

"God so loved the world." What about you? Do you love your world? You can probably think of some wonderful blessings that you treasure in this world, some great experiences, some loving people. But you also may be struggling. You don't love the loneliness that you're feeling. The health struggles that you or a loved one are going through get you down. You lost your job and you wonder what you're going to do. Or, life just hasn't turned out the way you thought it would. And you don't love that very much at all.

But Jesus told a man named Nicodemus in John 3:16, "God so loved the world." Nicodemus was just like you. He didn't love his world all that much. He was a religious leader who felt trapped in a helpless and hurt-filled life. He didn't know a way out. His friends weren't helping. So one night he snuck away to meet Jesus. Jesus was unlike anyone Nicodemus had met. This Jesus was doing miracles. He was teaching about new life instead of the old, humdrum life. Nicodemus knew he needed something different, so he went to Jesus.

And, do you know what Jesus did? He put something new into Nicodemus' life. To a life that was plagued by brokenness and sin Jesus said, "God so loved the world."

You may not love your world or be thrilled with your life, but God loves you deeply. And He comes to you today with the strength, the hope, the encouragement, and the new beginning that you need.

This is the true story about a young man named Johnny. He was a bagger at a grocery store, putting people's groceries in their bags all day. Johnny the bagger was by no means in the upper tier of the organizational chart in the company. But he was included with all the other workers when the president of the grocery store chain invited everyone to a vision and mission meeting for the company. Two world-renowned business consultants were meeting with all the workers to present the vision of effective customer service. They told the group, "Every encounter you have with a customer is a chance to make a difference. Your words and actions matter, so go make a difference."

Johnny was inspired by those words. So as Johnny made his way home, he started to think about how he could make his encounters with customers more meaningful, how he could give them something that would make a difference in their lives. That's when he had an idea. When he got home, he wrote down a "thought for the day." It was a kind and helpful statement that he thought would bring some cheer to the people in the grocery store line. His dad helped him type the thought for the day into the computer, six to a page. Then Johnny printed out 50 pages-enough to make 300 "thoughts for the day." He cut them into strips of paper and signed each one of them personally. Then he brought them to work. Every time he bagged someone's groceries, he put his thought for the day into the last bag. When the customer was getting ready to leave the store, Johnny would smile and say, "I put something extra in bag for you. I hope it helps you have a nice day."

An amazing thing happened at the store. Customers loved what Johnny was putting into the bag. Soon the line at Johnny's checkout was stretching back into the frozen food aisle. People who normally shopped once a week were coming into the store every day. When managers tried to usher people to shorter lines, they refused to go. "We want Johnny's thought for the day," they said.

Not long after that, managers were reporting that the culture of the store was changing. When the floral department had a broken flower or unused corsage the workers would usually throw the

flowers away. But now they searched the store for an older woman or little girl and, with a smile and greeting, presented the flower to her. Everything was changing—all because one person decided to put a blessing in people's bags.

As you live your life, a lot gets put into your bag. Some of it is good, some not so good. You've got some heavy items to carry in your life. Some of what you've got is balanced precariously. You're not in control. It feels like everything can come tumbling out at any moment. Every day you pick up more items, you get loaded down, you bear the burden of brokenness and sin. But then comes Jesus. And he put something into your bag—something different, something that brings blessing. Something that makes the other things bearable.

You heard that happen in John chapter three. Nicodemus was loaded down with a life that he did not love. And Jesus said to him, "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." You see, Johnny isn't the only bagger. Jesus is a bagger, too. And this was Jesus the bagger in action. He brought blessing to a broken heart. He brought the news of forgiveness to a hopeless soul. He brought the joy of the resurrection to a worn out life. Jesus the bagger put something new into Nicodemus' bag. It was the gospel—the good news—the announcement of what Jesus was doing in the world.

That's what He does for you today. You may not love your world, but your Savior Jesus loves you! And He comes to you where you're at and puts blessing into your bag. It's not just a thought for the day. It's Himself. He bled and died on the cross to be in your life with the forgiveness of your sins. He rose up from the grave to be in your bag, to be the help and strength you need in your life every day! The Lord Jesus who loves you gets poured into your life through baptism and communion. You may not love your life, but you can love Him, because His love for you knows no bounds.

Johnny and Jesus aren't the only baggers. You are, too. What are you putting into the lives of the people your "line"? What about your actions?

Perhaps being a bagger means being a friend. Who needs you to listen to them? Who needs you to show some genuine care? When you really care about someone, God will give you opportunities to put blessing in their bag. It may be a word of encouragement. It may be a prayer. It may be a word of correction and accountability. But it's putting blessing in people's bags.

Nicodemus left after that evening talk with Jesus. He appears again in John chapter seven, defending Jesus to His opponents. We see Nicodemus again in John chapter 19, using his own resources to help with Jesus' burial. Nicodemus' world was changed. More precisely, Nicodemus had changed. He had the blessing of Jesus in his bag.

You have the same. You have the truth—"whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life." There's a lot of empty bags out there. Let's change that. Amen.