



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

Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

Lesson #25

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

John 3:14-18 very clearly applies to every individual in any kind of audience because Jesus uses the words **“world”** and **“whoever.”** Every individual in every audience is a member of the world that God loved in such a way that He gave His only Son to the world and lifted Him up on the cross as a Savior for the world, that is, for every individual in the world. That is why Jesus can say: **“Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

A person who trusts in their own goodness is not afraid of perishing because of their sin. For this reason, it is necessary for you to make everyone in your audience aware of the fact that he or she is by nature on the path that leads to perishing. This was true even of Nicodemus, the Pharisee, who needed to be born a second time in order to enter the kingdom of God. Mankind in general needs to be released from the power of death and the devil, because they **“through fear of death”** are **“all their lifetime subject to bondage”** (Hebrews 2:15).

Every person has a conscience given them by God that makes them conscious of the fact that there is a supreme being who is watching human behavior and will some day require them to give an account. Every person has a voice within them approves when they do something that is considered good and that produces fear, disgust, dismay, and even despair when they do something that is considered wrong or that does not measure up to their own standards.

This knowledge of right and wrong, which is found in every human being to some extent, makes a person agree with a preaching of law, whether human law or God’s law. Because of our sinful nature, however, it easier to accuse others of wrongs than it is to admit our wrongs. We try to justify our own behavior, so that we do not seem to be as bad as we actually are.

John 3:14-18 contains statements that can strike fear in the hearts of the people in your audience who are well aware of their own faults. But there may be others in your audience who need you to point these words out to them to make them more aware of who they are and what they are like. They are perishing, they are dying, they are mortal, subject to death – physical death, but also eternal death. In other words, they are subject to condemnation; in fact, they are under condemnation already in the sight of the supreme Creator and Controller of the universe.

In order to underscore these points, you should emphasize the account of the Israelites under Moses in the wilderness. The Israelites were supposed to be God’s chosen people, and yet they did not honor

God as their God, nor did they love and trust in Him as they should have. Instead, they complained about how He was treating them. They expressed their anger with Him because they were hungry and thirsty. Instead of appreciating the manna that God was providing for their daily sustenance, they **“spoke against God and against Moses: ‘Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread’”** (Numbers 21:5).

Every time we are unhappy with our circumstances in life and begin to blame God for our problems, we are sinning against God. In the case of the complaining Israelites, God sent swift judgment to make them aware of their sin. **“The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died”** (Numbers 21:6). This swift judgment had an immediate effect on the people. **“Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people”** (Numbers 21:7).

Everyone to whom you will speak has also sinned against the Lord God in one way or another. Everyone deserves judgment from God. It is not just physical death that threatens us because of our sin, but we face eternal death. That is why we say we are on the way to condemnation and perishing eternally because of our sin. This is true of all of us without exception, as it is written: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23).

When you apply these words of law to your audiences, you need to have a feeling for how long and how much you need to dwell on the fact of human sin, the judgment and condemnation of God, and the prospect of eternal punishment. If it is clear to you that your audience is well aware of its sin and the punishment of sin, a short reminder of sin and its punishment may be all that is necessary. But if you are addressing a group that seems to be proud of its own virtue and goodness, a group that is hardly aware of sin at all, then you need to emphasize the law and the punishment for sin, even though this text is basically a Gospel text. As Jesus said, one does not need of a physician if one is not sick. Jesus is our Physician, and in order to appreciate His healing, we must be aware and conscious of our fatal disease of sin that leads to eternal death.

Every preacher of the New Testament is eager to be a minister of the new covenant. We delight in presenting God’s solution to the human predicament of sin and its consequences. John 3: 14-18 presents God’s remedy in a particularly graphic way: by comparing God’s solution in Christ to God’s remedy for the Israelites in the wilderness. God told Moses to make and then lift up a bronze serpent on a pole. God then promised that anyone who was bitten by a poisonous snake could simply look up at the bronze serpent and be healed.

What happened in the wilderness was a preview of God’s much greater remedy that He would provide for the entire human race. Our problem is not poisonous snakes. Our problem is the judgment of eternal death – the just punishment for our many sins against God and our neighbor. God’s remedy for mankind’s universal problem was to give His Son to the world and to lift Him up on a cross to bear the ugliness of sin in Himself. Jesus on the cross is not a pretty picture, even as the picture of the serpent in the wilderness was not a pretty picture. But when we look up at Jesus on the cross and trust in what God did for us there, we are instantly cured of our disease, and we are on the road to eternal life rather than the eternal death that we deserve.

We cannot look up to Jesus on the cross with physical eyes as the Israelites looked with their eyes to the bronze serpent. Our look is a look of faith. Believing in Jesus is the equivalent of looking up at the bronze serpent. The Bible explains in detail why it is that Jesus’ suffering and dying on the cross is our salvation. God gave all human sin to Jesus, so that He became responsible and guilty for all human sin. He was then punished by God as though He had committed all of human sin Himself. In other words, the punishment for human sin was eternal damnation, and Jesus endured eternal damnation in our place on the cross.

The particular point that Jesus stresses in John 3:14-18 is that God's love extends to the **"world,"** and that anyone (**"whoever"**) who believes in Him has everlasting life. The word **"world"** occurs four times, so that we cannot miss the emphasis that Jesus puts on this word. Every individual in the world can insert his or her name in place of the word **"world"** and it would be a true statement. Let me insert my own name: "God so loved David Lau that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever (namely, David Lau) believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. God did not send His Son to David Lau to condemn David Lau, but that David Lau through Him might be saved." Put your own name into this sentence. Put the name of every single hearer of your sermon into this sentence, and the sentence will still be true.

Because of what Jesus says in these verses, it is correct to call Jesus **"the Savior of the world"** as the Samaritans did (John 4:42). But this text also makes it clear that this does not mean that everyone in the world will be saved. Everyone has been saved in the sense that Jesus paid for the sins of all, and God declares everyone forgiven because of what Jesus did. But it is possible to reject and disregard God's gift to the world in the person of Jesus Christ. Eternal damnation is still possible for those in the world whom God has saved. That is what Jesus says in John 3:18: **"He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."** Individuals are condemned, not because Jesus did not save them (He did), but because they rejected the salvation He won for them. This also has to be a part of a sermon on this text, so that no one gets the idea that everyone will go to heaven. Those who reject Jesus are under condemnation already. Unless they are brought out of darkness into God's light during their lifetime, their destiny is eternal damnation. Christ is the only Savior of the world. Without a connection to Christ by faith in him, there is no salvation for anyone. This faith is worked by God Himself through the means of grace.

Here is the great mission of the Christian preacher: to tell everyone that there is good news for sinners, to tell them about the promise of forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life through Christ, the Savior, the only Savior, that God has provided for the entire human race.

You need to present the law and the Gospel in every sermon you preach, based on the way your text talks about the law and Gospel. Everyone present should be brought face-to-face with the fact that he or she is a sinner deserving punishment, and that God has provided salvation for each one of us in Jesus Christ. This is what the love of God has done, and God wants each one of us to receive the benefit of His love and live with Him forever.

Questions

1. Why can we say that John 3:14-18 applies to every person who hears your sermon?
2. How is the listener's conscience an aid to the preacher?
3. Why do people, by nature, resist the Gospel of Christ?
4. What does the Holy Spirit use to overcome this resistance?
5. For this reason, what can actually happen during a sermon on John 3:14-18?