that wonderful? All is forgiven.

And that is God's promise to you today. If you will humble yourself, say God have mercy on me a sinner. Come to Christ. Christ. Don't turn away from God. Come to Christ.

[ 26 : 15 ] Let's pray. Father, we thank you.

Thank you, Lord, for your mercy and your grace. Lord, hell is what we deserve because we've sinned against our loving, our awesome, our glorious creator.

We deserve to be cut off from you, O God. But because of your great love, Lord, for us, you sent Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you for Jesus. Thank you, Lord, for loving me and for going to Calvary. And Lord, you know how wretched we are. You know every secret sin.

You know everything about us. But Jesus dealt with it on the cross. He was the victor, completely beat the devil, sin and the death, the full works. We thank you, Jesus.

[ 27 : 17 ] We thank you, Lord. And O God, if there's someone not right with you today, we're the backslider. O God, if we've lost our heart for you, Lord, become cold.

O if we don't know you, Lord, may we be made right with you today through your word, through your spirit, Lord. Have mercy. Lord, you know our weakness. But Lord, be our strength, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Let's bow our head for the benediction. This is what Paul prayed.

for this reason, I kneel before the Father from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

[ 28 : 25 ] And to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us.

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen. Amen.