

FINDING OUR PLACE IN HIS HOPES

I Samuel 15: 35 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson -- Youth Snow Camp

God has expectations for each one of us.” He made us by divine design to be His own, and He deeply desires us to find our place in a deep and solid relationship to Him. Is it possible some of us have been playing “Hide and Seek” with the Lord? Recently, I read about a Mom who heard her son and daughter playing “Hide and Seek.” She heard her son, Kevin say, "Rose, you cover your eyes. I'll go hide and text you when I'm ready." His mom thought that was pretty ingenious of her son but she was even more surprised when her daughter Rose got the text and she watched Rose race straight for the computer. "What are you doing?" her mom asked. Rose replied, "I'm tracking Kevin's location with GPS." Tonight, I ask you all, “Have you found your place in His hopes, in God's hopes for you?”

Back in 1956, Stephen Sondheim wrote a song with music written by Leonard Bernstein. My favorite artist all time to sing this song was Barbra Streisand. Some of you may know the song. “There's a place for us Somewhere a place for us Peace and quiet and open air Wait for us somewhere There's a time for us Someday a time for us Time together with time to spare Time to learn, time to care Somewhere Somewhere. There's a place for us A time and place for us Hold my hand and we're half way there Hold my hand and I'll take you there Somehow, someday, somewhere.” That song has always been one of my favorite popular songs because it shows the hope of the world for each of us to find our niche. Yet this song fails miserably to tell us how to find our place. The words suggest that if you'll just trust me or trust someone else, we'll all find our niche, our place in life. But the Holy Spirit in me cries out –“It's not true!” You can't find your real place in life outside of finding Jesus and finding your place in His hopes/plans for you.

As I prayed over how to approach God's message to us all tonight, I kept going back to I Samuel 15: 35 which says, “And the prophet Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.” This weekend, I want us all to begin to understand who God is and see if we can begin to understand Him more, and even come to know His hopes for each one of us. We know Saul missed finding his place in God's hopes for him. Oh, yes, he became the first king of Israel. He rose to the top, but he didn't find his real place, the place God wanted him to find by obeying the Lord and following His plan. When Samuel wrote that the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel, that is an expression that is loaded with pathos and sadness and sorrow and tragedy. How many of you

want to come to the end of life and have God say of you, “I regret that I made you and gave you an opportunity to serve me, because you disobeyed Me and wasted your life in selfish disobedience, stubbornness and rebellion.” Way back in Genesis 6: 5-8, when God decided to wipe out all the people of the earth who hated Him, God had this same reaction to mankind as He decided to send a world-wide flood.

We read in Genesis 6, “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them. But Noah found favor/grace in the eyes of the LORD.” What God wants me to explore with all of you tonight is the simple question, “Who is God? Unless we know who God is, we will never understand His claims on us, His hopes for us, and His expectations that we will find our place in His hopes. If we really know who God is, it opens the hopes He has for us to run to His arms and enter into His hopes for us. What we are going to explore tonight are the ABC’s of the faith as to who Jesus is. The command in Hebrews 5: 12-14 is that believers are to go on from the milk of the Word of God to solid food, to the meat of the Word. Yet, assuming all of us know exactly who Jesus is may not be a kind or fair or true assumption. None of us can find our rightful place in God’s hopes unless we know who Jesus is. Who is Jesus? I have four answers that build one upon another! Who is Jesus? When we know who Jesus is, we are then eligible to find our place in His hopes.

