

Fourth Sunday in Lent

OLD TESTAMENT – Numbers 21:4-9

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” 6 Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

21:4 *the way to the Red Sea.* The Gulf of Aqaba is meant, on the east side of the Sinai Peninsula southeast of Canaan. This region (likely near Punon) was well known for its copper mines. (Copper is used for making bronze.) (TLSB)

impatient. Caused by travel away from Canaan rather than toward it. (TLSB)

With Moses' determination not to engage Edom in battle (see note on 20:20), the people became impatient with him and with the direction the Lord was taking them. Flushed with victory, they were confident in themselves. They forgot that their victory over Arad was granted by the Lord in response to their solemn pledge (v. 2); now they were ready to rebel again. (CSB)

Following the thirty days of mourning, Israel sets out from Hor to go around Edom (Num 20:20-25). Attention to these places indicates that Israel was going back to where they started from. They were walking in circles. On the road going nowhere, they begin to believe that the Lord's delays are his denials. – Even this generation, which was removed forty years from the life of Egypt, repeated the complaints of the first generation. (PBC)

21:5 *why have you brought us up out of Egypt* – Egypt never looked so good as when the Israelites were in the desert. In the wilderness all they remember is the fleshpots of Egypt, not the whips and the bricks. They go even so far as to call Egypt a land flowing with milk and honey (Num 16:13). Once they had to slave for their bread under the lash. Now they pick up manna for free. But impatience has clouded their memory.

Tertullian: “Although they were there nourished with divine supplies, nevertheless [they] were more mindful of their belly and their gullet than of God” (ANF 3:679). (TLSB)

we detest this miserable food! The people's impatience (v. 4) led them to blaspheme God, to reject his servant Moses and to despise the bread from heaven. This is the most bitter of their several attacks on the manna (see note on 11:7). Just as Moses' attack on the rock was more than it appeared to be (see note on 20:11), so the people's contempt for the heavenly bread was more serious than one might think. Rejecting the heavenly manna was tantamount to spurning God's grace (cf. Jn 6:32–35, 48–51, 58). (CSB)

21:6 *fiery serpents.* Hbr *nechashim seraphim*; similar to the word for “bronze” The wordplay may refer to the shiny, metallic brown appearance of some species of adder. (TLSB)

fiery. May also describe the pain that accompanied the animals' bites. (TLSB)

21:7 *We have sinned*. A second time, the people resort to prayer, which shows they begin to understand the way of life in which the Lord will lead them: sin, repentance, restoration, and service. (TLSB)

21:8–9 In response to the people's confession of sin (v. 7), God directed Moses to make an image of a snake and put it on a pole, so that anyone who had been bitten could look at it and live. (See the typological use of this incident in Jn 3:14–15). (CSB)

21:8 *make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole* – Israel had confessed its sin after a rebellion one other time in Numbers (14:40). But then they went out without the Lord's presence and were defeated (14:41-45). Their confession was shallow; they believed they could fulfill the promises of the Lord through their own efforts. This background of the earlier confession helps explain why the Lord does not simply get rid the serpents immediately. The bronze serpent by itself does not have the power to heal (as Israel mistakenly believed, 2 Kings 18:4). No, it is the serpent connected with the promise of the Lord that brings life.

Hbr term also used to describe a sign, which could likewise mean a miracle, as in “signs and wonders.” God's word of promise made the healing possible. The Fathers held that this pole/sign was in the shape of a cross. Just: “Moses, by the inspiration and influence of God, took brass, and made it into the figure of a cross” (ANF 1:183). See Basil (NPNF 2 8:299). (TLSB)

21:9 *bronze serpent*. Hbr *nechash nechsheth*. God spared those who accepted the means of rescue He provided. Healing did not magically emanate from the coiled piece of metal but depended on faith in the power of God's Word. Cyril of Jerusalem: “That brazen serpent was hung up as a remedy for the biting serpents, not as a type of Him that suffered for us, but as a contrast; and it saved those who looked upon it, not because they believed it to live, but because it was killed, and killed with it the powers that were subject to it, being destroyed as it deserved” (NPNF 2 7:431). Cyril of Jerusalem: “Whoso had been bitten by the living serpent, and looked to the brasen serpent, might be saved by believing” (NPNF 2 7:87). John Wycliffe: “Christ, in his own person ... [is] the sacrament of sacraments.... Jesus our living serpent, having the likeness of sin upon him, though he could not possibly sin, was suspended on the cross, that those who are stung by the poison of the old serpent, sin, may become spiritually whole” (TT, pp 157–58). Later, when its healing power was not attributed to the Creator but to the creature, the bronze serpent was destroyed by King Hezekiah (2Ki 18:4). His action was necessary because serpents were the idolatrous object of veneration among the earliest peoples. But the rescue from death that God wrought through the bronze serpent was only a type of what He intended when His incarnate Son bore our sin and was lifted to the cross. When faith looks up to Christ crucified, God saves from eternal death all victims of the fatal venom of sin (Jn 3:14–18, 36). Irenaeus of Lyons: “The law never hindered them from believing in the Son of God; nay, but it even exhorted them so to do, saying that men can be saved in no other way from the old wound of the serpent than by believing in Him who, in the likeness of sinful flesh, is lifted up from the earth upon the tree of martyrdom, and draws all things to Himself, and vivifies the dead” (ANF 1:465). (TLSB)

and lived – This account is especially dear to people of the NT because Jesus pointed to it in John 3. Just as the Israelites were from the poison of the snakes when they looked in faith toward the bronze snake, so believers of all ages can look to Christ in faith and be saved from the spiritual poison of sin. (PBC)

21:4–9 As Moses guides God's people in the direction of the Red Sea, away from their primary objective of the Promised Land, rebellion begins anew. Our lives also persist in the pattern of rebellion, repentance, and restoration. Those in Israel who repented received God's salvation by looking to the sign of His mercy in faith (v 9). What an excellent precursor of God's redemption through the cross. Those who look

upon the cross in faith are saved. • Gracious Lord, send Your Holy Spirit to **deepen our faith in Christ**, that we live by daily repentance and faith in Your Son. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Ephesians 2:1-10

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

2:1–10 In ch. 1 Paul wrote of the great purposes and plan of God, culminating in the universal headship of Christ (1:10), all of which is to be for “the praise of his glory” (1:14). He now proceeds to explain the steps by which God will accomplish his purposes, beginning with the salvation of individuals. (CSB)

2:1 *you were dead* – A description of their past moral and spiritual condition, separated from the life of God. (CSB)

Prior to their conversion, they were spiritually dead under the Law’ condemnation (Rom. 5:12-21; 7:9-10), unable to make a single movement toward God (Mt. 8:22; John 5:24-25; Rom. 6:23). “The Scriptures teach that a sinful person is not only weak and sick but also finished and entirely dead” (FC SD II 10). (TLSB)

