

For God so Loved the World

This week I would like to turn our attention to John chapter 3, which is one of the best-known and most loved portions of scripture. We shall concentrate on verses 14-21. Jesus has been in dialogue with Nicodemus, and told him that he (and we) needed to be born again by the Spirit of God in order to see and understand the kingdom of God, yet alone to enter into its blessings. For Nicodemus to grasp these truths, he needs to acknowledge that they can only be revealed from heaven itself, and that he, the Lord Jesus, is that supreme revelation come down from heaven. In addition, as Ezekiel promised and prophesied (ch 36:24-27) this new birth and spiritual transformation, so Numbers 21.4-9 is a type, an illustration of the work of the Messiah, Saviour and Son of Man as he dies to save his people from their sins, and procure their eternal salvation.

The context of Numbers 21 is the all too frequent murmuring and rebellion of the children of Israel against God, which brought forth his righteous anger and punishment in the form of poisonous snakes. The people go to Moses to intercede, and God graciously provides a remedy, a way of escape from the deadly consequence of the sin. All they had to do, as an act of faith, was to look at the bronze snake that was set up on a pole and they would live. Likewise, says Jesus, when He is lifted up on a cross, all who look and believe will receive spiritual life, indeed eternal life in Him. Notice that this is a 'must'; it will not be an unfortunate accident, not just a grave injustice - though it will be, but the God-planned and ordained way of salvation for a sinful world. In John's gospel the phrase 'lifted up' points to and refers to the lifting up of our Lord on that wooden cross, with all the suffering, humiliation and curse that it entails, and also the sense of being lifted up to glory. It was the Father's plan, voluntarily undertaken by our Lord, to bring his beloved Son to glory, but only by way of the cross. That too, the path of suffering, is the way for believers, and is especially true in many parts of the world e.g as the Chinese clamp down ever harder on churches while the attention of the West is elsewhere, but it could so easily be so for us too if the progressives get their way.

We now come to John 3:16, probably one of the first verses memorised as children in Sunday school. Readers following in the NIV will see that this verse starts a new paragraph with another quotation mark indicating that they, along with many scholars, believe that verses 16-21 are an extended comment and explanation by the apostle John of verses 14-15. Some may disagree, but we can all agree on the

wonderful gospel content these verses relay. Let us take note of the following truths from these verses:

- 1) It is out of love for a rebellious world that God sent his Son to save that world. Jesus did not have to make God loving by dying on the cross, but rather it was love that sent His only Son to the cross.
- 2) It was not a morally neutral world, but a corrupt, lost and sinful world under condemnation and deserving only of punishment that God loved. This truth must surely be a cause of endless thanks and praise, for why would a Holy God save any sinner, yet alone one like me?
- 3) God giving his Son ensures that everyone who believes (or it could be translated who 'is believing', ie continues in belief) will have eternal life and will be raised to glorious resurrection life on the last day (see John 6). It was to save his people that Jesus came.
- 4) Those who will not believe and come to Christ are already under condemnation. All who believe will never perish. There is no third alternative.
- 5) The natural person, born in sin, will not come to the light, but keep in the dark so that their sinful hearts will not be exposed to the truth. We should never be surprised when unbelievers turn away in disgust at biblical truth, but we should cry out to God that He will open their eyes to the truth and change their hearts of stone to hearts of flesh, just as He did for us.
- 6) The mark of a true believer, who loves the truth of God's word, is that they will put themselves under God's spotlight and let the Spirit reprove them so that their lives will be seen to be Christ-exalting and God-glorifying.

Amazing grace- how sweet the sound- that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.