

## The Son of Man Must Be Lifted Up

Does love have a price-tag? There was a time when Jesus went to the temple. He saw all the rich people putting in vast amounts of money. Then there was this small widow who came. She came and put everything she had into the box. She put in two small copper coins. Jesus told his disciples: *"I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."*

Jesus could see how much she loved him because she gave up everything for him. In the words we look at this morning, we see the same attitude. The Apostle John tells us: *"John 3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "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."*

The Son of Man had to be lifted up. But, why did he have to be lifted up? He had to be lifted up to show the limits of his love. God loved the world *so much*. Now, it might be tempting for us to work through this verse quickly. After all, we have heard John 3:16 so very often, we know it by heart. And that may be true. We know the words. But do we know the meaning?

And so, this morning, we look at these words, bit by bit and word for word. Verse sixteen starts out with the word, "for". Why did Jesus have to be lifted up like a snake in the desert? Because that's how much God loved the world. And what is interesting about this verse is the word that John uses here for love. It is not the love of friends. It is not the love of husband and wife. It is not the sort of love that gives and expects something in return. God shows an *ἀγάπη* sort of love. He shows a sort of love that doesn't expect anything in return because there is nothing we can do in return to earn our salvation.'

We move on in this verse, and who is it exactly that God shows this love to? The world. Notice how rich and lavish God is with his love. God doesn't just love those whom he knows will believe in him. God loves the entire world. He loves everyone. There is not one soul whom God does not love in this beautiful, *ἀγάπη* sort of love.

But, this leads us to another, important question: who is the world? What sort of people are in the world? Is the world full of people who hunger and thirst for righteousness? Or is it full of people who do not know who God truly is—and they don't want to know? John answers that question for us in verse 19: *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."*

Jesus came into the world and all he found was darkness. All he found was people loved darkness and sin. He did not find a world of people worthy enough, smart enough, ambitious enough to earn salvation or to choose it. He found a world of people who were in darkness and loved their darkness.

And those words speak to us today. We live in the age of the internet. We have facebook. We have MySpace. We have blogs and google. And one of the most horrible parts of the internet is that it doesn't forget. If, you write down something hasty and sinful, it stays there. It stays there for a long time. And anyone can look for it. What if the rest of life was like that? What if everyone knew *all* of our thoughts? What if everyone knew *all* the evil things we have every done? How many friends would you have? That is how much God loved us. He knew all of our sins, he saw all of our darkness. He did not turn his back on us because that is how much he loved us.

But what is it exactly that this great love for us moved him to do? How did he show that love? John tells us: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son."* God gave up his one and only Son. Just as the widow gave up what was closest to her heart out of love for God, so God, the Father gave up his Son to be captured, tortured and lifted up like a snake on a pole for us. And his great love is all that much more real and true to us when we look at what sort of relationship the Father had with the Son. The NIV says that Jesus was the "one and only Son" of the Father. There was nothing and no one closer than *this* Father was to *this* Son. But that's how great his love was. The Father willingly gave up his Son because of his great love for us.

So, John tells us: *"John 3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."* The Son of Man was lifted up to show us the Father's great love. But he was also lifted up to show us the importance of God's plan. John tells us in the next verse: *"17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."*

God saved us. The word John uses here describes being in a dangerous, horrible, un-escapable situation. It's being in a collapsed mine-shaft, miles below the surface of the earth. It's being in a building that's on fire with no way to get out. That was our spiritual condition. But, God rescued us.

And here is where we see the importance of God's plan. God rescued us. But, there was one and only one way that he rescued us. He rescued us by being lifted up on the cross. He gave us life at the price of his own death. He gives us peace through his own pain. Just as he says "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*", he also demands that we understand that the cross is the one and only way we are saved.

The context in John, chapter three is so very important. Jesus is talking to Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a teacher of the Jews. And Jesus had to tear down all his pre-conceived notions about salvation. He told him that he had to be born again—not through a choice that Nicodemus would make, but through an action the Holy Spirit would take. He told him that God's plan to bridge the gap between heaven and earth was to punish his one and only Son. His plan was not to have God do his part and then have us do our part. No, his plan was the cross. The one and only Son of God was the only one who could pay the full price for all of the sins of the entire world.

The Son of Man must be lifted up. He was lifted up to show us how great God's love is. He was lifted up to show us how important his plan was. And it is our privilege then to constantly seek and see the importance of Christ's plan. If there was only one way for Jesus to take away our sin, and if he was the only one who takes away our sin, then what should our attitude be for Jesus and his cross?

This is what separates us from so many denominations and religions. When it comes to our salvation, we struggle so hard to let Jesus do all the work on the cross. Our sinful hearts and unfortunately, so many other church bodies want to find room for themselves on the cross. For them it isn't enough for Jesus to be lifted up. They too have to lift themselves up. They have to give up things for Lent. They have to renew their vows to the LORD. But, that's not what Lent is. It's not muscling our way next to Jesus on the cross, so that we can earn our own way. No, it's falling at the foot of the cross at pondering the great love of our God, that he would give up his son to die for our sins.

So then, always fight for the truth. Do not let anyone, whether they are outside of this church or inside your hearts rob you of the truth that Jesus had to be lifted up. He had to be lifted up to show his Father's great love. He had to be lifted up to show the importance of God's plan. Amen.