

OpenTheo

John 3:13 - 3:36



Gospel of John - Steve Gregg

In this passage, speaker Steve Gregg discusses the third chapter of the Gospel of John, focusing on the concept of spiritual rebirth and the role of belief in obtaining eternal life. He also reflects on the use of metaphorical language in the Bible and its connection to the story of the bronze serpent in the Old Testament. Through his analysis and interpretation of the text, Gregg emphasizes the importance of faith in Jesus Christ as the path to salvation and a life lived in the glory of God.

Transcript

Last time in the Gospel of John we got through part of the third chapter. A very famous chapter because it contains the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. We actually got through about a third of it, but probably the thickest and slowest part.

It may be that we can complete the chapter tonight. We shall see. In the first 12 verses at least, we found this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews, coming out of curiosity, probably representing a group, perhaps a minority within the Sanhedrin of which he was a member, who had noticed Jesus doing these miracles. We do not actually have record of any of the miracles that they saw. In fact, John has not recorded any miracles of Jesus up to this point except for the turning of water into wine.

But that was not in Jerusalem where Nicodemus lived. He had not seen that. But Jesus had gone to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover, a week-long feast, and apparently at the beginning of that feast he had cleansed the temple with a whip.

He had been challenged by the rulers of the Jews to show them a sign that he had the authority to go and clean the house as he did in the temple. He said, well, you want to destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again. They mocked him, of course, because they thought he was talking about the ordinary temple.

They did not take him up on it. They didn't set to demolishing the temple to see if he could raise it again in three days, and it's probably a good thing because he didn't intend

to be understood that way. He intended it not to be understood, most likely, that he was speaking about his body and that they would eventually destroy his body, but not permanently.

He would raise it up in three days. This is probably the very earliest reference recorded of Jesus to his death and resurrection in chapter 2. But he continued at that time, the same week that he had cleansed the temple, he no doubt continued the whole festival week, and there were signs and wonders that he did in the midst of the Jews there in Jerusalem, but none of them are recorded. We only have at the end of chapter 2 the statement in verse 23 that many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he did.

Those signs are unrecorded. And then Nicodemus came and said, we know that you are a teacher sent from God because no one could do these signs that you do unless God was with him. So this we know apparently represents Nicodemus and some others, probably of his own class in the Sanhedrin, who were no doubt speculating among themselves whether Jesus might be the Messiah.

He obviously was claiming to be something special, that he could drive people out of the temple, a public access facility, and claim it was his house or his father's house. That was making a strange kind of a claim that no one had made before. And then of course doing miracles.

So Nicodemus and others were beginning to wonder, is this the Messiah? We aren't told that he was wondering that, he didn't actually ask the question, but certainly that was what was on his mind. The Messiah would come and establish the kingdom of God. And Nicodemus comes and he begins the conversation with simply formalities, with niceties.

Good teacher, we know you come from God because the signs you do prove that to us. And Jesus just cut right to the chase and said, listen, if you're not born again you can't see the kingdom of God. Now Nicodemus had not mentioned, but no doubt it was foremost in his mind, is the kingdom about to appear? And Jesus just knowing what his real concerns were before he expressed them said, you can't see it unless you're born again.

And the man said, well I don't understand, obviously you don't expect a man to go into his mother's womb a second time and be born a second time like that, do you? And Jesus said, no, that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit, you have to be born of the spirit. And the man said, well how can these things be? And Jesus said, well are you the teacher of Israel and you don't know these things? And then he talked about the wind, how that the wind defies human analysis, you don't know where it comes from, you don't know where it goes, it's invisible, you can't even see it, of course it does leave evidence of its presence upon the visible world. But he said, that's how it is with this business of being born of the spirit, it's a spiritual thing, it's going to be

mystifying to you, no doubt.

But he said in verse 11, most assuredly I say to you we, and by this he probably means himself and John the Baptist, we speak what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not receive our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? And by this strange statement he apparently meant that if he has been speaking about things for which earthly analogies can be framed, birth, wind, things that are commonplace things of the earth, familiar things, if I can't make you understand spiritual things by the use of earthly analogies, what in the world are we going to do? When we get to the time to talk about things for which no earthly analogy can be imagined, can be presented, we're not getting off to a very good start here, he's saying. And then in verse 13 he says, no one has ascended to heaven, but he who came down from heaven, that is the son of man who is in heaven.

And this is where we left off last time, and I mentioned that last line, who is in heaven, it's probably omitted from some translations because it's absent from some manuscripts. In fact, the very oldest manuscripts lack it, but there's very strong manuscript evidence for it otherwise. And so scholars do not know if this last line, who is in heaven, belongs there or not, whether John really wrote that or not.

But the problem with it, of course, is that Jesus is seemingly the one speaking. And if Jesus is speaking about the son of man and says, who is in heaven, well, Jesus was not in heaven at that time. He had come down, he had descended.

He was not in heaven when he was speaking. Now he was at the time the book was written, and so some have thought that this statement, the son of man who is in heaven, is a comment by the author. Writing after the fact, after the conversation, he's making his own little comment there.

The son of man, of course, is back in heaven again. He came down, but he's now back up there. In any case, the insertion of this clause, who is in heaven, when you have manuscripts that contain it and manuscripts that don't, you have to decide which one is original.

And when you think about it this way, if it wasn't there originally, why would someone put it there? It only creates a problem. And yet if it was there, we could see why they might omit it, thinking it's a mistake, because it's awkward. Usually when there's a difference in the manuscripts and one reading is rather awkward and the other is not awkward, you can usually consider that the more awkward phrase is original.

And that somebody has removed the difficulty in a later manuscript, rather than the earlier manuscripts didn't have the problem and someone put it in there. Why would they do that? So it's probable that this line was there originally, but may not have been

Jesus speaking. Because what we find in this chapter and in much of John is that John is not really writing the same kind of gospel the other writers of the Gospels wrote.

They are simply interested in telling the story. John is wanting to analyze and interpret the story. I mean, he began his gospel differently than the others.

The others just begin with the facts of Jesus' ministry or his life or his birth. But John begins with an interpretation of it. In the beginning was the word.

The word was with God. The word was with God. And he was the light of men and so forth.

And so John is interested not in just giving a bare facts kind of account of the life of Jesus. That had already been done by the time he wrote this. That had been done three times at least by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

John wanted to give a life of Jesus that was interpreted. He wanted to give his own analysis and interpretation of the life of Christ, illustrated by examples of actual events and things Jesus said. And so we find insertions from time to time of John's own commentary after he's reported something that was said.

Now, in modern translations of the Bible, there are quotation marks where translators think they belong. But no one knows for sure in some cases where the quotes close. Because there are no quotation marks or punctuation marks in the Greek manuscript.

