

God So Loved The World
March 22, 2009
[Ephesians 2:1-10](#), [John 3:14-21](#)

Picture if you will a major sporting event, most likely football. The stands are packed with cheering fans, some officially decorated with their team's colors. The roar of the crowd is deafening as the home team makes a miraculous play. The camera pans the crowd, and somewhere in the stands appears one fan holding a huge sign that simply reads, "John 3:16".

This verse is included in our text for this week, and yet it remains one of the most popular verses of all. Why? What is it about this scripture that would make a devoted sports fan want to share this message with the world? Perhaps it is best to look at the scripture in context.

Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council in Jesus' time – he was a good Pharisee. He is confronted

with a true mystery. Seeing as he needed to find answers, but was still a devout Pharisee, he came to see Jesus at night. He calls Jesus, Rabbi, which means teacher – a truly respected title of the day. Nicodemus says, “We know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Jesus explains that unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus’ responds in a very logical manner – it is impossible to literally be born again.

So what is Jesus talking about? We are introduced to the most remarkable message of hope that seems to have captured the fascination of the masses. We have to start our lives over. Why? What is wrong with our lives as they are? Many of us work very hard to make the best of our world for ourselves and our families. We spend our time

trying to do what is best for us and provide for our families, which can be especially difficult in our current economy.

Perhaps we have been distracted from helping others. Jesus introduces a true paradox that challenges our way of thinking. Maybe we are not supposed to be looking out for just ourselves.

The truth of the matter is that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. The hard lesson to hear is that we have all sinned. In our striving to better ourselves, we may have neglected to take care of our souls, and to help take care for each other. In putting ourselves and our families in first place, we automatically put God in second place. But Jesus presents us with an incredible message of hope. Jesus presents us with the keys to the kingdom.

True, we have all sinned and come short of God's glory. But God loved us so much that He presented us with

the ultimate sacrifice and atonement for our sins. God gave us His only son to die for those sins. Jesus was despised and rejected by those He came to save. At any time Jesus could have denied this task, but He willingly went to the cross to pay our debt for sin. *God So Loved The World.*

For those of us who have children or grandchildren, we can probably recall the first time we laid eyes on our little ones. It seems like at that very moment we would do anything for that child. The truth of the matter is that that child had done nothing to deserve our love and devotion, but you know in an instant that if your child or grandchild needed a kidney or an eye, you would gladly give them yours. Without hesitation and without reason, your life becomes a part of theirs.

As parents of the Baby Boomer age, our big concern was safety. The first time I saw each of my children, I

made a pledge to do everything in my power to protect them. And yet, they had done nothing at all to deserve this devotion from me. They simply existed as my children. But as good parents we were ready with bike helmets, knee pads, child locators, ‘Baby on Board’ signs for our cars, and more and more complicated car seats to protect our children on every level. I heard one pastor say that if she could have put a safety helmet on her children *in utero* she would have to protect them while coming down the birth canal! How much more does God love us.

God So Loved The World – Why? Why should God care so much about us? God created us. God seeks a relationship with us. God is calling us to be God’s children.

God So Loved The World – Even when we turn away from God’s love, God politely waits for us to accept that

love and forgiveness. God's grace is ever-present. The term John Wesley uses is God's prevenient grace. We must take the first step to accept this grace for ourselves through justifying grace.

God So Loved The World – God is ready to welcome us as heirs, no matter what sins we have committed, or how hard we have tried to disobey God's commandments to love God and to love our neighbor.

God So Loved The World – as judge God knew there must be atonement for sin, but God provided the perfect sacrifice through God's son Jesus. Jesus willingly walked the path to a criminal's death on a cross so that we would have the promise of peace and comfort while on earth, and the ultimate reward of eternal life in heaven.

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. But the message does not stop there.

Verse 17 says, *God did not send his son into the world to*

condemn the world but to save the world. I'm using the

Upper Room Disciplines for 2009, and one of the

devotionals for this week says it this way: The 'eternal

life' that Jesus refers to means much more than immortality

or life after death. John 10:10 says that 'Eternal life'

describes the 'abundant life' we can live in the present

because of Jesus' victory over the effects of sin and death.

There is no greater love than this.

So why would God value us so much? I'd like to

share this story from Pastor Jerry Smith. A gem dealer was

strolling through the aisles at the Tucson Gem and Mineral

Show when he noticed a blue-violet stone the size and

shape of a potato. He looked it over, then, as calmly as

possible, asked the vendor, "You want \$15 for this?" The

seller, realizing the rock wasn't as pretty as others in the bin, lowered the price to \$10. The stone has since been certified as a 1,905-carat natural star sapphire, about 800 carats larger than the largest stone of its kind. It was appraised at \$2.28 million. It took a lover of stones to recognize the sapphire's worth. It took the Lover of Souls to recognize the true value of ordinary-looking people like us.

You have probably heard the term, 'a diamond in the rough.' I've seen this depicted in movies from 'My Fair Lady' to 'Aladdin'. God is able to see us in a way that others can't. God sees our potential. God sees our inner beauty. God sees the good in us when at times we may not be able to see it for ourselves. God values each of us and wants to be in relationship with us. When we are able to put God first in our lives, we are able to fulfill our purpose

as God's beloved children. We have the comfort and assurance that in spite of the difficulties in our lives, God is with us every step of the way.

True service involves putting God first. We need to acknowledge that Jesus became human, dwelled among us to share in our experiences, and ultimately chose to die on a cross for our sins. We need to accept God's grace for ourselves and truly be born of the spirit. We are then tasked, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to go and share this message with others.

During this season of Lent, as we pause and reflect on God's love and care for us while we were yet sinners, let us remember that we have a guide to walk with us through the storms of life and a promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. God's love for us continues to grow as we share this love with others. Amen.