JESUS IS GOD! (I.) What I want us to do tonight is to find ourselves going on a bit of a long footpath journey with Jesus and His inner circle of disciples. It was Jesus’ third year of ministry with His disciples. Jesus had departed from Judaea into Galilee and now, He took His inner circle of followers far to the northeast to an area just south Mt. Hermon in the district of Caesarea Philippi, 115 miles north of Jerusalem. Jesus knew His time on earth was short before He must go to the cross and be crucified in Jerusalem. Jesus had purposely left the mobs and the multitudes for some last moments alone with His twelve disciples. They had left Jewish country and were now in pagan country—just about 28 miles straight east of where Johnny Hayes and Jimmy Elswick are missionaries in Lebanon. And guess what Jesus asked His disciples? It was ABC time all over. Turn to Matthew 16: 13-18, 20-26. “Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the

prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!--For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it... Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me--For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

When Jesus asked the disciples who He was, their first novel suggestion was that some people thought He was John the Baptist, who had already been beheaded months before. Already a legend had developed based on the suspicion and the fear that he would return. The disciples added that some others said Jesus was the prophet Elijah. You may recall that Elijah was one of two men who did not experience death here on earth, Elijah and Enoch. Elijah went straight to heaven in a whirlwind in a chariot of fire. For hundreds of years, the belief among Jews was that Elijah would return to usher in the coming of Messiah. Even Malachi 4: 5 declares, “Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.” The disciples said others said he was Jeremiah the prophet who had been dead for over 550 years. Another tradition had developed that Jeremiah would come back to life and usher in the Messiah’s coming. The disciples also said others said Jesus was one of the other prophets. What fantastic public acceptance Jesus had and He was only 33 years of age! He was already seen as John the Baptist up from the dead, Elijah returned, Jeremiah resurrected, or one of the other prophets. Yet, Jesus doesn’t seem to have been particularly interested in the opinions other people held of Him. Rather he turns to the disciples and asks them what I am asking all of you tonight, “But who do you say that I am?” I picture a moment of total silence. These disciples had followed Jesus for over three years, and He is asking them who they say He is. Finally, impetuous Peter couldn’t bear the silence. He must had jumped to his feet and declared, “You are the Christ, Messiah Himself, the Son of the living God.” Jesus told Peter, “The only reason

you have this information, Peter, is that you have learned it from My Father who is in heaven.” Immediately, Jesus took His disciples into His confidence and told them about the future, that He would be crucified for them in Jerusalem.

Peter, now coming down from the mountain top of knowing who Jesus was, took Jesus aside and told Him not to make the trip back down to Jerusalem 115 miles to be crucified. Peter wasn't willing to find his place in Jesus' hopes. And Jesus rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan, you are a hindrance to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Then Jesus turned to Peter and James and John and the twelve, including Judas and said, “If anyone would come after Me, (I am God), let him deny himself, (and all his own ideas) and take up his cross and follow Me.” One of the most curious things is that many believers in America have been nominal believers in the church for years, and suddenly they take Jesus seriously, because He claims to be God. Did you know there are literally thousands of Christian churches in America today that deny the deity of Jesus? The ABC's start with John 1:1—“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Jesus said, I am in the Father and the Father is in Me,” (John 10: 38) and “He that has seen Me has seen the Father.” (John 14: 9) In John 1: 14, we read, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Jesus said, “You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.” (John 8: 23) Jesus added in John 8: 58, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” Colossians 1: 19 declares, “For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” I John 4: 2, 3 gives us the test—“Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist, which you heard was coming, and now is in the world already.” Secondly,

JESUS IS CREATOR! (II.) John 1: 1-3 is clear. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” Hebrews 1: 1,2 declares, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.” And Paul in speaking of the pre-eminence of Christ said, in Colossians 1: 15, 16, saying, “He, Jesus, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold

together.” Jesus claims not only to be God, but Creator. No wonder He could walk on water, He made the water. No wonder He could heal the sick; He made each one of us, with our own unique DNA and it is Jesus who holds us together. Jesus made the cell adhesion molecule called Laminin that holds us together in one piece. Can you imagine the hopes the Creator has for us whom He has made? Can you imagine the grief of Jesus our Creator as millions, even billions of His creatures deny His existence, and totally scoff at His intelligent design as Creator? Richard Dawkins, born on March 26, 1941 is an Oxford zoologist, evolutionist, author and media commentator. He said, “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” It appears that this 72 year old man has few years left to find his place in Christ’s hopes. 3rdly,

