

John 3:14-15 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. A child spilled some milk, now I must to clean it up. The plow truck ruined your lawn, now you must fix it. The kids destroyed the inside of the car, now we must vacuum it out. Throughout our time in this world there are things that other people do that then cause us to have to do something, or else live with the consequences. Sometimes it's not a big deal, like those 3 examples. But sometimes it is. A child in trouble, we must help. A friend in need, we must lend a hand.

Why? It's obvious. How can we not? We're obligated to. But, what if it's not a child? What if it's not a friend? What if it's an enemy? What if it's someone who has wronged you, spoken bad about you, and wanted you out of their life forever? That's a different situation altogether.

Here we are on the 4th Sunday in Lent. We're further than half way through the season and we're starting to see the culmination. The top of the cross is cresting the hill and we know what's coming. The Son of Man *must* be lifted up.

Why? Jesus tell us it's “**Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness...** So why did Moses have to do that? From almost the moment God led his people out of Egypt, the children of Israel acted just like that — children. They grumbled, they complained. And we get it. It was hot. And they were on a long walk, a walk made much longer because the people in the land of Edom wouldn't allow them to cut through and take the shortest route to the promised land. They had to go around. They had plenty to complain about. But it's when their grumbling and complaining got to the point of turning against God, I mean really turned against him, saying things like, “We had it so much better in Egypt,” misremembering potfuls of meat and forgetting the fact that they were slaves. They turned against God and lost all trust in him: “**Why have your brought us out here to die?**” They turned against God, his blessings were no longer good enough for them — “**We detest this worthless food!**”

Grumbling, complaining, is one thing, sinful even, but wishing God was out of their lives after he had chosen them to be his special people to carry the promise of the Savior to fulfillment — that was a problem. So not just because of their grumbling and complaining, but because their actions

were leading people to forsake their God, and because if they all forsook their God the promise of the Savior would be lost, God needed to set them straight. “**The LORD sent venomous snakes among the people, and the snakes bit the people. As a result many people from Israel died...**After their change in attitude, **The LORD said to Moses, “Make a venomous snake and put it on a pole. If anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will live.”**”

So why did Moses lift up that snake in the wilderness? To save God's people from the consequences of their sinful actions.

So when we hear Jesus say, **Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up**, we naturally go to the same place. The Son of Man must be lifted up because of how horribly sinful we all are.

That's why Jesus had to die on the cross, because I'm a poor miserable sinner who grumbles and complains against my God. I forced him there because I fail to trust in him as I should and I don't appreciate the things he blesses me with. I cry out against him when things don't go my way and I look longingly at what everyone else has wishing God would give me what they have too.

But it's not only that. By nature, all that I am goes against God. My thoughts are not always God's thoughts. My words aren't always bespeckled with his love. My actions only carry out my sinful thoughts and become extensions of my sinful words. What sinful wretches we are. This is what the Son of Man *had* to be nailed to a tree for? God looked at this sinful world and concluded, they're so horrible, so bad, so sinful, so lost, I just *have* to die for them? Is that what God thought? “Because of how sinful they are, now I *must* do something...”

It's just like our sinful natures to make it all about us. Yes, *I'm* the reason Jesus died. *I* was so bad, he *had* to be lifted up on the cross to die.

But did he really have to be? God had no part in our sinfulness. That was all us. God had no part in the unbelief we were born in. That was all us. God had no part in any of the mess we are born into and continue to live in. It was started by man, and it continues by man, until man living on earth is no more. God was not obligated by guilt, nor was he compelled by remorse to do anything to save us. The truth is he didn't have to do anything. **Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?**

But Jesus says it right here. The Son of Man *must* be lifted up. Because of my sin? My guilt? My wretchedness? No. Jesus So that **everyone who**

believes in him shall not perish. Jesus is the focus, not me. Faith is the basis, not my sin. It was necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up, not because of how sinful we were, even though we were! but because of how good and gracious and merciful God is. God had to do something not because of us, but because of himself, because of who he is and what is in his heart.

Yes we are sinful, but that is not the cause of our salvation. Yes, we were destined for the fires of hell, but that is not what forced God to give up his one and only Son. What caused our salvation, what forced God's Son to do the unthinkable and give up heaven and come to earth to suffer hell in our place? To die at the hands of his own creation?

He wanted to.

The very next verse, John 3:16, sums it up perfectly. God so loved the world. Not, "God felt bad for the world..." Not, "God felt partly responsible for what happened in the world..." No! God *loved* the world. Why? He wanted to. He just *does*. That's who he is. That's what's in his heart. It has nothing to do with little old me. It has nothing to do with little old you.

The Son of Man *must* be lifted up, because God wanted him to be. It was his prerogative, and in his grace, mercy, and love, he took it. And so he promised it. In the Garden of Eden he said, "Even though you sinned, even though you turned against me, even though you failed to trust me, still I love you and will save you. I will send a Savior who will take your sin away. He will render Satan powerless. He will make your future in heaven, rather than in hell." The Son of Man *must* be lifted up...because God promised it. And God always keeps his promises.

Yeah, but we still sin. We still grumble and complain and turn against God. What does that mean? Does that mean the Son of Man wasn't lifted up for me? Have I lost the benefit of his life and death? If it never was because of you to begin with, but only because God wanted to, because God promised it, because that's who God is, then that's *still* who God is. You were a sinner yesterday and Jesus' death counted for you then. How do today's sins change that? How will tomorrow's? They can't. Because God's love, grace, mercy never change. Jesus said, **Everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** That means you!

It's Satan's nasty trick to get us to think more about how sinful we are and less about how God just wanted to save us. That if we focus on our sins more, we can somehow do better and make God happy. And it sounds like a noble goal. But if we are constantly focused on our sins, we start to

think that God isn't happy with us, that God doesn't love us, that with each sin we either earn God's love by not doing it, or forfeit his love by giving in. What Satan doesn't want you to know is that by faith in Christ you are perfect in God's sight already. His love is yours already, and for Jesus sake, it always will be. The more we focus on the reason the Son of Man *had* to be lifted up — because that's what God wanted to do to save us — the more we will naturally be motivated to live for him.

He wanted to do it. He promised to do it. He did do it. When the children of Israel looked at the remedy to the poisonous snakes, what were they looking at? They were looking at a form of their oppressor. They looked to a snake to be saved from the snakes. When God looked at Jesus on the cross, he saw our oppressor on his back, every single sin, of the world, of you and me, laid on him. And he suffered the consequences so we never would.

So that when we look to the cross, what do we see? Sin, guilt, shame? There is a time for that, a moment perhaps. But more than that let us see the wonderful, comforting, reassuring truth to Jesus' words: The Son of Man must be lifted up, not because of who we are, but because of who God is — Our Savior in every sense of the word, today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen!