

Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

November 11, 2018

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Opening – Jack Longgear

- Jack Longgear’s Story – chair of deacons; board member of important ministries, but he didn’t know Jesus Christ. He was a good man, influenced by the church, but not saved.
- When his grandson John was run over by a car one night at the corner of Fielder and Park Row, Jack prayed through his tears for God’s will, above his prayer for the life-saving measures for his grandson. You will, not mine, Oh Lord. And it wasn’t a forced prayer.
- Lost his wife, died the happiest man I have ever seen; at his funeral, I preached from the verse Phil. 1:21, to live is Christ, to die is gain, because he lived at that intersection as much as any man I’ve known;
- Do you know Jesus Christ? Martin Luther thought he did. He was a monk. He was very scrupulous about his following God’s rules. But he discovered he wasn’t saved.
- The context for today’s passage in John 3:16 is Nicodemus. Nicodemus was at the top of his game. He was an elite religious leader acknowledged by any and all as a very religious man. He was the one that others came to for spiritual help. Yet, here he is, struggling with questions of the soul. He had seen something in Jesus that he had never experienced before. He wasn’t saved, and he wanted to know what it was about and how to be saved.

Context – John 3:16

1. Six words: God /Only/Son/Perish /Everlasting /Life – spells gospel;
2. Gospel – We may only know this word as a reference to music; It is actually an Old English word, which means “good news.” This is the gospel “in a nutshell.” It is the “best news.”
3. The middle word - 25 words in this verse – 13th word is the word “son.” 1st 12 words all about God; Middle word is son. Last 12 words are about us.
4. The Bridge God is on one side; / we’re on the other side, and the Son is in the middle. Jesus came to bring God and man together.
5. The question becomes “How can I be saved?”

HOW CAN I BE SAVED?

You must experience God’s Love – God so loved the world

1. HOW? Not intellectually, but emotionally, personally.
 - a. We all know who Jesus is, right?
 - i. In the last 2 thousand years, no other individual has commanded such respect, such honor. Our entire Western civilization, from its laws to its ethics has been shaped by his teaching. For over 2 millennia, history’s greatest works of art have centered on his life,

death, and resurrection. Enduring musical masterpieces have celebrated his worth and glory.

- ii. So, why is it he often feels so far away? So historical. So church related. The distance between knowing about him and knowing him is huge. On the other hand, the distance is only about 6 inches – the distance between your heart and head.
 - iii. I am reminded sometimes about phone calls I receive at Mission Arlington when people ask me if they can speak to their close personal friend, Ms. “Tellie Burjin.”
- b. Article in a psychology journal I read this week talked about the difference. The author talked about how difficult it is to “unravel the knots of the mind,” to know the difference between something only in your head, and in your heart, or your experiences.
- i. Example: Let’s say that after a great deal of reflection, a person comes to understand that they are timid around authority figures because their father was a remote and distant figure who didn’t give him the support and love he needed to work through difficult problems. This is a keen, intellectual insight, but it isn’t enough. Knowing this may help, but it doesn’t provide relief or help.
 - ii. The author suggest that to find genuine healing, the person needs to edge his way to a far more detailed, visceral appreciation, an emotional understanding of his suffering. The suggestion is to relive the past sorrow as if it were happening today. The authors suggest that the person should remember “the light coming in from the garden, the corduroy trousers he was wearing, the sound of father’s voice as it reached its pitch, the tears that ran down our cheeks, the shouting that followed as he ran into the hall.”
 - iii. I’m not a counselor, and I’m not suggesting or recommending this technique, but it is relevant, because some people only know of God intellectually, but not emotionally, not personally. Do you know God in your head, but not in your heart?
- c. What does “knowing God experientially look like?” It’s about a deep and abiding sense of his nearness on the journey. It’s about an unshakeable confidence that only his abiding presence can give; It’s about a closeness that enables your spirit to commune with Him, anywhere, anytime, regardless. It’s about meeting him in places you may never have dreamed of . . . in the most heated of seductions, in the midst of suffering, and in acts of unflinching surrender. In some sense, there are inexhaustible ways to express it, and in other ways, trying to define it, degrades it. It is so big and so small at the same time.
- d. I don’t know if you’ve heard, but they released a statistic recently that the mortality rate has reached 100 percent. That’s why Jesus says of the Judgement – those who didn’t have a personal relationship with him will be turned away. I am often surprised at how carelessly people treat the care of their own souls. We act as if there is no tomorrow, so we are either oblivious to our own heartbeat, or we put off for tomorrow what we need to do today.