He is speaking to the Ephesians of Gentile background. Their Jewish counterparts will be addressed later. For now Paul is speaking to Gentiles, and he has some very damaging things to say. (PBC)

Paul describes life before Christ as no life at all. Sin kills. It paralyzes us with a killing force. Sin kills the spirit and the will. What’s more, sin separates from the life God has to give. In this sense, more than in any other, life before Christ is a walking death. (LL)

Corpses can’t move. Dead people can’t do anything; they are totally unable to help themselves. Such was the spiritual plight in which the Gentile Ephesians had found themselves. If any were inclined to question Paul’s diagnosis regarding their spiritual bankruptcy, he urged them to take a look at their lives and actions. (PBC)

2:2 *once walked* – Imagine a person whose entire perspective on life had been shaped only by television programming. What would such a person’s morality be like? His sexual ethics? His attitude toward violence? The value he placed on life? How strongly would he desire to serve others? The world sets standards different from those of Christ. Life before Christ is lived by a set of standards that usually settle for the lowest common denominator – standards like, “What’s in it for me?” or “How much can I get away with?” or “It worked for them; why shouldn’t it work for me?” So a newspaper reporter observes Mother Teresa washing the sores of a leper and says to her, “I wouldn’t do that for all the money in the world.” And Mother Teresa responds, “Neither would I.” Two separate worlds with two

distinct sets of standards collide in those statements. Before Christ, we blended into the world's mediocre, self-focused values. After Christ, we adopted a new set of challenging standards, those given us by God. (LL)

This is biblical imagery for conduct before God (Ps. 1; Romans 6:4). Before Christ they were "dead men walking." (TLSB)

course of this world – In our passage the salient point lies in the words "this world." This world is mankind estranged from God, the apostolic world. And now the course of this world appears as the determining force for the way of life of the present Gentiles. Not only by their inborn evil nature and constitution and the resultant sinful condition but also by their entire environment. Through the evil world and the evil time in which they lived, they were led into sins and transgressions and held fast therein. (Stoeckhardt)

ruler. Satan (cf. Jn 14:30, "prince"). (CSB)

air. Satan is no mere earthbound enemy (cf. 6:12). (CSB)

The devil, who operates in "heavenly places" (3:10; 4:27; 6:11, 16). "The Church is Christ's kingdom, distinguished from the devil's kingdom" (Ap VII and VIII 16). (TLSB)

This evil principle, the spirit of disobedience, is located, as it were in the air, is the spiritual atmosphere wherein they live, move, and breathe. It is nothing but sin, disobedience, unrighteousness that the men of this world spiritually inhale and exhale without ceasing. (Stoeckhardt)

He ranges not only in the material world but in the spiritual world as well. (LL)

spirit. Satan is a created, but not a human, being (cf. Job 1:6; Eze 28:15; see note on Isa 14:12–15). (CSB)

He was created as an angel and has powers far transcending human might. He seeks especially to turn believers into "those who are disobedient," persons whom he controls and through whom he works his evil will. (LL)

sons of disobedient - a Hebrew expression for one's character (cf. v. 3). The Gentiles were disobedient unbelievers. By contrast, "son of God" have His holy character (Luke 20:36; Rom. 8:14; Phil. 2:15). (TLSB)

This is the atmosphere of the spirit that now, and in this era, operates in the children of disobedience. (Stoeckhardt)

2:3 *when all.* Jews and Gentiles. (CSB)

That is to say: among whom also we Jewish Christians once, while we were still Jews, wandered about in the lusts of our flesh. "Among whom" - the Jews, did not only live among the Gentiles but belonged in the same category with them, the children of disobedience, were also disobedient unto God. Just as the Gentiles opposed natural law, so the Jews opposed the revealed law. (Stoeckhardt)

Here. As in Romans 1:2, the apostle concludes Gentiles and Jews under sin, under disobedience - only that there he describes disobedience according to its detailed expressions and appearances, while in our

passage he briefly sketches it according to its leading features and leads it back to its source: original corruption. (Stoekhardt)

The remark is hardly necessary that Paul is here not looking at the believing, pious Israelites of the OT Covenant, who were also by nature sinful and were through God's power and grace freed from sin's corruption. (Stoekhardt)

Paul had charged the Ephesian Gentile with coarse and sinful actions. For himself and his fellow Jews Paul now admits to sinful thoughts and desires. (PBC)

God's law, given to Israel on Mount Sinai, guided and regulated nearly every phase of Jewish life. As such, the law held in check among the Jews many of the coarse outbreaks of sin that were scandalously common among the Gentiles. But even this outward Jewish decency wasn't the full complete obedience that a holy God rightly expects and deserves. Their very nature - hearts, minds, and attitudes - was tainted to the core. That showed itself in their "gratifying the cravings of (their) sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts." (PBC)

passions of our flesh – A few examples: Abortion, business corruption, cohabitation, homosexuality, political correctness (there is more than one truth), spiritual laxity among Christians. – The word Paul uses for cravings carries the idea of wanting that which is forbidden, seeking that which is clearly wrong. Before Christ, our glands speak louder than our brains or our conscience. We follow our appetites. Like Big Bellied Ben in the old nursery rhyme, we eat the church, we eat the steeple, we eat the town, we eat the people. Our insatiable desires take us to extremes – as when in ancient Rome they built vomitoria in homes so that the gorged could regurgitate and return and eat more. (LL)

With the lusts and desires of the flesh one first of all thinks of the lower, common, sensual inclinations and lusts: un-chastity, lewdness, impurity of all kinds. But even the nobler, intellectual powers and abilities of man, as reason, understanding, are corrupt. Only unholy thoughts arise from the inborn nature and direct the will to evil. Also the apparently good, reasonable and intelligent reflections and deliberations of natural man are an ungodly form and set the will in motion against God. And so everything that natural man does, even what appears to be good and commendable, is the work of the flesh. (Stoekhardt)

The grosser and more animal propensities. A life of indulgence in whatever natural feelings may arise in us – be they right or wrong. (Pulpit Commentary)

desires of the body – Paul here writes of a fallen nature without God. It is our natural tendency as sinners to do as sinners to do the wrong, to lay ourselves wide open to temptation and sin. Jesus described sins coming "from within, out of men's hearts." He said, "All these (sins) come from the inside...(Mark 7:20-23). That warped inside of us is our sinful nature. (LL)

Romans 7:15-25 ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this

body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin”

children of wrath. See Ro 1:18–20; 2:5; 9:22. (CSB)

Before Christ, God’s condemnation was our only inheritance (Rom. 1:18; Col. 3:5-6). (TLSB)

