

## FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

John 3:9-21

Key Verse: 3:16

*“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.”*

In today’s passage is the key verse of the entire Bible—John 3:16. This verse teaches us about the amazing love of God.

### I. FAITH AND SALVATION (9-15)

Jesus taught Nicodemus the secret of a spiritual rebirth. Jesus told him that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Nicodemus should have repented of his sins and let the Holy Spirit change him into a new man. Then he could see the kingdom of God. He could come to know the love and mercy of God toward sinners. He could have a personal relationship with God.

Unfortunately, Nicodemus was not ready to accept the truth. It was not easy for the religious leader to humble himself to accept the truth. He insisted on his own way of thinking and said to Jesus, “How can this be?” (9) This was not a sincere question from a person with a learning mind. This was a question from a proud scholar who did not want to accept the truth. Jesus’ teaching was clear. Anyone could understand it. In essence, Jesus taught that when a person comes to God with sincere repentance, the Holy Spirit will work in his heart to turn him into a new person. He will have a new loving relationship with God with a new hope and a new direction in life. He will be able to see the kingdom of God as his eternal home. The Holy Spirit works in a person like the wind. We cannot see it with our eyes, but we can certainly see the result of the work. Jesus’ teaching was very clear.

But Nicodemus asked, “How can this be?” He refused to accept the plain truth because of his pride. The Holy Spirit could not work in his heart when he was proud and unwilling to accept Jesus’ words. At this point, Jesus could have given up on him. But Jesus did not give up. He rebuked his stubborn attitude, by saying, “You are Israel’s teacher, and do you not understand these things?” (10)

Look at verses 11-12. *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?* Two verbs jump out of these verses. They are “accept” and “believe.” Nicodemus’ problem was that he did not accept and believe the words of truth as testified by Jesus. Nicodemus kept on repeating “how?” instead of accepting and believing the word of truth. Why did he stubbornly refuse to accept Jesus’ words? Perhaps because he did not want to change. He did not want to let go of his old life. Some people want to believe in Jesus and start a new life, but at the same time, they are afraid of a change. Nicodemus did not want to do anything to jeopardize his successful

career. He did not want to give up his old self. However, a new plant cannot be born unless the old seed dies. Likewise, Nicodemus had to deny his old self in order to be born again in Jesus.

Jesus also told Nicodemus that a new birth is just the beginning of many wonderful things to come. He said, *“I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”* (12) Jesus had spoken to him of earthly things to help him understand the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus wanted to share with him many more wonderful things--heavenly things like the kingdom of God and eternal life. Jesus is uniquely qualified to teach the heavenly things, because, as the Son of God, he is the only one who came from heaven (13).

Look at verses 14-15. *“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.”* In these verses, Jesus taught Nicodemus about God’s salvation work through his cross and resurrection. The event of Moses’ bronze snake in the desert teaches us about faith and salvation. It is recorded in Numbers 21:4-9. By his great mercy, God brought the Israelites out of their slavery life in Egypt. They were on their way to the Promised Land and they had to pass through the wilderness. They were free but they still had a slave mentality. Forgetting the wonderful grace of salvation, they would complain bitterly against God and his servant.

They 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!" God punished them by sending venomous snakes. People were bitten by the snakes and were dying. In this situation, they begged Moses to ask for God’s mercy. What was God’s answer? He opened a door for their salvation. He did not provide an antidote for the snake venom. Instead, God told Moses to make a bronze snake and hang it on top of a pole. God promised that if only they looked up at the bronze snake, they would be saved. This was God’s way of salvation for them. This did not sound logical at all. When you are



bitten by a venomous snake, you must suck out the blood immediately and call 911. You also have to look around so that you may not be bitten again. Looking up at a lifeless bronze snake on a pole does not make sense when the live snakes are hissing around you. Nevertheless, whoever looked up at the bronze snake lived, while those who looked down at the live snakes perished. The difference was the faith in the promise of God. It is very easy to look up at the bronze snake. Anyone can do it. It does not take a great effort. But it takes faith to look up at the bronze snake. We must have faith that believes the promise of God. To have faith in God may not be logical, but it results in a wonderful healing and salvation.

Let us read verses 14-15. *“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.”*

The bronze snake on the pole symbolizes Jesus who was hung on a cross. Jesus was crucified on the cross, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And God promised that anyone who looks up at Jesus would be saved. This world is filled with venomous snakes. People are bitten by the snake of pride, lust, greed, jealousy, and many other snakes. They are dying from the poison of the snakes. Adam and Eve died after they were bitten by the snake of pride and ingratitude. But our Lord Jesus came and was hung on a cross to become the bronze snake for us. Whoever is bitten by snakes can look up at Jesus to receive salvation. Only the love of Jesus who gave himself on the cross can heal the deep wound of sinful people.

## II. GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD (16-21)

Let us read verse 16 together. *“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.”* This verse sums up the love of God. Let us think about God’s love shown in this famous verse.