So when you look in your Bible, unless you're reading the King James, which wouldn't have any quotation marks anywhere in it, all the modern translations will have quotation marks. And in the case of the New King James, which I'm reading, the monologue of Christ is treated as if it goes all the way through verse 21. That's where you finally find the closed quote at the end of verse 21.

You'll find the same to be true in the punctuation of the New American Standard and the ESV, all reputable modern versions. But I think it's a mistake. I don't think Jesus is talking that long.

I think it's very possible that you should have a closed quote after verse 12, and a parenthesis with John giving his own commentary in verse 13. That would explain why 13 ends with the statement, who is in heaven. John is reflecting back on the fact that Jesus now has gone back to heaven.

That's where Jesus is now. However, I believe at verse 14 and 15, we have Jesus speaking again. Now this is a little artificial of me, because like I said, we don't know where the quotation marks really belong.

And I'm going mostly by, frankly, intuitions about this, which are notoriously inexact and

unauthoritative. But having looked at this a great deal over the years, I'm thinking that Jesus is saying things, then John is saying things about what Jesus said, then Jesus is saying something, then John says something more about it. And you don't have to see it that way.

You can go with the translations that have the closed quote at the end of 21. Actually, the Revised Standard closes the quote at the end of verse 15, which is another reasonable place to close it. But of course, that leaves verse 13 within the statement of Jesus, and maybe just favoring the readings that don't have that last line of who is in heaven there.

That who is in heaven is a bit of a bugaboo. First of all, it's not known for sure if it was in the original. And if it is, it certainly raises questions about whether that's Jesus speaking that line or not.

Probably could not be. But I believe Jesus is speaking again. John resumes the quotation in verse 14 and 15.

And I'm going to agree with the Revised Standard in closing the quote after 15. I believe 14 and 15 are also what Jesus is speaking, then John gives his commentary again. In 14 it says, And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.

Now, this is speaking about something that must happen apparently in the future from the standpoint of the speaker. So this must be Jesus speaking to Nicodemus rather than John writing afterward. We are now not reading John's comments, but Jesus continuing discussion.

And he says, The Son of Man must be, at some point in the future, lifted up. And he's referring to the crucifixion, of course. That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Now, lifted up is a term that is used in the Gospel of John. As I said, it is a reference to him being crucified. And he says, It's just like when Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.

That's the same way that the Son of Man must be lifted up. Now, the serpent in the wilderness, of course, was not a living serpent. This is a bronze serpent.

This is alluding to the story back in Numbers chapter 21. Israel was grumbling against God again. And God sent fiery serpents, venomous serpents among them, who bit them.

And many of them were dying. Perhaps all of them were bitten. Some died and others were dying.

And Moses pled with the Lord for them. And God said, well, you make a serpent out of bronze. And you put it up on a pole.

Interestingly, the word that is used for pole in the Hebrew text is the word for a banner pole. Now, the reason that's significant is a banner pole is a cross. It's got a vertical.

And it's got a horizontal beam from which banners are hung on either side of the vertical pole. And if it wasn't so, how would they keep the snake from falling down anyway? The thing had a cross beam. And therefore, they made an image of a bronze serpent and put it on the pole.

And God said, whoever has been bitten by one of these serpents, if they simply will look at this bronze snake, they will be healed. And so it was. It so happened.

And this is the image that Jesus gives similar to himself being raised up on a cross. So whoever believes in him. So believing in him for the in the case of believing in Jesus is the corresponding part to looking at the serpent.

It's not works. It's not earning anything. You don't earn anything by believing any more than people earn something by looking at something.

It's not labor. It's not works. It's not law.

It's strictly a matter of being willing to turn your gaze that way and not rebelling against it. I don't know if there are any Israelites in most say who just refused. I'm not going to look there.

Why would they? Why wouldn't they look there? Well, some of them just want to be rebellious, I suppose. But all it took was to not be rebellious, just to look the direction that they're supposed to look and they'd be healed. They would have life given to them instead of the death that they were dying.

And so Jesus says essentially that his own death is going to be play a role for mankind analogous to that of the serpent on the pole. Now, Christians sometimes are a bit bothered by the fact that that in the Old Testament which would here represent Jesus on the cross would be a serpent on a pole. One would think that a serpent would be an image of Satan, not of Jesus.

Why didn't he say put a lamb upon a pole or something else that might be a suitable image of Christ since this was intended to be a foreshadowing of Christ on the cross? And there's no obvious answer that can be given with the exception of maybe a couple of possibilities. One is that when Jesus died he seemed to be defeated to the eyes of man, but really who was defeated on the cross was Satan. It was really Satan that was ended up crucified, so to speak.

Not literally. Jesus was uncrucified, but he defeated Satan. He destroyed him who had the power of death.

That is the devil it says in Hebrews 2.14. It says that through death Jesus destroyed him who had the power of death. That is the devil. Jesus wasn't destroyed on the cross as would normally be the case of a man crucified, but he was victorious.

It was the devil that was destroyed there. In Colossians 2.15 Paul says that Christ disarmed the principalities and powers and made a show of them openly triumphing over them in the cross. When Jesus was anticipating his death in John 12.31 he said now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

In John 16 when he's talking to his disciples how the Holy Spirit will convict the world of judgment he says because the prince of this world is judged. The prince of this world was judged at the cross. The prince of the world was cast out at the cross.

The principalities and powers were disarmed and Satan was triumphed over at the cross. He that had the power of death, that is the devil, was destroyed through the death of Jesus. The death of Jesus conquered the devil.

So to the eyes of man it's like Jesus was hanging defeated on the cross, but really from the divine standpoint Satan was hanging there defeated on the cross so to speak. Not because Jesus was Satan, but just because that's the upshot of what Jesus accomplished you see. Now that's one possible reason why God would have chosen a serpent in Numbers 21 to be a representative of what Jesus would later be likened to.

Another possibility is this that the Bible says that Jesus though he knew no sin he became sin for us. He became serpent like in terms of God dealing with him. God had to deal with him as if he was evil itself.

Not that he was, not that he had ever done anything evil, but it's 2 Corinthians 5 21 says that he who knew no sin became sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. In the Old Testament the lamb that was sacrificed received the laying on of hands beforehand. The laying on of hands signified that the sins of the sinner were being transferred to an innocent victim, the lamb.

Then the lamb was treated as if it was the sinner. It was put to death, the wages of sin is death, the lamb was then slain. It's as if all the wickedness from the wicked person was transferred to this innocent lamb and now the lamb was treated as if it was the wicked one.

In Isaiah 53 and verse 6 it says all we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. That Jesus had all of our iniquities laid upon him it became his burden to bear.