Life apart from Christ is life in the hands of an angry God. (LL)

Paul paints a grim picture. All people are by nature spiritually dead, totally unable to change their condition. Not only are they unable to improve their lot, but they are the objects of an offended God’s wrath. They can expect nothing but the harshest of punishment – and that for all eternity. (PBC)

2:4-10 Martin Franzmann (*Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, p. 186) sees the content of the entire book summarized in 2:10: “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” St. Paul emphasizes that good works are not the means to salvation but the witness to it. By word and deed, God’s people join in “the praise of his glorious grace” (1:6), to “show the incomparable riches of his grace” (2:7), to make known “the manifold wisdom of God” (3:10). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Paul sharply contrasts God’s wrath and mercy. (TLSB)

Who we are is described in 2:1–3: originally “dead in . . . transgressions and sins . . . gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts . . . the objects of [God’s] wrath.” The self-examination of Lent reminds us that these phrases continue to describe the *peccator* side of the *simul* formula, but this Sunday’s text fairly shouts for joy the *justus* side. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

2:4 but - This would be a terrifying chapter if not for the fact that Paul can continue with a “but.” That three-letter conjunction is the pivotal point of this chapter, yes, of the whole letter - in fact, of all Scripture. Mankind as a group has made a terrible mess of things. In their wickedness and perversity all people are at odds with God. All are spiritually dead and enemies of God. All deserve the severest punishment. (PBC)

great love – This is agape love. It speaks of a love and affection that is totally one-way. It all comes from God. Nothing in man the sinner, the God-hater, the spiritual corpse, drew God to him. Love resided only in the heart of God. (PBC)

God is the One who acts out of love (*agapē*), mercy (*heleos*), grace (*charis*, v 5), and kindness (*chrēstotēs*, v 7). The words are not entirely synonymous; each carries a specific weight. God has seen us as we are, and he has been moved to have mercy on us. (The LXX often uses *heleos* for *chesed* and *chrēstotēs* for *tov*, two key Gospel terms.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

1 John 3:1 “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”

rich in mercy – eleos – For no other reason, God has rescued men and women from death and given them life. God’s mercy is his overflowing active compassion, freely exercised, excluding all idea of merit on the part of the object. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

Mercy is a positive quality that certainly has much in common with love. But it is also somewhat different. Mercy is the attitude in the mind and heart of God that moves Him to take pity on us when He sees our lost and wretched state. Mercy prompts Him to action. (PBC)

Psalm 103:17 “But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children—

Titus 3:5 “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

2:5-6 *made us alive* (5) *raised us up and seated us* (6) – Paul describes not what we *should* be but what we *are*. This makes it Gospel, not third use of the Law. A parallel might be drawn to the full rights of citizenship an infant has already at birth even if the infant is unaware and does not actively use them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Paul uses three aorist verbs, denoting onetime action in the past, to show that what Christ did (1:20) *included* us—a much stronger concept than just being done *for* us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Though we were dead, God made us alive with Christ (vivification), raised us up with Christ (resurrection), and seated us with Christ (enthronement). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

It would be inadequate to say here that we are in a continual process of vivification so that some day we will be raised from the dead. Nor does Paul say these were done “in” Christ, as though what he did was symbolic or substitutionary. No; the thing is done. These three verbs, accomplished in our baptism (Rom 6:3–11), will be consummated when we enter the eschaton after Christ’s return. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Romans 6:4 “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

2:5 *made us alive together with Christ*. This truth is expanded in Ro 6:1–10. (CSB)

Through Baptism, we were put to death by the judgment of God’s Law and raised as forgiven children (Rom. 6:1-11). (TLSB)

It is contrary to the context to refer as some do “hath quickened” to the future resurrection of the flesh, guaranteed in the resurrection of Christ. The apostle rather means an inner quickening which we have already experienced in ourselves, as ethical, spiritual quickening, translation from spiritual death into a new, spiritual life. As spiritual death consists in the complete lack of knowledge of God, fear, love and trust, in complete impotence with respect to the things concerning God and the soul’s salvation; so the new spiritual life, whereto God has quickened us, consists in this, that we now have contact with God, possess us, an organ for God and divine things, that we now rightly know God, fear Him from our hearts, love and trust Him. (Stoekhardt)

Paul, however, does not simply write “hath quickened” but “hat quickened together with Christ.” God has quickened us with Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

Raising Christ from physical death signaled the completion of Christ’s saving work and sealed our redemption. It made possible our resurrection. It made possible our resurrection from spiritual death. (PBC)

When we could not lift a finger to help ourselves, God through Word and sacrament worked faith in our hearts, creating life where formerly there had been none. (PBC)

when we were dead – Just as a dead body cannot raise itself to bodily, earthly life, so a person who by sin is spiritually dead cannot raise himself to spiritual life” (FC Ep. II 3). (TLSB)

1 Timothy 5:6 “But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.”

Romans 5:6, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”

heavenly realms. See note on 1:3. (CSB)

Verses 6 and 7 emphasize how our union with Christ assures us of our place in heaven. Just as Christ has ascended to sit at the right hand of God the Father, so we can be confident that our place “in the heavenly realms” is secure. (LL)

in Christ Jesus. Through our union with Christ. (CSB)

This union with Christ, already providing a foretaste of our reward, displays the riches of God’s love. Christ is often called the first fruits of the resurrection. Here appears as the first fruits of the ascension. The grace of God doesn’t just save us from hell – it delivers us to heaven. (LL)

2:7 coming ages. Cf. 1:21; probably refers to the future of eternal blessing with Christ. (CSB)

show. Or “exhibit” or “prove.” (CSB)

Imagine how at the turn of the century immigrant families sent one of their own on to America. Sometimes months later they would hear that their loved one had arrived and was doing everything possible for the rest of the family to follow. That loved one’s presence in the new country left those in the old country already sensing the blessings that were to be theirs. That is the dynamic at work here. Christ is in heaven, victorious after the living, dying, and rising. As sure as he is there and has done all that is necessary for us, we will follow. His grace, his love, in going before us, has made it possible. (LL)

God did not make us alive just to give us a small taste of heaven. He did so, “in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (PBC)

immeasurable – The incomparable (*hyperballon*) riches are so great that they surpass any hyperbole. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

There is nothing in our present range of experience that can compare with heaven, so great is the love and mercy of our God, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (PBC)

2:8-9 “And this (*touto*) not from yourselves.” *Touto* is neuter, referring back to the concept “saved,” not to “grace” or “faith” which are feminine. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

2:8 A major passage for understanding God’s grace, i.e., his kindness, unmerited favor and forgiving love.

