



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

### Lesson #21

#### **D. Preparing to Preach a Sermon on John 3:14-18**

- Step 1: Begin with Prayer
- Step 2: Choose a Text
- Step 3: Study the Text and Context
- Step 4: Look for Law and Gospel
- ▶ **Step 5: Find the Main Point**
- Step 6: Determine the Order of Presentation
- Step 7: Apply the Word to Your Audience
- Step 8: Choose the Right Words
- Step 9: Prepare an Introduction and a Conclusion

As we study our text in preparation for preaching a sermon, it is important to decide what is the main point of the text. Ordinarily, the main point of the text will also be the main point of your sermon. In general, it is preferable to look for what God is doing or saying in the text, rather than what human beings are doing or saying. In John 3:14-18, Jesus Himself talking to the Pharisee Nicodemus. At this point Nicodemus is not a believer in Jesus, because Jesus tells him he needs to be born again. Jesus also tells him that he does not believe the **“earthly things”** (John 3:12) that Jesus has been telling him regarding regeneration and spiritual rebirth. Now Jesus is going to tell him **“heavenly things”** as the One who Himself has come down from heaven and will ascend to heaven again. Even while He is on earth, He is the Son of Man in heaven. So, our text is most definitely the Word of God. It is the teaching of the Son of Man Himself, who is also the Son of God.

So, as we look at this text, we want to learn what these heavenly things are that Jesus wants to tell to Nicodemus. What is the main point? This text begins with a comparison between the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness with the lifting up of the Son of Man. The lifting up of the serpent is not the main point of the text. But Jesus referred to that Old Testament incident to introduce another lifting up, namely, the lifting up of the Son of Man.

In the next verses Jesus emphasizes the importance of believing in the Son of Man who has been lifted up, even as it was important for the Israelites bitten by snakes to look up in faith to the bronze serpent on the pole. Jesus is clearly emphasizing the important of believing **“in Him,”** for this idea is repeated in verses 15, 16, and 18. In verse 18 it is spoken of as believing **“in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”**

Surely then, one of the main things that Jesus wanted to get across to Nicodemus was the importance of believing in the one and only Son of God. He did not plainly tell Nicodemus that He Himself was this Son of Man or the Son of God. But since He is speaking of heavenly things, and knows what He is talking about, it is clear that He must be from heaven. In fact, Nicodemus had earlier admitted that Jesus must be a **“teacher come from God”** because of the miracles that He did.

Jesus makes the point that believing in the Son of Man makes the difference between perishing and having eternal life. What could possibly be more important than that? In verse 16 Jesus traces this possibility of eternal life back to God’s love for the world. God’s love for the world is demonstrated by the giving or sending of His Son (the Son of Man and the Son of God) into the world.

Why did God send His Son into the world? God did not send His Son into the world to judge or condemn the world. God sent His Son into the world to save the world. How did Jesus save the world? By being lifted up, just like the bronze serpent in the wilderness.

The difference between condemnation and non-condemnation is belief in Jesus: **“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”** (v. 18).

It is also important that Jesus twice uses the word **“world”** in connection with God’s love. The sending of His Son into the world was God’s way of demonstrating His love for the world. God’s motive in sending His Son into the world was **“that the world through Him might be saved.”** We notice also that twice Jesus uses the word **“whoever”** to bring out the point that God’s love extends out to each person in the world. This invitation is extended to every sinner, because of God’s love for the world and for every person in the world. God’s desire is to save the whole world.

So, we have many important and even vital concepts in these few verses. Which one is the main point Jesus is making? Is it God’s love for the world that led Him to send His Son? Is it the importance of believing in Jesus in order to have eternal life? Or is it the lifting up of the Son of Man like the serpent in the wilderness? These are all very important ideas, and each one is worthy of being preached. One way of preaching a sermon on this text is simply to explain it verse by verse and emphasize all these important points, without choosing a main point and stressing that one main point.

But it is usually best to find one main point and make sure that you present that one main point in such a way that everyone in your audience will understand that main point. In this case your choice may depend on your expected audience. What is the concept that your audience really needs to understand? Excellent sermons on this text could be preached from various points of view, and with different emphases. Here are some possible suggestions, and it is up to you to choose one of them or to present still another statement that focuses on the main point of the text and the main point of your sermon:

Look Up to Jesus on the Cross and Believe in Him

You Have Eternal Life Rather Than Eternal Death through Jesus

Jesus is God’s Way of Loving the World

God Sent His Son to Save the World

Believing or Not Believing, What Difference Does It Make?

The Words “World” and “Whoever” Give Hope to Troubled Sinners

Condemnation or Salvation, Which Shall It Be?

## Questions

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1. What did you choose as the main point in John 3:14-18?
2. In your opinion, which one of the above statements comes the closest to presenting the main point?
3. If none of the above is a satisfactory presentation of the main point of this text, present what you think the main point is
4. Why should the main point of the text ordinarily be the main point of your sermon?