

*“The Ultimate Lift for Your Life”*

Text: John 3:14-21

Shortly after the terrible crash of Florida Flight 90 in January of 1982, *Time* magazine printed an essay entitled, “The Man in the Water.” The man in the water was the unnamed hero who was one of the survivors clinging to the tail section of the plane in the Potomac River. Every time the rescue helicopter lowered a lifeline, he passed it on to one of the other passengers. When the helicopter had rescued the others and finally came back to him, it was too late.

He had gone under the icy waters. He knew as he passed the lifeline, especially the last time, and the helicopter pulled the passenger to safety, that he was giving up his chances for life. He sacrificed his life to a cold death in the river so that others could live. There is a natural connection with our text, for Jesus did the same thing in a much greater way.

There is another connection. It is between an event that occurred in the Old Testament and what Jesus did for us on the cross. Jesus says: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in may have eternal life.” What our Old Testament lesson for today shows us is a picture of what God would do through his own dear Son. He sacrificed him for the life of the world. Lifting is a common theme in both the Old Testament and the Gospel. The people avoided death from bites of poisonous snakes by looking at the serpent that was lifted up on the pole. We avoid eternal death by looking at our Savior on the cross and trusting what he has done because it is God’s great gift to us. Through Jesus’ death you have-

**THE ULTIMATE LIFT FOR YOUR LIFE**

**I. Comes as a result of God’s promise**

**II. You are brought form death to life**

## I.

**A.1.** Prior to our text, Jesus is engaged by Nicodemus in a discussion of new birth. Jesus had told him: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:5-6) This is a clear reference to your baptism, but it is connected with Jesus death and resurrection for you and for the world.

In the Gospel of St. John, a key concept is that the world is opposed to God. Because of the world’s opposition to God, we would expect him to act in a different fashion. He operates by his grace because he desires the salvation of all. In the Old Testament he says through Ezekiel: “As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his ways and live.” (Ezekiel 33:11) In the New Testament St. Paul writes: “God our Savior desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (I Timothy 2:4)

The world is opposed to God, yet his promise still remains. Verse 17 says: “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 very thing we would not expect God to do in this situation he does because we are helpless to do anything about our condition.

**2.** The people in the wilderness had a problem. Their rebellion had angered God and he retaliated. As he always does, he presents a solution for man’s problem of sin. In the Garden of Eden, he first created covering for Adam and Eve, and then promised deliverance through Jesus. In the wilderness, he didn’t simply wipe out the snakes. When the people were bitten, they could look at the snake on the pole and live.

In both of these cases, it is his doing and not the doing of the people in either day or time. This is God’s promise and not people’s performance. God makes this all possible through the life and death of his own dear Son for the sins of the world. It is that way because of sin and only God’s solution can solve that problem in our world.

**B.1.** Throughout the Old Testament, God had promised a deliverer. We know him as our Savior Jesus Christ. He did this in both words and pictures. Our Old Testament lesson for today is one of the greatest pictures in the Old Testament. It is interesting I believe that the devil used a serpent to lead Adam and Eve into sin and here we have a serpent as well. This time it is God using the serpent to paint a picture of Jesus and his deliverance of the world.

The first promise of him is made by God to Adam and Eve as God addressed the devil (serpent): “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15) Now in the book of Numbers God says: “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole and everyone when he is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” (Numbers 21:8) Moses did just that and it happened as God had promised.

**2.** Like the serpent, Jesus too must be lifted up. He is lifted up on the cross of Calvary for the sins of the world. When people look on him or believe in him they are saved. Again this is the work of God and not of people.

It is natural to think that people can do this. Even some in Christianity says this. There is an idea that we are saved because God is pleased with our behavior. Our epistle lesson says: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

## II.

**A.1.** During World War II there was rationing of any number of things that were in short supply. This was because much of our resources went into the war effort. A little girl wanted a watch for Christmas, but watches were very scarce in those days. On Christmas morning the mother of the little girl told her to look into the toe of her Christmas stocking for a special gift. As she opened the package, she realized that it was a watch! Her mother told her that it was only to be worn on special occasions.

Years later she discovered that it was her mother's own watch with a new shiny band. As years went on it became more important and special to her because it was such a special gift. You have been given the greatest gift of all as you have been brought from death to life. The light of Christ has come into our world. The world has no desire for it, but it has a great need. People go blindly in the darkness and run from the light of Christ.

**2.** There is no middle ground here. Either people believe in Christ and live, or they don't and are condemned. People want to live their lives in their own fashion. This way can only lead to death. Yet God has shone his light into the world through the coming of his Son as the Savior of the world. It is his free gift to us and it gives direction and purpose to our faith.

**B.1.** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." That says it all doesn't it. This is life from God to you. There are two alternatives here. People believe in Jesus Christ and are saved, or they don't and are condemned already as Jesus says in our text.

Several years ago I was asked to make a hospital call at St. John's. It was a relative of a pastor friend of some years ago. The woman had her voice box removed and the pastor thought a visit would be good. As I approached the door and announced myself, her husband responded: "We're not believers!" I told him who had sent me and he was going to welcome me in the room, but his wife refused. How sad is that? Here was a great need, but a clear rejection of any message I could have brought to her.

Life is a gift from God through his Son Jesus Christ and it can lift us up no matter what our circumstances are. Jesus said: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (John 12:32) St. John tells us that Jesus said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

**2.** You and I do not run from God. Rather we want to be seen as those who live in the light of Jesus Christ. Our epistle for today says: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

In our world of today, people are always looking for an escape. They look for ways to feel better about them. They want to get stronger faster or seek a quick fix. All these attempts fail because they are people centered and mostly deal with the physical world.

Various things can lift us up and make us feel better, but they may not be fulfilling. The ultimate lift is what we receive through our Savior Jesus Christ. The good news is that this lift is free and guaranteed. There are no side effects or down side. It is a lift that your Savior gives that can never fail or be taken away, for God grants it to you for Jesus' sake. Amen.