2. **WHY?** Because you are the object of it.

- a. Colossians 1:16 says, “All things were created by him and for him.” He created planets, stars, animals, and you. It gave God pleasure to create us; But, what if that means, he created us to be his slaves, or to provide him entertainment?
- b. Genesis 1:27 says, “He created us in his image.” We have a conscious; we have free will; we have a mind, a heart, a soul. We have the capacity to know the difference between right and wrong; Jesus bent low to scoop the dirt, to form out bodies, and then to blow his own breath into us for us to live. This is a very personal love.

- c. Martin Buber, a Jewish theologian wrote a very popular book in 1923 titled “I and thou.” He said that there are two primary ways to define relationships: 1) That of an I towards and it,” an object which we either use or experience; 2) that of the “I” towards a “thou,” or a you, in which we move into an existence within a relationship without bounds.
 - d. We see this by the constant reference to God as Father. Jesus said, “If a child asks for a bread, will the parent give him a stone, a snake?” This is the Father’s relationship with his children. Jesus said God is a Father who hurts when his children turn away from him;
 - e. You were created for a purpose – to be loved by God. If you are alive today; if you are breathing today, it is because God loves you and wants a relationship with you. He wants you to know him, and for you to open up to him;
 - f. He hurts when we are estranged.
3. **WHY?** Because there is no force with greater power. Paul says, that once you are “rooted and established” in it, the Lord wants us to take it out on the road – to see how wide, how long, high, and deep is the love of Christ. It is 4 dimensional.
- a. Wide – It’s for everyone, no one left out. Psalm 113 says that the name of the Lord is to be praised from the rising to the setting of the sun, from the east to the west.
 - b. Long – It is everlasting. Human love doesn’t last, but God’s love does; His love never gives up.
 - c. High – high enough to overlook your sin, your stuff; to want you back. Your shame keeps you from going to him, because you think he will scold you. But he just wants you to come home, where he can love you and protect you, and bless you. He’s not mad at you. He’s mad about you.
 - d. Deep – Are you unreachable? Too far gone? Sunk too far. God is in the depths. In your rejection of him, in your self-centeredness.
 - e. There is no shortage of it – 1 John 3:1 – How great the Father’s love that he has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God. Not created to be angels, but children.
4. Transition – To be saved, we must experience God’s love. How? It has to be personal. Why? Because we are the object of that love, and it is the most powerful and beautiful force in the universe. Finally, we must receive the Father’s Gift.

You must receive the Father’s Gift – “he gave his only son” / whoever believes will not perish

- 1. He sent his only son.
 - a. Not an angel. Not a prophet. Not just something, he could do away with, like a prized object, but his only son.
 - b. Not just to say nice things to us, or to attempt to make a sale, but to give his life. Think of the horror we feel when we read Genesis 19, when Abraham is asked to sacrifice his only son. At the end of that experience, Abraham understood God’s love. Yet, while the Lord spared Isaac at the last minute, no one spared Jesus.
 - c. When Jesus was born, the wise men brought him gold (fit for a King), and myrrh,(because he was born to die), and Frankincense, because his purpose was to be our High Priest.
- 2. To die in our place – Lacey Sturm in the Billy Graham video said “God is holy, and we are not.” In the same way that operating rooms have to be sterile, and we all understand that, unsaved sinners can’t come into God’s presence for all eternity. It is the same reason we put locks on our doors. When sin entered this world, all of us fell, and Satan thought he had won, because God’s heart was to spend

eternity walking and talking with us, in a personal relationship with us. And now, no one could, so God sent his son to pay the debt for our sin. On the cross, the wrath of God was satisfied. Why wrath? Against evil and pain and suffering.

