

## Title: “Drawing Near”

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John 3:16-17

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**Service Readings:** Gen. 12:1–9, Rom. 4:1–8, 13–17, John 3:1–17

*God saves by drawing near, not by standing at a distance.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

<sup>13</sup>No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <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.

<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. <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.

The cross is the most visible manifestation of the Father’s love that we have. To consider it an accident of history, or something God simply used after the fact, is to miss what Jesus says in this passage: that the lifting up of the son is the very way the Father makes his love known to the world. For John, the cross is not merely humiliation — it is exaltation. It is not merely suffering — it is glory, revealed. It is not a loss of control — but the place where judgment is accomplished. When the Son of Man is lifted up, we are not watching tragedy unfold. We are seeing the Father’s love on display.

And Jesus tells us that his lifting up is not a new idea. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” He is referring to the time of the Exodus when God led his people out of captivity. They grew impatient with Him and cried out. The Lord sent venomous snakes among them who bit and killed many Israelites. The people repented and Moses intervened to God for relief.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” <sup>9</sup>So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

Jesus reaches back into Israel’s history to help us understand. In the wilderness, God didn’t remove the serpents, instead he instructed Moses to create and lift one up. And this bronze serpent, a symbol of the curse, *became* the instrument of healing for God’s people.

Jesus is connecting this event to himself *and* to the love the Father has for His creation. In the wilderness God used a symbol of the curse as the vehicle of healing. But in Jesus, there is no symbol. Jesus *becomes* the sin that is then nailed to the cross and lifted up. In the wilderness, Israel looked at the bronze serpent and found earthly life. But those who look to Jesus, it is eternal life that is found.

What Christ is teaching is nothing less than this: we are all under a curse of sin, But unlike the Israelites, the bite from *this* serpent means more than an earthly death – it means eternal separation from God. And there is nothing that we can do about it. We cannot work hard enough, move fast enough, or hide well enough to

escape the venom of this enemy. It will find us and work its way into every aspect of our life. It shapes our priorities, constructs our idols, and distorts our loves.

But this is the love of God: not that he simply removes the serpent, but that he sends his son to bear the curse the serpent brought. On the cross, the Son of Man is lifted up, and there, in his flesh, sin is condemned, judgement is carried out, and death is extinguished. And now the promise stands: whoever looks to him — whoever believes in him — shall not perish, but have eternal life. The serpent may still hiss. The curse may still wound. But it no longer has the final word. The son has been lifted up. And in him, the Father's love has spoken life into a dying world.

So when Jesus says, "For God so loved the world," he is explaining the cross. The Father's love is not abstract. It is lifted up for the entire world to see. And what do we see? We see sin condemned. We see judgement carried out. We see death undone. *We see the heart of the Father.*

"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." This includes Israel in the wilderness. This includes Nicodemus in the night. This includes you. You have been bitten by sin. You cannot draw out the venom. But the son of man has been lifted up. And whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The cross is not an accident. It is not a tragedy that God repurposed.

It is love – deliberate, determined, and saving.

Look to him and live.

Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, we thank You that in love You sent Your only Son to be lifted up for us and for our salvation. When we are wounded by sin and burdened by guilt, turn our eyes to Christ crucified. Grant us steadfast faith to trust Your promise, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.