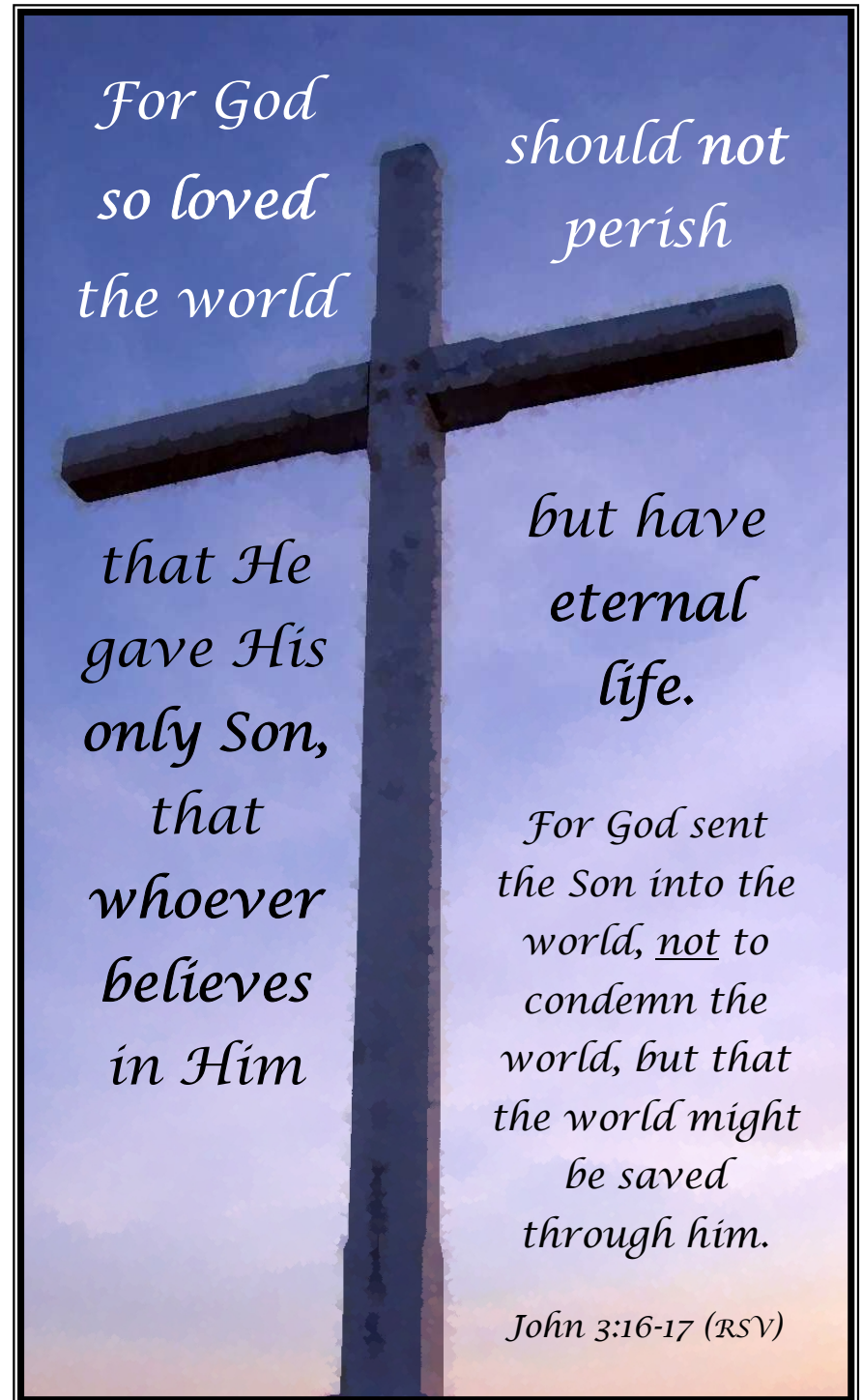


The promise is given to you! *Whoever believes in Jesus!* Already, in the comparison of Jesus being lifted up on the cross with the bronze snake being lifted up on the pole, we have been told what it means to believe. Just as the Hebrew people looked to a bronze snake on a pole in order to live, so we look to the One and Only Son of God lifted up on the cross on our behalf so that we might live—and live eternally. One look to the bronze snake after having been bitten brought a Hebrew life; one act of believing in Jesus as the remedy for our rebellion, selfishness and sin brings eternal life! The word *believe* also conveys the idea of *entrusting*, entrusting one's life into the hands of another, entrusting one's life into the wounded hands of Jesus—to do for us what we can't do for ourselves.

The final clause of the promise gives the benefit or results of the promise: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him **should not perish but have eternal life.**”* First, whoever believes in him *should not perish*. God had warned Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die. Ever since, humankind has been plagued with the consequence of sin—death. The Apostle Paul said in his letter to the Romans, *“For the wages of sin is death.* If we earn anything in life by our own corrupted effort, the result is always death. But those who believe in Jesus *will not perish*. Even though physical death may overtake us, we will one day be resurrected to a life in which there will be no death! Second, the result of the promise is eternal life for those who believe in Jesus! The moment one believes, one is brought to eternal life. The rest of Paul's verse in Romans reads, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus the Lord.”* (RSV) Eternal life is given to everyone who believes in Jesus! It's that simple.

At the end of his gospel, the Apostle John wrote, *“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”* (NIV) The entire purpose of the gospel of John is that you might believe in Jesus and thereby have eternal life—living in the immeasurable love of God for you forever! Reading the gospel of John then is a good place to begin; there is so much more to learn! So, do you believe in Jesus?



In John 3:16 Jesus proclaims the most remarkable promise ever given to humankind *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* (RSV) His promise is given irrespective of one’s ability, ethnicity, gender, merit, performance, status or work; his promise is given to the most desperate and evil of men and women as well as to the best amongst us! The result of believing his promise is the deepest longing of the human heart: eternal life.