3. How do we receive this gift?

- a. It's tempting to believe we can just open our hands to take it. But it isn't that simple.
- b. This isn't a gift that is outside of you – like receiving a car, or “putting on a new coat.”
- c. This is an internal gift, one that changes you from the inside out. You have to open the doors of your heart to let Jesus move in.
 - i. Believe here means “to put your life into his hands” by faith. You surrender your life, so that God can move in.
 - ii. You acknowledge that you are a sinner. The middle word of sin is “I.” Your life centers on you, even when you are doing good for others. Psychology Today has a picture of a narcissist – in front of a mirror, kissing himself, taking a selfie.
 - iii. The struggle with sin is twofold:
 1. *Seeing it in yourself.* Sin has the power to blind you. Kind of summed up by American poet Phyllis McGinley who wrote ‘Sin has always been an ugly word, but it has been made so in a new sense over the last half-century. It has been made not only ugly but passe. People are no longer sinful, they are only immature or underprivileged or frightened or, more particularly, sick.’ Same thing was said by Bill Maher in a more simplified way when he said “Everything that used to be a sin, is now a disease.”
 2. *Surrendering, once you see it.*
 - a. If you grab a hot wire with your hand, your muscles will contract around it, and you will need to fight against this command to release your hand. Current traveling through your body will heat your flesh, burn it from the inside, and damage the nerves. If that current path goes through your heart, then you are likely to have a cardiac incident which can cause death.
 - b. We hold on to our bitterness, our lack of self-esteem, our hurts, and our pain. Even when the change is positive, we can't let go.
 - c. We have to let go of our blue ribbons and our victories, our ego needs. Coming to heaven, we think Peter will say, Lord, this one's a keeper.” But it is only through Jesus Christ.

d. The Gift of God is Eternal Life

- i. *You gain Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:8)* – you gain Jesus, and the forgiveness of your sins: past, present, future.
 1. All the goods and gear this world throws at you become relatively cheap toys; all the success in this world becomes of no ultimate value; this relationship with the indwelling Christ not only resolves our problem with sin and guilt, but it showers us with an abundance of love, joy, peace
 2. We also receive an inheritance that no government can tax, no thief can steal, no terrorist can destroy, and no human can revoke it.

3. Our Lord's 24/7/365 presence and prayers on our behalf, along with the heavenly advocate and comforter, the Holy Spirit, so that we have to fear no human being, have peace in all circumstances, and are rich even when we're poor.
 4. A limitless supply of grace to help you in times of need.
 5. So much more.
- ii. *Your life is placed in him* (Phil 3:9). We didn't just have Christ come into our life, but we are found "in him." Covered by him with a righteousness that is not our own. Try imagining the blinding, white, searing fire of a new star blazing in the heavens. Now, what if you could take that searing radiance and slip it over you like a robe. That just barely begins to describe what it is like to have the righteousness of Jesus covering our life. Apart from being found in him, we could not approach the throne of God in prayer.
- iii. *We are guaranteed a resurrection from the dead* – (Phil. 3:11) We no longer fear our own death, nor the judgement. For the believer, death has been defeated. We sing, Death where is your victory. Death, where is your sting?

ONCE SAVED, THEN WHAT?

You grow to be more like him

1. We are saved when we accept Jesus, and yet, we are being saved, as we continue to grow in Him. Eternal life that we are given begins here and now, so we start to live differently;
2. When temptation comes? – JESUS IS THERE!
 - a. Need to lie to avoid a problem? Give your problem to him. He will get you through;
 - b. Feel like cheating to get some extra cash? He will meet all your needs;
 - c. Attracted by the buzz of sensual fulfillment? He offers the long-term pleasure of a pure heart without damaging and polluting your soul.
 - d. Feel the need to manipulate your way through a situation? Simply do what is right, and he will guide your footsteps.
3. In trouble? – TURN TO HIM!
4. Do you have Ego needs? – Are you always in need of "personal strokes?" For someone always to make you ok? SURRENDER!
5. Are you lonely? – YOU ARE NEVER ALONE!
6. Billy Graham asked by Minister Joseph M. Stowell, the President of Moody College, "What was your best experience? Was it your time with Presidents, or meetings with important people?" Graham answered instantly, "It was my relationship with Jesus Christ." He didn't even need to think about it.
7. "Tired of Me," by Joe Stowell by Life Change Books, 2002. (Long Quote – Pages 22-4).