It became his wrath. He had to take the wrath as if he was the crook. In 1 Peter chapter 2 it says in verse 24, 1 Peter 2 24 who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree that we having died to sins might live for righteousness.

So Jesus bore in his own body our sins on the tree. Therefore it was as if hands had been laid upon him by everyone in the whole world. He was the spotless lamb and all the sin of the whole world was transferred to him and he became the sinner who was punished in our place.

On the cross though he was 100% innocent of any wrongdoing, he took the role of the wicked one who was receiving the penalty for all the wickedness. It's almost like he who was the lamb became in the reckoning of God and in the dealings of God the serpent, the foul thing that had to be destroyed, that had to be killed. And that may be one reason why the bronze animal on the pole had to be a serpent too to represent Christ.

Strange as it is to our thoughts, there's a mystery and there's an irony in it that Christ was perfect and yet he had to be treated as if he was as wicked as anything has ever been. As wicked as the devil himself. So whether it was because on the cross Jesus really conquered Satan rather than Jesus being the one conquered and therefore the serpent is represented as hanging on there as the victim of this transaction.

Or whether it's because Jesus himself is seen as serpent like after all the sins of humanity are placed upon him and he is then reckoned to be guilty of all that. I don't know. But these are some possible explanations of what's really kind of a gnarly problem.

And that is why would Jesus choose a serpent to compare himself to or more probably why did God back in the days of Moses choose a serpent to represent what would eventually be an illustration of Jesus on the cross. But the suggestions I've made may go some of the distance in trying to get some kind of satisfactory answer to that perhaps. So he said so much the Son of Man be lifted up verse 14 that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

I guess some manuscripts leave out the term shall not perish and yet it of course is found in verse 16 also which I consider to be John's own gloss on what Jesus has said. I see him picking up the language of Jesus last statement in verse 15 and making his own summary of the gospel based upon it in the famous verse John 3 16 for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. That whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The last clause being exactly like the last clause of verse 15. Which I mean it's again it's my own intuition I could be wrong but I think Jesus is speaking up through verse 15 verses 14 and 15 and then John taking his cue from what Jesus said there at the end of verse 15 makes his own summary of the gospel in verse 16. And one reason is because

we find in verse 16 the word God whereas Jesus would more commonly refer to God as the father.

If Jesus was speaking you might expect you to say the father so loved the world because that's how Jesus almost always spoke about God as the father to speak of God seems just a little more detached. Not that Jesus never used the term God he did sometimes it was very much less his preference than father. And so in using the word God it seems more like a theological pronouncement whereas when Jesus spoke about the father it was more of a relational kind of thing rather than a theological thing that he seemed to exhibit in speaking of the father in that intimate way.

Now a few things here just related to certain theological controversies. I've been involved in so many theological controversies over the years that I can't look at any text that I know to be a proof text for one or another side of the controversy without bringing it up here. Partly because I don't just want to talk to you about the material but I want to also if possible equip you somewhat for controversial application of the material in certain controversies that you may encounter.

One of those controversies of course is that of Calvinism and in particular the question of whether a person is born again as a result of believing or whether they believe as a result of being born again. Now you may never have heard it put this way but it's almost the quintessential summary of the difference between Calvinism and other forms of Christian theology. Other forms of Christian theology say that you must repent and believe and then as a result of repenting and believing you are born again.

And what that means you pass from death into life. You were dead in trespasses and sins but now you come to life because you have believed in Christ. Calvinism says no because you are dead in trespasses and sins prior to your conversion a person who is dead cannot believe and cannot repent and therefore God must make you alive first.

And then you can believe. So to the Calvinist regeneration which means coming alive from the dead, being born again is what we are talking about here. To the Calvinist regeneration precedes faith.

To all other forms of theology including those which predate Calvinism by hundreds of years faith precedes regeneration. In fact faith allows for regeneration whereas to the Calvinist regeneration allows for faith because to the Calvinist if you are not born again you are dead in the sense that you can't do anything. You can't repent, you can't believe, you can't make any motions toward God, you can't even seek God.

That's what total depravity means in Calvinism. And that's why they come up with unconditional election, the second point. Total depravity is the first point.

Unconditional election means God has to elect to save some people. But he can't do it on

the basis of anything they'll do because they're dead they can't do anything. So he's got to just unilaterally choose to bring some of these people to life so they can believe.

And since he doesn't do that for everyone he makes a choice who he will and who he will not do that for. And he doesn't do it based on anything he sees in them because there's nothing to see in them, they're dead. And so it's unconditional.

And so this idea that regeneration has to precede faith is essential at the core of the Calvinist concept. Whereas non-Calvinistic theology teaches that anyone might believe or repent and if they did then they would have life, they'd be regenerated as a result of believing and repenting. Now I've tried to make that all clear so that you can see as we read John or any other passage in the Bible on the subject of being born again or coming to life or regeneration, having eternal life given to you when you were dead before, all the passages in the Bible indicate that it is as a result of believing that you're born again.

And this is one of them. This is the passage where Jesus speaks most plainly about the whole subject of being born again. And the last thing we heard Nicodemus say was how can these things be? That is how can a person be born again? Now Jesus could have said if he thought it was true, well a person can't be.

There's nothing you can do to be born again. This is just the sovereign providence of God toward the elect. If you happen to be elected then you'll be born again.

If you're not elected then you might as well forget it. I might as well not be talking to you. I might as well be talking to a rock because you can't anymore repent than a rock can if you're not elect.

But Jesus didn't say it that way. Jesus said well let me put it this way. Do you remember when Moses put a snake up on the pole? Do you remember anyone who had been bitten by a snake and was dying? They could look at that snake and they'd be healed.

Well it's just like that. The Son of Man is to be raised up also on a pole. And whoever believes in him will live.

Not whoever lives will believe in him. Not whoever God brings to life first will then have the capacity to believe. But rather whoever believes in him will then as a result of believing will live, will have life, will be born again in other words.

So he's answering the question how can this be? And the answer is well it's just by believing. It's just if you believe in the Messiah, the Son of Man who is to be lifted up then you will have this new life, this eternal life which begins with being regenerated, begins with being born again. Now this is of course the consistent teaching throughout Scripture.

There's never any place in the Bible that says if you come to life then you will believe.

But there are many places that say if you believe you'll come to life. And that faith precedes regeneration which that very fact alone settles the whole debate.

For anyone who I would think doesn't have an agenda in the matter and just would like to see what the Scripture teaches. If you look at John chapter 20, John chapter 20 and verse 31, John says, But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. That is I'm trying to bring you to the point of believing because then if you believe then you can have life.

Believing means as a result of believing then you will have life through his name. So again the life comes as a result of believing. The believing doesn't come as a result of having previously unilaterally been brought to life because you have to be unconditionally elected for that.