By grace – It is utter generosity, unselfish, spontaneous, recklessly prodigal generosity, which acts wholly out of loving concern for the other’s need, even if he is completely unworthy of the love and help thus offered him.

you have been saved.† “Saved” has a wide range of meanings. It includes salvation from God’s wrath, which we all had incurred by original sin and our own sins. The tense of the verb (also in v. 5) suggests a completed action with emphasis on its present effect. (CSB)

through faith.† See Ro 3:21–31 which establishes the necessity of faith in Christ as the only way of being made right with God. (CSB)

not of your own doing. No human effort can contribute to our salvation; it is the gift of God. (CSB)

Corpses don’t resuscitate themselves! Our rescue, our life, comes as a gift from God. (LL)

The Greek literally says, “not from you.” – “You have not done this of your own strength.” (Brauer)

John 3:16 ““For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,^f that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Romans 3:24 “and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in^a Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:32 “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

2:9 *not a result of works.*† One cannot earn salvation by “observing the law” (Ro 3:20, 28). Such a legalistic approach to salvation is consistently condemned in Scripture. (CSB)

The only way good works could save us with a perfect and just God is if our whole life were perfect. God cannot accept a 99 percent morally perfect life. He requires 100 percent perfection. (LL)

The New English Bible translates it “not a reward for work done.”

no one may boast. No one can take credit for his or her salvation. (CSB)

The idea behind the Greek is an attitude of self-congratulation and pride.

Matthew 5:48, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, ^f that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in ^a Christ Jesus our Lord.”

2:10 *workmanship*. The Greek for this word sometimes has the connotation of a “work of art.” (CSB)

“Workmanship” (*poiēma*) is that which is made or fashioned. While the verb *poieō*, “make,” is used in the LXX of Gen 1, *passim*, the next word in our text, *ktizō*, “create,” is used more frequently in the New Testament to denote God creating out of nothing (e.g., Mark 16:15; Rom 1:20). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

The Greek word for “workman” is *poiema*, the same word from which we get our word “poem.” God continues to work in each of us in order to make us what he wants of us – and what God creates is always a thing of beauty! (LL)

poymah – To be the product of someone who has very lovingly crafted something. We say that a craftsman communicates with his work so God continues to do so with us.

Mark 16:15 “He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Romans 1:20 “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Galatians 6:15 “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.”

for good works – God has much work for us to do. Good works are a crucial aspect of the Christian life. Our good works, however, become an expression of thankfulness for all Christ has done for us, not an attempt to win heaven. (LL)

“To do good works” (*epi ergois agathois*). The connection denoted by *epi* is not motivational but descriptive: just as the sun was created as that which shines, so we have been vivified-raised-enthroned with Christ as those who do good works. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

All of man’s work is God’s work through man. It embraces the whole conduct of a man in so far as he falls under the antithesis of good and evil.. and including the hidden motions of the will, whether in relation to God, to the world or to other men. (Kittel) –

With our new God-given spiritual life we are indeed able to respond to God's will. We are able, albeit imperfectly, to do what God wants. It is not that we have to, but rather that we want to do God's will. The good works that flow from faith are simply an opportunity to show our appreciation for all that God in Christ has done for us. It would be hard to improve on the apostle John's terse analysis: "We love (God) because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). But even the good deeds we do are not basis for boasting. They are really not our own doing; we're simply being given the opportunity to do the good things "which God prepared in advance for us to do." (PBC)

Good is agathos and means to do something that is of benefit to others. Works comes from ergon which means an act of labor. The sun has its purpose and so do we. What we are to do is connected to the gifts/talents and opportunities God gives us. Our walk in Christ is a walk in good works (little Christs).

Matthew 5:13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."

Matthew 5:16 "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

2 Corinthians 5:15 "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

Galatians 5:16 "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

Ephesians 5:2 "and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

prepared beforehand.† Carries forward the theme of God's purpose and planning, seen in ch. 1. (CSB)

All the ways of holiness and righteousness are God's design and preparation. We need not puzzle about and search for what may please God, he has long ago mapped out the entire course. They all spring from faith. (Lenski)

"Which God prepared in advance for us to do." In *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961, p 427), Lenski writes, "All the ways of holiness and righteousness are God's design and preparation. We need not puzzle about and search for what may please God, he has long ago mapped out the entire course. What Paul says is not that God prepared us that we should walk in good works (so Luther), but that he prepared the good works." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

1 Corinthians 12:11 "All these (gifts) are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."

2 Timothy 1:9 “who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”

GOSPEL – John 3:14-21

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

3:14-15 Refers to the Old Testament Reading from Num 21:4–9. Throughout the Gospels, “lifted up” is used as a metaphor for crucifixion. It does not mean “lifted up in praise,” as is often thought in our day. Our praise is not what draws persons to Christ. It is his perfect sacrifice for our sins. Our response is then praise. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

While most translations begin a new sentence, the *kai* at the beginning certainly allows us to treat vv 13–15 as one complete thought: the Son of Man came down from heaven in order to be lifted up above the heads of sinful men and thereby to bring salvation to mankind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Again, human effort is completely discounted. The bronze serpent sat in Israel’s encampment for all to see. No one cured himself of his snakebite; God effected the cure. So also, when we look upon the One who was pierced (cf. Jn 19:37), who has now ascended into heaven, we are healed of sin-sickness and eternal death. By “looking to Jesus” (Heb 12:2), we are blessed with eternal life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

From the heavenly point of view, the deliverance from snakes in the wilderness (Num 21:4–9) was not merely for the benefit of the people at that time. As wonderful as the miracle was for the individual people who recovered from snakebites, it was also a miracle that kept the people of Israel alive. Since that was the nation from which Jesus would be born, the salvation of the world depended on Israel staying alive. In addition, it has become a lasting picture of God’s deliverance for all people from *the* serpent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:14 *just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert* – Jesus draws a comparison between the lifted up bronze serpent and the lifted up Son of Man. This comparison is developed throughout the pericope. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

In Num 21:4–9, the Israelites complained about their redemption from Egypt and the “miserable food” God supplied them from heaven. (Similarly, in Jn 6:25–71 many complained when the redeeming Christ said he would feed them with the real food of his body and blood, given for the life of the world.) God sent deadly serpents which bit the children of Israel, and many died (cf. 1 Cor 11:30). This was a physical manifestation of the old spiritual plague brought by Satan, “that ancient serpent” (Rev 20:2). The serpents brought death by biting their victims and injecting poison. Even so, the serpentine devil brought death to Adam and Eve, and the entire human race, by deceiving them and injecting the poison of original sin (Genesis 3). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

According to God’s command and promise, however, Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. Note the play on the similar Hebrew words *nechash-nachushtet* “snake of bronze” in Num 21: 9, leading to its name *nachushtan* “Nehushtan” in 2 Kings 18:4 (which says the serpent was preserved and revered as a “holy relic” until godly King Hezekiah ended the idolatry about 800 years later). All those who were

bitten and looked up at it lived. The serpent is a type of the Son of Man; Christ is similar, but greater, in the following ways: (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The lifted-up serpent looked like a deadly serpent, but was without poison. The lifted-up Son of Man looked like a sinner, but was only in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8:3); he was crucified as a criminal, but was without sin (Is 53:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The bronze serpent was lifted up to make sport of the deadly serpents, as if it were a slain trophy. The Son was lifted up to make a public spectacle of the enemy, as if the defeated devil were on the cross (Col 2:15 NIV, KJV; cf. RSV footnote). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

God made the elevated bronze serpent the source of life (Num 21:8). The elevated Son of Man is God's source of eternal life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Whoever looked up to the bronze snake was healed. They did not need to do any good works first, only behold the "savior" God provided, and God fulfilled his objective promise. Likewise, "everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life" (Jn 6:40). No good works are necessary first (Epistle Lesson). God fulfills his objective promise in Christ without any merit on our part. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

All who looked to the serpent were healed. God's promise was for the entire people. Similarly, but in a greater way, God's salvation in Christ is for the entire world, Jew and Gentile alike. Note the emphatic "all" in Num 21:8 (NIV: "anyone"), and pas, "all," in Jn 3:15, 16. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The lifting up of the Son refers not only to his crucifixion, but also to his resurrection and exaltation to glory in heaven. The verb *hupsoō*, "lift up," is also in the "exalted" of Phil 2:9. Jesus speaks of the hour of his crucifixion as the hour of his glorification in John 17. cf. *anabebēken*, "gone up," in Jn 3:13, which suggests that the lifting up of Christ on the cross is also his exaltation back to heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

To help Nicodemus link Christ with the Scripture he already knew. It also point to the fact that there is only way to be saved. The serpent is a type of the Son of Man; Christ is similar, but greater, in the following ways: (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

Some versions begin a new section at this point, others that a new section begins at verse 16. In either case they attribute these words (from here to verse 21) to the Evangelist John. But we note that Jesus is still speaking in verses 16 and 17. (Buls)

Jesus is explaining. Verse 12 denotes what is observable: the results of regeneration. Verse 13 denotes what is not observable: the eternal counsel of God for man and the marvel of the person of the incarnate Christ. Verse 14 introduces the second unobservable truth: The salvation of mankind. Verses 15 to 21 are like the opening of the flower with beautiful petals. Jesus moves from the unobservable to the observable in verse 21, the good works of a Christian. In other words, Jesus is the speaker to the end of verse 21. (Buls)

Back to verse 14. (Buls)

Kretzmann: There are three points of similarity between type and antitype in this story. The brazen serpent of Moses had the form and appearance of the poisonous reptile after which it was modeled, just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had the needs and ways of an ordinary human being, was finally punished as a criminal. Just as the brazen serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like unto sinful men, was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled. A strange curse was resting upon Him, He hung upon the cross. And finally, just as he that looked at the brazen serpent in faith remained alive, so also every sinner that has been poisoned by sin in its various forms, but now looks up to Jesus the Savior, in simple, trusting faith, shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Buls)

"Must be" is impersonal and does not denote compulsion or fate. The necessity is caused by the will of God and the dire and awful condition of mankind. (Buls)

"Lifted up" are correlative adverbs of manner, indicating a precise comparison. What they have in common is the verb "lift." The Old Testament account is found at Numbers 21:8ff. This verse reminds us immediately of John 12:32-34 where the same verb is found. (Buls)

Bengel: Where there was no other remedy. (Buls)

True. What he is implying is that there is no remedy except in the uplifted Son of man. The impersonal verb does not denote compulsion or fate but the necessary willing obedience of the Son of man. For it was for this purpose that He became incarnate. Lenski insists that the point of comparison should not be pressed beyond the idea of "being lifted up." After due consideration we prefer the interpretation of Kretzmann: (Buls)

The act of Moses in the wilderness, in erecting the brazen serpent before the eyes of the stricken people, was typical, symbolical, Numbers 21: 1-9. . . Jesus is the antitype of the brazen serpent. . . There are three points of similarity between type and antitype in this story. 1) The brazen serpent of Moses had the form and appearance of the poisonous reptiles after which it was modeled, just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had the needs and ways of an ordinary human being, was finally punished as a criminal; 2) Just as the brazen serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like unto sinful men, was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled. A strange curse was resting upon Him, He hung upon the cross; 3) And finally, just as he that looked at the brazen serpent in faith remained alive, so also every sinner that has been poisoned by sin in its various forms, but now looks up to Jesus the Savior, in simple, trusting faith, shall not perish, shall not be punished with everlasting destruction, but have eternal life. (Buls)

Hendriksen has a good exposition of type and anti type at this point, but ruins it completely when he adds:

Though Christ is lifted up in the sight of all, he does not save all. (Buls)

He believes in a limited atonement and his interpretations are very often synergistic. More on this later. (Buls)

Lenski: The Book of Wisdom 16:6 calls this serpent the symbol of salvation, and in church decorations it is constantly used to picture Jesus. (Buls)

so must the Son of Man must be lifted up – "Lifted up" (*hupsōsen*) is an obvious reference to the story of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21. It may also suggest the glorification of the Suffering Servant in Is 52:13: "He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted." Later in John's Gospel (12:32-33),

Jesus uses this word to signal the kind of death he was to die. And the same word is used again in Acts 2:33 and 5:31 as a reference to the ascension of our Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:15-16 Jesus makes clear that salvation is a gift, for the Son of God is himself a gift that God gave. No restrictions are placed upon the recipients, for “whoever believes” lives. The Son of God come down at Christmas finally fulfilled his mission on Good Friday. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Luther here emphasizes the personal union in Christ. He notes that while earlier Jesus spoke of the Son of Man, he now shows that “God’s Son and Mary’s Son is only one Person. He appropriates both natures for the work of salvation and redemption from eternal death” (LW 22:351). It is not a mere man who saves us, nor is it God exercising his unbridled power. Instead, the God-man Jesus Christ conquers through surrender and saves his people from sin, death, and devil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

3:15 *whoever* – All the “that” clauses in this section (15,16,17,20,21) denote purpose. In this instance the word “that” hangs on “eternal life.” By the way, the passive infinitive denotes what was done to Jesus, what He suffered on the cross. There is no such thing as faith in Christ unless it be in the crucified Christ. Compare Galatians 2:20. The Son of God loved me by giving Himself in my stead. That is the only way in which the love of God is revealed to us. (Buls)