"I'm only fifty-seven, and I already find myself weary of the hollow thoughts of what few accomplishments I may have mustered in my life. My failures continue to embarrass me. The inadequacies I have carried with me since my youth still frustrate me. My insecurities still trouble my soul. And the praise of others has an increasingly hollow ring. I am tired of worrying about whether or not the sermon I preached was good enough or whether or not someone will "pat me on the back" for a job well done. I'm tired of worrying about what people think about

me. I'm weary of the carnal feeling that sometimes haunts me when someone talks about his favorite preacher, and it's not me.

Bottom line, I just flat out get tired of me. But I never get tired of Jesus.

After all these years, I still find him more compelling, more engaging, more awesome, more surprising, more fulfilling, and more attractive than ever before.

I never get tired of singing his praises or of watching him perform. I find him to be gripping. Absorbing. Beyond comprehension. And that's why, along with Paul, my grandmother, Billy Graham, and countless others through the years, I find myself longing to know Him Better.

I am becoming increasingly aware that life doesn't go on forever. When we're young, we think we're bulletproof. We live like we'll never die. But when your knees protest certain movements, and your eyesight, and memory begin to grow fuzzy, reality sets in. I can see the day coming when there'll be another president of Moody, and a better one at that. There will be other preachers who bless hungry hearts.

And me? I'll be sitting in the corner of some nursing home waiting for them to ring the lunch bell. And if life up to that point has been all about me, that is going to be a sad and empty day, no matter what they are serving for lunch. Why? Because all I will have will be me! Which at that point won't be much.

But. . .if my life has been about knowing Jesus and experiencing a deepening relationship with Him, as I sit in that corner of the nursing home waiting for the lunch bell to ring. He'll be there with me:

- The mighty Son of God;
- The Bright and Morning Star;
- The Desire of all Nations;
- The Great Shepherd of the sheep;
- The wondrous Creator of all;
- The King of kings and Lord of lords.

And He'll be more wonderful on that day that ever before. He'll walk with me as I toddle along the linoleum in my walker. He'll talk with me, and I won't have any trouble hearing Him when He tells me that I am His own. He'll say, "Well, Joe, you're almost home." And I'll say, "Lord, the sooner the better. I've heard Your voice through all these years, but I can't wait to see Your face." He and I will be having such a grand time of fellowship; I just might miss that lunch bell."

Conclusion

1. Famed agnostic, Chuck Templeton, was a colleague of Billy Graham when he was young. Templeton was practically a household name in families of faith back then. He pastored on of Toronto's leading churches, and along with his close friend, Billy Graham co-founded "Youth for Christ" in Canada. "But while Billy Graham stayed the course, Templeton turned away from Christ and from the faith.
2. This former preacher went on to fame and fortune. He managed two of Canada's leading newspapers, and even made a run of being the Prime Minister of Canada at one point.
3. Templeton wrote a book called "Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith. Lee Strobel, the atheist journalist turned Christian, was writing his own book called "The Case for Faith," and one of his interview for the book was the now 82 year old Chuck Templeton.

4. Templeton still affirmed his agnosticism confidently, but towards the end of their time together, something changed. Stroebel asked Templeton what he thought about Jesus, and the old man softened.
5. “In my view,” Templeton said, “He is the most important human being has ever existed.” Then as his voice began to crack, he haltingly said, “I miss Him.” With that, Strobel writes, tears flooded Templeton’s eyes, and his shoulders bobbed as he wept. At the end of two men’s journeys, Billy Graham says Jesus was his prized possession, and Chuck Templeton weeps for having left him long ago.

Invitation

1. Do you know Jesus?
2. Do you need to come home to him?
3. Will you share with others about this great love?