

*“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.”*

Today is the second sermon of the six I will be preaching on this verse. Last week, I asked if God sat in his abundant overflowing love for his world, doing nothing, or did he have discernment and action? I promised I would try to answer that this week. The clue to what God has done is found in two small words in the verse. Those words are “so” and “that”. *“For God so loved the world **that**...”*

The most natural way that we understand *“For God so loved the world”* is to assume it means *“For God loved the world SO MUCH”*, but that is not what the Greek says. Rather than telling us how much God loved this world, it says *“For in **this way** God loved the world”*.

It naturally leads us to ask “In which way?” and from that question we have to look back to what came before it, and then forward to what follows. What did Jesus say just before this verse?

He had been talking to Nicodemus, who could not understand Jesus. As he tried to explain a bit more clearly, Jesus referred to something Moses did in the wilderness. In verses 14-15 Jesus said *“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.”*

& then he said *“For **in this way** God loved the world **that**”*

Moses was told to lift up the bronze snake wrapped around a pole when a plague of snakes was killing the Israelites. If the people were bitten they would die, unless they looked at the snake on the pole. When they looked at the pole, God cured them, as promised.

That snake on the pole is now used as the symbol for a doctor.

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*the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”*

God’s love is expressed in such a way that it is like the lifting up of the son of man, so that perishing people are rescued.

This is described more in the **that** of Jn 3:16. *“For in this way God loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.”*

God gave his one and only son because He loved the world. He did not just send, or told his son to go. He gave him. And there are two major aspects of this giving: 1. Jesus came into our world, and 2. he also was lifted up like the bronze snake.

Have you ever thought about the cost to our heavenly Father for Jesus to come into our world? Philippians 2 reminds us of that enormous task from Jesus’ point of view. Philippians 2:6-7 says *“Jesus Christ, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”*

Many people have scoffed at the idea that God should become one of us. It has always been hard to accept, because how could our creator God become one of his own creatures?

To think he gave up equality with his Father, to come here as a person. God the Son, the God of eternity, born as a baby, cute cuddly, totally dependant.

But John’s Gospel says people find that hard to accept, just as they found Jesus’ claims hard to accept. John 1:10-11 says *“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”*

In the world he created, he was rejected, despised and crucified... lifted up as Moses lifted the snake.

Looking at what happened to Jesus, like in the Philippians passage, often reinforces how much Jesus gave up. But John 3:16 reinforces the fact that it also cost God the Father. Because of our Heavenly Father's love for us, which is not a vague sentimental feeling, but a love that costs, God gave what was most dear to Him, his one and only son.

Some of the stories we have heard on the television from the tsunami region tell of parents who have had to make that agonizing decision of letting go of one child in order to cling to another. That is a choice I hope I never have to make.

Yet our heavenly Father made that costly choice to give his only Son to save us. and he did not have to make that choice on the spot. Ephesians 1:4 shows that even before the world was created, God had made his plans. He knew we would need rescuing. He knew He would give his only son for us, to rescue us. Yet He still went ahead and created us with choice, so that we could choose god or evil.

He still continued making us with free will, so we could have real choice and therefore need rescuing. He still continued knowing the costs and consequences.

And in love for this world, God gave his son.

This costly love involving his one and only son was foreshadowed in the life of Abraham. In Genesis 22:2 God said to Abraham *"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love... Sacrifice him as a burnt offering..."*

That long, lingering emphasis on the son he loved must have tripled the sorrow and suspense in Abraham's heart. Isaac was his son of old age, the son of the promise. In him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Yet that was the son he was asked to take and offer. As Abraham obeyed, God provided a way out. He gave Abraham a ram as a replacement, so that Isaac did not have to die.

The awful task that God asked Abraham to do,

God was ready to do himself. God loved the world in this way, that he gave His one and only son. But would there be a way out? Would there be a replacement for Jesus? The Koran says Judas replaced Jesus on the cross. Others have suggested it was Joseph of Aramathea who carried the cross. Others have said it was all an apparition that it only looked like Jesus died on the cross. But in each of these, it means God conned us. They proclaim that God performed a massive hoax. The truth is that there was no replacement. Jesus had to be sacrificed for us. By his sacrifice, we find that a way out of judgement has been made for us, which we'll consider in coming sermons. Such is the love God has for us and the whole world, that he gave his one and only son.

Give thanks to God for His gift of love.