Weird - Part 4

# A Weird Way to Save The World

# (John 3:2-18)

Good morning, welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We find ourselves this morning in a very difficult place because of prohibitions by the state of Maryland not to gather together in settings of more than 10 people. And so, facing these challenges head-on, honoring our leadership, all the while being mindful of the command of the Lord not to give up meeting together, we’ve gone online; moving church online as people of faith, and doing our part to stop the spread of this virus. And so, I thank you for joining us from your kitchen, living room, car or wherever you are as we continue our series “Weird.”

Today, I want to talk to you about a weird way to save the world. And we’re looking at it from the perspective of those who are shielded by God’s power, even “though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials” (1 Peter 1:6). And so, we’re coming together in a different way, but we’re coming together in faith, having a confidence that comes from the presence of our Savior who promised that he would never leave us nor forsake us.

It’s in this time of great uncertainty when many are fearful and anxious, that we’re going to respond in a way that is very weird, very different from this world; because the Lord Jesus has given us his peace and the presence of the Holy Spirit allowing us to be a supernatural stabilizing influence in our culture. In fact, in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus tells us that we are the salt and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14). Therefore, no matter what we face in life we can say with confidence, saying boldly,

*“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid…” (Hebrews 13:5-6).*

This is so important today, when there’s all this fear about the coronavirus, COVID-19, or whatever they’re calling it today, because Jesus is our hope, he’s an anchor for our souls, that firm foundation, secure in the storm.

Now, several weeks ago, we began this series talking about Jesus teaching of two roads, two paths, and how everybody is on one or the other. You could say it was the normal path and the other path, the weird path, that one off the beaten path. And as we begin let’s look at it again in Matthew chapter 7, verse 13 and 14, Jesus said,

*"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Matthew 7:13-14).*

Jesus tells us there’s a broad road, the normal road, where many people are traveling, and it appears to lead to life but it leads to destruction. He says it’s the easy way, the wide gate, where many normal people are; but then on the other hand, Jesus says there’s a narrow road, with a small gate, where you find people who’ve realized that normal just isn’t working. And so, they began to take the Word of God seriously, they believed and began to take their faith seriously; they left the broad road and they detoured off through that small gate onto the narrow road that leads to life. And so, as you could imagine, their friends and family on the broad road are like, “Hey, where are you going, what are you doing, that whole Jesus thing, that’s just weird.”

Some of you are going to experience that, others of you already have, you’ve been accused of being weird, acting like a Jesus freak. But if you’re on the narrow road and you find people calling you weird, you should find comfort in that because God chose a weird way to save the world. You see, it’s weird but it’s not about you, it’s not about what you’ve done, God says it’s about Jesus Christ and him alone. In fact, I want to share with you a familiar Scripture, but I want you to hear it like you’ve never heard it before. The Bible says in John chapter 3,

*"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” (John 3:16).*

In other words, God came down, he put on flesh, he was born of a virgin so that he wouldn’t inherit the sin nature of an earthly father. It was weird, but Jesus had been sent to live a sinless life because God was setting the stage for something so much greater. And the Bible tells us that when Jesus began his public ministry at about the age of 30 that he began to teach things that were just weird. He didn’t teach like the other religious men did, the scribes and Pharisees, teachers of the law, but he taught that the greatest was the one who served, if you wanted to be first you needed to be last, if someone hits you, insults you, or persecutes you, just pray for them. And if you want to find your life you’ve got to lose it, and so, what he taught was just so different, so weird.

The teachers of the law, the scribes and the Pharisees debated about the validity of the things he said, some even said he had a demon, that he spoke blasphemies against God, but others sought him out in an attempt to understand. And it was in that context that a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and said,

*“Rabbi, we know you’re a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you’re doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2).*

In other words, he recognized that Jesus was not just another teacher, because he confirmed the things that he said, the Word that he spoke, by the signs that accompanied it. In other words, he did things that were not humanly possible, healing the deaf, blind, and lame, and even those that were considered untouchable, he touched and healed them. And so, Jesus replied to Nicodemus knowing the thoughts and intents of his heart,

*"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" (John 3:3-4).*

Jesus answered in verse five, *"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:5-8).*

In verse nine, Nicodemus asked *"How can this be?" "You are Israel's teacher," Jesus replied, "and yet you don’t understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven — the Son of Man. 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” (John 3:9-15).*

Jesus reminds us and Nicodemus of a story he would’ve been familiar with because it was part of his family’s history. It was when they were in the desert and the nation of Israel found themselves in a vulnerable place, they were traveling, they’ve got backpacks on their shoulders, carrying with them all of their belongings, they’re on the move, when suddenly here comes trouble. The Canaanites attacked them, overcame them, and captured some of them.

## 1. Brought to Our Knees

The Israelites cried out to God in their distress and he delivered them from the Canaanites and they completely destroyed them. Now, they’re traveling again, and it’s recorded in Numbers chapter 21, but it’s not easy because they’re forced to take a detour. God had just fought their battle for them, he’d given them a great victory, delivering them from the Canaanites, but now they have to go around Edom, and verse four says,

*“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!" (Numbers 21:4-5).*

Now, remember that God had just given them a great victory over the Canaanites and so you’d think they would be happy. You’d think that if God had blessed you, if he’d given you a victory, if he’d answered your prayer, if he brought you through that test, if he brought you through that storm, that you would be rejoicing and praising God. But the Israelites aren’t praising God, they’re not rejoicing, they’re not clapping their hands or dancing, in fact the Bible says that they spoke against God and Moses.