In Colossians chapter 2, might as well see whether Paul and Jesus are on the same page or not. I think they are. In Colossians chapter 2, Paul says this in verse 13.

Colossians 2 verse 13, Paul says, And you, being dead in your trespasses and uncircumcision of your flesh, that is before, that's what they were. They had been dead in their trespasses and sins. You being dead in your trespasses and your uncircumcision of your flesh, he has made a lot.

He has regenerated you. Together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses. Now that last line, having forgiven you, means that happened previous to him bringing you to life.

He has brought you to life having previously forgiven you. How did you get yourself forgiven? We are justified by faith, aren't we? Isn't that the whole teaching of the scripture? Justification by faith. If you have been forgiven, it is because you've had faith.

Abraham believed in the Lord and it was counted to him for righteousness. You have been forgiven, of course, because of your faith like Abraham was, like David was, like Paul argues everywhere we are. But notice he says that God has brought us alive from the dead.

You were dead, but he has made you alive together with him. The word having means having previously forgiven you of all your trespasses. That means, of course, that transaction of forgiveness took place before the transaction of regeneration.

I believe simultaneously, essentially, but Paul is saying that the regeneration is the upshot of forgiveness. Because God has forgiven you, because you believed, then he has made you alive again. Anyway, I don't have to go on and on.

One could just say, as you look at any scripture in the Bible about regeneration, about coming alive from the dead, in every case it is said to be the result of faith, not the cause of faith. And so Jesus is the first to bring this point up when he is talking to Nicodemus.

How can I be born again? How can I be regenerated? Jesus doesn't say, well, it just all depends on whether you are elected or not before you are ever born.

Maybe you can be, maybe you can't be. He said, no, anyone who believes in him shall not perish, but will have everlasting life. Will receive this life that comes through regeneration.

Anyone who believes in him, that's what Jesus says. Whoever believes in him should not perish. Now, my own understanding is that John is the writer, that is not Jesus.

Jesus is not speaking beyond this point, but John is giving our commentary based on this conversation he had with Nicodemus in verses 16 through 21. So the fact that the New King James and many translations keep all those verses within the quotation marks as if Jesus is still speaking is an area where the translators and I would have a different opinion about that. So, Jesus having spoken about whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

John picks up that thread in verse 16, I think, and says, For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world. And men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done in God. Now, as I said, there's reasons why I personally think this is John instead of Jesus continuing to speak. The use of the term God so frequently instead of the Father.

None of these verses do make reference to the Father, but the word God is used again and again. Also, that he speaks about the light in the same way that John did in the prologue of the gospel a great deal and in John's epistles. But of course, one could argue that Jesus used those terms here and John picked it up from him.

That's a possibility. Certainly, John was influenced by what he heard Jesus say in these things. But the material in verses 16 through 21, especially 17 through 21, don't seem to be directly relevant to Nicodemus' concerns.

Nicodemus was not one of these people who was hating the light. He came to the light. He knew Jesus was something and so he approached him.

Now, these verses talk about people who come to the light because their deeds are truthful deeds. Then there's people who don't. It's more like a universalizing of the choice that people have to make that John might be making to his readers.

There wouldn't be a real direct reason for him to say these things to Nicodemus, who had already showed himself to be one who comes to the light. Jesus could just be talking in the abstract about people who aren't there who hate the light. But it wouldn't be an essential part of what he's communicating, I think, between himself and Nicodemus, in my opinion.

Anyway, whether Jesus said it or John, it's true theology and so we'll just deal with its contents rather than worrying overmuch about who spoke it. Now, John 3.16, of course, at one time was the best-known verse in the Bible. I say at one time because I think another one has become more well-known since in modern times and especially among unbelievers.

And that would be Matthew 7.1, judge not that you be not judged. But I think that verse is the most often quoted verse in modern times. But John 3.16 used to be the best-known verse and it's a good summary of the Gospel of John and of really the message of the Bible as a whole.

It's not always the case that you can find one verse that encapsulates all the main themes of the book because, of course, John didn't even divide the book into verses. So it's not like he thought, I'm going to come up with one verse that people quote forever as a summary of this thing. But it's just a great verse in this respect because it talks about the love of God for the world, which is the motivation for everything in God's dealings with mankind.

That's why he called Abraham, that's why he called Israel out of Egypt, that's why he sent his son, because he cared for the world. And through Abraham's seed, Christ, he would eventually bless all the nations of the world. Every family of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's seed, who is Christ.

It's God's love for the whole world that caused him to do this. And therefore he sent his only begotten son. Now that's how the King James and the New King James read.

Modern translations don't usually use the term only begotten because it's not really the right translation for the word monogenes. The Greek word monogenes is there instead of only begotten. And in the old days in 1611 when the King James was translated, Greek scholars thought that monogenes was related to the word genea, or generated, or birthed.

And mono means only, so they thought only begotten is the meaning of it. However, they now know that monogenes has a different etymology, and it has more of the

meaning of something like unique. Not so much only begotten, but unique.

Now, essentially it's the same issue, but a lot of translations, I think the NIV uses the phrase one and only son, something like that. The one of a kind son, the one and only son. And we're dealing with the New King James here, so we've still got the King James wording.

There's no significant difference, I think, except that if the term did mean only begotten son, then it has to be taken not absolutely because of course God has begotten us also, the Bible says. We've been born of God. Peter says, blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So we're begotten sons too. In that sense, Jesus is not the only son that God has ever begotten, but he is the unique son. He's not like any other son.

He's the one and only son of his kind, and that's what the word monogenes means here. And God did this so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Perish, what does that mean? God sent Jesus so that people would not have to perish, and those who believe in him will not perish.

What does perish mean? Well, the Greek word perish, *apollousai*, means a number of things. Sometimes it's translated die. Sometimes it's translated destroyed.

Sometimes it's translated to lose or to be lost, and sometimes perish, and there's a variety of other meanings. But for example, when the Bible talks about the lost sheep, the shepherd goes out and recovers it. The same word is used as perish, the word lost.

The sheep has perished. When the prodigal son's father said, my son was lost, but now he's found, the word lost there in the Greek is perish, the same as here. Perish has the idea of loss.

It has the idea of being destroyed. Now, is that the fate of people who are not believers, that they are destroyed, that they're merely lost? We have a much more developed theology about the judgment ultimately on sinners. That has come down to us through the ages, and that is, of course, that they're not really fully destroyed.

They're kind of maintained alive forever and ever and ever in a torture chamber called hell. And certainly the idea that there's a hell is biblical. There is a lake of fire.

After the judgment, those whose names are not found written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire. But the debate nowadays is what happens then? You might not know there's a debate. If you've listened to my show long enough, you do, because people keep asking me about it, and I keep talking about it.