JESUS IS SAVIOR! (III.) It isn’t so hard to understand how the One who is God and our Creator, knows each of our names and has numbered the hairs of our head; it isn’t so hard to understand why Jesus would want to save those whom He created. Jesus made us muscle and blood and skin and bones. He created us to grow up, get married, most of us, and find ourselves saying as husbands what Adam once said to Eve or hearing as wives what Adam said, “You are now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” We are who we are by God’s design, but though God created us for life, eternal life, each of us were born in sin since Adam’s fall in the Garden of Eden. We have each chosen, not life, but destruction. And Jesus knew that only by coming to us incarnate, born of a virgin, He would become the perfect vessel to die in our place. When Jesus went to die on the cross, our sins were poured onto and into Him as into a vessel. There at Calvary, Jesus endured our physical and spiritual death. He endured our hell for us that He might become for all who will repent, believe and receive Him, our Savior. At Calvary, Jesus paid the full penalty for our sins. Romans 5: 8, 9 declares, “But God shows His love for us, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.” Paul wrote to Titus in Titus 3: 4-6, “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” I Timothy 1: 1 tells us Christ Jesus is our hope. We will never find our place in His hopes until we know Jesus as God, Creator, and our Savior. Lastly, fourthly, we must come to know Jesus as Lord.

JESUS IS LORD! (IV.) The plan of Jesus is to possess us as His own, His Bride. His plan is to occupy us by His Holy Spirit, and to purchase us by His blood so that He becomes our Lord and Master. That's how we find our place in His hopes. Jesus claims to be the Master, Lord, and Commander-in-Chief of every life He possesses, if we know Him. Jesus will not allow us to claim heaven as our future home and yet claim Satan as our commander-in-chief. That's why Jesus told Peter, "Get behind me, Satan, when Peter tried to be lord of Jesus' life. Jesus was saying, "You will not pick your priorities, Peter, nor will you choose them for Me. No, you are going to accept My priorities for you or you will deny Me. You are not going to have Me as Savior if you are not going to follow Me as Lord." Listen tonight! When Jesus is Lord, He is God, Creator, Savior, and Lord. They all fit together. If you deny one part of that 4 part equation, you are denying the rest. You'll never find your place in His hopes until He is God, Creator, your Savior and Lord.

Suppose today, a pollster would come up to you here at Snow Camp and say, "Who do you say that Jesus is? Most pollsters, Gallup and Barna polls find that people find Jesus to be a great teacher, a great miracle worker, a great prophet, but all of those are less than His claims in the Bible. If He isn't God, He can't be Creator. If He isn't Creator, why would He love you so much that He died for you to be your Savior? If He is Savior, why would He permit you to live the rest of your life in bondage to the enemy, with Satan as your master, living in the same miserable fashion as millions who have never heard of Jesus? Never get away from these ABC's of who Jesus is. This is who He claims to be. Turn Him down or receive Him as Savior and Lord. But never say you don't know who He is. You have only one vote. That's all! It's up to you. Whosoever will may come. But it's your life. Who do you say that Jesus is? Have you believed and received Him as God, Creator, Savior and Lord? A.W. Tozer says that people who are crucified with Christ, who can say Jesus is Lord, have three distinct marks: 1. They are facing only one direction, 2. They can never turn back, and 3. They no longer have plans of their own. I close with a question asked of Emily Post, the etiquette expert of America for decades. The question was, "What is the correct procedure when one is invited to the White House but has a previous engagement?" Emily Post replied, "An invitation to dine at the White House is a command, and it automatically cancels any other engagement." Young people, someone far greater than President Obama has invited you to come to Him and dine with Him and live in your life. It is Jesus, who is God, Creator, Savior, and Lord! Who is Jesus to you? Have you found your place in His hopes for you?