

God So Loved

- ✠ a world of sinners (vv.14-17)
- ✠ to give the gift (v.18)
- ✠ in the light (vv.19-21)

Carrying the cross of Lent to the crown of Easter, dear fellow redeemed, loved by God:

Isn't it amazing how God hides His grace behind some of life's greatest tragedies? A teenager named Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers and becomes the prime minister of Egypt to save the family of God's promised salvation. Another teenager and his friends are kidnapped and become powerful government officials in Babylon. Joseph and Daniel had company in New Testament times – another kidnap victim. You celebrate his day, but maybe don't know his story.

Captured in England at age 16, he was bought by an Irish farmer and put to work tending sheep. Somehow God's love in Christ found his heart and filled his life with faith. A daring escape finally brought him back to his family at age 22. But God had laid a burden of love on his heart for his former captors. A few years of Bible study and back he went to Ireland. Everyone worshiped rocks and trees as druids performed human sacrifice. Powerfully God's Word pierced the darkness bringing 100,000 souls into the light of Christ. By the time he died on March 17, 461, Patrick had planted 200 churches. "I am greatly a debtor to God," he wrote, "who has bestowed his grace so largely upon me, that multitudes were born again to God through me. The Irish, who had never had the knowledge of God and worshiped only idols and unclean things, have lately become the people of the Lord, and are called sons of God."¹

✠ a world of sinners (vv.14-17)

It was night outside and dark in his soul when a man named Nicodemus came looking for Jesus. So many miracles, who could He be? Nicodemus had to know, hopefully for some powerful political solution to the Roman invasion of God's Holy Land. How strange his first encounter with Jesus. This famous rabbi from Nazareth kept talking about being "*born again*," or "*born from above*," but Nicodemus could not see how that was possible. A grown man going back inside his mother's womb? Then Jesus scolded him. We are all so blind to God's truth. You've heard many sermons; do you witness for Christ? Plenty has been preached into our ears, so little has penetrated our hearts "*If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*" (3:12 EHV)²

Jesus recalled an incident of Israel in the desert when snakes were biting the people. The LORD God saved them by having Moses put a venomous snake on a pole. Anyone who looked at the bronze snake would be healed. Then Jesus drew a line right to Himself: "*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" Try figuring that out if you didn't know the rest of the story.

Do you think you have to come up with convincing arguments to debate people into God's kingdom? God hides His saving power behind this simple, awesome message of eternal affection: "*God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*"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 from condemnation with a **world of sinners** by giving His only Son.

¹ Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day*. © 1997, Thomas Nelson, Inc. DailyReader © 1999-2001 Wheeler, Rairdin. Laridian.

² EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version*, the Wartburg Project. Northwestern Pub. House, © 2017. Order: 800-662-6022.

† to give the gift (v.18)

Nowadays, society has trashed most every belief system. They say, “What’s true for you is fine, but it may not be true for me. So you believe what you want, and I’ll believe what I want.” Strange, isn’t it? They’d never let doctors and mechanics operate like that! Imagine how much cheaper a heart valve would be if you could just buy one at *PullParts* – off an old car. “Don’t worry about the specs on that baby, just get a bigger hammer to pound it into place. After all, everyone can believe whatever they want. So if you want it, then do it and feel good about yourself.” “No!” the critics counter. “This is people’s lives we’re talking about!” But try to point out we’re talking about souls, where they will spend eternity. And off they go again into the darkness of “it’s my life!” But there is no life without **the gift** of God.

“God is love.” (1 John 4:8) He designed and created our bodies, giving each of us an immortal soul that will live on after this body dies. God has promised to reunite our bodies and souls when He raises everyone from the dead on Judgment Day. Whether your body will be glorified like Jesus’ glorified body or horrified like the rest of the mockers, scoffers, scholars and pundits all depends on where you put your faith. Is your hope built on the shifting sands of human opinion or on the solid rock of God’s Word? Jesus says, **“The one who believes in him is not condemned, but the one who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.”**

God’s **name** is His reputation. The Lord is the Savior-God. He wants so much **to give the gift** of eternal life to you that He let Jesus volunteer for a rescue mission no one else could do. It’s similar to how Saint Patrick left the safety of home in England for dangerous missions among his former captors in Ireland. Jesus came **“to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³They were born, not of blood, or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband’s will, but born of God.”** (1:11-13 EHV)

† in the light (vv.19-21)

Did you ever have to stand trial or at least serve on a jury in a courtroom? Ever wish you could know the verdict right away? Sometimes all that evidence can be really boring. It might be a group of asbestos cases where bronchial tubes and cancerous fibers will make your head swim. A murder trial might be more interesting until you find out you were only an alternate. You don’t get to decide anything. Everyone, even the judge and the attorneys, are in the dark about the verdict until it’s announced.

Not so with Judgment Day. We already know the verdict. Here’s how God’s Son our Savior explains: **“This is the basis for the judgment: The light has come into the world, yet people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰In fact, everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, or else his deeds would be exposed. ²¹But the one who does what is true comes toward the light, in order that his deeds may be seen as having been done in connection with God.”** In other words, people’s **deeds** reveal their creeds.

How are you at self examination? Are you trying apart from God? “If God is your co-pilot, trade places.” The Holy Spirit wants to shine the light of God’s truth into the dark corners of you life. Why roll up like roly poly bugs to hide from the light? Since **God So Loved**, come **toward the light**. Then expect opposition like the druids in Ireland that threatened Saint Patrick many times. Another missionary found a whole village worshipping an ancient oak tree. He cut it down and built a church.

Thank God that the light of God’s Word dispelled the ignorance and unbelief of our ancestors too. Eventually they came to Christ like Nicodemus. Follow his story in John’s Gospel account, and you’ll find Nicodemus speaking up more and more for Jesus. But you know when he finally throws caution to the wind and walks **in the light**? Right after Jesus died. So mysterious God’s ways! He hides His glory under the suffering of the cross. Not Christ’s miracles but His cross converted Nicodemus and powered up his bold confession. When the winds of adversity blow strong, hoist the mainsail. God is working His kingdom of grace because **God So Loved**. Amen.

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