

John 3:14-21March 26, 2006 – 4th SUNDAY IN LENT**Look in Faith, for God So Loved**✦ **Saved from the serpent (vv.14,15)**✦ **The whole wide world (vv.16-18)**✦ **Living in the Light (vv.19-21)**

In the name of Jesus, the Light of the world, dear shining lights of God's truth:

If you grew up in a Christian home, it may be hard to relate to Nicodemus. And if you live in a predominantly Christian country where religious freedom is the law of the land, understanding the plight of men like Abdul Raman may be foreign too. Why can't Muslims today see that there must be something desperately wrong if people must be forced to stay Muslim or face the death penalty? Can't they see that Abdul Raman and countless Christians like him who would rather die than give up on Christ must have something worth dying for? But that seems to be why Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. He may not have been killed by his fellow Jews, but to worship Jesus as the Christ of God could certainly have cost him his place of authority in the Jewish government. It isn't until Jesus has died on the cross that Nicodemus openly comes with another secret disciple named Joseph of Arimathea to ask Pilate for Jesus' body to bury. Courage comes from the cross because there we **Look in Faith, for God So Loved.**

✦ **Saved from the serpent (vv.14,15)**

Critics of the Bible would already be shaking their heads in disbelief. "You Christians criticize the Muslims, yet your own 'Holy Book' tells of a vindictive God who killed people in the desert with venomous snakes. Wasn't Moses forcing people to believe too? What's the difference with Islam?"

O Lord, help the blind to see! Help us pay closer attention to your Word! Maybe we could demonstrate the difference if we all went out in a field and took turns trying to make venomous snakes appear at our command. The fact is that Moses did not call for the snakes. The people rebelled against the LORD who had been providing manna every morning, quail meat every night, and water for millions of Israelites for nearly forty years. When the people complained about His care, God got angry and sent the snakes. This is not at all like one of the world's major religions killing everyone who wants to convert to something else. In fact, this illustrates one of the main differences. The Holy Bible tells us to wait for God's judgment. The Quran tells Muslims to do the killing now. Read both books and see for yourself.

But even if you nod your sleepy head in agreement at something so obvious, you've missed the point of the venomous snakes. Have any of us ever complained about our food? Have we ever said there was "no food in the house" because we were too lazy to go to the grocery store? Have we ever whined when prices went up without stopping to think we pay so much less of our income for food than most people in the world today? Go to KFC and order a combo meal. It's one of the most popular fast foods overseas. But you would have to pay over \$20 for a basic meal in America to match what the Chinese pay. Do you think we give God reason to send snakes against our rebellion? What about our children?

The miracle was not the snakes on the ground, but the one on the pole. It defies human reason that looking at a bronze snake could save anyone. But God said so, and so it was. Yet that miracle is like a tiny industrial diamond compared to the massive rock most women want on their finger. For "*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.*" From all eternity the God of the Bible would rather save than destroy. His mercy triumphs over His perfect and holy judgment. In order that we might be **Saved from the serpent** of hell who wreaked havoc on God's creation starting in Paradise with Adam and Eve, God sent His own Son on a volunteer rescue mission that we might **Look in Faith** to Him. **For God So Loved...**

✦ **The whole wide world (vv.16-18)**

Why did Abdul Raman convert to Christianity from Islam sixteen years ago? And why won't he give up on Christ now since he's facing the death penalty in Afghanistan? You and I have never met him. But because we believe in the same Lord Jesus Christ, we can understand. The simplicity of the Christian faith has always compelled witnesses for Christ to proclaim with their dying breath that God's love in Christ is worth more than life itself. Nothing else even comes close because the God of the Bible is so rich in love compared to any god of any religion of any time in human history.

Again, we have to ask, can't people see the difference in suicide bombings? Do only radical Muslims take money to have their sons blow themselves up to kill the infidels, i.e. everyone who is not a Muslim? Maybe. Yet how many of the "moderate Muslims" dare to speak out against such barbarity? When Muslims riot, the "peaceful" ones don't stop them. How many have read the Quran which only promises Paradise for sure to those who die in *Jihad*? Not even Muslim leaders can be sure of heaven.

How different this is! *"For God so loved the world..."* – not just Christians and not just people but **The whole wide world**; *"that he gave..."* – not charged money, not demanded penance, not forced suicide bombings or death penalties, but *"he gave his one and only Son...."* There was nothing more precious to Him and no One so loving and kind as His *only begotten Son* who volunteered for this rescue mission with one goal in mind: *"That whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* Again, and again the Bible stresses that *"He died for all."* And when God raised Jesus from the dead, *"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."* (2 Corinthians 5:14f, 19 NIV) This is such a different message from any of the world's religions that *"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."* So why won't **The whole wide world** just believe?

✦ **Living in the Light (vv.19-21)**

The best explanation comes from Christ Jesus Himself in the last verses of this text which Nicodemus may have still been hearing that night he secretly visited our Lord: *"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."*

If you really want to understand, you can start by looking at bugs. In our old house if you turned on the light at night, centipedes and millipedes scurried for cover. They were out hunting spiders, some of which escaped – like the one that crawled out from under my computer keyboard one morning, or the one in my wife's water glass one night. When I was growing up, we liked to play with roly-poly bugs because if you touched them, they rolled up. Bugs don't like the light. And much like us sinners with God, bugs think if they can't see you, you can't see them. But they squash just the same.

How close can you live to a *"consuming fire"*? (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29) That's the one true God in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. If you can't stand people who are right all the time, how can you love the Holy God? That's why He came down to us in order to give us His *"righteousness [that] endures for ever."* And *"his love endures forever."* (Psalm 112; 136) Such love keeps us praying for suffering Christians all over the world. May God give strength to Abdul Raman and every Christian called upon to witness in life and in death to the glorious love of God in Christ. He sacrificed Himself to save the world from sin. We're glad to be **Living in the Light** because heaven is our home. We confess that everything good we do is really God doing it through us. We want no credit except what God gives us by way of credit in Christ. What more do we need? What more could we possibly want? We **Look in Faith, for God So Loved** that He raised us from the death of our sins and keeps us **Living in the Light** of His truth. No need to run. No need to hide. No need to force. Christ is our reason to praise and give thanks for God's great love – now and forever. Amen.

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