But there is debate among evangelicals. Many, many books written from different positions, all of them by evangelicals, not liberals, not unbelievers, but people who believe in the Bible, who hold all the evangelical distinctives, believe the same gospel that I do. But there's some who believe that what happens when people are thrown into the lake of fire is they're tormented forever and ever and ever and ever without relief and without end.

Others believe that when they're thrown into the lake of fire, they perish. They're destroyed. They're annihilated.

They don't exist anymore, after a while anyway. And others believe that when they're thrown into the lake of fire, they are lost, but like the sheep or the prodigal son was lost, yet later retrieved. When a shepherd has a lost sheep, he goes after it until he gets it back.

The prodigal son was lost and dead, but he was now found and alive, said his father. So perishing, at least in some usages in the Bible, does not necessarily mean an irretrievable condition. The word perish sounds like it in English, but since the same Greek word can mean just being lost and possibly recovered, some people believe that those who perish, as it were, who are lost to the lake of fire, are not necessarily lost forever, that maybe God can recover some of them even out of there.

Some people would say even all of them. So these are the different views that people are banding about here. One thing I would say is that if the traditional view is correct, that people are tortured forever and ever.

Jesus never mentioned it here. God didn't mention it in the Old Testament. And there's really only a couple of places in the Bible that have wording that sound like that.

So it's hard to say. But the interesting thing is that Jesus didn't seem to feel the need to explain what perish means. Perish, which was an ambiguous term, he left it ambiguous.

Whatever is going to happen to people who don't believe is, well, they're going to perish. Well, what's that mean? Well, why do you want to know? Are you going to count the cost? Are you going to decide whether you want to do that or not? Do you want to perish? I'm not going to really lay that out for you, because that's not an option I'm leaving open for you. I'm calling you to be a believer.

The call of God is to believe in Christ and be saved and not perish. So what happens to those who perish is left unspecified in most cases. And we have a morbid curiosity about, well, what's going to happen if people don't come to Christ? What's their punishment going to be? Well, apparently it's not one of those things that God felt like he had to just lay it out in unambiguous terms.

If you think he did, then you probably aren't thinking of all the passages relevant to the

subject. So whatever happens to those who don't believe is that they perish, whatever that means. But they have everlasting life.

Now, the word everlasting, *aionios* in the Greek, means unto the age or pertaining to an age. Some translators would translate it age-abiding, like it abides through the ages. But many translators think it's just from the word age.

Aion is age, and the word *aionios* means of the age. Or of an age. And so the life that is spoken of, as well as many other things that are said to be eternal or everlasting, the meaning of *aionios* doesn't really necessarily have the meaning of everlasting or endless, although in some cases it may describe something that is endless.

But the meaning of the word itself is pertaining to the age, the Messianic age. Whoever believes in it will have the life that pertains to the age of the Messiah. Now, that happens to be endless life, so we have no problem, I have no problem with the word everlasting life, because the life of the age in this case is something that is unending.

But not everything in the Bible that is said to be *aionios* is unending. The same word with a Hebrew equivalent is *olam*. It's translated *aionios* in the Greek Septuagint from the Old Testament.

But *olam* is used, it's also translated everlasting or eternal in many places in our English Bible. But it also, it refers to things that are temporary in many cases. At least not eternal.

Like that the lamps of the tabernacle were to be kept burning eternally. But of course they're not even an eternal substance, I mean it's obviously a figure of speech. So, not every time you find the word *aionios* is it going to mean everlasting, but in the case of this life it can mean that, because it is everlasting, it is endless.

We know that because Jesus elsewhere in John chapter 11 said, whoever believes in him will never die. And that would suggest an endless life. So, although the word *aionios*, everlasting here, doesn't necessarily mean everlasting, the life he's talking about in fact is confirmed elsewhere to be everlasting.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, he didn't have to do that. The world was already condemned. He came to remedy that condition, that through him the world might be saved.

He who believes in him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Now, a verse like this puts all, it sounds like it puts all human beings into two categories. Everyone on the face of the earth either believes in him or does not believe in him.

Sounds like there's no third area. And those who believe in him obviously must

necessarily be those who have heard of him, have heard the gospel and have put their faith in him. Therefore, those who do not believe in him, seemingly by this dichotomy, would be those, not only those who've heard the gospel and don't believe it, but those who've never heard the gospel because they don't believe it either.

Whoever doesn't believe is contrasted with whoever does believe. And on this basis, many evangelicals have always assumed that the fate of those who never hear the gospel must be that they perish along with those who do hear the gospel and reject it. Because there's only two categories, those who believe and those who don't believe.

It's clear that no one believes unless they've heard. But those who don't believe, some of them have heard and some have not, but they still don't believe for whatever reason. But clearly, we all intuitively know there is a difference between a person who disbelieves when they've heard, on the one hand, and a person who disbelieves only because he doesn't know, he's never heard.

And so Jesus clarifies what he means when he says those who don't believe will be condemned. He says in verse 19, this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. Okay, so this is not about how much information they've received, it's about what they love.

They love darkness. This is not talking about necessarily, he doesn't have in mind the people who have never had any light, but people who have had light. He's not talking about people who haven't heard, but people who have heard.

They are condemned, he says, because the light has come to them and they didn't like the light. It was their orientation, it was their attitude of hatred for the light that condemns them. This is the condemnation, he said, not that they were in darkness and never saw any light, but rather that the light came to them and they rejected it.

So it would appear that when Jesus says whoever does not believe is condemned, and then he explains what condemnation he's talking about, he's talking about people who have heard. The two categories, he that believes and he that does not believe, he's mentioning in verse 18, are referring in both cases to people who hear the message. Some believe and some do not believe.

That is, some receive it and some reject it. And he explains that what he's talking about because in the next verse, this is what I mean by the condemnation. The light has come to these people, but they don't want the light.

Their deeds were evil, they won't come to the light. They hate the light, they love darkness. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen that

they are done in God, they have been done in God. This indicates that there's two, really, attitudes toward light. Hatred and love.

Welcome and shunning. Some people shun the light and some people welcome the light. Some people love darkness and others love light.

Now, obviously, these descriptions are not descriptions of people in terms of God receives them because they have this information and he doesn't receive these people because they don't have that information. He's not talking about the difference between having information and not having information. All these people have the information.

All these people are, the light has come to them. That's the starting point of his discussion. The light has come into the world and some people come to the light, other people hate the light.

They receive into the darkness because they don't want light to expose what they're doing. In other words, these verses do not have anything to say about the subject of those who've never had light come to them. Now, on the other hand, we sometimes have pointed out that everyone has some kind of light and that John has said this in John 1, 9, in the prologue.