That word “everyone” does not denote limitation but open invitation. Just as the serpent was lifted up for all on the occasion, so Jesus was lifted up for all. Furthermore, “who believes” does not mean that man must do something first to make the atonement an actuality but rather that God Himself causes the hearers to believe in what has already been done for all. (Buls)

believes. That is the whole point of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in verses 1-10. Faith in Christ is always the God-given *modus* of salvation, not the man-generated *causa* of salvation. (Buls)

Note that both participle and verb, are in the present tense. Being in possession of life eternal is a present reality for the believer. For him there is no such thing as judgment. (Buls)

The promise belongs to everyone who believes. It is universal. No one who believes is excluded. At the same time the promise belongs to each one who believes. It is personal. God knows our names, and each of us has eternal life. (PBC)

eternal life. An infinitely high quality of life in living fellowship with God—both now and forever. (CSB)

Bengel: The cross is the ladder to heaven. Eternal death, because of the poison of sin. Eternal life, by regeneration and faith. This mention of eternal life is made at the earliest opportunity in each instance in the discourses of the Savior, and occurs in this passage first (in the Gospel of John). (Buls)

Note that Bengel considered the words “should not perish” textual. They are found in the Koine text and therefore in KJV and NKJV. This difference should not be passed over lightly. By the way, the term “everlasting life” occurs seventeen times in the Gospel of John and six times in 1 John. (Buls)

The dying Israelites who looked at the bronze serpent lived. Now everyone who looks in faith at the Son of Man will live forever. The typology and the textual variants support taking the words “in him” with

“believes,” not “have,” though both make sense. Echēi, “have,” is present subjunctive, indicating that the believer has eternal life both now, in the midst of deadly snakes, and forever in heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

“so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:1–15 Nicodemus, though “the teacher of Israel,” shows that he cannot comprehend the Spirit’s miraculous work of new birth through Baptism. Human reason, darkened by sin, cannot accept that God can grant spiritual rebirth through ordinary water used with His Word. But such a great promise has come from none other than the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross for our salvation! • O Holy Spirit, I praise You that You have given me new birth to a living hope through Christ’s resurrection. Amen. (TLSB)

For God So Loved the World

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 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. 18 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. 19 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. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 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.”

3:16-17 V 16 is referred to by many Christians as the Gospel in a nutshell. Since Baptism is a Means of Grace that conveys the gifts of the Gospel, and since the water of Baptism is sometimes administered by way of a scallop shell, Baptism might be referred to as the Gospel in a scallop shell. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

3:16 *God so loved the world.* The great truth that motivated God’s plan of salvation (cf. 1Jn 4:9–10). (CSB)

Very likely the best known verse in the Bible. Verses 16-18 explain verses 14-15.(Buls)

"World" is the Greek word "kosmos." It must denote all human beings. Not just people who have been chosen, or "elected" to believe. (Buls)

"So that" denotes actual result. (Buls)

"One and only" is translated in KJV, NASB, AAT and NKJV as "only-begotten." Others translate it "only" in the sense of unique. The Nicene Creed and our Lutheran fathers understood this word in the sense of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. (Buls)

The verse clearly shows that Jesus is God's gift to all human beings of all time. (Buls)

The love referred to is the aorist of agape; the “one and only” notes a uniqueness, only one of its kind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

Greek *agapao*, used repeatedly in John; God's sacrificial and faithful love for the entire world alienated from God, that is, all humankind. (TLSB)

God values, cherishes, and esteems mankind on the basis of God's own being; from eternity he is love (1 In 4:8). He loved the whole world, all people (vv 17–18 preclude a limited love or atonement). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Perhaps the best-known verse in the Bible. In verse 14 "so" meant "thus" in the sense of "in the same way." But here in verse 16 it means "to such an extent." "For" is an explanatory particle, used here to elucidate verses 14-15 further. This example is the clearest in the New Testament as to what God's love means. It does not say that God "liked" the world. He did not. But He loved the whole world in all its misery and sin, loved it to redeem it. (Buls)

"The world" must mean the entire world of people. The Reformed limit it to the elect from every nation. Compare Lenski and Hendriksen on this point. Parallel passages here are John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 5:12-21. More could be mentioned but these are sufficient. (Buls)

Again and again the Scriptures stress the fact that IN CHRIST, in His suffering, death and resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, redemption, justification, eternal salvation FOR ALL MEN is an accomplished fact. Because of their twin false teaching of a limited atonement and synergism, the Reformed (and those like them) teach that forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, justification are merely potential, merely making it possible for all to be saved. Read Article IV of the *Apology* and Article II of the *Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration)* where again and again reconciliation, justification, forgiveness, redemption are used synonymously and interchangeably as accomplished facts for all men, posited in the means of grace for all. (Buls)

Even some Lutherans claim that although John 3:16 is universal, 2 Corinthians 5:19 and Romans 4:25 are merely potential. That won't do. To deny the universality of the justification of all men, in Christ, at Romans 4:25 or the universality of reconciliation of all men, in Christ, at 2 Corinthians 5:19, means to deny the universal atonement *per se*. (Buls)

Back to verse 16: "so that" with the indicative, to denote actual result, is found only here and at Galatians 2:13. (It can be used with the infinitive to denote actual result). Note that "so much-so that" are correlative. The first "His" is relational denoting the divinity of Jesus. "One and only" makes that even clearer. KJV, NKJV, NASB, and AAT (2nd ed.) translate "only-begotten" denoting the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. All other translations have "only" which is surely wrong. (Buls)

By the way, some commentators feel that verses 14-21 are the words of the Evangelist not those of Jesus, for only in this passage Jesus calls Himself by this term. But if Jesus gave the word John at 1:18, why couldn't He use it of Himself? It is powerful in the mouth of Jesus. He knew that He proceeded from all eternity from the Father and yet He was willing to become man to die for us. (Buls)

world. All people on earth—or perhaps all creation. (CSB)

kosmos – This refers to everything in the world but in this case especially that portion of the population that is hostile to the God. This word is used 75 times in John.

that he gave. God gives, gives, gives. That's the story of the Gospel. "That" introduces another purpose clause, repeating and amplifying the one in verse 15. There it was stressed from the point of view

of the Father sending and giving His eternal Son. "Whoever believes," not restrictive but invitational, for all. "Not perish," death and destruction, for the believer, are gone, abolished. For him death is not dying but the beginning of eternal life. "But" following a negative is very strong: "quite to the contrary." We know nothing quite so antithetical as eternal death and eternal life. (Buls)

God not only sent His Son, but also offered Him to the world. He became our atoning sacrifice. (TLSB)

This verse brings together several of John's most important and frequent theological words: *theos*, "God," *huios*, "Son," *monogenēs*, "only-begotten," *agapaō*, "love" (about 40 occurrences, including the noun *agapē*), *kosmos*, "world" (75), *pisteuō*, "believe" (90), and *zōē* "life" (35, of which 17 are with *aiōnios*, "eternal"). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

