

## God Loved the World So Much that He Gave!

✦ His Son for salvation (vv.1-21)

✦ His Christ for everlasting joy (vv.22-36)

In the Name of Jesus, God's greatest Gift, dear heirs of **salvation** and **everlasting joy**:

Our District President, Pastor Charlie Degner, suffered a heart attack shortly after we elected him. In the years since he has shared his research into pastoral stress. This week's article is "Grace Beyond Burnout: Reading the Warning Signs, Embracing Hope." <sup>2</sup> It was my year in a cabinet shop that impressed on me how all this intersects your life too. You may not be in a profession where 90% "quit, burn out, get fired, die or suffer a disqualifying moral failure before retirement." Clergy 50% experience depression or burnout requiring time away. We easily fall to the temptation of our culture wanting success in numbers – bigger, richer, faster – idols all. We all need to focus on our real Savior. To save pastor and people from the deadly numbers game, health and deliverance are here in John 3 and next week John 4. Keep your eyes on Jesus. His only number is *one – each individual soul*. He set your value by the blood Jesus shed on the cross for you. **God Loved the World So Much that He Gave!**

✦ His Son for salvation (vv.1-21)

In the four accounts of the Gospel you often notice how Jesus would take His disciples away from the crowds. In John's account, we see our Lord with individuals like a certain religious leader. Imagine you are a member of the Jewish Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin. You've been hearing great things about a rabbi from Nazareth. He makes the blind see, the deaf hear, the sick well, and even the dead alive. So what's not to like? Yet your fellow Pharisees, the "holy ones" as they considered themselves, do not like this rabbi because he claims to be the Son of God. How do you find out without losing face?

You come at night and question Jesus. Nicodemus, you start with something nice: "*Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these miraculous signs you are doing unless God is with him.*" At first, Jesus' answer sounds off point: "*Amen, Amen, I say to you, if someone is not born again from above<sup>3</sup>, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" Jesus is like a mountain guide with spiritual knowledge. He leads you up over a hard rock face to the wide open spaces of God's grace. The Master Teacher skillfully rescues Nicodemus from earthly thinking: "*How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?*"

Using physical things to teach spiritual lessons, Jesus answers: "*Amen, Amen, I tell you, if someone is not born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God! <sup>6</sup>Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh. Whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not be surprised when I tell you that you must be born again from above. <sup>8</sup>The wind blows where it pleases. You hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*" Confused, the judge asks, "*How can these things be?*" Our Lord has to scold him: "*You are the teacher of Israel and you do not know these things? <sup>11</sup>Amen, Amen, I say to you, we speak what we know, and we testify what we have seen. But you people do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup>If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? <sup>13</sup>No one has ascended into heaven, except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven.*"

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from a draft translation by the undersigned for the Wartburg Project – John.

<sup>2</sup> Rob Wilkins in *Outreach Magazine*, January 2014.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek original can mean both "born again" and "born from above," combined here. Also v.7; "from above" v.31; 19:11.

To help Nicodemus see his Savior Jesus references Moses. Every Jew knew how Israel rebelled in the wilderness, causing the LORD to send poisonous snakes. But when the people confessed their sin and asked for deliverance, Moses prayed for them. *The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live."* (Numbers 21:8 NIV84) Like that snake on a pole, the Son of Man on the cross would hold God's promise of eternal life for all who looked at Him in faith.

Will someone flash a "John 3:16" sign at the Super Bowl again today? *"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him would not perish, but have everlasting life."* Jesus saved the whole world of sinners by dying on the cross, but gives grace to believe one soul at a time. *"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost one."* (Luke 19:10 TPA)

Sadly, "Some Prefer No Light." Did you catch that in last week's *Meditations*? A neighbor's cancer finally gave opportunity to witness about Jesus, but he changed the subject. The pastor wrote, "I realized, he preferred no light." Christ died for each neighbor too, but you can't make people listen to God's Word. Another man who always changed the subject was running sprints in the park one summer evening, felt sick, then died alone in an outhouse. Remember that famous quote by C.S. Lewis? "There are two types of people in the world: Those who say to God, 'Thy will be done.' And those to whom God says, 'Thy will be done.'" God will not force Himself on anyone. **God Loved the World So Much that He Gave! His Son for salvation.** (vv.17-21) Don't cover your guilt. Confess it like a mortgage already paid, or a car title free and clear. Let God's kindness lead you to repentance. If you were the only sinner in the whole wide world, Jesus would die just for you. God wants you reconciled by...

### ✦ His Christ for everlasting joy (vv.22-36)

Now John's disciples demonstrate how laymen can also have a problem with number-idols. They were arguing with a certain Jew about ceremonial washing. Their complaint? *"Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, for whom you testified – look! he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him!"* Sometimes an established congregation resents its members helping start a new mission. Mission members may forget a fellow Christian's gifts are needed in an established congregation. So how do we reconcile the need to build up our congregation with starting other missions that need members too?

First, we ought to ask, "Whose *need* are we talking about? The *need* of that one soul? Or our *need* as pastor and people for numbers?" John did not need a Christian magazine article to reveal the masks we wear "when success defines itself through numbers," when "temptation lurks to forget your need for a Savior." Those earthly success idols promise to make you seem powerful and significant, the source to fix people's problems. You feel needed by numbers and fulfilled by busy requests that make you feel in control. But John would not protect his own ego to save disciples from theirs.

If he had, they too would have suffered like pastors when authentic, loving personal relationships become impossible because of masks. "Decreased energy, weight gain, lack of drive, rising blood pressure, irritability, headaches and insomnia" – those afflict other workers besides pastors, don't they? We all suffer when we take our eyes off Jesus and forget we work for God, not man. "Growing disillusionment toward people,...depression, anxiety, guilt and feelings of detachment" form a treadmill going nowhere fast. Addictions cannot fix our feelings of failure or cure our sense of helplessness.

Only one thing can. John rejoiced that **God Loved the World So Much that He Gave! His Christ for everlasting joy.** He taught his disciples the all-sufficiency of Christ Jesus: *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* Jesus is the bridegroom who gets the bride, His church. *"The Father loves the Son and has put everything in his hands. <sup>36</sup>The person who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him."*

Your significance and purpose are not the result of your performance. God can grow His kingdom without you or me. But each of us loves best when we love like Jesus: *one soul at a time.* Find one precious soul who needs Jesus. Give all God's love to that one. Enjoy all God's love for you. Amen.

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