In other words, they murmured, they grumbled and complained against the same God whom they just asked to help them and who delivered them from their enemies. In other words, they were in that place of uncertainty, kind of like we are with this virus that we can’t define me, an economy that’s paralyzed, a political climate in turmoil, and yet God had delivered them but they forgot. They spoke against God and against Moses, they spoke against heaven and against earth, against that which was above and against that which was below. Now, it’s one thing to speak against your leaders, those in authority, but when you speak against God, especially after he’d fought for you, delivered you, and blessed you, that’s not a good place to be in. And so, God’s patience had worn thin and the Bible says,

*“The Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died” (Numbers 21:6).*

You see, God has a way of getting our attention, a way of making you stop playing church, a way of bringing you down to your knees. And so, the Israelites had forgotten God, they beat the Canaanites, but they became proud and boastful as if they’d done it themselves. They forgot God and so he sent venomous snakes among them; not just one or two, but snakes were coming out of everywhere; and I can’t help but think it’s like this virus, just coming out of nowhere, going all over the place; and so these people came to Moses apologizing in verse seven saying,

*“We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you…” (Numbers 21:7).*

The people started confessing, we’ve sinned, we’ve done wrong, we’ve been using God to fight our battles but not serving the God we used. They’re down on their knees pleading, *“Pray that the Lord will take these snakes away from us" (Numbers 21:7).* And so, they’re having an encounter with God, and don’t you know that God can start a revival without a preacher? God can start a revival with the valley of dry bones, he can start a revival speaking through a donkey or with a gentle whisper. The Israelites are down on their knees, they’re delirious, their vision is blurring, their pulse is weak, people are dying all around, but number two God is working.

## 2. God Is Working

God is working and that’s so important to remember as everything is shutting down. Stores and businesses are closing, schools are closed, everybody’s trying to figure how they’re going to make it and God’s working. Moses prayed for the people, they’re lying on the ground, they’re about to die, and the Lord says the weirdest thing to Moses. In verse eight God says,

*“Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live" (Numbers 21:8).*

And so, somebody started a fire and began to melt down some bronze, because fire will change the way you think, it’ll change the way you walk and the way you talk. Fire will humble you; it’ll bring you to your knees, making you surrender, offering your body as a living sacrifice. Moses took that bronze, he heated it and melted it down to nothing, he heated it until it lost its shape, it lost all its power to stand on its own, people are dying and it’s bubbling, but God was working on a cure. Verse nine says,

*“Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole…” (Numbers 21:9).*

Now, you’ve got to admit this is weird. I would’ve thought he would’ve made something to symbolize healing, but it says that he melted it down and made the bronze into a snake. And so, he made this image of the same thing that caused the trouble in the first place. The cure that God told Moses to make for this deadly venom is an image of the very thing that the enemy used to kill. And so, the people are dying, and the Lord says the weirdest thing, he tells them to look up on the pole.

*“When anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived” (Numbers 21:9).*

And so, the people are on their knees, their crawling in the desert heat, and God said look up. Turning their weak heads, peering, and looking up; this is where we make the connection to John’s gospel. You see, we need to understand the correlation between the cause and the cure. It’s the very same thing, it’s the same image, and that’s why Jesus said in John chapter 3,

*“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” (John 3:14-15).*

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, Jesus had to go to the cross, he went to the cross holy, but he couldn’t stay that way. You see, as long as he was sinless, holy, and righteous he couldn’t save us, and so he had to become the same thing that bit us, that infected us with that venom in order to save us. The Bible said it this way,

*“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).*

And so, when they lifted up Jesus on the cross, he became sin for us. God was working and he took the Law, the written code, with its regulations, all that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-14). It’s a weird way to save the world, but there was a reason, there was a purpose, God was working on a cure as Jesus said,

*“When I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32).*

Even now God is making a way of escape, and so if you’ve got a problem, God has an answer. If you’ve got a sickness, God has a cure, and the answer is Jesus. If only number three, we would believe in the cure.

## 3. Believe in the Cure

I mean it’s so simple that we miss it all the time, we give him works, all kinds of sacrifices, but none of that’s going to count as much as taking God at his Word and believing what he has said about you. You just need to simply believe, looking up to the Son of God, the One lifted up on the cross. Jesus said clearly,

*"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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son” (John 3:16-18).*

And so, Jesus is talking about believing in God, but he’s also talking about believing God, believing what he’s said about you.

You see, life is an equal opportunity experience. And so, what you do with what God gave you is up to you. In fact, the Bible says that God has given to each one of us a measure of faith. Let me read it you from Romans chapter 12, the apostle Paul said in verse three,

*“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Romans 12:3).*

And so, God levels the playing field, there are no superheroes in church, because God gave to every one of us the measure of faith so that we could believe.

One day, the Bible tells us in Philippians chapter 2,

*“Being found in appearance as a man, Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:8).*

You see, one of his own disciples, Judas betrayed him with a kiss. Jesus humbled himself, submitting to the authorities, allowing the created to abuse the Creator. They drove spikes to his wrists and through his heels, placed a crown of thorns on his head, and lifted him up on the cross. As they mocked him, he looked up to heaven and said,

*"Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing” (Luke 23:34).*

On the cross, he became sin for us, he became my sin and yours. Jesus became everything and anything in this world that stands in opposition to the righteousness of God. Jesus became sin, the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world becomes our sin on the cross. Once again, he looked up to heaven and said,

*"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).*

He died and was buried, but that wasn’t the end of the story, because three days later he rose, the stone was rolled away by the invisible hand of God, and the tomb was empty.

This is so important, Jesus said it very clearly,

*"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26).*

I know it’s a weird way to save the world, but the question Jesus asks is critically important. Do you believe this? Not just kind of believing in God, just living like everyone else, but stepping through the small gate, the gate called Jesus. Because you’re only reasonable response is to give him your whole life, to offer yourself as a living sacrifice, being willing to die to yourself so that you become so full of his love and so full of his kingdom that you’ll be weird in a God kind of way. Let’s pray.

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