**First, how much does God love us?** The verse begins with, *“For God so loved the world ...”* Genesis 1 teaches us that God loved us from the very beginning. He created us in his own image. I mean, why else did he create us in his own image? He also created a beautiful Garden of Eden with all kinds of provisions for mankind to be happy. The problem was that Adam and Eve took God’s blessings for granted. They became greedy. They became proud. They listened to Satan’s sweet talking instead of holding on to God’s word. As a result, they began to doubt God’s love for them. They became rebellious toward God. They were bitten by a snake. They decided to disobey God’s word and go against him. They sinned against God and they were cursed. They were kicked out of the paradise and became restless wanderers. The devastating effect of their sin was that the loving, trusting relationship between God and them was broken. When God came to them, they hid behind the trees because they were afraid. Ever since the fall of Adam, mankind came under the darkness of sin and death. They abandoned God and turned to worthless idols. St. Paul says in Romans 1 that “their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Ro 1:20-21). This was our situation until God sent his Son to us.

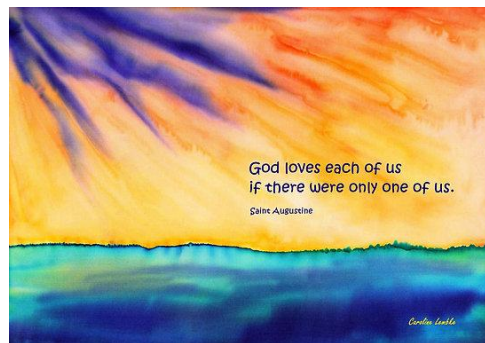


What would you do if your love is betrayed like this? What would you do if you are the owner of a vineyard and your tenants beat and kill your messengers in an attempt to take over your property? What would you do if someone slaps you on the face when you try to do him a favor? A natural response would be to punish him or to get even with him. God could have wiped out the sinful mankind several times over with a massive earthquake or Tsunami, or an enormous comet colliding with the earth in full speed. God could easily have done this if he really hated us. But God did not hate us. John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world.” He did not just love the world, saying, “Okay. I still love you.” But God so loved the world. He loved us all the more, despite all we have done against him. How could he do this? Why

did he do this? The answer is—because he is God. He is our Heavenly Father. He is the same God who created each of us in his own image. If we asked Shep. Maria the question, “Why do you love your three boys so much?” she would say, “Because they are my children.” There is no other reason. It does not matter if they misbehave at times, like spoiling her beautifully decorated cake or messing up the newly painted walls. She still loves them because they are her children. This is the heart of a father or a mother. This is the heart of the father in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son. And this is the heart of God toward sinners like us.

**Second, how did God show his love for us?** A young man asked his girl friend, “Do you love me?” The girl answered, “Buy me something and I will tell you.” It’s funny, but it has a truth in it. Love is more than a word; it has to be shown. Love is more than a feeling; it is demonstrated in a decision. So how did God show his love for us? Look at verse 16 again. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son ...”* God gave us his one and only Son to demonstrate his love for us. Love is not an abstract idea. True love is demonstrated by an act, especially an act of giving. God did not just say, “I love you so much.” He showed his love by giving us his one and only Son. We sometimes hear a

poignant story about how a person gives one of his kidneys to a family member who needs it to survive. Love is like this. To love someone is to sacrifice something that is very important to us for the person. God showed his love for us by sacrificing his one and only Son. He did not just comfort us, saying “I feel your pain.” He sent his Son to save us from our sins. Jesus came to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He came to pay the price of our sins with his own life. As he was



being crucified, Jesus prayed in his excruciating pain, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). God’s love for us is so amazing that it is beyond our human understanding. Sadly some people still reject this love of God. It is a tragedy. Let us praise God for his amazing love shown to us through his Son Jesus Christ and let us love him back with our own acts of love. Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” He also said, “Do you truly love me? Feed my sheep!” (Jn 21:15)

**Third, how can we receive this love of God?** Let us read verse 16 again. *“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.”* What was the purpose of God in sending his one and only Son to us? God sent Jesus so that we may not perish but have eternal life by believing in him. Whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life. God does not require anything other than our faith in Jesus. All we have to do to receive the gift of eternal life is to believe in Jesus. All we have to do is to open our hearts and welcome Jesus into our lives. Revelation 3:20 says, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” The problem is that opening the heart and welcoming Jesus is not so easy to some

people. They would lock up their hearts with deadbolt and would not open the door of their hearts for Jesus, even when they hear him knocking. They would rather use Jesus' name in their jokes than come to him and get to know him through the word of God. This is very tragic.

Instead of accepting the love of God, some people ask, "How can a God of love condemn people to hell? Why does God condemn anyone if he is love?" They misunderstand God as one who is unfair, one that only judges and punishes for their wrong doing. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Let's read verses 17-18. *"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."* God sent his one and only Son to save sinners from eternal condemnation. He opened the way of salvation through Jesus. Therefore,



people condemn themselves when they refuse to believe in Jesus. Think of it this way. God throws a rope to a person who is drowning in the sea of death. If that person refuses to hold onto the rope, he is the one who condemns himself to death. *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 ...*

Look at verses 19-21. *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."* According to these verses, Nicodemus' real problem was his sin. He loved the darkness more than the light. While living in this world, he tried hard not to, but he committed sin—little by little. Now his sin had piled up high. He loved the world so much that he hated to come into the light of Jesus. As a result, he was carrying a heavy burden of sin on his shoulders. Sin was eating away his soul. It was his sin and guilt that made him unhappy despite his success. Nicodemus had to accept Jesus and be born again!

In today's passage, we learn that God so loved the sinners like you and me that he sent his one and only Son Jesus to save us from our sins and to give us eternal life. Let us open our hearts and welcome Jesus into our lives. May God help us to know personally the love of God so that we can also share the love with young people who are still in darkness!