He says that Jesus is the true light that enlightens every man that comes into the world. In John 1, 9. Jesus is the light that enlightens everyone who comes into the world. So everyone has some light and John says that light that they have is Jesus.

He is that true light that enlightens everyone. So, some people obviously have never heard of Jesus, but that doesn't mean they have no light. They have some kind of light and whether it's simply the light of an inward conscience of right and wrong, that's better than being totally in the dark.

Remember Jesus said to the Pharisees in John chapter 9, if you were blind, you would have no sin. But because you say, we see, therefore your sin remains. But you're not blind.

If you have some light, you're responsible for that light. And that's okay because it's not threatening to you because if you have some light, you love the light. If a person would respond well to a lot of light, they'll also respond well to a little bit of light.

There are people who never have so much light as we have. They never hear the gospel presented as we hear it, as we read it. We were born and positioned right in a position where we are very fortunate to hear the gospel.

Other people are somewhere where they can't. But that doesn't mean they have no light. Jesus enlightens everyone who comes into the world, every man.

And so every man, even in the darkest jungles, has some light that God gives him. And he will be condemned if he has turned away from that light, if he loves evil and therefore seeks to suppress that light that God has given him, whether it's merely conscience, whether it's more philosophical because he sees the heavens declare the glory of God. He knows there must be some kind of a great spirit out there or whatever.

He doesn't know who it is. He's never heard of our God, never heard of Jesus. But there's some kind of light coming to him.

He's not absolutely without any illumination. It may be a very dim light and a very hazy one. It might even be a little off color.

But if he says, I want that light, I want my life to conform to that light, then he is like the one it says in verse 21, he's the one who practices the truth and he comes to the light. These may be clearly seen that they've been done in God. But if a person, even with the dim light they have, hate it and still choose evil, then they're like the person in verse 20, everyone practicing evil hates the light, does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

Every person responds one way or another to the light that they have. If people have heard the gospel preached, then that's a lot of light. And a person who rejects that light is extremely culpable because that light is very bright, very clear.

On the other hand, some people live in lands where the gospel has been preached a long time but the light isn't that clear because the people preaching the gospel are misrepresenting it. There certainly are... Imagine if you were raised in the Middle Ages in Europe and the only church was the medieval Roman Catholic Church. And at that particular time the popes were, you know, sleeping with women as they did sometimes, committing adultery and fathering children and just in it for the money and corrupt men.

And that's the only person you ever heard about God from. You might be worse off than someone who's never heard about Jesus at all because you might think you know who Jesus is and it's really a bad picture. Well, those people maybe don't have so much light.

You think, well, they're in a Christian country. Well, but what kind of picture of Jesus has been given to them? We cannot judge. I guess the bottom line is this.

We cannot judge who God will see fit to save and who he will not see fit to save because we can't see how much light they really have. God knows how much light they have. We don't know what measure of responsibility they bear, but God knows that perfectly well.

And so now someone might say, but are you suggesting then that some people who have never heard the gospel might possibly be saved because God saw that they responded favorably to the light they had? Well, I'm saying that certainly sounds like a possibility to me. It sounds like what Jesus teaches could certainly make room for that

possibility. But what if that is true? Does that mean we shouldn't go preach to them? Why should we lay down our lives to go and reach people who could possibly, without us reaching them, maybe be saved anyway? Well, they can't be saved.

They might be able to go to heaven, but that's not what salvation is in the Bible. Salvation isn't going to heaven. Nowhere in the Bible is salvation described as going to heaven.

Salvation is being restored in a relationship with God and being able to fulfill the purpose that God made you for, including heaven. But heaven is just what happens after this. Our prayers are that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And a man who's living in a jungle and he never hears about Christ, it's possible that if he's responding well to the light he has, that God in the final judgment will say, you know, I don't see you as my enemy. I see you as somebody who really wanted the light. You just didn't have the good fortune to have a lot of light.

So I'm going to take that into consideration. And maybe that guy won't go to hell. But his whole life was wasted.

His whole life was lived without knowing Jesus, without living for the glory of God. God's will was not done on earth in his life as it is in heaven. And that's what our goal is.

We are always focused on heaven so much that we almost think that the only way we can be motivated to evangelize people is if we convince ourselves that there's no way they'll go to heaven without us evangelizing them. Well, I don't know if there's any way they will or not. But I know this, that that's not what we're supposed to be motivated by.

We're to be motivated by the glory of God. If people don't know Jesus, they can't glorify God in their lives. They can't live for, they can't obey Jesus if they don't know about him.

They can't be set free from their sinful bondage if they don't know Jesus. They will live their lives in darkness and sin and so forth and frustration and bondage because they don't have the one who can set them free from that. But, despite all that negativity, they might conceivably be seen by God as someone who's responding the best they know how to the light they have and is not hating the light and is not loving darkness and are not seeking to hide from God.

And who knows? Maybe they're not condemned. The condemnation is that light comes to people and they hate it. That's what Jesus said condemns people.

Now, after these things, Jesus and his disciples came into the land of Judea. Now, they were already in Jerusalem, which is in Judea, but they went out of the city into the region, the countryside of Judea, apparently, and the village is there. And his disciples came into the land of Judea and they remained with them.

There he remained with them and he baptized. Actually, it doesn't say he baptized, it just says am baptized. Jesus is the subject of the sentence, but we know from what John tells us in chapter 4 that Jesus did not personally baptize.

He authorized his disciples to do so. Now, John's the only gospel that mentions Jesus doing any baptizing. All the gospels mention John baptizing and mention that John baptized Jesus, but no gospels mention that Jesus ever baptized people except John.

And then John tells us Jesus didn't do it himself, but he did it through his disciples. That's what we see in John 4 and verse 2. It says in John 4, 2, though Jesus himself did not baptize, only his disciples did. But what did Jesus baptizing mean? Apparently, he was just kind of continuing and extending John the Baptist's ministry.

It is not likely that the baptism Jesus was conducting through his disciples here had all the meaning that Christian baptism would later have, because Christian baptism is of a different type than John's baptism. Remember, Paul met some 12 men in Ephesus in Acts 19. They had been already baptized with John's baptism, but that wasn't Christian.

And Paul told them about Christ, and then they wanted to be baptized in the name of Jesus as Christians. In all likelihood, at this point in time, Jesus was just seeing himself as an extension, at least in his baptizing work. He was just extending what John was doing, the same kind of baptism, in all likelihood.

We don't know that Jesus continued doing it for very long. But it became a matter of conversation between John's disciples and some Jews that were not friendly toward them, because it says, and now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim because there was much water there, which makes it sound like immersion was what they were using. I don't know that you need much water for sprinkling.

You pick a place to baptize because there's a lot of water. You must need more than a little bit. And it says, And they came and were baptized, for John had not yet been thrown in prison.

Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. Now, purification refers to the Jewish practice of washing all the time to get rid of ceremonial uncleanness. It was a ceremonial ritual.

It had nothing to do with getting really physically clean. It had to do with trying to rid oneself of ceremonial defilement from having maybe touched an unclean thing or eaten an unclean thing or something. And so this conversation with John's disciples and some Jews, some translations say Jews, some say Jews, that were in conversation with these men, they were disputing over the subject of Jewish purifications.

Why would they do that? Apparently, the similarity of John baptizing to the practice of Jews washing had not escaped them, and they were probably discussing the degree to

which what John was doing was and was not the same thing. Whether John's ministry was overlapping what the Jews were already doing by purification or whether there was some other significance to it. We're not told what the discussion really entailed.

It was a dispute. And so there's a disagreement between John's disciples and some Jew over the significance of this baptizing. And apparently, in the course of having that dispute, the Jew must have mentioned to John's disciples that John, what does it matter what he's doing anyway, he's a has-been.

After all, that newcomer Jesus, he's baptizing more now than John was. And this was the first time John's disciples heard that, and it apparently alarmed them, and they came to John with that information. And they came to John, verse 26, and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan to whom you have testified, behold, he is baptizing, and all are coming to him.

Now, they were apparently concerned because they had thrown in their lot with this prophet John. He was very popular at one time. The other Gospels tell us that all Judea came to John to be baptized.

I mean, he was like a household word. Everyone knew John the Baptist. When those who became disciples of John linked themselves with him, they thought he was the cutting-edge guy.

He was the guy that was going to bring in the kingdom, perhaps. Maybe he was the Messiah, although he denied it. He was obviously something very significant.

He was causing a big splash. He had the biggest megachurch in the town. And so joining him and being on his staff, being his associates, puts you in a position of prominence in the religious world in terms of what was going on.

You're on the cutting edge. But suddenly John is kind of fading from popularity. And there's another church across the street growing bigger.

Everybody's going to this other guy, Jesus, now, instead of John. And I remember when I was in Santa Cruz in eldership of Calvary Chapel there. We had a good-sized group of Jesus people there for the town.

It wasn't one of the big Calvary Chapels, but it was a respectable number of people coming. And then another church came up. There was a church plant from a church down in L.A. They planted a branch up in Santa Cruz.

And it was getting a lot of publicity, and a lot of people were going there instead. A lot of our people started going over to that church instead. And I remember as a leader in the church feeling a little uncomfortable about that, like, you know, we're losing our people.

Now, that really doesn't agree with my philosophy. I don't consider that they're our people. I don't consider that the church owns anybody.

Jesus owns them. And if the sheep go to be fed somewhere else, that should be no occasion of complaint from the pastor they're leaving. But there is an ego there.

There is a concern there. And they go, you know, what don't they like about us, you know? And you get concerned about that a little bit. Human nature is that way.

Like, it's kind of an insult. Why you were going to our church, and now you want to go to their church. What's wrong with us now? But you know what? John's disciples were feeling that too.

And John, you might think, would have been tempted to feel that as well. But John didn't have any of that rivalry in him. And that's interesting because he was the big church.

It's like Bill Heibel's church, Willow Creek in Chicago, was the nation's largest church at one time, I think back in the 80s. Now I think it's Saddleback's the biggest church in the country now. And I don't know if that will last long because churches keep changing.

And, you know, once you've been the pastor of the biggest church in the country, you get a lot of publicity. Christianity Today is interviewing you, and your face is on the cover, and everybody knows your name. And then, you know, like a couple years later, someone else is in that position, the new kid in town.

He's now got the biggest church, and you're just kind of in his shadow. When you've been the big man, and now someone else is the big man, and all the attention is turned from you, and you're kind of standing in the back of the crowd looking at the new guy with him. There's an area where you can get kind of, your ego can be deflated a little bit, can be maybe a little hurt because you're carnal.

I mean, it is a carnal thing to be jealous like that, but there's that temptation. And John seemed to have absolutely no temptation. He did not seem tempted that way, or he did not succumb to it if he did.

He was absolutely not concerned to see himself diminish. In fact, he said that's how it should be. And he had the attitude that every minister should have.

If, you know, God has used you, and now your significance is waning, God is using someone else now more, if it's a good thing, then one should have the same attitude John had, which was what? Verse 27, John said, A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. In other words, when people are coming to me, that was God's gift to me. Now they're going to him, that's God's gift to him.

You know, we just have to see God in all this. We're not kind of having a tug-of-war here

for the affections of the public. God gives his followers, his sheep, to whatever shepherd he wants to give them to.

If John was their shepherd for a little while, and now Jesus is their shepherd, then John says, well, that's what God wants. It's their God's sheep. He can give them to whoever he wants to.

You yourselves bear me witness that I said I'm not the Christ, but I've been sent before him. So if I'm not the Messiah, then how can I hope for them to be followers of me? Paul said the same thing when he wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 20. He says, I'm hearing some of you are saying I'm of Paul.

And some are saying I'm of Cephas, and some are saying I'm of Paulos, and some are saying I'm of Christ. He says, what, was Paul crucified for you? He said, I hope you don't think you were baptized in the name of Paul. And in other words, I'm not the Messiah? Everyone in Corinth followed Paul when he was there for the first time because they were all his converts.

He was the first Christian to reach that town. Every Christian in Corinth was Paul's, you know, his sheep, so to speak, when Paul was there for 18 months. Then he left, and Apollos came, and he had some people who liked him better.

Maybe his movement started moving bigger. Paul said, listen, there's no rivalry between me and Apollos. I planted, and Apollos watered, and God gives the increase.

Apollos and I are just laborers together with God in God's field. And so John the Baptist has that attitude too, though his followers are starting to feel insecure because their movement is getting smaller and Jesus is getting bigger. He says, I said I'm not the Christ.

I've been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice.

Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. And I believe the quotation should close there, though again the New King James runs it to the end of the chapter.

I think it's very unlikely John the Baptist says all the rest of the things. I think this is the close of John's words and the last recorded words of John the Baptist in this gospel. Now he said, I'm not the bridegroom.

I'm the friend of the bridegroom. What's the friend of the bridegroom? In Judean weddings, there was a man, the best man. He was called the friend of the bridegroom.

He's the one who was the matchmaker. He went and negotiated with the family on behalf of the bridegroom to get the bride to agree to marry the guy. He made the arrangements for the wedding.

The friend of the bridegroom did all the work. But he wasn't working for himself. He was working for the bridegroom.

The friend of the bridegroom didn't want the bride for himself. He wanted the bride for the bridegroom. He was just the go-between, the matchmaker.