The conjunction *hōste* (NIV: "that") followed by the indicative emphasizes that the result actually happened (M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, pp. 121–22, para. 350). The Father actually gave up his Son to death, only to receive him back in glory, fulfilling the typology of Abraham, a human father who also did not spare his only son and received him back alive (Gen 22:16; cf. Rom 8:32). The adjective *monogenēs* may mean "one and only, unique," or "only-begotten" (see *Holy Bible: New Testament—New Evangelical Translation*, 2d ed. [Cleveland, NET Publishing, 1992] appendix 2. c. 6., pp. 542–44). The *hina* clause indicates purpose: God sacrificed his Son in order to save. This reasserts the bronze serpent typology of vv 14–15. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

"so that" (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this "lifting up" of the Son of Man is that every believer may not "perish" (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have "life eternal." In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins "believing" with "life." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

God's love brought results. He offered the ultimate sacrifice for the world He loved. (PBC)

his only Son. See 1:14, 18; cf. Ge 22:2, 16; Ro 8:32. Although believers are also called "sons of God" (2Co 6:18; Rev 21:7), Jesus is uniquely God's Son. (CSB)

monogene - Sole or only born. – auios A child or son. In this case the son was not adopted like we are.

Believes – pisteuo - To have faith in God. Found 90 times in John.

"Whoever believes in (the Son of God, be it with a strong or with a weak faith,) may have eternal life (John 3:15) Worthiness does not depend on the greatness or smallness, the weakness or strength of faith. Instead, it depends on Christ's merit" (FC SD VII 70-71). Luther: "Look at the words, I beseech you, to determine how and of whom He is speaking... No one is here excluded. God's Son was given for all. All should believe, and all who do believe should not perish, etc. Take hold of your own nose, I beseech you, to determine whether you are not a human being (that is, part of the world) and like any other man, (you) belong to the number of those comprised in the word "all" (WLS 1859). (TLSB)

not perish – apollumi To be destroyed, in this case eternally. To die.

Eternal separation from God. Cf. Is. 66:24; Mk. 9:48. "Out of His immense goodness and mercy, God provides for the public preaching of His divine eternal Law and His wonderful plan for our redemption, that of the holy, only saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

eternal – Adjectives like perpetual, for ever, everlasting are used to describe eternal.

Life – Life like a lifetime.

3:17-18 Jesus was sent to earth as an authoritative representative of the Father. A contrast should be noted between the judging/condemning and the saving act of his mission of salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

3:17 *did not send* - “so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

As noted above, verses 14-17 tell us what Christ accomplished for us. This verse is the last in this section. "For" is explanatory, emphatically elucidating verse 16. It tells us why God DID NOT and why He DID send His Son. Mankind has a bad conscience because of sinfulness and sin. According to his flesh he is always listening to Satan who pictures God as enemy, not as friend. Even Christians, insofar as they still have a flesh, all too often think of God as enemy and judge rather than as Savior and Friend in Christ. (Buls)

Jesus says: "God did NOT send His Son into the world in order to judge (condemn) the world, but, quite to the contrary, in order through Him (Christ) the world be saved." Compare John 12:47 and then His words to His enemies at 5:34. (Buls)

SEND SON – *apostello* The one who was set apart and sent specifically for this cause.

JUDGE – *krino* Someone who makes a decision and judges right from wrong. The trial in our case left to defend ourselves would result in being condemned, punished and sentenced to eternal damnation.

The Church of Rome, because of its works righteousness, was constantly presenting God as Judge. Over and over Luther said that the Gospel presents God as Savior, not as Judge. Compare Galatians 4:4,5 and Galatians 3:13,14. The "so that" clauses in Galatians 4:5 and 3:14 (two sets of them) respectively denote what we call objective and subjective justification. In Christ, the blessing of Abraham (justification) became effective for all nations. Christ redeemed all the condemned, all human beings. And in Galatians 4:5 we are told that Christ came to redeem the condemned, all human beings. The Gospel portrays Christ as Savior, not as Judge. (Buls)

We know that Christ will return in judgment, but at this time, Jesus doesn't mention God's alien work of condemning and crushing through the Law. Instead, he focuses completely on the unmerited favor God shows the world. While not explicit in this verse, *anōthen* remains implicit, for God sent Jesus from above into his creation, “in order that the world might be saved through him.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

save – The following adjectives say it well: Deliver, protect, heal, preserve or make whole.

"Sent with a commission." Note that "all people -- the world" is used thrice in this verse: to denote Christ's incarnation, becoming a man, for all; again, for all people; and again, all people. Christ came to condemn no one, not even Judas. That should never be forgotten. Mix no Law into the Gospel. (Buls)

The two *hina* clauses show purpose from two different perspectives. In the first, the active voice asserts that God's purpose was not to condemn. In the second, John goes against the natural flow of language and switches to the passive *sōthēi*, "be saved," to emphasize the Son as the agent who does not carry out his saving work independently of the Father, but humbly serves the Father's purpose. The NIV obliterates the difference between the two *hina* clauses; the KJV, NKJV, RSV and NET have it right. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Another explanation. The obvious reason for which this verse is added is that people (even Christians) think of God merely as a judge. This verse has two more purpose clauses. The first tells us why God did NOT send His Son, and the second tells us why He DID send Him. Christians need to listen to this verse. Christians, too, often slip into the false idea that Jesus is merely a Judge. (Buls)

Note that "world" occurs three times in this verse. The first instance, in a prepositional phrase, denotes the incarnation. The second and third instances denote all mankind. (Buls)

By the way, if "kosmos" (according to the Reformed theology) in verse 16 means only the elect, the conclusion of verse 17 is difficult to understand. "Kosmos" simply must mean "all people." (Buls)

Note: Pentecost I is the same day as Trinity Sunday. John 3:1-17 clearly speaks of the Trinity. The Triune God is the saving God. One cannot be saved without faith in the Trinity. It is suggested that on this day the Athanasian Creed be used rather than the Apostles' or Nicene Creed because the Athanasian Creed is so very clear on the doctrine of the Trinity. Many sects deny the Trinity. They are not Christian. Therefore, we must stress the Trinity in our teaching and preaching. (Buls)

3:18 believes – For the first clause read Romans 8:1; John 3:36a; 5:24; Mark 16:16a. The believer is judged neither now nor on Judgment Day. He will hear only: "Come, ye blessed of My Father." Well, then, why are the majority lost? Jesus answers that with "but, however." (Buls)

condemned – Luther: "All men are already condemned and imprisoned to be damned eternally, but the Son of God was given to us to redeem us from that judgment" (AE 22:380). (TLSB)

