

## Discipleship in the Lectionary – 03/10/2024



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

**Fourth Sunday in Lent**

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, March 10th

**John 3:14-21**

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### For God so loved the world

This familiar passage reveals the depth of God's love. Every Christian may know this passage but to what extent does every Christian live into the potential for what this passage enables in this life. Something to ponder during this Fourth Sunday in Lent.

#### John 3:14-21 Commentary

Chapter 3 begins with a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Since there are no quotation marks in the original text, there are different views on where Jesus' discourse ends. Some suggest the conversation ends at 3:15 and what follows is John's commentary. Others suggest the whole text is Jesus speaking and is shown here in the ESV in quotation marks.

*<sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*

Numbers 21:4-9 records the incident in the wilderness where the people spoke against God and Moses, so the Lord sent fiery serpents. Many people died. Once the people repented and asked Moses to intervene, Moses was told by the Lord to make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole. Anyone who was bitten was saved by looking at this bronze serpent mounted on a pole. Jesus being "lifted up" in John is used five times and each time is an allusion to His crucifixion. The lifting up of the serpent was God's provision for salvation from death because of rebellion against God. The lifting up of the Son of Man (the crucifixion of Jesus) is God's provision for salvation from eternal death for all those who believe. In essence, vv.14-15 answer Nicodemus' earlier question about how a man can be born again when he is old. The remainder of the passage discusses the significance of vv.14-15.

*<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

This most famous verse must be considered in light of vv.14-15. God had only one Son and because of His love for humanity, He gave Him to make eternal life available to the world.<sup>1</sup> Eternal life is to know God - to be in relationship with him - and experience the many blessings which result, both in the present age and the age to come.

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<sup>1</sup> C. G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 116.

*<sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”*

In this world, Jesus did not come to condemn or pass judgment. He came to save. Without Jesus, the whole world is already condemned. However, the Father gave Jesus the responsibility for final judgment at the end of the age. The human requirement here is belief in Jesus. Whoever believes in Him will not be condemned but those who do not believe are already condemned. Verse 18 indicates the importance of belief. The default state of humans is to reject the light because our deeds are evil due to our fallen state. Being exposed to the light of truth and righteousness is not comfortable for those who wish to continue to engage in worldly life. The Good News is bad news before it becomes the Good News! In every generation since, people who want to persist in living “fleshly” lives hate Jesus while those who are driven to seek the truth are attracted to Him.

#### Reflection and Application

These verses confirm the initiative for salvation lies with God and speaks of the breadth and depth of God’s love for all. As a result of God’s agape love for humanity, the sacrifice of Christ has freed us to love God and to love one another. In Christ we are redeemed and are free to come into the light and live into who we were created to be. We no longer must live behind a mask and hold each other at a distance. We are free to live relationally with God and with others. We are thus free to experience joy rather than live a condemned life constantly battered by a myriad of fear and negative emotions.