The promise begins with a simple word: *for*. *“For God so loved the world...”* The word *for* serves as marking the reason for what has just preceded. In John 3:14-15 Jesus had said, *“And 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.”* (RSV) Jesus has likened his being lifted up on the cross to an ancient account of the Hebrew people’s disobedience in grumbling against God after having been delivered from slavery in Egypt. The account is found in Numbers 21:4-9, one of the five books of the Law found in the Hebrew scriptures:



Numbers 21:4-9 (NIV) *They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!” Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away*

from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. 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.” 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, he lived.

Hence, just as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on the pole so that anyone who had been bitten by a poisonous snake would live by looking to the bronze snake, so anyone looking to Jesus’ death on the cross will live after having been bitten by the fatal bite of our own rebellion and selfishness and sin. Not only will the one who believes live, but will live eternally!

The first line of the promise reveals God’s motive for giving the promise: *For God so loved the world.* Jesus said that God *so loved!* Jesus is emphatically stating the degree to which God has loved. The object of God’s love is *the world*, meaning the entirety of humankind since the dawn of creation down to and beyond our present generation—until the end of days. This means that God *so loved you!*



The second line of the promise reveals the *degree* to which God has loved us in the world: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.* To give up a son from among many to die on the behalf of others is extraordinary, but to give up One’s only Son is beyond comprehension—especially when it’s for a ragtag world of selfish rebels! Jesus is the One and Only Son, the unique Son of God the Father. According to John in the opening words of his gospel Jesus is both coeternal *with* God and at the same time *is* God: *“In the beginning was the Word (Jesus), and the Word (Jesus) was with God, and the Word (Jesus) was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”* (RSV) For love of the world, God gave up his only Son! God gave up to the cross the very One who created you—all for the love of you!

The third clause of the promise tells both the *scope* of the people to whom the promise is given and *how* the promise is received: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him.* The promise is given to *whoever believes* in Jesus! *Whoever* is emphatic; the promise is open to everyone!