Kretzmann: The unbeliever refuses to believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And therefore this unbelief condemns him. . . Unbelief is thus the sin of sins, for it rejects the salvation which has been gained and is offered for all sins. . . Their sin is no longer the result of ignorance, but of deliberate choice and preference. (Buls)

Now read John 12:47,48. Jesus does not judge the rejecter. His Word of Law, which warns against rejection of the Gospel, will judge that man. Note the tense of the dejection verbs. The first denotes that judgment sets in at the time of refusal to believe. The second makes that refusal plain. Judgment begins with and is caused by man's refusal in the face of clear knowledge. The text is making plain that the unbeliever rejects God's plain revelation. "In the name of God's one and only Son," is adjectival, the specific revelation about Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son. The judgment on the last day will be only the public announcement of what was already true in this life and finalized at the time of death. (Buls)

already – The final judgment has moved into the present with the coming of His kingdom (cf. Mt. 3:10). (TLSB)

does not believe.† John is not speaking of momentary beliefs and doubts but of continuing, settled faith. (CSB)

Like a bitten Israelite, the sinner still carries the devil's poison of original sin, but through believing in the Son he will live (*sola fide*). Whoever does not look to the Son stands condemned. The poison of sin will kill him because he has rejected the only (-begotten) Cure, and there is no other. His "name" is synonymous with his person, words, and work. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Everything hangs on faith! In fact, judgment can be said to have taken place "already" (*ēdē*), based on the faith or lack of it in the hearers. *mē pepisteuken* in the perfect tense indicates a continuance in unbelief, rather than an initial recoil from the message. Compare this whole section (3:15–19) with 12:46–48 for some striking similarities. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:19-20 Imagery of light and darkness (cf. Jn 1:4–9) is now added to the motif of life and death (bronze serpent). *Prassō*, "does," implies habit. Those who continue to practice worthless deeds hate the Son. They will do anything to stay out of the light because of what it does (cf. Job 24:13–17). *Elengchō* can mean "bring to light, expose," "convict," "reprove, correct," or "punish" (BAGD p. 249); all are true. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Jesus gives a definition of what he means regarding judgment. The inner motive for choosing the darkness is because humankind is wicked and in need of saving. "Evil" is also translated "worthless."

For those used to thinking of the end-times judgment, these verses add a dimension about "the judgment" (*hē krisis* with the article). Jesus' words replicate the dualistic vocabulary of ch 1 ("light" and "darkness"). The life of the disciple in response to God's gift is described simply: he "does what is true" (literally, *poiōn tēn alētheian*). The light comes and reveals us for who we really are. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

3:19 *the judgment* – Greek "krisis, brings to mind the judicial process, including the adverse verdict brought on by rejecting the Son of God. (TLSB)

light – "This is" is like the English "now." The English colon is inferred. Look at John 1:1-5. Jesus is the only source of true spiritual light. Compare John 8:12 and 1 John 2:18. This Light shines in all the Messianic promises beginning with Genesis 3:15. He is the comforting Light of forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, redemption. "Has come," has come with permanent results (perfect tense). This refers to His incarnation. The implication is that this Light shines on all men. John 1:9. (Buls)

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3:20 DOES EVIL – Greek "phaulos" means base. (TLSB)

On verses 20 and 21 Stoeckhardt says:

Jesus here sheds light on the contrast between faith and unbelief, which also becomes evident in the works and conduct of man, because he who does not believe shies away from the light, hiding from others his evil works, of which he must be ashamed. However, he who believes in Christ, doing what is right before God, confidently stepping before God and man, with his good works, which are done in God. (Buls)

Man can judge another man only by his works. Verse 20 elucidates and explains what was said in verses 18 and 19 chiastically. Verse 18 speaks of the believer, verse 19 of the unbeliever. But in verses 20 and 21 this is reversed. Note the contrasting words in verses 20 and 21. Look at John 5:29 where the same distinction of verbs is made: "worthless -- genuine;" "hatred opposed to attraction;" "exposed as opposed to made plain." Note what the two verses have in common. In the former, shame is involved whereas in the latter, forthright openness is stressed. We translate the two verses literally to bring out the utter contrast and the meaning of crucial words: "You see, everyone who constantly practices worthless deeds hates the Light, and therefore does not approach the Light, lest his deeds be exposed. But the one who is constantly producing the true and genuine works approaches the Light in order that his works may be made plain as to the fact that they have been worked by God Himself." (Buls)

hates the light ...exposed – Those with low moral standards hate disclosure of their foul deed, just as marauders of the night flee from the light of day. (TLSB)

The unbeliever loves the works of darkness but is ashamed of them. That is proved by the fact that he refuses to approach Christ, for if he did, his works would be exposed for what they are, worthless and actively evil. However, the believer, who by faith in Jesus does the will of God (third use of the Law), gladly approaches Christ so that everyone can see that God and God alone "works in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Compare 1 John 1:5-10; Ephesians 2:8-10; John 1:13. (Buls)

3:21 *whoever...does what is true* – Augustine: "He that does truth accuses his evil works in himself, spares not himself, forgives not himself, that God may forgive him: for that which he desire God to forgive, he himself acknowledges, and he come to the light; to which he is thankful for showing him what he should hate in himself. (NPNF1 &:86). (TLSB)

The unbeliever, dead in his trespasses and sins, is a man of dead and worthless works and is actually ashamed of these works, though he glories in them. The believer, alive unto God by faith in Christ, forgiven and reconciled, is a man of living and genuine works of which he is not ashamed. He gladly acknowledges that God is the author not only of his salvation but also of his new life in Christ. Read Matthew 5:16. The Christian wants people to see his works, not himself. His works glorify the heavenly Father. (Buls)

"[He who] does the works that flow from a regenerated heart, such a one comes to the light. He is glad to have his works revealed in order that they may speak for him. For they are in reality not his own . . . they are done and performed in God, who giveth both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Those are truly good works that are done in communion with God" (Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary*, NT [St. Louis: Concordia, 1921] 1:424). V 10 of the Epistle says much the same thing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

HAS BEEN DONE THROUGH GOD – God is at work in those who have responded to the Gospel (cf. Php. 2:13; 1 Th. 2:13). (TLSB)

3:16–21 God gives His only Son as a sacrificial gift to deliver the world from condemnation and to give eternal life to those who believe in Him. When we continue in an immoral lifestyle, we naturally resist divine disclosure of our sin and thus our need for a Savior. Do not flee the light, but repent. God has revealed His strong love in His Son, Jesus Christ, to forgive your sins and give you life. • O heavenly Father, grant that my life may be a vivid testimony to Your sacrificial and faithful love in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)