That's what he was there for. And John says, the friend of the bridegroom doesn't get the bride. Of course that did happen once in the story of Samson.

Samson's best man did get his wife, but that wasn't the way it's supposed to be. Samson killed a bunch of people for that. That wasn't right.

And John says, I'm the friend of the bridegroom. Jesus is the bridegroom. The people are the bride.

The bride shouldn't be coming to the friend of the bridegroom, but to the bridegroom. And so I'm glad. I'm the friend.

I matched these people up with him. I pointed him out to them. I introduced them.

Now nothing remains for me but to decrease, to kind of fade into the woodwork. I must decrease, and he must increase. It would be great if every minister had that little ego involved in their ministry, that they don't mind if people stop coming to hear them and go to someone else because they're getting more from someone else.

Well, if they're getting more out of them, praise God, they're going there. That guy's giving more than I can give him. So, I mean, it's not about me.

And that's what John says. This isn't really about me. I'm an auxiliary person to this wedding thing.

The Messiah is the bridegroom, and the people are his bride, and this is how it's supposed to be. They're supposed to go to him, not me. Now I believe the rest of the verses in the chapter are the author, John, giving his commentary again based on what John the Baptist had said.

That's, again, you don't have to agree. Obviously, the New King James Translators didn't agree, and they kept John speaking to the end of the chapter. He who comes from above is above all.

He who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. Now, this is probably comparing Jesus with John the Baptist.

John the Baptist is, after all, a human of the earth. Jesus came down from heaven, and so he's got a higher position than John. And what he has seen, that's what Jesus has seen and heard, that he testifies.

And no one receives his testimony. He who has received his testimony has certified that God is true. Notice the contrast between verse 32 and 33.

No one receives his testimony, but the ones who do. Now, if no one does, then there aren't any who do. And, therefore, we see the common use of hyperbole here, and important, because John sometimes seems to make absolute statements about everybody or about nobody.

But you can see that in the context, it is not absolute. It's hyperbole. It's like back in John chapter 1. In verse 11, it says, He came to his own, and his own did not receive him.

But then verse 12, As many as did receive him, why, I thought they didn't receive him. Well, some of them did. Mostly they didn't.

His own did not receive him, but some of his own did. And, likewise, here in John chapter 3, it says, No one receives his testimony, but the ones who do. In fact, I just said no one does.

Well, you need to understand the hyperbole here. He's saying, essentially, not many people do receive his testimony. For the most part, people are not listening when Jesus speaks.

But the ones who do listen, he who has received his testimony, has certified that God is true. When you accept what Jesus said, you're putting your stamp of approval on God's honesty. To believe is to say God is telling the truth.

To disbelieve is to say he's not. And so, believing is simply glorifying God and certifying God to be honest. For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure to him.

Some manuscripts say to him, to Christ. He gave the Spirit by measure to individuals in the Old Testament. But God didn't give a measured amount of Spirit, but the unmeasured fullness of the Spirit in Christ.

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life. And he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

So, again, remember John said he's writing this so you'll believe and have life. He keeps coming back to that, whether he's commenting on what Jesus said, or commenting on what John the Baptist said. He gets back to this matter of having life or not having life.

He that believes has life. He that does not believe does not have life. Now, this means that having life is coextensive with believing.

And it raises the issue, well, what if you stop believing? What if you used to believe and you don't believe now? What if you've left the faith? Do you still have life? Well, there's no place in the Bible that says that he that used to believe has life. In fact, it says he that does not believe shall not see life. A person who used to believe and doesn't now, which is he? Is he a person who believes or a person who doesn't believe? He doesn't believe.

So he's in what category? He doesn't have life. But he believed before. What category was he in then? He was a believer.

What's that mean? He had life. Well, is it possible to have life and then not have life? Well, is it possible to believe and then not believe? You see, life comes with believing. And when you don't believe, then you don't have life.

So it is the person who believes in him, not the person who believed in him. I had a pastor once say to me, Oh, you don't believe in the security of the believer then. I said, I absolutely believe in the security of the believer.

It's the former believer. Though I don't have any confidence in his security. Because a believer is by definition someone who believes.

I believe. I'm a believer. I've got total security.

Now if tomorrow I abandon the faith, then I won't be a believer. And I'll have no security. There's security of believer, but not security of the former.

Used to be a believer. Whoever used to be a believer is an unbeliever. And doesn't have life.

But if you are believing, that's a relationship thing. You see, a lot of people when they think of believing and having life, they think of it like a business transaction. I signed the contract.

I believe. This is a permanent thing. Put the stamp on me.

You can't erase that. I have eternal life whether I believe from now on or not. No, it's not a transaction.

It's a relationship. It's a relationship between you and God. That's what salvation is.

And that relationship is one of trust. And so, as long as you're trusting in Him, then that relationship is continuing. If you decide, I don't believe in God anymore.

I don't believe in Jesus anymore. I don't want to have anything to do with trusting Jesus

anymore. I want to trust myself, not Him.

Well, then that relationship is over. For the time being, I'm not saying the person can't come back to Christ, but when you believe, you're tapped into that root, that vine. You're abiding in the vine.

And the life of the vine is going through you like a branch. That life is continuously flowing as you are trusting in Him. Paul said, by grace you've been saved through faith.

That's through believing. Through faith, that's the conduit by which grace comes to you. Remove the faith, then the conduit is removed.

There's no grace coming to you anymore. Grace is a continuous benefit to those who are believing in Him, who are trusting in Him. And so, that's what this passage says, and every passage.

There's not a passage in the Bible that says, if you used to believe in Christ, you have eternal life. Preachers will say that, but the Bible would never say anything like that, because it isn't true. What the Bible says is, if you do believe, you have it.

If you don't believe, you don't have it. Do and don't are present tense. And so, every time this is spoken of here, it's always in the present tense.

So, the wrath of God is abiding on the person who's not a believer, but eternal life is the believer's portion. Not future, now. He has eternal life.

Some people think, well, we don't have eternal life until the resurrection, or until after the judgment. No, if you're a believer, you have the life of God in you now, and that's eternal life. But it can be forfeit.

Just like the branch attached to the vine has the life of the vine in it, right now. But you cut the branch off, and it doesn't have that life in there anymore. So, it's a relationship to Christ through faith that saves.

That's what the Bible says, by grace through faith. In 1 Peter it says, you're kept by the power of God through faith. It's through faith.

Faith is the conduit by which the keeping, the grace, the salvation comes. The eternal life comes through faith in Christ. And so, to maintain the faith, and to not depart from the faith, and to not have an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, as the writer of Hebrews talks about, this is incumbent on those who wish to have, and continue to have, eternal life.

All right, well, we've gone longer than I thought we would, but not longer than you thought I would. So...