

14And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Last Sunday afternoon I was driving along, sometimes passing, sometimes being passed, minding my own business when out of nowhere came a shout from Sue, a horn from the car I was pulling in front of. I had not seen him, without the shout and the horn I would have been struck by him. They had saved me.

And my reaction? Resentment. I don't like being the one in the wrong, being told what to do, receiving help from others – not even if the help is intended to save my life.

On the other hand, how I like to give help. Later in that same drive Sue was behind the wheel, a stoplight ahead changed from green to red, I told her to stop. Sue wondered out loud how it was that she managed to get to work each day without my wonderful guidance.

There is name for all of this: It is called sin in me. “If you eat of the fruit of the tree you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” That is what the serpent promised, and I eat. I want to be god - the wise one, the giver of help, the director of myself and others - self sufficient, in control. I want to be Lord over me, and over you. It feels so good when I am.

But who am I to be god, I cannot even change lanes on the interstate safely. Who am I to be god?

I am a brother to all the Israelites in the wilderness, freed from slavery, witness to the Lord's deliverance when they were trapped between the chariots of Pharaoh and the waters of the Red Sea. The Lord divided the waters and they were saved. But before long they are complaining about the quality of the food. They know better than God.

The Lord sent fiery serpents and these people who were wiser than God died. The survivors pleaded for help, the Lord told Moses to put a serpent of bronze on a pole and those who looked at the serpent lived. One moment knowing better than God, the next moment desperate, afraid, dying - yes, I am a brother to them. You are sisters and brothers to them also.

To me and to you I have been appointed to make this announcement: “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

To a dying people God has sent Jesus Christ. God has lifted Jesus up above us. In looking to him there is life.

Just when we were about to crash, Jesus is the shout that saves us. We hear, we believe, we are saved. Thank God.

Who do you know that needs to hear the shout that will save them? A friend, a spouse, a sister or a brother, a parent, a son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter? How can you tell them of Jesus?

It is a simple thing to bring a child for baptism, especially an infant in his father's or mother's arms. But what of the ten year old that no longer wants to go to Sunday school, the fifteen year old that has better things to do on a Sunday morning. What can you say to the child grown and no longer living under your roof?

All of this is difficult for me to even talk about for I have witnessed the pain that it brings when children turn away from Christ. We are tempted to believe that faith in Christ doesn't really matter after all so that we can cling to hope for those whom we love.

But God has sent Jesus Christ to give us life, life now and life forever. “I am the way and the truth and the life,” says Jesus , “no one comes to the Father except through me.”

Sue's shout in the car was a harsh shout - not gentle, not full of understanding, not patient.

Your friends and parents and spouses and children and neighbors and coworkers are loved by God. God so loved them that he sent his only Son that they might believe in him and have eternal life. But how can I tell them and not drive them away. If I do not want to even be told how I should drive, how will they receive a word about a new Lord in their lives - a Lord Jesus Christ who is the only way to the Father? As soon as I say it they may hear me as saying, I know more than you.

In that car Sue did know more than me, I am thankful she shared what she knew. But an hour later my advice was only meddling, not trusting her.

Pray for those you love who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Pray for love for them in you. Pray for humility and gentleness in you. Pray that they will come to believe in Jesus who is God's only Son, the light of the world, the bread of life, the true vine which nourishes - the resurrection and the life.

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