



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 2

March 1, 2026

Look and Live

John 3:1–17

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

³ Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹ Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? ¹¹ Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 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. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

What’s the primary focus of your life? Do you find yourself getting hung up on your troubles? Do you fixate on your mistakes – or the mistakes of others – or do you try to keep at least one eye focused on the goal? You see, the devil – that old evil foe, as Luther used to call him – would like nothing better than to have you live in darkness. He’s delighted when he’s able to get you caught-up in the effects of some disease, or buried in remorse. He’s ecstatic to see you drowning in anger, guilt, or condemnation. But, that’s not what God wants. And that’s the point of today’s Gospel.

You have to focus outside of yourself if you want real solutions to your problems. Focus on Jesus. In Him there’s light that can overpower any darkness, and life that can



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 2

March 1, 2026

overcome death itself. Lententide provides a wonderfully clear reminder that our focus ought to be on Christ, the Crucified Savior, for in doing so, our lives are kept on course.

That said, I think we need to acknowledge that this is easier said than done. Isn't it almost always simpler, when you find yourself in dire straights, to blame someone or something else? I mean, it sure beats the hard work of self-assessment, right? And griping at God is SO much easier than owning your faults and asking Him for help.

That's why Jesus directs our attention today to the Israelites who were making their way from bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land. Even though God had delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh – even though He'd fed them with manna and quail from heaven – the Israelites continued to complain bitterly about . . . everything – including the kind of food God had miraculously given them to eat. One of the things today's Gospel shows us is that the Lord's patience toward us far out-paces our own, but that He won't put up with those who reject Him forever. In this case, God eventually sent deadly serpents to punish those grumbling Israelites.

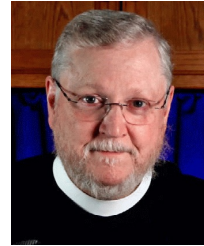
I find it interesting that Adam and Eve fell into sin by being "bitten" by a snake, so to speak, and how that passed the curse onto all of us – the curse that poisons our lives, cuts them short, and embitters them, so that by nature we're more inclined to grumble against God than to turn to Him for relief.

In the case of the Israelites – God could've left things the way they were – let those whiners and complainers go on getting killed by the venomous vipers – but He didn't. Instead, He instructed Moses to make a snake out of bronze and set it on a pole. It would look like an image of death, but by God's power it would neutralize the poison in the bodies of those who'd been bitten. Simply by casting their gaze on the image of the snake – which was really an act of faith and trust in God – they would be saved from death and live. This was no magic snake, mind you; it was the miraculous power of God working to save His people from their sins.

Think, now, about how Jesus was also lifted up. On the cross, Jesus didn't look any different than the criminals beside Him. But He was not what He appeared to be. He looked like the very image of death. But, instead, He was the image of life – the Son of God – the Righteous One – who took upon Himself the curse for our sins – who *became* sin in our place.

You have trouble in your life; who doesn't? Is sin not only crouching at your door, but seems like it's moved in and taken over? Has it shriveled your faith and made you miserable? Then, listen to what the Word of God is saying to you today: "Look to Jesus!" "Look to Jesus, the Sinless One, who became sin for you so that He could remove the curse and give you a whole new life!"

When we allow ourselves to wallow in misery, what we're really doing is imitating the



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 2

March 1, 2026

sinful actions of our first parents, Adam and Eve; we're listening to Satan. Remember: the devil never quits; he's not going to let up in His accusations and taunts. You've heard him say these things a million times, haven't you?: "See your horrible sins? How could God possibly love *you*? You're not worth it. You deserve to feel wretched and alone. You might as well just throw in the towel. There's no way out for you. Give up, already!" And we listen sometimes, don't we? For some very odd reason, we'd rather listen to the devil than to God – and don't you think Satan knows this?

Yet, in those moments of doubt, confusion, and pain, God also has a Word for you. He says, "Remember the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness." Though the danger of the poisonous snakes was very real indeed, the bronze serpent made by Moses was impaled and lifted up as a testimony against them. So also was Christ lifted up on the cross to silence our accuser, Satan. Imagine an Israelite child asking his father why Moses put that bronze serpent on a pole for everyone to see. "Daddy, those snakes killed grandma and grandpa, and my best friend. I don't want to look at a snake!" "My child, it's only God's way of showing us that He has defeated the snakes, and we don't have to worry about them anymore. We can look up at that pole now and not be afraid."

The Son of Man was lifted up on the cross as a testimony against the old serpent, the devil. He made a public spectacle of the defeated Satan, as if *he* were the one hanging there. And, just as those who looked at the bronze serpent were healed, so also Christ has not only removed the curse of sin, but has healed our hurts and pains in the process.

Beloved, the bronze serpent's power wasn't magical; all it was doing was pointing to another Reality, the One who would come later: Jesus Christ. It's the elevated Son of Man who ultimately heals the deadly bite of sin, death, and the devil. So, in faith, we look up to the crucified Christ – now raised, and forever glorified! In Him is life everlasting – in Him is the light which overcomes all darkness.



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 2

March 1, 2026

So, every time you gather around the Table of the Lord to receive His very body and blood, you're looking up to Him again in faith. In Him you know you will live – not only here in His house, but also out there in the world – in that wilderness of sin and death. And, even though there's snakes out there, their venom will not poison you, because you look to Jesus, the Crucified One – and in Him you will live forever. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen